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Comments: I have professionally worked with Mountain Goat habitat since 1972 and served as Lolo NF Ninemile District Ranger from 1988-1998. As Ninemile District Ranger I was deeply involved in and responsible for much of the proposed Great Burn Wilderness. We made strong decisions to prohibit both mechanized and motorized use on the Montana portion of the Great Burn. These actions were to prevent incompatible uses in a proposed Wilderness.

Working with mountain goat habitat revealed that goats have avoidance and displacement adverse reactions to contact with humans. In Idaho, I observed (and supported by literature) summering goats avoiding using high basins with lakes that attracted human use in favor of less used high basins. In winter, goats are very restricted to mostly windblown ridges or cliffy areas where deep snow does not accumulate. These preferred winter habitats are usually small and isolated. When disturbed goats are forced into exhausting deep snow treks to other such habitat if it does exist. While tough on adults, such energy consuming treks are extremely difficult for sub adult goats. It may prove fatal to a goat that does not expend energy unnecessarily in winter when forage is very limited.

While Ranger, we learned of snowmobiles routinely violating the Lolo travel plan prohibiting their use. Snowmobiles increasingly are able to "high mark" into the most rugged but very limited terrain supporting mountain goats. As a ranger I quickly learned that once beyond the trail or road head it was difficult to locate and cite violators. Apparently these violations have continued to the present.

Frankly the only way to enforce snowmobile restrictions from frequent violations is at visible trailheads in proximity to plowed roads. Allowing snowmobiles to access a mountain and then stop at some marked or unmarked (or snowed over sign) is certain to fail to contain snowmobiles. They simply will be everywhere. Any other method is throwing the whole Montana and Idaho portions of the Great Burn open to snowmobile interests due to the lack of design to be able to effectively enforce restrictions.

Providing for snowmobile access on 40,000 acres in a new Forest Plan language will rely on some future travel plan to permit or contain them. The Forest Plan is the direction to follow for 20 years while the Travel plan can be altered at any time. How can a mountain range be managed with different Forest Plan directions on the Idaho and Montana portions? Once snowmobiles are permitted on any lands, my political savvy has taught me that they will never be removed due to politics of special interests and therefore much of the present proposed wilderness will never be Wilderness. Thus, effectively, opening the door to snowmobiles is an irretrievable commitment and must be so noted in the EIS.

For future consideration for Wilderness, allowing mountain bikes will preclude passage of a Great Burn Wilderness because bike enthusiasts will be a political force preventing Wilderness passage. A cherry stem allowance will sever the integrity of the landscape as Wilderness. Thus mountain bikes are not compatible with the Great Burn and should be prohibited via the Forest Plan.