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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I spend a significant amount of time recreating on Lolo National Forest lands, and I highly value easy access to non-motorized backcountry recreation. This includes backcountry skiing in the Fall, Winter, and Spring, trail running year-round, and river rafting/kayaking in the Spring, Summer, and Fall. I also enjoy mountain biking in the Spring, Summer, and Fall, and snowmobiling in the winter. I support land management decisions that increase access to, and availability of satisfying recreational experiences on Lolo National Forest lands for all these recreation types. I also support decisions that reduce user conflicts between motorized and non-motorized user groups.

As an avid backcountry skier, I am concerned about the impacts of climate change on our access to winter backcountry recreation trailheads. With less snow falling and snow limited to higher elevations, we need to rethink our access points for winter recreation. This applies to both motorized and non-motorized uses. During the 23/24 winter season, historically low snow levels made access to winter recreation difficult. Non-motorized users had to hike significant distances on dirt to access snow for skiing. Snowmobiles had to ride on dirt roads lacking snow for significant distances. Snowmobiles are not designed for this. For winter backcountry recreation to remain viable on Lolo National Forest lands, please consider opening/closing road gates at different times of the year and/or changing the locations of winter road closures to higher elevations. Also, please consider increasing access by improving the road and parking area plowing. Some of the areas impacted by this include: Mormon Peak Road, Wisherd Ridge/Lockwood Point, Snowbowl/Point 6, Elk Meadows Road/trailhead (near Lolo, MT), Morrell Mountain, Seeley Lake Westside Trailhead, Seeley Lake Eastside Trailhead to Pyramid Peak area.

The Land Management Plan Revised Assessment states, "As a result of limited road and parking area plowing, backcountry snow activities tend to congregate to 5 primary areas on the Forest including St. Regis Basin, Hoodoo Pass, Lolo Pass, Morrell Mountain, and Marshall Mountain." The Point 6 area just outside of Snowbowl Ski Area should be added to the list of primary areas on the Forest with high backcountry ski usage. This area sees a significant amount of backcountry ski usage. People access the terrain either by riding up the lifts and then exiting the ski area or by hiking up the ski area outside of operating hours. Significant numbers of people also hike up the ski area during non-operating hours and closed days to ski within the ski area boundaries. This is one the easiest access locations for backcountry and human powered skiing within the forest. Please work with Snowbowl Ski area to preserve and prioritize access. Please improve access to this popular backcountry ski area for those without a ski lift pass by having a designated uphill route that is open at all times of day.

Additionally, some very popular backcountry ski areas on Lolo Pass have dense trees growing back in that make backcountry skiing in those areas less satisfying. Consider removing some trees in the popular backcountry skiing areas to keep them viable and popular.

Backcountry skiing in this region can be very difficult to access due to long approaches to upper-elevation terrain with adequate snowfall. Additionally, avalanche hazard often limits the options of safe terrain to recreate in. Preserving easy access human-powered backcountry ski areas within the region is very important, as it will increase safety and lead to more satisfying experiences on Forest land.

Additional points:

I support the designation of a Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized setting for our favorite local spots at Lolo Pass, Hoodoo Pass, Saint Regis Basin, Wisherd Ridge, Marshall Mountain, Morrel Mountain, and Point 6. These popular areas provide opportunities for accessible human-powered backcountry skiing/riding day trips on public

lands.

Please 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.

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.

Please 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.

Thank you!