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Organization:

Title:

Comments: The Blue Mountains have been at the heart of my family's life since we moved to La Grande, Oregon in 1990. We chose this place so we could be close to these forests, and for decades we've spent nearly every weekend camping, mushroom hunting, hiking, biking, picking huckleberries, and hunting. These forests are not just scenery to us-they're part of our family's history, our daily lives, and our community's way of life. Over the years, I've watched the roads deteriorate, including places like Spring Creek 21 and many others, to the point where I only feel safe driving my ATV on them. The condition of these roads now makes it much harder for people like us-especially as we get older-to reach the places we love. With wildfire seasons getting longer, we also worry about taking our camp trailer into the forest because of the risk of being trapped by fire. I am disappointed that e-bikes are not allowed in places where they could help people like us continue to enjoy the more remote areas as we age. When roads are closed, it only makes it easier for illegal activity to go undetected, as we've seen in the past with meth labs and illegal grows discovered in the forests. The Forest Service must protect and maintain existing motorized access in the Blue Mountains and restore access where it has already been reduced. Direction for wildlife and habitat must not be used to limit motorized access further. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and final plan must clearly disclose and analyze the impacts of any access changes on roads, routes, families, and communities like ours. Roaded and historically motorized areas must not be reclassified into more restrictive categories that would reduce public access in the long term. Grazing, timber work, road maintenance, and other working uses all depend on practical access and direction that works on the ground. The final plan must also support fuels work, active forest management, reliable emergency access, and effective fire response. I urge the Forest Service to keep roads open and maintain them. I support dropping the roadless rule and increasing access to the forests through driveable roads for trucks and cars, and trails for ATVs. I've seen real benefits from active forest treatment-like the improvements along the Rainbow Road in Union County and the work on Anthony Lake Highway-and I hope to see more of this, especially in places like Tower Mountain that remain overgrown decades after a fire. Leaving areas like that untreated feels like mismanagement. This is personal for us. Now that my husband and I have more time, we want to enjoy the forests in every season. We walk daily at the Birdtrack Nature Trail and have visited the Ochoco and Malheur National Forests, but the Wallowa-Whitman remains our favorite for camping, foraging, and hunting. We value the ATV trail system on the Umatilla and have taken many trips to Tower Mountain from Umapine Campground. In comparison, the Ochoco and Malheur forests feel overregulated and offer little dispersed camping. Closures like the one at Riverbend on the upper Grande Ronde River are a real loss for longtime forest users, and closing roads like 7740 through the watershed took away good access for hunters-especially those of us who can't make long hikes anymore. Keeping these forests accessible is vital for everyone's well-being. If we don't get our children and grandchildren out into these forests now, future generations won't care for them, and the forests will suffer for it. The Forest Service must protect access so families like mine can continue to experience and care for the Blue Mountains.