

Honorable Senator Jon Tester
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Washington, D.C. 20510-2604

Honorable Senator Steve Daines
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Timothy Garcia, Supervisor
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January 4, 2017

Dear Senators Tester and Daines, Foresters Marten and Garcia,

We write to express our strong opposition to the “deal” to open up the Inventoried Roadless Areas on the Lolo National Forest next to the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wilderness to “play areas” for mountain bike users (see 12/20/16 *Missoulian*). We represent thousands of citizens of western Montana. The proposed 3,000 acre mountain bike play area is both a terrible idea and a terrible precedent.

The Monture, Swan Front and North Fork Blackfoot roadless areas are prime occupied grizzly bear habitat within the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem Recovery Area. They are a vital component of the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex and support a host of primitive recreation activities as well as being prime elk habitat accessed by hunters.

Additionally, we are concerned the Forest Service and the mountain bike community have not learned enough from the tragic mountain bike death of Forest Service employee Brad Treat, who collided at high speed with a grizzly bear and was fatally mauled. Small parties moving at high speeds through dense vegetation and blind curves are a recipe for disaster in grizzly bear habitat. Conversely, large parties on mountain bikes disturb wildlife and the surprise encounters are incompatible with hikers and people on horseback.

Creating designated mountain bike “play areas” in prime roadless grizzly bear habitat would increase encounters and mortality risks for both bears and people. A destination resort, with new parking facilities and a new network of mechanized trails would have innumerable impacts on wildlife, fish, soils, the wilderness character and wild nature of the area. Combined with the adjacent proposed Otatsy recreation area for snowmobiles, the expanded year-round mechanized use would cause significant disturbance to grizzly bears, elk herds and other wildlife.

The Forest Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service must realize that high-intensity use non-motorized trails are a threat to grizzly bear secure core habitat. **As such, for the purposes of public lands management and planning and assessing impacts to wildlife, we strongly believe that mountain bikes should be re-classified as mechanized recreation vehicles with impacts more similar to motorized vehicles than traditional hiking or stock use.**

Let us not forget that continually dividing up and fragmenting the tiny percentage of undeveloped lands left on the planet is terrible for wildlife and the rest of wild nature.

The collaborative involved cannot be substituted for the public comment and involvement process. This deal between user groups, prior to the forest plan revision process, is an end run around the greater public and the public involvement process.

Please adhere to the established land management planning and public involvement process so that the broader American public can be involved and not just a handful of self-selected special interest user groups. These lands belong to all of the American people — not just the political elite special interests. The American people are absolutely fed up with political insiders making deals that affect them.

Sincerely,

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cc: Jennifer Fortin-Noreus
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service