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Organization:

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Comments: Hello Forest Plan Revision Team,

My name is Matt Radlowski, I live in Missoula, and I am an active member of the recreation community. I am a small business owner, parent to two teenagers who love the outdoors, and I've lived in Missoula for twenty years. The Lolo National Forest is where the bulk of our outdoor recreation adventures take place, so I am very interested in participating in the forest planning process. I'd like to thank you all for organizing and hosting so many public meetings, answering questions, providing us the information we need to be informed, and for all the opportunities to weigh in on this important process. Below are my comments on the Lolo National Forest Proposed Action.

I recreate on the Lolo National Forest via hiking, skiing, running - but mountain biking is my primary way of accessing and enjoying public lands, especially in the backcountry. As a backcountry mountain biker, my goal with riding in wild places is to slow down and connect with nature. I ride my bike in a deliberate and intentional manner with many rides averaging 3 to 5 mph. This style of riding is a deeply immersive experience. The trails I seek out are rugged, remote, and quite difficult to ride - requiring solid navigation skills, self sufficiency, and often sections of walking or carrying my bike. When mountain bikers ride backcountry areas like these, we are seeking challenge, solitude, and an undeveloped recreational activity - essentially we seek a wilderness-like experience on our bikes. This is something that is becoming harder to find as more and more areas in the west are recommended for Wilderness designation, and trails within them would therefore become closed to mountain biking.

I am concerned about the potential loss of mountain bike access to trails historically ridden by myself and other mountain bikers in the backcountry areas of the Lolo National Forest. While I support the recommendation of vast areas of the Lolo National Forest for Wilderness protection, I would like to advocate for no net loss of bike access in the forest plan revision. I'd also like to recommend the forest make more use of land designations that are friendly to mountain bike use, such as Recreation Emphasis areas or Backcountry Areas. Additionally, as seen on the Nez Perce-Clearwater plan that was recently released, the use of boundary adjustments and corridors can be used to effectively provide high levels of land protection while preserving access for a wide range of recreational activities.

There are three specific areas on the Lolo National Forest that I am particularly interested in as a mountain bike rider within the proposed actions; Heart Lake, Mill Creek/Carlton Ridge, and the Cube-Iron.

The proposed action for the Lolo shows the Heart Lake drainage would be included in the Great Burn Recommended Wilderness (also known as the Hoodoo Roadless area), resulting in the loss of access for mountain bikers to several trails. The trails in the Heart Lake area have historically been ridden by backcountry mountain bikers since the mid 1980's. I support the majority of Great Burn protected as Wilderness - with a small but important boundary adjustment to allow for existing and historical mountain bike access to the Heart Lake Trail (Tr 171) and Pearl Lake Trail (Tr 175). With the recently released Nez Perce-Clearwater draft plan restoring mountain bike access via a corridor on the Stateline Trail (Tr 738); the Lolo has an opportunity to preserve a unique sub-alpine mountain bike riding loop, accessed from Hoodoo Pass, beginning on the Stateline Trail and connecting to the Lolo's Pearl Lake Trail and Heart Lake trails.

In the Mill Creek and Carlton Ridge area just north of Lolo Peak, the proposed action maps and geographic area descriptions appear to show a proposed extension of the Selway Wilderness north along the South Fork of Lolo Creek. The way this appears to be mapped in the proposed action should allow for continued mountain bike

access to some important trails in this area. The proposed Selway Wilderness extension along the South Fork of Lolo Cr, adjacent to Carlton Ridge appears to leave open the Lantern Ridge Trail (Tr 309) as well as the 3 miles of trail from the Mormon Peak trailhead up to Carlton Ridge and down the Mill Creek Trail (Tr 1310). This area contains excellent backcountry mountain bike riding opportunities close to the urban core of Missoula. I am in support of these proposed actions because they preserve mountain bike access into alpine and sub-alpine areas on the Lolo while also recommending the addition of more land to the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness. I believe this is an excellent way to balance and support multiple land designations and uses.

The Cube-Iron Roadless complex north of Thompson Falls is another area of high importance to me as a backcountry mountain biker. The proposed action recommends this area as a Backcountry Area which is a land designation that is inclusive of mountain bike access. The Backcountry Area being proposed includes trails accessed by the Four Lakes Trailhead, specifically the Cabin Lake Trail (Tr 459) and the trail connecting Mt. Headley and Cube-Iron (Tr 450). Access to these trails allows for a loop ride with Big Spruce Creek (Tr 1102). Additionally, the ridge trails (Tr 1510 and Tr 433) would continue to remain open and accessible to mountain biking. I support this proposed action for the Cube-Iron area because it maintains the wild and undeveloped feel of the area while also preserving mountain bike access.

In addition to these three areas that are most important to me within the Lolo's forest planning process, I also would like to submit comments on several other areas and topics.

In the Rock Creek Area, while I am personally disappointed to see the potential loss of mountain bike access to the Grizzly Gulch Trail (Tr. 208), Chico Gulch Trail (trail on the ridge between Chico Gulch and Flat Creek), and Ranch Creek Trail (Tr. 65) for the loop ride this provides, I also understand the importance of new Wilderness in the Quigg Peak area. In this specific instance, I agree the proposed Wilderness designation should be the priority.

Also in the Rock Creek Area, I support the Backcountry Area management proposal for the Stony Mountain area to retain access for mountain bikes on the trails in that area. These include Big Spring Creek (Tr 1269), Wyman Gulch Trail (Tr 8), and Stony Creek Trail (Tr 2).

As someone who has lived and worked in Missoula for 20 years, I am very pleased that the proposed action includes opportunities to enhance trail connectivity around the city itself - including allowing for the creation of new loop rides closer to Missoula's urban center. I support this action and suggest these new access opportunities be considered for the Marshall Canyon drainage, Mt Dean Stone area, and the Missoula Frontcountry Project area including the hills around Dry Creek road (more commonly referred to as Deep Creek trails).

I am concerned the plan does not have explicit language recognizing e-bikes as a new technology that is becoming more prevalent both at large, and as a user group accessing roads and trails on the Lolo. I believe that failing to clearly recognize this technology, its growing recreation user group, the need for planning for it, and/or not communicating a forward-looking plan to the public, will lead to increased conflict as this (and other technologies) become more available and common on the trails and roads. Planning now will put the Lolo in a better place to avoid resource damage, user group frustration, and reactive enforcement actions in the future.

While it is not explicitly a part of the Lolo's proposed Forest Plan, I would also like to state I am strongly in support of the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act (BCSA). This Act was drafted by a coalition of interested parties and submitted to Senator Tester's office for congressional action. The coalition included mountain bike advocates and the BCSA maintains desired mountain bike access to the Center Ridge Trail (Tr. 246) and to the Otatsy Lake Basin while simultaneously adding to the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex - therefore, it is highly relevant to the trail connectivity issues highlighted above that are of great value to the mountain bike community.

The forest planning process is an immense undertaking and I commend the Forest Planning Team on its efforts. Thanks again for taking the time to gather information and involve the general public in this process.

Regards,

Matt Radlowski