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MONTANA GROUPS TO SENATORS, FOREST SERVICE—NO MOUNTAIN BIKE DEALS IN PROPOSED WILDERNESS, GRIZZLY BEAR HABITAT

MISSOULA— Nine conservation organizations from throughout Montana today sent a letter (<http://bit.ly/2j188Ow>) to Senators Jon Tester and Steve Daines and the U.S. Forest Service opposing a mountain bike play area in a proposed Wilderness Area on the Lolo National Forest.

The letter states the deal announced between the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project, Montana Wilderness Association and the International Mountain Bike Association proposing a 3,000 acre “play area” for mountain bikes is *“both a terrible idea and a terrible precedent.”*

“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. “

The roadless areas in the Monture Creek and Swan Front have been proposed for inclusion in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex for decades and support a host of primitive recreation activities as well as being prime elk habitat accessed by hunters. It is also primary grizzly bear habitat within the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem Recovery Area.

"This is another unfortunate example of humans and their machines penetrating deeper into our few remaining wildlands," stated Wilderness Watch executive director, George Nickas. "Places like Monture Creek need to be preserved intact for wildlife and wild nature, not divvied up amongst the ceaseless demands of recreation user groups."

The groups object to the inherent conflict of mountain biking in grizzly bear habitat, noting the Forest Service has not fully learned the lessons from the tragic mountain biking death of Forest Service employee Brad Treat, who collided with a grizzly bear and was fatally mauled. The groups emphasize that ***“for the purposes of public lands management and planning and assessing the 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.”***

"State and federal agencies have long warned against high-speed mountain biking in bear habitat," said Swan View Coalition Chair Keith Hammer. "Mountain bike play areas don't belong in the backcountry and wilderness designation should instead be pursued for the protection of wildlife."

“As a mountain biker, I believe mountain bikes have their place, but that place is not in roadless areas that have potential for wilderness designation. And mountain bikes, by their very nature, are disruptive to the concept of ‘an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man,’” explained Mike Jarnevic, a mountain bike user and Sierra Club member.

Jonathan Matthews, chair of the Montana Sierra Club and a Helena resident said, "I love mountain biking, but mountain bikes do not belong in wilderness areas or areas with wilderness character. These places are sanctuaries from the mechanized world. There are so few of these truly wild places left and we need to preserve them, not surrender them to mountain bike play areas."

A copy of the letter is here: <http://bit.ly/2j188Ow>

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