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Forest to Accept Additional Objections on Bikes in WSAs

Hamilton, Montana (October 2, 2018) – The Bitterroot National Forest announced today that it will accept objections related to the issue of mountain biking in WSAs from all interested individuals and organizations, regardless of whether they have previously commented on the subject or not.

The objection period is in response to a recent court ruling by Federal Judge Dana Christensen on a lawsuit challenging the Bitterroot Travel Plan. The court instructed the Forest Service to conduct an objection response period regarding closures of trails in WSAs to bicycles.

“We’ve received many questions about the objection process,” said Amy Fox, Environmental Coordinator. “It has come to our attention that there is still some confusion from the public regarding who may object. In an effort to ensure a more open and transparent process we are clarifying this today and also restarting the objection period, to give people more opportunity to comment.”

In his June 29th ruling, the Judge indicated that the Forest Service did not provide the public an opportunity to comment on additional miles of trails (*62.4 miles*) closed to bikes in WSAs in the final plan. These additional closures were proposed following the comment period on the DEIS, so restarting and expanding the objection process allows all interested parties to have input on this issue.

The Forest Service is publishing a corrected legal notice which restarts the 45-day objection period, giving the public additional time to object. If individuals or entities have already submitted objections, they do not need to resubmit them; they will be considered with all others received.

Following the Reviewing Official’s response, the Bitterroot Forest Supervisor will either modify the FEIS and Final ROD accordingly, or reaffirm the decision to close the additional trails to mountain bikes.

As directed by the court, the only issue to be considered during the objection response period is the closure of the Sapphire and Blue Joint WSAs to mountain biking. No other aspects of the Travel Plan will be subject to the objection process.

The new deadline to submit objections is November 19, 2018.

Objections mailed or hand delivered must be submitted to the Reviewing Official by one of the following methods; mail: Objection Reviewing Official, USDA Forest Service, 26 Fort Missoula Road, Missoula, MT 59804. Fax: (406) 329-3411, or email: appeals-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us. Hand delivered objections must be delivered between 8am-4:30pm weekdays, excluding holidays.

Objections should include: 1) Objectors name, address, phone number, and organization represented, if any; 2) title of project on which the objections are being submitted along with the name of the national forest; 3) A description of those aspects of the proposed project addressed by the objection, including specific issues related to the proposed project; if applicable, how the objector believes the environmental analysis or decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy; suggested remedies that would resolve the objection; and 4) objectors signature.

Please put "Bitterroot Travel Plan Objection" in the subject line for emailed objections. An automated response will confirm that your electronic objection has been received. All objections are open to public inspection and will be posted to the Forest Service website.

The Travel Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD) are available online at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=21183>. Please refer to pages 24-25 of the Record of Decision (ROD) for the decision maker's rationale for closing WSAs to mountain bikes. The site also contains a detailed description of trails/miles closed to bicycles in WSAs.

For more information or questions, please contact Amy Fox, Environmental Coordinator, 1801 N. First Street, Hamilton, MT 59840 or (406) 363-7100.

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