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Comments: I am objecting to the DSEIS proposal to reopen the Fish Lake trail 419 to motorized use. The SEIS proposes reducing the standard for elk habitat effectiveness because it claims it cannot reach 100% effectiveness due to other factors. However, it does not yet fully address the effect this change will have on other wildlife, particularly grizzly bears, lynx and wolverines, as well as whitebark pine. If the standard is reduced for elk, it may have larger effects on these other species. The Forest Service plans to look at the effects of these species later, but the trail should not be reopened until these studies are done. Wolverines were just recently listed, so this action should be delayed until effects on wolverines can be determined.

100% EHE should be a goal even if it is never absolutely achievable. Motorized use obviously cannot fit into this management regime.

Furthermore, it seems the reason to make the change is solely to reopen the trail to motorized use, which should not be the primary goal. This area has been abused over the years, but still has wilderness characteristics and should be given time to heal. The Fish Lake trail and Fish Lake are not subalpine, so the habitat could likely recover in a reasonable amount of time. However, just east of Fish Lake is the fragile ecosystem of the Bitterroot Divide. It needs a buffer to protect it.

We backpacked into Fish Lake last summer (2023) and then up onto the Stateline trail. In 2023, Fish Lake was a completely different place than when we were there some years ago. Previously, the lake was eroded, trashy and noisy. This time, the trails were still eroded, but the lake was quiet and beautiful. Heavily used campsites and trails looked like they were starting to heal. Just up from Fish Lake is fragile country, the Bitterroot Divide, where motorized vehicles can tear up trails and delicate plant life and it would take a very long time to regenerate. With access to Fish Lake, motorized users can easily access the Divide, where whitebark pine, wolverine and other endangered creatures cling to existence.

This decision appears to be due to pressure from motorized users. While I respect their desire to recreate, there are many, many roads and trails, and many lakes in the NPCNF that are open to motorized access. The Fish Lake trail and lake is under B2 management, is part of the Great Burn proposed wilderness and should remain open to non motorized access only.