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Title:

Comments: Dear Forest Service,

This past summer I attempted a thru-hike of the PNT in the summer of 2022. My hike ended in the Ross Lake Recreational Area mainly because of the Copper Ridge fires but because of logistical reasons as well.

The PNT had long been a dream of mine since my first long trail, the Colorado Trail in the summer of 2020. I was disappointed I was unable to complete it.

I wasn't drawn to this trail because of the isolation, or the remoteness of the trail but for the opportunity to tour the Northwest in a way that few people are ever able to.

When planning for this hike I was of course made aware of what sets the PNT apart from other long trails in the united states. Extended stretches through Idaho and the Pasayten with limited resupply options. Long road walks skirting private property. Unknown trail conditions and bushwhacks. And of course the wildlife. For the most part, all of these obstacles were ones that could be planned around, these risks could be mitigated as well as could be expected with proper education. Traveling in the backcountry is always a risk. I mention these risks because I don't see them as something the governing bodies of the lands the trail passes through should be responsible for. The responsibility lies on the Hiker to be aware and prepared.

I started and finished my hike alone but I met an amazing group of people. Those with thousands of miles under their feet and some with much less experience than I. Within this cohort, I saw a range of reactions and strategies to these risks.

During my 750+ mile experience, I did not see a degradation of the land from overuse or overcrowding. The PNT sees much fewer visitors than the PCT for example. During the 14mile overlap with the PCT I saw more people than I had seen on the entire PNT. I think care should be taken when deciding the future of the Pacific Northwest Trail. Hordes of people could overwhelm the limited infrastructure the trail towns can currently accommodate. Of course, this could be seen as an economic opportunity for these towns but the people of these towns may not always view this as such. The people who live along the PNT should certainly have a voice in its future.

In my experience outside of popular areas such as Glacier National Park, Priest Lake, and Ross lake I rarely, if ever, saw people on the PNT who were not hiking for purpose of a thru/section hike. The primary users for these spaces seemed to be dominated by long-distance hikers. I'm sure this varies by season.

Water resources for the most part were abundant. There were several lengths of trail where "cow water" was the only available source. The hesitancy to collect from these sources varies from hiker to hiker. Relatively few locations had spring sources adequately defended from the bovine.

The condition of the trail varied enormously. In some spots, bushwhacks withstanding, the trail was non-existent. The PNTA has done a tremendous job in trail upkeep but there is still a lot of work to do. I believe there was a recent push to add trail markers and signage. It was disappointing to find many markers had been torn off of trees. Areas that need attention are Mount Locke, the burn section around Copper Butte, and the Pasayten. Again the PNTA has done a tremendous job in organizing volunteers and trail crews.

In terms of re-locations, I can only speak on the trails I walked. Jackson Creek was a pleasant hike. I am sure there are other alternates that should be considered for being adopted in the official trail. For trail maintenance

reasons as well as desired usage. I am unsure of the reasoning behind the Northport road walk and the history behind the O'Hare Creek/ Black Canyon Rd / Deep Creek re-positioning but the trail as it exists today leaves much to be desired.

Fire in the west is prevalent. It is an unfortunate event if not dangerous for a hiker, but is sometimes needed for the surrounding ecosystem. Burn areas such as Mt. Bonaparte should be allowed to recover without needless erosion. I would be disappointing to have much as the trail be clear-cut for use as a fire break.

I'll touch briefly on the bushwhacks. They are truly one of the defining features of the PNT. I am glad to have walked the Lion's Head Ridge. If trail use rises these areas could see a tremendous amount of wear and erosion. Some of the shorter bushwhacks, below .5mi, seem pointless.

In closing, I believe the PNT will change whether the governing bodies of the land it crosses, the PNTA, the people who live on its borders, and those who have walked it realize it or not. Decisions regarding its future should be careful in conserving the character of the trail, its wildlife, and the people who access it regularly.

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