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Comments: After reviewing the Austin Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement, I am left with significant concerns about how the proposed actions will affect public access, particularly for those who rely on motorized vehicles like ATVs. For generations, my family and many others in the community have used these lands for recreation, firewood gathering, and household needs, creating memories and traditions that we hope to pass on. The proposed shift to designated routes only, with stored roads and the elimination of cross-country travel, risks undermining this heritage and limiting opportunities for rural residents, visitors, and those who are unable to access the forest by foot.

The DEIS does not clearly demonstrate how restricting motorized access to designated routes is necessary to meet the project's stated Purpose and Need. While I understand the importance of managing resources and protecting the landscape, the document lacks a clear, enforceable plan that supports ongoing motorized access for recreation and practical uses. There is also no reasonable alternative presented that would maintain or improve access while still addressing restoration or conservation objectives. The lack of detailed maps and consistent definitions, along with statements from staff that seem to contradict what is shown in the project materials, make it difficult to understand what specific closures or restrictions are actually being proposed. This uncertainty not only causes confusion but also raises concerns about transparency and future access restrictions that could be built on the foundation of this project.

Additionally, the Draft EIS appears to overstate timber production numbers, which gives the impression that production targets are being exaggerated in order to gain support for the project at the expense of motorized access. This approach risks pitting supporters of recreation access against those who rely on timber jobs, even though the promised mill jobs may never materialize if the numbers are not realistic. If timber production is a key part of the project's justification, the agency should provide clear data on species mix, utilization, and market feasibility, rather than making assumptions that may not hold up.

Emergency access and public safety are also at stake. Closed roads can slow response times for first responders and make it harder for local residents to address urgent needs. The DEIS does not adequately analyze these impacts or explain how the proposed closures would affect the ability of communities to respond to emergencies.

Public lands belong to everyone, and access should be managed in a way that balances conservation with the needs and traditions of local communities and visitors. I urge the Forest Service to stop closing roads and to re-open those that have already been closed, or at a minimum, provide a clear and reasonable alternative that maintains access. The agency should provide specific disclosure-using accurate maps and tables-and plainly explain how each proposed action is necessary to meet the project's stated Purpose and Need. Without this level of detail and transparency, it is not possible for the public to fully understand or provide meaningful input on the project. Taken together, these gaps in analysis and disclosure make the decision feel more arbitrary than reasoned, and I respectfully request that they be addressed before moving forward.