Data Submitted (UTC 11): 11/11/2026 10:33:36 PM
First name: Leah
Last name: Perkins-Hagele
Organization:
Title:
Comments: RE: Whitman Post-Fire Recovery Project - Public Comments

Dear Forest Service Project Team,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the potential impacts of the Whitman Post-Fire Recovery Project on winter recreation access in the Elkhorn Mountains, Anthony Lakes, Sumpter, and surrounding areas.

For more than 50 years, I have enjoyed these mountains as both a snowmobiler and a cross-country skier. My 80-year-old father still rides these trails, and our family is now looking forward to introducing our great-grandchildren to the same mountains we have enjoyed for generations. Four generations of our family have shared a connection to this landscape through outdoor recreation. That is something worth preserving.

What makes this area particularly special is its accessibility. Ample parking, established trail systems, and terrain suitable for a wide range of ages and abilities make it possible for everyone from young children to older adults to experience the outdoors. Not every winter recreation area offers that opportunity. For families like ours, snowmobiling provides a way for multiple generations to enjoy the mountains together, including those who may no longer be physically capable of accessing remote areas on foot or skis.

At a time when our society is increasingly concerned about sedentary lifestyles, excessive screen time, and declining physical activity, preserving opportunities for outdoor recreation should be a public priority. Our public lands provide places where families can disconnect from technology, engage in physical activity, develop an appreciation for nature, and build traditions that last generations.

These opportunities should not become more difficult to access, particularly for children, older adults, and families seeking affordable ways to experience the outdoors.

I fully recognize the need for responsible post-fire recovery. Hazard-tree removal, forest restoration, and necessary road repairs are important for public safety and the long-term health of our forests. I am not opposed to this work. However, forest recovery and recreational access must be approached as complementary responsibilities, not competing priorities.

I respectfully ask the Forest Service to ensure that:

1. Existing snowmobile trails, cross-country ski routes, trailheads, parking areas, and access corridors are preserved throughout project implementation and remain usable afterward.
2. Logging, hauling, and road construction activities are coordinated with local snowmobile clubs and grooming organizations to minimize disruptions during the winter recreation season.
3. Road repairs and restoration activities account for winter use, including adequate trail widths, safe grooming conditions, accessible parking, and the removal of debris or obstacles that could compromise recreational access.
4. Temporary closures are minimized, communicated well in advance, and accompanied by reasonable alternative access wherever possible. Temporary disruptions should not become permanent losses of established recreational opportunities.
5. The needs of multigenerational families, older adults, and young children are considered when evaluating access and project impacts. Accessibility is not simply a convenience; it determines whether many people can enjoy these public lands at all.

I also encourage meaningful, ongoing collaboration with the Oregon State Snowmobile Association, local grooming clubs, and the people who have spent decades recreating in these mountains. Their firsthand knowledge of trails, seasonal conditions, and access needs is an invaluable resource.

Our national forests belong to all of us, and responsible stewardship includes both caring for the land and ensuring that future generations can experience it.

My father is still enjoying these mountains at 80 years old. My hope is that our great-grandchildren will someday be doing the same, perhaps with their own grandchildren alongside them.

That is what preserving access really means. It is not simply about keeping a trail open. It is about protecting a connection between generations, encouraging healthy outdoor lifestyles, and ensuring that public lands remain truly accessible to the public.

I respectfully urge the Forest Service to pursue a balanced, collaborative approach that allows necessary forest recovery work to proceed while protecting the recreational opportunities that make this area so valuable.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Respectfully,

Leah Perkins-Hagele