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First name: Jill

Last name: Romanello-McCleese

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Thank you We look forward to working with you.

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Jill McCleese

Elkins Creek Horse Camp & Club

Wayne National Forest

Athens Ranger District - Athens Unit

Re: Wayne National Forest, Forest Plan Revision

To: Forest Plan Revision Team

We so appreciate this time to work with the Wayne National Forest, Forest Plan Revision.

A learning process for us!

Forest Plan Assessment:

Pg. 69. Recreation on public lands is high. Hocking Hills State Park receives several million visitors per year - with 2,356 acres, open year around including holidays. Hocking State Forest with 9,696 acres open year round.

Need to change: Compared to Wayne National Forest, Ironton District approximately 107,000 acres, campgrounds close and recreational trails expect hiking and backpacking starting mid October for campgrounds and Dec 15 to April 15 for trails. Then the 204,000 average would give opportunity to access the forest year around. Suggest to look at recreational groups, their impact, compare to other trails and camps. With the stated warming climate change how much freeze and thaw is really happening and which recreation could have significant impact of damage to trails.

Please see attached recreational study on 1 private campground low conservative study based on the camp only. It does not include day riders, shoppers or people riding through from trail heads.

The average person traveled one way to camp 252.3 miles.

The average stay was 5 days.

Over half, 52.8% visiting from states or countries touching Ohio borders.

An increase in horse recreation since 2006 due to forest plan objective met - Private Equestrian Campground developed. The horse trails had a permit but the trails were in deplorable shape of backlog. A stimulus grant in 2012 repaired them to usable. Then the Elkins Creek Horse Club formed as volunteers acquiring all certifications and safety through WNF to help maintain and be a partner with the WNF since 2011. The club has partnered with Lawrence County Ohio Horseman's Council, American Endurance Riders Conference (AERC) and SWAC throughout the years. The club partnering with AERC have contributed over 80,000 in grants and training. The average volunteer hours is 4500 per year, some years more when building new trail to reroute off roads for safety and scenic purposes with little to no cost to the Forest.

The horse trail permit was removed which improved access to the trail system. The new trail riders stated, "Ohio's best kept secret", "I did not know they had horse trails here."

The American Horse Council Study showed Ohio to be 4 in the Nation for most horse population. See attached study.

The decrease in ATV use has been for several reasons:

1. Inconvenience of Ohio State registrations for ATV plus a WNF permit. Adjoining states on the border do not require the State registration and it is difficult to go to the DMV when they are closed evenings and weekends. Then the cost for the State registration and the WNF permit is exorbitant compared to the cost, available time of use and type of use of Rush Off Road.
2. Rush Off Road (rushoffroad.com) located just across the Ohio River in Rush Ky with 7000 acre tract of land and over 100 miles of trail with a season pass 95/season January 1-December 31 calendar year. A mega draw for users.
3. ATV units width has changed since 2006, suggest change in width within reason and gear toward family with spur trails to the fishing ponds near the ATV trails. Look to see if the State Registration can have an exemption for registration on National Trail in the State of Ohio.

Need for Change: Recreation increasing in areas, suggest a recreation plan for each district. When you have working groups on the ground, volunteers, don't set them aside for years when they are willing to improve the systems, create balance to keep recreation fluid and not discouraging. Trail looping and to scenic areas with a spur, educational and historic interpretive signs of the area. Use existing fire lines so maintenance is shared and fire lines stay open for trails where possible. Connect communities with trails to enhance health and economics.

Need to Change: Recreation Respect: Recreational Trails are highly valued, highly invested and the people's access to the forest. Safe, Scenic, and Sustainable trails should not be closed for logging or used for logging roads. Scenic value integrity is up most importance when people travel not just 50 miles but 100s to see the beautiful WNF. Using trails is the easy route but for who, certainly not the volunteers, small businesses, and users. I suggest we look broader and not just what we have always done... logging trail areas because of easier access.

Pg 72. Management Implications - Sustainable Recreation

Most new recreational infrastructure development on forest will be associated with the Baileys Trail System project over the next five years. - This is on the Athens district.

Need to Change: Suggest collaborate to find a way that other districts are not on hold especially when they have volunteer partners and seek funding. This is very discouraging to the volunteers and the communities on the other districts for plans that have been long past due and are much needed.

Pg. 75 Scenery Management

Need for Change - Suggest a non complex system

Trail Closure Dates - December 15 to April 15, due to climate change and the need to recreate comparing with Hocking and other trail systems in Ohio and the surrounding states they are open year around.

Need to Change - Open trails year around as compared to other National and State forest, parks.

Pg. 77 Information Gaps

National Visitor Use Monitoring Database does not capture the real recreational use of the forest. Need to work on other inputs to use with it or work to change their application of collecting data.

Social Economics Report

Need to Change - The report seemed to lack adequate recreation use and where traveling from on the Ironton district. Suggest to include WV and KY and work with the community for improved analysis. Ironton Ranger District has a potential to improve the health of the people and the economics of the community while protecting the natural resources given the collaboration of the people and the forest. There is a cultural distention that hopefully can be healed by working together.

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