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Organization:

Title:

Comments: January 26, 2024

Re: Objection Period Comment - Nez Perce-Clearwater Forest Plan Revision #44089

Dear Reviewing Officer,

I am writing to support the Final Environmental Impact Statement, Draft Record of Decision, and Revised Forest Plan during the current objection period based on my standing as having previously submitted formal comment during the Nez Perce-Clearwater Forest Plan Revision process.

I appreciate the extensive effort given by the planning team to balance best-available science with diverse stakeholder input. Finding the balance was certainly no easy task. The Draft Plan reflects sensible compromise in many areas including designation of Recommended Wilderness with opportunity for mechanized use. As a lifelong mountain biker and also as a supporter of protecting our nation's wildlands, I view this balance as critically important.

Paramount to most mountain biker's concerns is the Draft Plan's intention to restore mechanized access to the full "Heart Lake Loop", which is a ride that approaches legendary status for local mountain bikers due to its unique combination of high quality trails, alpine scenery, and backcountry experience. This ride typically starts on the Montana side at the Heart Lake Trailhead and uses a counterclockwise loop using FSR #250 (or Trail 111) to Hoodoo Pass, then south on Trail #738, then Trail #175 down to Pearl Lake/Heart Lake and out to the Heart Lake Trailhead.

I am also very pleased to see the recommendation to allow mechanized on the Stateline/Divide Trail (#738) between Hoodoo Pass and Kid Lake Trailhead. The 150-foot corridor in the Recommended Wilderness boundary along Trail #738 between Fish Lake and Kid Lake Trailhead is particularly creative and strikes a good balance between the high-quality preservation afforded by the Recommended Wilderness designation and logical mountain bike access. The corridor is exactly the kind of win-win solution mountain bikers requested during the planning process, and it will allow mountain bikers to access the amazing alpine terrain along Trail #738 and egress at multiple locations along the route to both the Idaho and Montana sides of the trail. The mechanized trail access afforded by the Draft Plan along Trail #738 helps create opportunities for multiple loops and long distance point-to-point routes, and it is precisely the kind of experience most mountain bikers desire for this area.

There are a limited number of true backcountry trails both open and suitable for bike travel in our Idaho/Montana region. In recent years, these opportunities have been reduced in both states as several long-distance routes have been closed to bike travel through various USFS management policies. It is highly important to the mountain bike community that the Draft Plan retains the heart of one of the most important backcountry mountain bike experiences that remains in our region.

I fully support the Revised Forest Plan for the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest, and I would like to see it implemented as it is currently written. As a supporter of balanced mountain bike access and sensible expansion to Recommended Wilderness areas, I think the Draft Plan does an excellent job, and I thank the Forest Service for the collaborative and inclusive process.

Thank you for considering my comment, and I wish to be included as an interested party in any potential objection resolution.

