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Title:

Comments: Further comments...

Wildlife and Habitat:

While concerns about habitat fragmentation and urban sprawl are valid, numerous studies and successful examples worldwide show that responsible trail development can coexist with wildlife conservation. Modern trail design incorporates ecological principles to minimize impact on wildlife. The International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) and other organizations have developed guidelines to ensure trails are sustainable and do not adversely affect natural habitats.

In areas such as Whistler, British Columbia, and Park City, Utah, world-class biking and skiing facilities coexist with thriving natural ecosystems. These projects have demonstrated that human ingenuity and an understanding of natural systems can lead to successful coexistence between recreational use and wildlife conservation. Moreover, controlled burns and selective timber harvests are not mutually exclusive with the presence of bike trails. In fact, integrating these practices can enhance habitat quality by promoting forest regeneration.

Dispersed Recreation - Hunting:

Hunting and biking can coexist with careful planning. Designating specific areas for each activity and scheduling usage times can minimize conflicts. In several regions, such as the Pisgah National Forest in North Carolina, multi-use management strategies have successfully balanced hunting, biking, and other recreational activities. The goal is to ensure that all user groups can enjoy the forest while maintaining its ecological integrity.

Economic Impact:

While the economic benefits of hunting are substantial, it is essential to recognize the potential for diversification that biking can bring. The \$159 million generated by cycling in Northwest Arkansas is a testament to the significant economic impact that well-designed bike trails can have. This diversification can enhance economic resilience, providing additional revenue streams that support local businesses and create jobs.

Educational and Community Benefits:

The Mena Bike Trails project aligns perfectly with the mission and vision of Mena Public Schools. Our vision is to prepare students, support staff, and instill community confidence. This project will serve as an outdoor classroom, offering unique learning experiences in environmental science, biology, and physical education. It will promote physical fitness, mental well-being, and community engagement. Furthermore, the job growth associated with this project will inspire us to enhance our curriculum to include vocational training and career-focused programs, better preparing our students for future employment.

Global Examples:

Successful biking and skiing systems around the world have shown that nature can thrive alongside human activity. In Switzerland, the Alps are home to extensive skiing and biking networks that coexist with protected natural areas. In Colorado, the Rocky Mountains offer similar examples, where outdoor recreation is balanced with environmental conservation.

Conclusion:

The Trails at Mena Project is an opportunity to enhance our community's health, education, and economy while preserving our natural heritage. Responsible trail development, guided by ecological principles and successful global examples, can ensure that we maintain the integrity of the Ouachita National Forest while providing new opportunities for recreation and education.

I urge the U.S. Forest Service to consider these points and recognize the potential benefits of this project for our community. By integrating modern trail design and management practices, we can create a space that honors our natural environment and supports our community's growth and well-being.

Thank you for your consideration.