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Title:

Comments: Kevin, allow me to begin by expressing my appreciation for you and the Forest Service. Especially in light of the challenges faced (and I won't pretend to know more than what's at the surface), the good you bring forward in this technologically-obsessed and politically-distracted world goes largely unrecognized. Thank you for all that you do.

Next, a bit of background. I'm an advocate for the benefits of outdoor recreation, and mountain biking is one of my passions. During my time as Board President of the nonprofit Northwest Trail Alliance, I engaged the Oregon Outdoors Coalition to bring the voice of mountain biking to statewide recreation advocacy. I'm also an advisor for the statewide, multi-user Oregon Trails Coalition and a founding steering committee member for the Oregon Mountain Biking Coalition (OMBC), a newly-formed statewide advocacy organization. However, my opinions are not necessarily those of the OMBC, as the short timeframe has kept us from polling the member organizations we represent.

On to the matter at hand.

At risk of stating the obvious, stifling backcountry access appears to be an unsustainable strategy in the face of increasing recreational demand and the overuse of closer-in and marquee destinations. It's from this vantage point that a decision against a proposal like Cowhorn Cutoff, a valuable extension of the Forest Service trail network, based on unfounded environmental impacts elsewhere in the network, would seemingly undermine effective system-wide planning, subverting the societal benefits recreational trails are intended to provide.

If the feared downstream impacts are well founded, let's move to mitigate those impacts. Yet we both know that the impact of recreational mountain biking on soils is comparable to hiking, and with regard to riparian and other trailside impact, literature has shown that mountain bikers travel off-trail less frequently than those on foot.

Of course, design and stewardship have a significant influence on environmentally-sustainable, trail-based recreation, and arguably should be the preferred options (above constraining user access) to mitigating undesirable recreational impact. Oregon's mountain biking community has shown itself as a positive (if not the dominant) volunteer force in (re)building and maintaining trails to best practices.

In other words, we're here to help, to move things forward.

Looking more broadly, we're blessed that the divisive national climate has yet to become entrenched in our backyard. I like to imagine how projects like Cowhorn Cutoff can help bridge current user divides in recreation ideology by making and widely communicating decisions that are based on inclusion and science.

If there's a way I, or the larger mountain biking community, can be of greater service, just ask.

My highest regards,

Chris Rotvik