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First name: Tristan

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Reviewing Officer,

I am writing today to thank you for your inclusion of a mechanized corridor for bicycle access along the State Line trail south of Hoodoo Pass.

While I am not a formally trained land manager, I have spent many years of my life pondering the importance of what you are deciding over the next few months. I spent seven summers working on Wilderness based trail crews for the Forest Service. Those summers in my 20's live firmly in my heart as a deeply meaningful and important period of my life. The importance of wild lands to me cannot be overstated. That being said, I am also a recreationist.

In my life I've found great joy in many forms of backcountry recreation including hiking, backpacking, trail running, cross country and backcountry skiing. I also feel privileged to have enjoyed several years riding horses and packing mules as a Wilderness Ranger and can say that I miss my time in the saddle, but perhaps more, I miss the animals. I loved the experience of staying in a camp with horses milling about, sometime right in the middle of our dinner by our campfire to avoid the bugs. To this day I appreciate seeing people on the trail who are dedicated to the trade, and maintain their skills to travel the backcountry on horseback. Unfortunately, it seems effectively impossible that I will ever have the land to own a horse, let alone an entire pack string with the associated truck, trailer, and equipment to ever do it again. I believe that the barrier to entry in the modern world is very high for horse packing.

But something I (and many others) can afford and do enjoy is mountain biking. While there are innumerable differences that can be drawn between horseback riding and mountain biking, I think the lines become more blurred in a backcountry setting. My mindset while riding my bike somewhere like the State Line trail is really not that different from riding a horse. Both take preparation, dedication, technical skills and a lot of work to make the adventure happen. Additionally, it's not the thrill of the ride that is captivating so much as the sense of wonder of being in the backcountry. And while for me, these days "going for a ride" means on a bike, I'm not there to conquer the trail, or set speed records. I'm there with my bike because it's a (hopefully!?) somewhat more efficient means of covering ground than walking. Which is very much the same intent as using a horse.

I do not see mountain bikes as a risk to the land nor the wildlife for a number of reasons, but suffice it to say that I believe, and I think the science will bear out, that the real threat to wildlife is not the occasional quiet recreator but rather it is extractive industries and development.

I understand the aesthetic difference between traditionally managed Wilderness without mechanized travel (mountain bikes), and I appreciate that these areas will remain managed as such. But I also ask land managers, such as yourself, to consider other forms of quiet, human powered recreation such as mountain biking in some of the limited backcountry areas that remain in the Northern Rockies that are not official Wilderness. Much like the wild lands that we are trying to protect, the human spirit has a need to feel untrammelled, free to enjoy the backcountry in differing ways, and I would like to think that we can share this one important trail, the State Line trail, through the Great Burn, as hikers, hunters, skiers, horseback riders...and mountain bikers.

Sincerely,

Tristan Dunlap