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Comments: As Co-leader of Northwest Montana Great Old Broads for Wilderness, I am grateful for the opportunity to provide public comment on the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail. I love our wild places and enjoy the privilege of being able to explore them. I am thrilled with the idea of a national scenic trail traversing Montana. I am dismayed that there was no provision for valuable public input in the selection of the existing route. I completely oppose any portion of the trail passing through critical grizzly bear recovery areas. Grizzly bears are a federally protected species under the Endangered Species Act. An EIS that includes a thorough assessment and analysis of the impact of the trail passing through critical grizzly bear habitat must be completed. The grizzly bear population in the Yaak has not recovered.

It is my understanding that the Forest Service neither considered nor publicly acknowledged the findings of two independent studies, one commissioned by Congress, that identify the existing PNT as highly detrimental to grizzly bear recovery in the Yaak. The travel of an estimated 552-1748 hikers in summer months would likely create impacts on several species of wildlife in addition to grizzly bears, such as Canada lynx and North American wolverine. The best alternative for grizzly bears is to move the trail out of their critical habitat, somewhere to the south and away from critical recovery zones. Further, I understand that the location of the current route poses major difficulties for local search and rescue and border patrol, should need of those services arise. I trust that the process ahead will remedy these concerns so that the splendor and beauty of this historical trail can be enjoyed by current and future generations.

Respectfully,

Mary Alexine

Co-Leader

Northwest Montana Great Old Broads for Wilderness