

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 4/1/2024 1:53:59 AM

First name: Lance

Last name: Pysher

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Like the majority of people who call western Montana home, our public lands are integral to my spiritual, physical and mental health. Alpine Lakes, old growth forests and the trails that wind their sinuous course through the landscape are where I feel most alive.

As beneficial as exposure to the outdoors is, all forms of recreational have and impact on the surrounding environment. Minimizing the impacts of recreational and balancing the demands of competing recreational groups may be one of the major challenges the Lolo National Forest will face in revising the forest plan.

I encourage the Lolo National Forest (LNF) to not further restrict access to trails that mountain bikes have traditionally utilized. There is little evidence that mountain biking has a disparate impact on wildlife or the relatively pristine character of the landscape relative to other non-motorized users. Rather than excluding the popular activity of mountain biking by restricting access in Recommended Wilderness Areas (RWA) I suggest the alternative utilization of the Backcountry designation.

As the former president of the Bitterroot Backcountry Cyclists I will focus my remaining comments on three areas of the Forest Plan Revision that I am familiar with. Specifically, Carlton Ridge, Heart Lake/ Stateline Trail, and Rock Creek.

Carlton Ridge is one of only two trails that allows MTB access to the alpine terrain of the Bitterroot Range from the Bitterroot Valley. The other being Ward Mountain. For this reason the trail is popular with mountain bikers from both the Missoula Areas and the Bitterroot Valley. Current access to this trail should maintained.

The Stateline trail and Heart Lake trails have long been a destination for mountain bikers interested in adventure and a wilderness like experience where the goal is not speed or "getting air," but rather the joys of exploration and challenge, where you are as likely to be pushing your bike as riding it. Concerns have be raised that encounters between horses and bikes are dangerous her because of the narrow trails and steep hillsides where there is limited space to pass. For the same reason bikes on the trail will not are going fast. Whether the encounter is between pack trains going opposite directions, hikers and horse, or bikes and horses, the difficulty is the same. Bikers can turn around and move off trail just as easily as a hiker and much more so than two horse groups encountering each other. MTB access to the trails should be maintained to be consistent with management in the Nez Peace National Forest

The Bitterroot/Rock Creek Divide Trail (#313) between Skalkaho Pass and Sawmill Saddle. has been maintained over the past decade primarily by the Bitterroot Backcountry Cyclist (BBC) through a volunteer agreement with the Bitterroot National Forest. This trail runs on the crest of the Sapphire Mountains and borders both the LNF and the BNF. To maintain consistency with current managerment, trails should remain open to non motorized use including mountain bikes.