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Organization:

Title:

Comments: To Andrew Skowlund,

I strongly oppose this amendment to the 1987 Forest Plan. I am in favor of option A, the no action alternative and the continued protection of elk habitat and wild character in the Clearwater National Forest.

I also request that the agency start the process of formally closing all motorized use in roadless/unroaded areas of the forest, including the Mallard-Larkins, Great Burn, Weitas-Bighorn, and Fish-Hungery Creek roadless areas.

As an outdoorsman, birder, angler, backpacker, and Idaho native, I find it obscene that the USFS is attempting to circumvent wildlife standards. These standards act as an umbrella for many species in the Clearwater. Not the least of course is elk. The behaviorally unique population of bull trout in Fish Lake, as well as rare long-ranging species that require intact roadless and wild country to thrive, such as wolverine and grizzly bear, are beneficiaries of a policy that limits motorized use in the backcountry. Such policies are rare, the result of a federal government that sees wildness as a problem and "access" as something that always comes from the roar of a Diesel engine and tax-payer funded roads.

It should be obvious that increased motorized use in the backcountry is a problem. Illegal use is rampant on the Clearwater, enforcement is slim to none (there is no LE in the North Fork District, except county officials, correct?), and the impacts are obvious and damaging. Besides the aesthetic damages (the entire north end of Fish Lake has been reduced to a parking lot of dust for ATVs), there are significant problems from noise pollution, decreased habitat security, erosion, and a loss of a real sense of wildness in roadless areas. Increasing motorized access an inch has (without any meaningful constraint on illegal use) given machines a mile, and so it should be clear to stop that inching away of wild areas.

Suffice to say, the direction that the agency is heading, one that puts motorized use as a major pillar of policy, above protections for wildlife, is indicative of an agency without moral footing in public land management. Indeed, one wonders what "footing" the agency allows at all, as compared to driving. Are rangers required to drive up and down the hallways of the ranger station on a side by side?

If such comparisons seem extreme, consider the lives of the most rare and human-averse species. Wolverine can live up to a decade or more. Doubtless one of the ~300 individual wolverine left in the lower 48 was around in 2011, and is now enjoying the relative peace and quiet of a Fish Lake unburdened by the decision to give motorists whatever-they-please-no-questions-asked.

Which, to be clear, is still mightily accessible, wonderful, and remarkable. I have visited Fish Lake, and (besides illegal motorized use) I was stunned by the wildlife, scenery, and solitude. Birds of all kinds abounded: tanagers, siskins, jays, thrushes, chickadees, and sapsuckers. Fish, including the bull trout, were plentiful. Moose tracks and wolf scat gave evidence of a wild place that still supports the most incredible predator-prey interactions of the Clearwater (something incredibly rare now that wolves can be shot from a moving ATV in Idaho). I swam in the cold, clean water. I hiked up to the Stateline ridge. Fish Lake is not a reservoir to drive around, and it's not a track to race. It's a sacred place, the corner of 260,000 acres of the most wild unprotected territory in America. And I accessed it on an easy and rewarding hike.

Again, the only negative to my experience was trash, noise, dust, and parking lots that are a direct result of motorized use on the lake.

Lastly, I would like to reiterate my extreme disappointment in this proposed action. The USFS should commit to wildlife, to habitat, to rule of law, and to respect of wild places. Please choose option A, the "no action" alternative.

Thank you.