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Comments:

I am submitting my strong objection to the proposed banishment of human-powered bicycles in the Custer-Gallatin National Forest Plan Revision.

I support the Gallatin Forest Partnership Agreement, continued bicycle access to Lionshead, and continuing the practice and historic management of allowing bicycle access to Recommended w Wilderness Areas.

The idea of closing this area to mountain bikers not only reduces recreation opportunities within the Forest, but for generations it will shut out thousands of mountain bikers and other trail users from of these areas. As the Forest Service continues to lose funding, general trail maintenance is primarily falling to volunteers. The USDA and the Forest Service continue to put out directives to engage volunteers that these closures are in direct conflict with these efforts. The main source for maintenance of these trails are from volunteer mountain bikers. Without access from mountain bikers it is likely that these trails over time will simply cease to exist and be impassable for all trail users.

Mountain bikers have been riding these trails for more than 30 years. These areas have provided a unique backcountry experience for mountain bikers that is not readily available elsewhere. Local roads and developed trails do not provide the same remote self-sufficient experience that these areas provide. This unique experience is consistent with the Forest Service's mission to provide varied experiences under the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum.

The unfounded claims that mountain biking is not compatible with "social and ecological characteristics to preserve wilderness character" are not based in fact. Studies have shown the impacts from a hiker and mountain biker are nearly identical in their effect on flora and fauna, including animal movement and behavior. These studies include Thurston & Reader (2001), Bjorkman (1998), Pickering et al. (2010), and Taylor & Knight (2003). It is alarming that the Forest Service would prefer to base their decisions on subjective values rather than published studies on the matter.

The Montana Wilderness Study Act did not exclude "non-conforming" uses. Congress was clear that uses such as bikes were acceptable. Multiple court cases over managing WSAs including the McAllister decision encouraged the Forest Service to manage these uses and to consider alternatives other than wholesale area closures.

There is no evidence of user conflict.

Other Forests dealing with similar issues such as Colville National Forest have decided that the presence of bikes does not inherently degrade wilderness character and rather than ban bike they will physically monitor use and reassess access as needed.

The idea that hunting, hiking, horseback riding, and mountain biking cannot coexist on these trails is in conflict with much of the Forest Service management across the country. The remote character of these trails combined with the difficulty in accessing the backcountry makes trail user conflict unlikely and not supported by studies or science or informal data.

The closure of these areas conflicts with the Forest Service's mission of serving many uses. These closures to a generation of low-impact, sustainable, land-steward mountain bikers guarantee a reduction of people visiting the forest, losses in volunteerism and reduction of needed land stewardship. All this continues to be in direct conflict with the Motto of the Forest Service "Caring for the Land and Serving People."

In short, Bikes Belong.

#bikesbelong

Thank you,

Richard M. Hackett
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