

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/28/2024 3:47:53 PM

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Hello and thank you for the opportunity to comment on this forest plan revision.

While I now live in Maine, I lived in Missoula for nearly 20 years. During that time, I backcountry skied at Lolo Pass regularly. It was my "go-to" spot due to its abundant snow, accessibility, and terrain. Some of my most special memories are from the times I skied at Lolo. I still visit Missoula regularly (my in-laws live in Coeur d' Alene) including as recently as March 2024, when I was not only in Missoula but went skiing at Lolo Pass.

I also regularly skied on the Lolo Forest near Lookout Pass (the St. Regis Basin), and on Wisherd Ridge. Lookout Pass is especially dear to me as it not only provides Missoula skiers with a great opportunity, but also skiers in north Idaho and Spokane (where as I mentioned, I know visit regularly to see my in-laws).

So much of area's national forests are open to winter motorized recreation, it seems equitable and reasonable to create opportunities for backcountry skiers and riders that are protected from motorized traffic. In addition to noise pollution (it is such a downer to listen to the drone of motorized vehicles while on a ski tour), there are significant safety concerns when both motorized and non-motorized users are in the same area. Years ago, at St. Regis Basin, a snowmobiler zoomed uphill while my ski group was descending. The operator fell off his snowmobile, which then traveled down the slope without a rider on it. It nearly hit one member of our ski party.

I strongly support the designation of a Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized setting for all of places I ski and mentioned above (plus others where I have skied, but did not specifically mention) including: Lolo Pass, Hoodoo Pass, Saint Regis Basin, Wisherd Ridge, Marshall Mountain, and Morrel Mountain.

Specifically, please restrict motorized access into Saint Regis Basin. I oppose FS 18591 as a Semi-Primitive Motorized setting. Please consider it as a Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized setting to lessen snowmobile conflict (see my anecdote above).

Please, also restrict motorized access into the Crystal Amphitheater on Lolo Pass, which is heavily used by the backcountry ski and snowboard community. I oppose FS 16675 as a Semi-Primitive Motorized setting. Please consider it as a Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized setting to prevent snowmobile conflict and trespass into this beloved ski area. This is a no-brainer. The snowmobiling in this area is limited due to trees, yet it is some of the best backcountry ski terrain within hours of Missoula. Restricting motorized traffic on the road would improve safety and experiences for the countless backcountry skiers who regularly use this area and would have little impact on motorized recreation opportunities.

Further, I'd encourage you to significantly reduce the excessive size of the motorized buffer along Morrell Mountain Lookout Road (FR 4365) to protect non-motorized access to this terrain near one of our very few backcountry yurts in this range. While I haven't had the pleasure of skiing here, it is on my list of places to visit when I am in the area. There is ABUNDANT snowmobiling opportunity in this area of the forest and this one buffer zone would be insignificant to the motorized community.

My last comment is regarding the opportunity the Forest has to anticipate future trends in winter recreation, and plan for those, precisely what a forest plan should do. New technologies, like "ski bikes" (modified dirt bikes outfitted with a snowmobile ski and track) are able to negotiate trees and side hills better than traditional snowmobiles, and they are become more and more popular. If the Forest chooses to maintain the status quo under the assumption that limited motorized use of Crystal Theater (for example) will continue due to terrain, vegetation, and topographic characteristics, it will find itself with an increasing number of conflicts and safety

concerns and ski bikes (and as yet developed technologies) become more popular and pervasive. This is a huge concern for the backcountry ski community and common sense, equitable policies that reduce current (even if limited) and future (likely to increase) conflicts is the right thing for the Forest to do when crafting a plan that will guide forest management for the next decade or more.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on this important work.

Sincerely,

Greg Peters