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Comments: I am writing in objection to the Northern Route of the PNT. The proposed addition to the Pacific Northwest Trail would introduce a high-traffic corridor of thousands of hikers through the heart of the grizzly's habitat. This northern route trail is highly problematic; 68 miles of the proposed PNT route currently pass through grizzly bear habitat in the Yaak, and 44 of these miles are designated as grizzly bear core habitat.

Slating the trail through the Yaak would be dangerous to both bears and hikers and would be detrimental to the grizzlies and their critical habitat.

A 1980 congressional study resolved that the northern route of the PNT would have a significant impact on grizzly bears and the sensitive high-elevation habitat through which it would pass. However, in 2009, the out-of-state club added the northern route to a rider of a must-pass bill, meaning it now requires an act of Congress to reverse. Since the 1980 assessment, the number of grizzly bears in the Yaak has decreased, not increased. The Yaak's grizzlies are an incredibly at-risk subpopulation of an already endangered species; responsible management of their protection, as well as the hikers that would be sent into their territory, is not currently being considered with priority. It is not suitable, necessary, or responsible to put a high-traffic corridor through the core grizzly habitat of the Yaak Valley.

Multiple proposals exist that would reroute the trail, allowing hikers to still experience the region along the PNT but not impact the core grizzly habitat. The benefits of the Southern Route of the PNT through the Cabinet region are numerous for many regional stakeholders, including communities, businesses, forest management, hikers, and grizzlies. A win-win solution exists on the Southern Route of the PNT.

I petition the US Forest Service to consider their responsibility to care for the land and serve people. I petition the US Forest Service to ensure that the Southern Route of the PNT is put in place instead of the Northern Route for the wellbeing of all involved.

Respectfully,

Joelle Szendel