

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 2/3/2024 4:30:16 AM

First name: James

Last name: Bleuer

Organization:

Title:

Comments: This project has some good and sorely needed components to it, but also some problematic points. In the interest of time, I will only address the areas of concern.

I'm a full-time McCall resident. I work full-time, and the proximity to town of the area that this project encompasses allows me to be a regular user of these public lands - often with my wife, 1 year old Son, and two dogs. In the winter, I cross country ski the Bear Basin Nordic trails 3-4x a week. I snowmobile out of Titus most weekends, and sometimes out of West Face or Green Gate. I'm a seasoned backcountry skier and sometimes sled in for ski touring. In the summer, I am on the Bear Basin or Rim trails almost every day - mountain biking, running, hiking. I hunt in the area this project covers, and I cut most of my annual firewood supply from there. I know the land in question extremely well, and treasure having this resource so close to home.

Given the proximity to town, these particular public lands are extremely important to locals and visitors. Major changes like these can not be taken lightly, and we must get them right the first time. My primary concerns with this project are as follows:

First issue - the Bear Basin Nordic closure expansion.

This expansion is a lot more aggressive than it initially seems, and I would like the Forest Service to clarify the justification. It seems to me like the Ski Club has a permitted area larger than they are currently grooming, and want to close down access to a large area that isn't accessed by skiers unless they decide to go off-trail (which is rare, and if they do, it's often utilizing packed trails left by snowmobiles).

The Northern / Eastern boundary of the current Nordic system is my favorite part of skiing Bear Basin. Most of my skis incorporate that basin. I also really value the areas North and East of the current boundary as a snowmobiler. It's where I learned to ride off trail, and where I plan to take my son to learn when he's old enough. It's a low-stress area to target when you've only got a few hours, or when you're taking beginners. There are completely open meadows and forest that has been heavily managed / thinned, so on a low snow day you need to worry less about hitting stumps and snags. You can get glimpses of the lake, not have to battle for parking, and in the case of an emergency, you're only a few miles on a well packed trail to the safety of a plowed road.

This is a huge asset for the snowmobiling community, in particular the locals who know about it and use it when the conditions / needs arise. There's nothing else that I'm aware of that we have access to that addresses this specific need.

If the aim of the expanded closure is to limit encroachment on the current groomed system by snowmobilers, I don't think it will do a thing to help. Every year as a Nordic skier I see the encroachment, and it angers me both as a paying ski pass holder and a snowmobiler who actually does the map homework to avoid conflict. I've been skiing in the northern basin and watched ignorant sledgers not only cross but actually ride the groomed trail, sometimes even ON the classic track. I try to educate people when I can, but most of the time I can't catch up on

skis.

Every time I've seen sledders entering / exiting the area, it's from NF-451. The map given to snowmobilers is extremely low resolution, especially the digital version, and nobody's going to constantly stop, take off gloves, and then pull out maps on phones or gigantic physical maps that show very little detail and often don't give you a clear yes / no answer on whether you should be there. What would help is putting a blown up map at the intersection with the groomed trail that leads most people to the Northern basin, explaining to people where they are. The same should be done at West Face and Green Gate. A few key entry points that see habitual encroachment could even justify some rope and a sign.

I'm somewhat suspicious of another aim here, which would be to appease home owners near the closure area. Beginning two years ago, I noticed what I believe to be FS-836 seems to be getting groomed for skiing, and even has a classic track set. The road I'm referring to is the one directly on the current boundary area shown on snowmobile maps, where Old Brundage Road turns left to skirt the groomed Nordic trails, or right to go downs towards Warren Wagon via what is apparently at some point private property before connecting to the public road, according to the abundant 'No Trespassing' signs. I skied there today, and this grooming appears private and disconnected from the Payette Lakes Ski Club grooming altogether. I also checked at the Bear Basin trailhead again today, and there's no trail noted on the publicly accessible maps.

That being said, I would like the Forest Service to better explain the impetus in closing an area that is not being used by the ski club. Are requests coming from the Ski Club, or private individuals? Who is grooming the road in question and for what purpose? What benefit is there to excluding snowmobilers from otherwise unused public land, close to town, that is ideal for beginners or those that only have time for short trips?

Second issue - the full Granite mountain closure.

Who specifically would benefit? Is Brundage going to operate outside of the current closure dates? If so, the only people who benefit are those who can afford \$450 a day?

Are the key beneficiaries those who sled assist ski? I do so myself, but I can count on one hand the number of snowmobilers with skis / boards who are at Titus on any given weekend day. Those that are there have plenty of opportunities in the area - many (myself included) put in the extra 1 mile to get to Twin Lakes, which hasn't been destroyed by snowcat-leveraging tourists all season, and is generally safe from snowmobilers.

Brundage signed between Titus and Granite so heavily this year that the trail ride into areas where many of us want to go feels like driving a highway in South Dakota littered with billboards. Neither Brundage nor the Forest Service has the resources to enforce the current closures, and my feeling is the snowmobiling community is angry. There's been more negative talk about Brundage this year than I've experienced in the past, to the point where I've seen people actively defying the closures - ie, running over the signs and going right up closed areas.

My worry is that if you continue to expand closures and do nothing to enforce them, then violations, disregard for the rules, and tension between user groups will only grow. Making the hundreds of people in Titus suffer through 40+ miles of trail to get a few hours of decent snow off trail, just so that tourists who pay \$450 for a single day

experience will have better snow seems like a recipe for disaster.

Third issue - fuel reduction.

I'm generally excited to see this big of an effort go into the area - sometimes it seems like FS resources aren't applied on thinning, prescribed burns etc at all once you pass Brundage / Bear Basin. However, I question if you could better leverage the general public here. Specifically, many of us are out there every Spring / Summer looking for dead trees, down or standing, for our winter heating. One limitation is that we aren't allowed to use any form of winching. If you allowed people to park just off the road and use winches, you would

See fewer people driving rigs off-road as far as they can

Increase the buffer on either side of the road by removing dead trees within winching distance

In closing, I appreciate the time you have taken to read these comments. I am likely unable to attend this particular live session due to work and family commitments, but I am generally happy to find time to speak in person or over the phone.

Sincerely,

James Bleuer

McCall resident