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First name: Elise

Last name: Loggers

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am currently a graduate student at Montana State University and I have called this corner of Montana home for the past five years. I'm here because of the outdoor opportunities but specifically because of the wildlife that calls this area home. The GYE is spectacular for many reasons but the most prominent to me is that it has the same suite of wildlife here as was here prior to Europeans settling in this area. I'm sure you know this but it's really the only place in the ENTIRETY of the United States that can boast this fact - that's pretty sweet. I recreate but I also study how wildlife and humans interact in the wilderness - not on the outskirts of Bozeman but in the depths of Yellowstone National Park. One would think that humans don't have too much contact with wildlife in the heart of YNP and roam as they would were people not around. That's actually not true at all. I know YNP has a massive number of visitors each year but most >95% never venture farther than 1km from the road so the wildlife in the backcountry aren't exposed to these hordes of people. Even with relatively low use, these animals only encounter horseback riders and hikers, they have completely changed their timing and use of areas near trails and campsites because of humans. Even in the depths of YNP, animals have become more nocturnal to avoid people. That's an example from your backdoor, but in other areas in the West, elk abandon areas because of snowmobile use. I love to snowmobile, each winter my partner and I go to Cooke City and YNP to ride, I mainly use it as an avenue to get farther into the backcountry to ski. But I also realize the impact I have on wildlife when I am out there. Every time I go out in the spring, I run into bears and other wildlife who do like those elk I just mentioned do - run away and probably don't return to that area for a while. It's really difficult to create a balance between allowing people to enjoy the outdoors and keeping them intact for future people to enjoy them too. I believe it is our commitment to steward the land like we will be here forever. Because of that, I oppose extending the snowmobile season on Beartooth pass. It will push around big horn sheep and goats and it tears up high alpine meadows, which are some of the most fragile ecosystems we have out here. They take a long time to regenerate. Additionally, this past year while I was skiing the Gardner Headwall, a snowmobiler lost track of their snowmobile and it tumbled all the way down the headwall causing the 20 or so people to scatter in all directions. That's a pretty dangerous situation, particularly since emergency vehicles take a while to get to the pass AND it takes a while to get to a hospital. Adding motorized access into areas that have not had it before and extending the season in areas that have it will disrupt wildlife patterns leading to reduced reproduction and survival of the animals we recreate with. We are stewards of this land - for people and for wildlife. There's plenty of science out there showing motorized use impacts on the natural world, please use science to guide your management. Thank you, and best of luck. I know these decisions are tough but necessary.