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First name: JD

Last name: Marshall

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I Support Access and Active Management in the Northwest Forest Plan

Dear Northwest Forest Plan,

I am writing to express my views on the Northwest Forest Plan, focusing on the importance of continued public access, especially through motorized routes, and the implications of current management strategies.

As an individual who deeply values the ability to access and enjoy our public lands, I find the prospect of restricted access through arbitrary closures of motorized routes concerning. The USFS, in its stewardship of these lands, should aim to maximize route availability, recognizing the multifaceted benefits these routes offer.

The economic implications of such restrictions cannot be overlooked. Outdoor recreation, including motorized activities, represents a significant portion of a trillion-dollar industry. The growth in popularity of motorized use on public lands is an opportunity for local communities to benefit economically. Limiting access through forest designations or closures, however, would lead to concentrating users in smaller areas, thus increasing impact and reducing economic benefits. These forests play a vital role in local economies through activities like timber harvest, recreation, grazing, and rock hounding, all of which necessitate comprehensive public access.

From the standpoint of equity, it is crucial to address the needs of Americans with mobility impairment disabilities. The current management approach often places motorized recreation, a key means of access for many with disabilities, in a secondary position to conservation and protection efforts. This can inadvertently lead to discrimination against a group of Americans who are already underserved. Policies should be inclusive, for instance, by allowing e-bikes on non-motorized routes, as they have similar impacts to human-powered bikes.

In managing these lands, the USFS should employ strategies that mitigate negative impacts through education and proper route management rather than resorting to closures. As outdoor recreation's popularity continues to rise, the focus should be on providing reasonable access to accommodate this growth without exacerbating environmental impacts.

I also wish to highlight the importance of dispersed camping. A robust network of designated routes is essential for maintaining access to dispersed camping areas. Such routes often lead to valuable camping spots and should be recognized and maintained for this purpose.

Furthermore, the First Amendment rights of groups to gather and organize rides for educational and recreational purposes must be considered. Restricting access to routes could potentially infringe upon these rights. The USFS has the capacity to manage diverse recreational activities, ensuring that motorized and non-motorized users can coexist without the need to restrict one group to accommodate another.

Lastly, I want to emphasize the role of road networks in wildfire management. With wildfires posing a significant threat to the Northwest Forest, roads act as natural barriers and are crucial in fire management strategies. Their maintenance and protection should be an integral part of the forest management plan.

In summary, I urge the USFS to consider a balanced approach in the Northwest Forest Plan that prioritizes accessibility, economic benefits, inclusivity for those with disabilities, and effective land management practices. Such an approach will not only benefit the diverse user groups but also contribute to the sustainable stewardship of these valuable public lands.

Thank you for considering my feedback on this important matter.

Sincerely,

JD Marshall

16870 Roaming Elk Dr Monument, CO 80132-9255

napjeeper@gmail.com