

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/12/2024 5:00:00 AM

First name: David

Last name: Hamer

Organization:

Title:

Comments: USDA Forest Service

Comprehensive Plan - Arizona National Scenic Trail

Thank you for your attention to the scenic and wonderful AZT.

I am leaving Canada for the AZT in less than a week. I plan to complete my hike of the AZT that I had to stop on March 17 of 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic. I know several people in my hometown in the Canadian Rockies who travel south to hike on the AZT. One of these individuals travels to the AZT quite regularly.

It is because of the AZT's scenic beauty and the very high level of trail quality, trail protection, and wildland conservation that the AZT attracts people from afar.

I hope the Forest Service is able to provide for, and enhance, the AZT's protective status.

I hope that the USDA does not bow to pressure to allow motorized vehicles on the AZT.

From where I live in the Canadian Rocky Mountains, I look out my window directly into Banff National Park (some 2 miles west). Parks Canada, inexplicably, has thrown in with the current fascination with electric vehicles.

For the first time in 5 decades, Parks Canada has opened the door to public use of motor vehicles in the backcountry - in this case, the electric motor bicycle - apparently because "They are so green." This greenwashing is a major step backward in backcountry management, and it increases the risk to the threatened Grizzly Bear population. Prior to this step backwards, which occurred two years ago, trails designated for mountain biking had been shortened in length in some instances, and deleted entirely from the list of approved bicycling trails in many other instances: biking is too fast, too quiet, and too intrusive (travelling much farther into the backcountry than hikers, in the same amount of time), and thus creates an unacceptable risk of bear-human encounters.

Now we are dealing with the even faster, even quieter, and even more intrusive motorized bicycle in the backcountry.

In the case of the AZT, comparable threats would accrue from electric motor vehicle use, regarding conflict with black bears, cougars, desert tortoises, and other wildland species and values. I encourage the USDA to not go down the path that Parks Canada chose. Possession is nine-tenths of the law: once electric motor vehicles are permitted, it is very difficult to turn back.

Thank you again for your efforts to maintain and enhance the quality and level of protection offered to the AZT.