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Comments:

After much review of the various Alternatives, and speaking as one who has lived in or near national forests since 1959, and as someone who has extensively hiked, fished, bicycled, motorcycled, hunted, backpacked, worked as a wilderness ranger in the Cabinet Wilderness, gotten many cords of firewood, and generally used the forest extensively, I feel that Alternative D is the best option, perhaps with some modifications.

All forest users will obviously not be happy with whatever is decided. Given that, perhaps what is most important is resource protection and wilderness protection. There is plenty of Gallatin Forest access for wheeled and motorized users, even with the loss of some access in Alternative D. If it weren't for years of personal experience with the Trail Share program in the Hyalite region, I would be in favor of the addition of Trail Share opportunities in the Porcupine and other areas. I have used the Emerald Lake Trail Share Days for no wheels (2 days a week from mid-July to early Sept.) several days a year since the program began. I'm on horseback, and I know several hikers who also had high hopes for the Share program. Unfortunately, in all the many days over several years I have been on the trail during the no-wheel use, there has been only one day that I have not encountered bicyclists, most of whom, when nicely confronted, don't give a damn that they there on days they are not supposed to be. Even "considerate" bicyclists are a danger to a horseback rider because a quiet, quickly-moving bicycle going downhill that's even a fair ways behind a horse is viewed by the horse as a predator. Therefore, the horse becomes anxious at best; panicky and dangerous at worst. Besides the disrespect shown to horseback riders by the bicyclists, I have talked to several hikers, including many with children, who will not hike on the Emerald Lake Trail except on the days designated for no wheels. They, too, are disappointed that bicyclists are where they are not supposed to be and have often had negative experiences when confronting the cyclists. Many hikers have said they have had harrowing experiences of downhill bikers coming quickly and quietly upon them around blind corners, and they want to avoid the worry and possible injury, especially for their children. Most hikers on non-wheel Share Days I have talked to are not opposed to mountain biking, but they do believe the bicyclists should be accountable and follow the rules.

So, for resource protection and for the peace and mind of hikers and horseback riders trying to enjoy the Forest, I support Alternative D. Trail Sharing might work if the Forest Service would commit some enforcement to the rules (I don't think it would take much for word to get out to the abusers), but it's certainly not working under the present conditions. When I have talked to Forest Service personnel about some enforcement, I generally get a shrug and the comment that 20% of the public doesn't follow the rules. Incidentally, of many, many miles of wilderness hiking, backpacking and horseback riding since 1964. I have only twice encountered violators with wheeled vehicles.

Finally, I am 68 years old and know that my hiking and horseback riding days are limited. I am fine with someday not being able to access wilderness areas, although I may use wheeled, even motorized vehicles on other Forest Service lands and trails. Multiple use does not mean access by all with all forms of transportation in all areas at all times. There are many people/groups who need to be reminded of that by the Forest Service.

Please feel free to contact me at any time.

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