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Comments: From my point of view, the whole process of decision making on the Pacific Northwest Trail has been upside down and backwards. We are only now being invited to comment on a trail that has already been in operation for several years. During those years, the Forest Service, despite having been warned back in 1980 by several well known bear biologists that the trail would jeopardize the Yaak population of grizzly bears, has not only promoted the trail on its website, but actually built new sections of it and put up signage. All of this with no meaningful public involvement, and the Forest Service having ignored a directive from Congress to do a comprehensive study on the trail.

So now, having wasted taxpayer money on losing a lawsuit that compels them to do the study, the Forest Service is finally asking us, the public, what we think. What I think: the trail stands to add one more nail to the coffin of a tiny, isolated population of grizzly bears who have enough problems without having to contend with 20 "parties" per week of hikers traipsing through their territory. I would like to know how the Forest Service arrived at this 20 per week carrying capacity, and how they know whether it is being exceeded, and what they plan to do if it is.

The trail, if it is to exist, needs to be rerouted such that it avoids core grizzly bear habitat. The Yaak Valley Forest Council has done exactly that, in creating the Southern Route. While any trail through grizzly country has the potential to disrupt the bears, the Southern Route was carefully chosen to minimize such impact, and should be considered as a viable alternative.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.