

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 2/12/2026 7:00:22 AM

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Austin Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement. As an individual who regularly camps, forages, explores, fishes, and swims in the Summit Creek, Idaho Creek, Bridge Creek, and Squaw Creek areas, I am deeply invested in how proposed changes will affect both my family and the broader Gambler 500 community, which is dedicated to motorized recreation and stewardship-particularly through our efforts to remove trash and litter throughout the Malheur National Forest.

My primary concern centers on the proposed reductions in motorized access through road closures, whether "stored" or permanently closed, within the Austin project area. From my experience, limiting access does not reduce overall use; instead, it forces more visitors into fewer accessible areas, increasing the risk of environmental degradation, user conflicts, and dangerous situations. This concentration undermines the stated value of public lands for diverse recreation and stewardship, and may also harm local flora and fauna by funneling traffic and disturbance into smaller zones.

The Draft EIS does not clearly explain how closing these roads is necessary to meet the project's stated Purpose and Need. It is important for the Forest Service to demonstrate, with clear maps and specific analysis, why these closures are required and how they will actually achieve the project's objectives, rather than simply reducing access for the public. The document should also address the on-the-ground impacts of concentrating recreation and motorized use, including effects on safety, user experience, and the environment.

On behalf of my family and the thousands of Gambler 500 motorized recreationists, I respectfully request that all roads remain open to public travel, except for temporary closures during active logging or vegetation management operations if truly needed. Maintaining road access is essential for ensuring equal opportunity for all Americans-including the elderly and disabled-to enjoy and care for their public lands. If the Forest Service has data supporting the necessity of these closures, it should be presented transparently so that the public can understand and provide informed feedback.