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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am an outdoor enthusiast who has been enjoying recreation on our public lands for over 40 years. I believe that all citizens should have access to our public lands. With growing populations and interest in outdoor recreation, it is essential that we protect our public lands from damage by overuse. One key way to achieve that is to limit the roads and trails through our public lands. I am very concerned about the explosion of bike trails across the West. This project is highly problematic as it is rewarding and encouraging illegal trail building on our public lands. I do not believe that illegal trails should be recognized and made into systems trails. I would like to see our public resources and dollars directed toward enforcement of the law and removal of illegally created trails. The natural integrity of our public lands should not be sacrificed for recreation.

Specific to the Jackson Mountain trail system being proposed, I am concerned about the impact of this trail system on deer, elk and non-game species. Deer and elk are losing habitat on private lands in the area and this illegal system has cut into an area of public land that had been identified as important winter habitat for deer and elk. Do we have adequate data on the boundaries of the winter deer and elk range? Is there adequate information on the importance of this area for non-game species of conservation concern? Before any trails are approved, there needs to be more research into the species that have already been impacted by these trails and how that impact can be reversed. Can we have detailed maps of habitat overlaid by the user-created trails? Will there be increased funds for law enforcement to assure that new trails do not creep into the western portion of the area from the newly recognized system trails? Is the government willing to fine and prosecute those that continue to build illegal trails?

Trails have a wide corridor of impacts (whether hiking or biking) to wildlife. One study showed animals flush 100 m from hikers or bikers on a trail (Taylor and Knight, Ecological Applications, 2003). Your maps and analysis should utilize this study and any more recent research to assess and show the public the corridor width of impacts to wildlife.

Given the impacts of the trail system, the vegetation treatments could add negative pressure on Jackson Mountain's ecosystems. I am concerned about the removal of any older trees, Ponderosa or White Fir, from a landscape that has been logged and is lacking historical old growth forest. These large trees provide thermal cover for animals in the winter and summer. Prescribed burns are the most natural way to reduce fuels where there are many small trees due to past logging. The largest trees should always be left and thermal cover must be considered on any winter range.