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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Shoshone NF Travel Management Planning Project

To the Shoshone National Forest Office, or whom it concerns.

My name is Kyle Vassilopoulos. My wife and I live and run businesses in Lander, WY. My businesses include Lander Bar, Gannett Grill, Scream Shack, Cowfish, Lander Brewing Co., Rusty Truck Restaurant, and Lincoln Street Bakery. My wife's business is Central Bank and Trust.

I am an avid outdoor enthusiast who especially loves rock climbing, fly fishing, biking, and hiking on public lands.

For nearly 15 years I was a professional climbing athlete and ambassador for Adidas Outdoors, CAMP USA, Mystery Ranch among other nationally recognized brands.

I am the author of Rock Climbs of Southwest Montana, the definitive guidebook to all of the Southwest Montana region climbing recreation.

I served as a member of the Southwest Montana Climbers Coalition non profit (no longer). I served as an executive board member of the CWCA/WyoClimbers non profit (no longer). I serve and am engaged in many other local community organizations and groups.

I have travelled extensively all over the world for rock climbing recreation and fly fishing recreation for 25+ years.

I am writing to you today to voice my concern about the new TMP for the Shoshone National Forest along with recent major access issues our community has been burdened with, and will be burdened with if this new TMP doesn't account correctly.

Concerning the TMP:

There is just too much information and history to unpack and so I must abbreviate my requests, limiting explanations in many places.

NO to alternative 3 in the TMP

-This alternative would decimate ALL recreation opportunities for 90+% of user groups currently and into the future. This is not going to work for all the reasons, not just a few. The single only recreation group unaffected by this alternative is motorized recreation groups, only.

Alternative 2 could be successful, but ONLY with modifications.

-The Wolf Point road, FS 326 (or 326-1D) right fork would be better re-designated as a non-width-restricted motorized trail open to all vehicles. Through WRORC meeting conversations this solution has been proposed in order to open the door to better funding for "trail" maintenance now and into the future. This better opportunity to maintain this road through better funding sources would greatly add value to outdoor recreation opportunities including, fishing, hiking, biking, climbing, and other. The issue of the current road conditions has been a standing issue with the local FS office since the placement of a new FS gate. This gate was placed by night and with no warning to the local community. This road, for 60 years, was two way passible and open year round. In recent times a FS gate has been placed and closed for much of the calendar year creating new access and recreation limitations where we once had vast resources available to the community. This modification to Alternative 2 is just a step in the correct direction of solving the "gate" issue according to our local FS office along with the WY Trails office. As such this is a KEY change to allow for the "opportunity" to have further access and recreation solutions into the future. Without this key change our community is left with no tools to help find solutions to the unwanted "gate" issue and the loss of once vast outdoor recreation resources. These resources are "roadside" and yet we still have lost access. This loss of access represents one of the single greatest negative impacts to our local community in a generation. The opportunities for all recreation accessed from this roadway are and still will be one of the single most significant economic and quality of life drivers for our community for years and years into the future.

- Proposed seasonal restrictions (Dec. 1-Apr 30) should be conditions-based rather than hard closures written into the new TMP, please. Again this change only allows for the possibility for our community to work together with NF for more responsible recreation opportunities, not less. This in and of itself does not solve much, but with a blanket closure written into the TMP we have no way whatsoever to address local issues around vast world class recreation opportunities seasonally. Please make the change to conditions-based closure to give our community a chance most years to access all recreation where we otherwise would not be able to do so.

-The 12" minimum snow cover rule for over-snow travel should be removed, especially on FS roadways. Once a snow pack has been established on FS roadways, less than a 12" minimum of frozen packed snow constitutes stable tracked vehicle conditions according to the WY State Trails office. Not modifying this in the TMP will kill many winter outdoor recreation opportunities on maintained packed and frozen FS roadways.

General sentiments as a community leader in our area and with regards to the most challenging 5 years of FS/community relations and recreation access our area has experienced in over a generation.

-In the last 5 years our community, an outdoor recreation centric community who's economic survival relies heavily on outdoor recreation opportunities for all user groups, has experienced a record crackdown to the access of our public lands from the local FS office.

-Our community has used countless resources, donation money, countless discussions, volunteer hours, the formation of many new organizations, and all just to attempt to offset the negative impacts our local FS office has imposed onto our community in recent times. These negative impacts all revolve around an alarming degradation to our access to our public lands and for recreational uses.

-Generally speaking from my perspective the above mentioned should not be the case ever. Our community should rather be using the many tens of thousands in donation money, countless discussions, volunteer hours, countless resources, and local groups to work constructively along with our local FS office to maximize responsible safe usages of our public lands. This is especially the case given our communities economic survival is so closely tied to outdoor recreation on public lands. Why we are using all our local resources just to keep our

"heads above water" with concerns for recreation access on public lands, is an absolute tragedy.

With concern to the "pass creek" gate issue, or the Limestone Mountain Road gate issue, or the Wolf Point gate issue, or the South Fork of the Little Popo Agie gate issue. (all one and the same)

- This gate, installed by night, and with no communication to our community has had a vast negative impact on all forms of outdoor recreation within our community in the last 5 years including: fly fishing (two roadside access points to the South Fork of the Little Popo Agie river), rock climbing (wolf point, strawberry roan, sweat lodge, ghost town, ben's block, wolf point, and other historically established areas), hiking, biking, hunting, ATV summer and tracked winter usages, other. Since the installation of this gate accessing these activities during prime activity seasons has been killed completely. This gate closes access to both "forks" in Limestone Mountain Road, left fork #352, and right fork #326 (or 326-1D)

- Specifically the climbing resource "Wolf Point" represents a resource of such uniqueness and high caliber that only a few of such similar resources exist in the world. Prior to the "gate" and loss of access our community was receiving attention on a world wide scale and specifically towards this Wolf Point destination. The accolades and benefits to our community if this resource had remained accessible or if this resource becomes accessible again in any future are immeasurably beneficial to our local quality of life and our local economic viability.

-Our community would like this gate removed, or at the least opened for a vastly greater timeframe yearly. Our community desires that the roadway beyond this gate gets any attention it needs in order to address this gate issue. Our community remains committed to working alongside the FS to achieve this goal no matter what it takes, time, financial, or other. If there comes a future time when the leadership at the FS will accept our communities help, listen for our outcry to action, and work together with us for a greater future in public land access, we remain at the ready.

I try to empathize with the leadership at our local FS office, and I continually find myself thinking about the values I would strive for in their position. I would strive daily for excellence in forest management, excellence in responsible public land usage, and excellence in community stewardship as a person in a position to hold influence over a community in a very positive way or a very negative way.

These things don't have to be at the expense of each other, rather they are all achievable together for those who refuse to settle for less.

Our current local FS management seems to be convinced achieving one of these goals can only occur at the expense of the others.

This current mentality will remain a tragedy for our community until intervention or until the leadership changes.

We are all waiting for this time, we will all remain at the ready,

All the best,

Kyle Vassilopoulos