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First name: Laura
Last name: Yale
Organization:
Title:
Comments: Hello,
My name is Laura Yale and I recently moved to Eureka, Montana and I am an avid backcountry skier and lover of all things winter. We moved to this area for its wilderness qualities, and its intact wildlife habitat, and hope that OSV management will align with both of these values we hold so dear here.

The plan proposes designating 1,257,633 acres, accounting for approximately 59% of the planning area, for cross-country OSV use. From this, approximately 278,000 acres will be open for use between December 1 and March 31. We hope that instead of allowing the remiaining 979,000 acres to remain accessible from December 1 to May 31, that the closures begin on March 31 to safeguard grizzly bears as they emerge from their dens, particularly vulnerable females with cubs wherever known or future grizzly habitat may be.

Furthermore, we believe the  Forest Service should add additional seasonal closures to ensure adequate snow cover for protecting whitebark pine seedlings and saplings from potential damage.

We applaud the Forest service for not proposing to designate OSV use in areas currently closed for cross-country skiing, campgrounds, or in regions deemed not suitable for OSV use in the forest plan, including recommended Wilderness and non-motorized backcountry regions.

While the existing questions KNF is addressing the minimization criteria are a good starting point, they mainly focus on wildlife and whitebark pine impacts. To ensure a comprehensive assessment, each area and trail should also be screened for potential noise or air pollution impacts, and the Forest Service should diligently consider and minimize any potential use conflicts arising from designated areas or routes.

In particular, it's essential to ensure that snowmobile area boundaries and designated trails are strategically located to discourage motorized use in non-motorized areas, like the pristine Wilderness regions. Further screening questions should be developed to address these crucial topics.

Overall, the Kootenai National Forest's proposal and analysis show a strong start in managing winter travel. However, to ensure a thorough evaluation of potential impacts from designations, developing a few additional screening questions is warranted.

Moreover, there are three significant roadless areas, namely the Galena, Barren, and Allen Peak Inventoried Roadless Areas, located adjacent to the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness. These areas play a crucial role in providing vital habitat connectivity for grizzlies, wolverines, fishers, and Canada lynx.

In the Proposed Action, the Forest Service is proposing to designate the majority of these roadless areas for over-snow vehicle use, which we believe is inappropriate considering their invaluable conservation value.

It is imperative for the Forest Service to meticulously plan the implementation of the new winter travel plan once it reaches completion. This implementation strategy must encompass essential components such as education, monitoring, and enforcement. To guarantee a seamless execution, these factors should be considered right from the outset of the planning process. Articulating a clear roadmap for achieving each element within the plan itself will be paramount to its success.

Lastly, we believe the Ten Lakes area OSV use should be addressed soon, and would hope it is managed for its

wildlife habitat and wilderness characteristic values.

Thank you for being proactive in your winter management, we are grateful!!

Laura Yale