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First name: Leslie

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear USDA Forest Service,

I have lived and worked in Montana for fifty years. I care about the state, our local animal and plant communities and how the human population can exist in harmony with the natural world. I am especially interested in protecting Grizzly Bear habitat.

The Pacific Northwest trail must be re-routed to the south, out of the Yaak grizzly recovery area and its critical habitat. The southern route would tangentially contact 10 miles of designated core habitat, rather than bisecting the heart's middle of 27 miles, as is currently being cleaved by the route being currently used in the north. If the PNT is to remain in Montana, this least-egregious, most ethical southern route should be analyzed and amended. The habitat-busting northern route is unacceptable. Independent modeling shows that if the Yaak loses one adult female grizzly every other year, the population will be extinct in fewer than 20 years. Putting high-volume of hikers into the precise habitat in the Yaak most utilized by females with cubs at the time of year when thru-hikers and females-with-cubs are in the same small patches of habitat makes no sense under any condition; that there is a superior and more ethical and scientifically sound southern route should finally make this an easy mistake to correct. The Endangered Species Act must be heeded.

The USFS has the authority to make such a modest alteration in the Yaak portion of the 1200-mile long trail. Further, failure to do so will have more unintended consequences than "merely" harm to the threatened grizzly population. Failure to adequately monitor trail usage threatens leading the USFS into another lawsuit over open-and-closed roads as well as high-volume hiking trails such as the PNT which, with as few as 20 hikers and all trail users, including locals, per week, can cause the trail to be classified as a "open road." This would force the USFS to close area roads currently open.

The current northern route is water-limited for hikers and poses difficulty to search and rescue; the southern route has more high points, cell service, and water.

I ask you to abandon the existing northern route and RE-ROUTE the PNT to the proposed southern trail. The southern trail will benefit impoverished Montana communities - Troy and Libby - along the way. In addition, struggling animal populations will benefit by eliminating the conflicts that arise from having humans hike unnecessarily through the critical areas along the northern trail.

Thank you for your consideration, Leslie V. S. Millar