

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 11/14/2022 2:30:00 PM

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Comments: November 14, 2022

Please accept the following comments regarding the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail Comprehensive Plan. While not a long-distance hiker, I have walked and backpacked through the Pacific Northwest Trail (PNT) in the Purcell Mountains as well as portions of the route in the rest of Montana and North Idaho. I have been aware of the PNT since moving to the Yaak Valley, Montana, in 1998 when friends of mine who were part of the Yaak Trail Club worked with Ron Strickland on trail route maintenance. After the PNT was designated a national scenic trail in 2009 I began to meet thru-hikers as I was working at the Yaak Mercantile, where we accepted resupply boxes that were mailed in. I became a supporter of the PNT after meeting and talking with long-distance hikers coming through the Yaak Valley. It was apparent to me then as well as now that long-distance trails provide an opportunity for hikers to experience memories of a lifetime while promoting values such as self-reliance in a physically challenging and healthy manner, while instilling simple land ethics that will positively impact hikers throughout the rest of their lives. Because of my interest in and respect for the hikers I was meeting I eventually signed up as a trail angel in the Yaak Valley to assist thru-hikers. In addition to the hikers, I have also had many discussions with my neighbors in this remote valley concerning the PNT. There is strong support from the local community for the people hiking the PNT, yet there is also a concern that if the trail grows larger in popularity and use it could start negatively impacting our remote valley, both in the small town of Yaak with limited services for a growing population and in the backcountry with increased use of trails during the summer months. Additionally, there is a concern that an increase in the use of trails through the Purcell Mountains could begin to negatively impact the small population of grizzly bears in the Cabinet-Yaak ecosystem by displacing bears into less ideal habitat. With these thoughts in mind and after reading the scoping documents I have the following specific comments regarding the PNT, primarily focused on Northwest Montana where I live.

In the scoping document under the Nature and Purposes section I have the following comments regarding the Nature Statement. From my conversations with dozens of thru-hikers over the past 12 years I think there is an overwhelming desire for primitive, non-motorized recreational settings, with only occasional routes through rural locations for rest and resupply. With that in mind, I think the statement "Trail experiences include working forests, grasslands, broad river valleys, farms and ranches that reflect how people since time immemorial have shaped these places and have been shaped by them" should be eliminated as it does not support the original vision of the trail and the desire of thru-hikers to experience roadless and wilderness landscapes primarily.

One aspect of the PNT that I have noticed over the last 12 years is that thru-hikers walking into the Yaak Valley are great ambassadors for speaking out about the values of the roadless and wilderness lands they have been traveling through. Many of the people living in the Yaak Valley do not have the desire or ability to utilize our roadless lands in the summer; hence, you sometimes hear terms like "wilderness is a land of no use," yet when thru-hikers come into our community with tales about their experiences in the backcountry without any sort of political agendas I've noticed that the people here really listen up and understand why thru-hikers are out exploring and enjoying remote landscapes. Considering this, I think the sentence under Nature in the Nature and Purposes section, "Communities along the trail share with travelers their history and deep connections to the land" should have something like the following added, "while thru-hikers share with local communities their experiences in and love of backcountry roadless/wilderness lands and hence the value of those landscapes to people."

In the section Trail Uses under desired conditions I do not think it is necessary to include 15. The Pacific Northwest Trail provides outstanding recreation opportunities for pack and saddle stock users and bicyclists, where appropriate to the setting and allowed by local management. This may be a byproduct of the national scenic trail but listing it as a desired condition may allow construction of trails to stock or mountain bike standards that are not compatible with what I think the majority of PNT thru-hikers want to see and could cause conflicts as

the trail grows in popularity. Additionally, while there has never been a conflict with thru-hikers and grizzly bears resulting in the death of people or bears, mountain biking has been shown to cause conflicts (and deaths) with grizzly bears so considering the small and threatened population of the Selkirk and Cabinet-Yaak grizzly bears I think it is unwarranted to have this statement included as a desired condition.

Under the biotic resources, management practices, I would like to see the comprehensive plan analyze and prescribe the establishment of campsites with priority in grizzly bear recovery areas that provides food storage (such as food hanging poles, bear resistant food containers, or storage lockers) that will benefit people and wildlife. I would suggest locating campsites close to trailheads and roads where feasible and roughly every 10 miles in the backcountry.

After reading the Carrying Capacity Report for the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail I have the following comments:

For a number of reasons I'll list below I think there needs to be an alternative in the upcoming draft EA that limits the carrying capacity of hikers to less than the Sustainable Affordance/Level of Service model listed in the scoping documents that results in a carrying capacity range for thru-hiking the PNT at 552-1748 people per high use season. My impression right now is that the ideal carrying capacity range should not exceed 400 thru-hikers per season but what I would like to see in the draft EA is a detailed analysis on the beneficial impacts and effects of having a smaller carrying capacity than modeled for hikers, small local communities and grizzly bears. Here's more details on why I think a lower use alternative is needed:

*A good percentage of thru-hikers I have talked to over the last 12 years specifically mentioned that a reason they were hiking the PNT was because it is less crowded than other long-distance trails like the AT, PCT and CDT. The PNT is currently a great alternative to the higher use trails for people who value the solitude, remoteness and smaller resupply towns than is available along more popular long-distance trails and I think will appreciate a PNT comprehensive long-term plan that acknowledges and manages for the benefits of less crowded trails.

*In the rural locations along the PNT it will take a smaller increase in trail use to cause conflicts as a result of less services available to people, particularly since areas like North Idaho and Western Montana have been seeing explosive growth in people moving into rural environments in recent years. While I think support is high right now for the PNT trail along rural towns that support may erode if use increases beyond the ability of local businesses to adequately service customers during the summer months.

*While I don't think there is a threat to grizzly bears because of thru-hikers on the PNT right now I do wonder if increased use reaches a certain level, could that begin to displace grizzly bears away from good berry habitat in roadless areas and into more possible conflicts closer to private lands in the front country? With a warming climate that in my opinion is threatening lower elevation huckleberry fields the impacts could be even more pronounced. Along with managing use for a lower carrying capacity I think in the Selkirk and Cabinet-Yaak populations of bears there needs to be an analysis on the benefits of limiting uses along the PNT during the high use season for activities such as mountain biking that has been shown to cause conflicts with bears as well as the benefits of requiring bear spray to be carried along the trail route.

In conclusion, I would like to see a comprehensive plan alternative developed that includes my enclosed input and emphasizes a high-quality primitive wildlands experience along the PNT for thru-hikers while managing for lower use long term. Thank you for reviewing and considering my comments.

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