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Comments: I am writing this letter to express my opinion and support for the existing route of the Pacific Northwest Trail location as it goes thru the Kootenai National Forest and particularly the upper Yaak Route. I have lived and worked in the Yaak for over 40 plus years and have hiked many parts of the PNT trail over the years. The trail takes you through some of the most beautiful country you will find anywhere in Montana. The proposed Southern Route as some are calling it is just ludicrous. Just look at the map. This proposal goes along old logging roads and old clearcuts. It just goes to show that the group promoting it does not understand what thru hiker's are all about. They are here to hike, not hangout in towns like Libby and Troy. They are here for the wilderness of the Yaak.

People who do this type of thru hiking are smart and aware of what is involved hiking in bear country. Many started in Glacier National Park which has no lack of grizzly bears.

Some of the information being given out by the local environmental groups is just wrong. They call the PNT a high-volume hiker trail. It is not. Over the years of hiking the Yaak I have only talked to two people on the trail and current information shows there isn't more than a dozen people a year.

They also claim it will threaten the grizzly bear population by camping in their feeding areas. These hikers are not building homes, they are moving every day. The biggest threat to the bears in the Yaak comes from the local human population which seems to kill one every year.

Another point is they say drinking water is scarce in the Yaak. The Yaak has more access to water than any other place in the state. All long-distance hikers carry water filters. The assertion that water is hard to find is just silly.

Another point being made by the local environmental groups is that the Yaak lacks cell phone for emergencies.

Really? Having hiked and worked in Glacier National Park, I can tell you there is no cell phone service there.

There is no cell phone service in the Whitefish range where the trail passes.

These hikers are trying to get away from cell phones and searching for that Yaak wilderness experience those of us that live here enjoy every day.

Another concern is if for some strange reason the so-called Southern Route becomes official. How do you stop people from hiking the Northern route if they want to? Armed guards at the trail heads? Close off the trail to the most popular fishing lakes in the Yaak because it's part of the PNT system? Start writing tickets to locals for hiking their favorite trail?

The Yaak has some beautiful country that every American citizen has a right to visit, and they should. One way to protect a place is for people to learn about it and understand what it is about.

The people who hike this trail are smart, caring, and environmentalists in their own way.

They should be able to enjoy this place we call home. I don't mind sharing.