

Glenda Wiles

From: Lance Pysher <lpysher@me.com>
Sent: Wednesday, October 3, 2018 3:30 PM
To: Ravalli County Commissioners Office
Subject: Commenting on Bikes in WSAs

The Bitterroot Backcountry Cyclists (BBC) are a 50 member chapter of the International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA). We promote mountain biking in the Bitterroot Valley and annually provide 500 volunteer hours clearing and maintaining trails primarily in the Bitterroot National Forest (BNF). As you may be aware, the BNF recently revising their rules for commenting on trail closures to mountain bikes in the Sapphire and Blue Joint Wilderness Study Areas that were implemented as part of the Travel Plan that was implemented in 2016. After litigation, the BNF was required to perform an additional objection period. Initially the objections were limited to individuals and groups who originally commented nearly a decade ago. We believed this was overly restrictive given the prolonged delay since the original release of the draft travel plan and the recent interest in the management of WSAs. With the assistance of Senator Daines we requested that everyone should have an opportunity to comment. Yesterday we were notified that the BNF has reconsidered and the objection period would be opened to all as we had requested. If memory serves, we believe that the commissioners did not originally comment on any aspect of the Travel Plan. We encourage the commissioner to take this opportunity to comment this time and hopefully support our request that bicycling be allowed in the WSA until their final status is resolved.

First we have been riding these trails for 30 years without measurable impact or conflict with other users. During the brief window these areas were accessible to bike this summer we cleared around 50 trees of 20 miles of trails, Trails that in many cases were impassable to all users. Given the limited resourced the BNF has for maintaining trails. Volunteer labor is essential in ensuring these trails remain cleared and in useable condition for all users.

Second increasing recreational opportunities in the valley are good for the economy. Not only is outdoor recreation a huge contributor to Montana's economy, it also makes one of the lifestyle factors that make the valley inviting for businesses. Along with wilderness, fish and skiing, mountain biking is one of those activities that make a community attractive.

Third these closure had little to do with concerns over impact but rather as stated in the Record Of Decision, "*...allowing uses that do not conform to wilderness character creates a constituency that will have a strong propensity to oppose recommendation and any subsequent designation legislation. Management actions that create this operating environment will complicate the decision process for Forest Service managers and members of Congress. It is important that when the wilderness recommendations are made to Congress that they be unencumbered with issues that are exclusive to the wilderness allocation decision. Congress is not the appropriate forum in which to debate travel management decisions.*" Nothing in the Montana Wilderness Study Act or the Forest Service manual directs the BNF to take into consideration the political ramifications of their management. Repeatedly congress has stated that , as our elected representatives. they are the appropriate forum for debating wilderness designation. For the BNF to restrict access to the WSAs based on their assumptions regarding a user group's political preferences is concerning.

Sincerely,
Lance Pysher, \President
Bitterroot Backcountry Cyclsts