

Glenda Wiles

From: C. Grandstaff <grandstaff@cybernet1.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 21, 2015 4:37 PM
To: Glenda Wiles
Subject: Bitterrooters for Planning position statement on BNF Travel Plan
Attachments: BfP position statement on Travel Plan.docx

Hi Glenda,

I'm attaching a position statement adopted by the board of directors for Bitterrooters for Planning on May 14, 2015. Please pass it on to the Commission.

Thanks,
Carlotta

5/26
meeting

Bitterrooters for Planning Position on the Bitterroot National Forest Travel Plan

The recently released Bitterroot National Forest (BNF) Travel Plan is a landmark planning proposal that affects the quality of life for all of us and will do so for decades to come.

The Bitterroot National Forest (BNF) is a very rare and special place of national significance due to the presence of a world class ensemble of fish and wildlife species. For example, Bull trout, lynx, wolverine, fisher, mountain goats and grizzly bears are known to presently occupy or have recently occupied areas in the BNF.

Viability of these wildlife species is dependent on core and connecting wildland habitat. Population levels we see today are directly related to the presently existing extent and quality of core and connected wildland habitat. Wildland dependent species are in decline in the BNF and the larger world because the quantity and quality of wildland is continually being compromised.

The BNF is distinctively characterized by its core and connecting wildlands, which probably constitute its most valuable asset. The BNF encompasses portions of the largest contiguous wilderness complex in the continental U.S., including the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness and the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness. These designated Wilderness core areas are critical, and so are less protected wildland regional connecting corridors. Notably, the Allan Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area serves to connect the core Salmon/Selway Wilderness complex to the Continental Divide wildland corridor. And the Sapphire Range, which intersects with the CD corridor, serves as a connecting wildland corridor that has the added value, in this era of climate change, of being oriented north-south, offering a route for northward migration to cooler habitat.

Wildland dependent species are adversely affected by motorized recreation. Winter motorized recreation can have an especially adverse impact because of the low energy budget of wildlife and the difficulties of being displaced from limited habitat isolated by deep snow.

Even if they never step foot in them, Bitterroot Valley residents and visitors benefit from wildland protection in remote 'rock and ice' wildland as well as in lower, more accessible wild country. Clean water with accompanying healthy bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout fisheries flow from the wildlands headwaters down into the Valley. Robust game populations, including mule and whitetail deer, elk, bighorn sheep and black bear are stabilized by wildland refuges and help ensure outstanding hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities in the roaded front country. Of course the beautiful views that we all can love from the comfort of the Valley and which call in dollars for fishing, hunting and home buying are an outstanding community aesthetic and economic asset.

Bitterrooters for Planning (BfP) supports the wildland protections offered by the Bitterroot Travel Plan.

BfP agrees with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MTFWP), “[We] are not opposed to responsible motorized use where it does not compromise natural resources and wildlife habitat...” (PF WILD-020)

BfP advocates the use of best available science in planning decisions. We recognize the primacy of ecosystem health as the foundation for economic and social well-being. And we believe any Travel Plan should be held within the constraints of road and trail maintenance budgets as well as the limits of law enforcement capabilities.

Consistent with these principles we commend the proposed restrictions on motorized and mechanized travel in the Sapphire and Blue Joint Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) and the Recommended Wilderness areas.

We are concerned about degradation of wildland habitat quality within the Allan Mountain IRA due to proposed motorized access.

We would encourage further restrictions on motorized use of some short routes leading directly to Wilderness, Recommended Wilderness and WSAs due to problematic enforcement of trespass.

The allowance of 600 foot wide motorized access corridors for camping, 300 feet on both sides around motorized routes, increases the extent of resource damage and reduces effectiveness of law enforcement. The degree to which this may become a problem is unknown but is worrisome because the user made routes will likely be directed towards water. It is reasonable to expect most backcountry visitors can manage to carry camp gear the length of a football field.

The new policy of ‘closed unless mapped as open’ along with the Motorized Vehicle Use Map is an essential component in the enforcement of Travel Plan regulations.

BfP appreciates the time and effort of FS personnel as well as their expertise in the formulation of the new Bitterroot Travel Plan.