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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Madison Ranger District

Attn: Greenhorn Vegetation Project Team

Greenhorn Vegetation Project #51053

Dear Project Team,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Greenhorn Vegetation Project. The Greenhorn area is one of the most important remaining motorized multiple-use recreation destinations in southwest Montana, providing high-quality opportunities for OHV riding, dispersed camping, hunting access, and family touring that are already in short supply across the region. Protecting and enhancing existing motorized recreation in this project area is essential to meeting the needs of local residents, visitors, and communities that rely on this access.?

For more than two decades, motorized users have documented that the vast majority of visitors to this landscape engage in activities that depend on motorized access, with approximately 98 percent of users participating in motorized multiple-use recreation. These include family outings, camping, weekend drives, hunting, fishing, sightseeing, accessing patented mining claims, and collecting firewood and other natural products, all of which depend on the current road and trail network. Motorized access is also critical for elderly, disabled, and veteran visitors who cannot meaningfully experience this country without wheeled vehicles and designated motorized routes.?

The benefits of these opportunities extend well beyond recreation. Accessible motorized multiple-use improves physical fitness, supports mental health, reduces stress, and strengthens family and social connections formed through shared trips and camping experiences. Nearby communities see tangible economic and tourism benefits from Greenhorn visitors, including Montanans and out-of-state guests whose spending supports local businesses and services in towns surrounding the project area.?

Because motorized opportunities across southwestern Montana are already limited and overcrowded, the Greenhorn area fills a critical gap; users who lose access here have few or no realistic replacement areas. Any temporary or long-term loss of routes, conversion of primitive roads to high-standard haul routes, or damage to existing roads from heavy equipment would significantly degrade the quality of the motorized recreation experience and could permanently undermine this unique setting. The same is true for dispersed camping: since the pandemic, established campsites have become extremely valuable to the public, and the project area's campgrounds and numerous dispersed sites are an irreplaceable asset that should not be disrupted or destroyed.?

To avoid these adverse outcomes, the project should:

Explicitly commit to maintaining motorized routes to safe, functional standards throughout project implementation and to fully rehabilitating them to appropriate OHV/high-clearance 4WD standards once work is complete.?

Identify, map, and protect existing dispersed campsites and developed camping areas with adequate buffers from logging activity, haul routes, and landings so that campsite capacity is not reduced.?

Avoid converting key primitive recreation routes into improved industrial haul roads in a way that permanently alters their character or reduces their recreational quality.?

Analyze and mitigate safety risks created by mixing logging trucks and equipment with public use on MVUM routes, including OHV riders, campers, children, and pets.?

In addition to protection, the Greenhorn Vegetation Project presents an opportunity to enhance the long-term motorized recreation resource. Thoughtful route design could include curvilinear alignment to improve rider experience and manage speed, drainage features such as rolling dips and swales to control erosion and runoff, and short connectors and spurs that create loop opportunities and access to scenic destinations. These measures would help provide a durable, sustainable motorized network that mitigates cumulative impacts from past motorized closures elsewhere in Montana.?

Motorized users in this area recognize a shared responsibility to respect and preserve the natural environment, stay on designated routes, coexist with all other visitors, and collaborate with land managers to solve problems without resorting to closures. Organized groups have expressed a willingness to partner with the Forest Service on education, trail maintenance, monitoring, and project implementation to ensure both vegetation objectives and recreation needs are met.?

Finally, national direction under President Trump emphasizes expanding and improving public recreation access on federal lands, including off-road opportunities, while maintaining environmental stewardship. Managing the Greenhorn Vegetation Project in a way that protects and enhances existing motorized recreation, rather than diminishing it, is fully consistent with that direction and with the multiple-use mission of the National Forest System.?

For these reasons, the final Greenhorn Vegetation Project decision should:

keep all existing designated motorized opportunities open;

protect established, dispersed, and developed campsites; and

incorporate clear commitments and design features that maintain and enhance motorized recreation before, during, and after project activities.?

Thank you for considering these comments and for your work to ensure that the Greenhorn area remains a high-quality, sustainable motorized multiple-use recreation destination for current and future generations.?

Sincerely,

Nichol Phillips
Helena, MT