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Comments:

Hello.

My name is Colton Stiffler and I am a photographer and engineer, currently residing in beautiful Bozeman, Montana. I am writing this letter in regards to the Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF) Forest Plan Revision that is currently underway which could potentially ban cyclists from entering the Lionhead area. It is my hope, along with the hopes of many active community members and cyclists, that bike access in this area will continue to be permitted.

As a native Montanan, avid outdoorsman, and recreational cyclist, I fully understand the importance of protecting our pristine, wild, and unaltered areas. I share a common vision with cyclists, hikers, and horseman alike. It's a vision that wilderness is supposed to be about solitude, and that the area's natural preservation should be held in the highest regard. Additionally, I feel a strong importance for maintaining human-powered accessibility to these areas, which should include mechanized (non-motorized) means of travel in addition to pedestrian and horse use.

Each summer, I spend a significant amount of my free-time exploring the trails around Southwest Montana on my mountain bike. From my experience, this form of travel is the most efficient and least disruptive ways to get around. I am confident that bike travel is no more damaging to trails than that of foot traffic. However, by comparison, it is orders of magnitude less damaging and disruptive to trails than that of horse or pack animals, yet travel by horseback and the use of pack animals continues to have largely unfettered access to wilderness areas while cycling is prohibited. In all of my years of mountain biking, I have seen no evidence that mountain bikes cause more erosion or disturb wildlife more often than other recreational trail users. Additionally, I do not believe that a bicycle on a trail in an area recommended for wilderness somehow detracts from the areas wilderness characteristics.

In light of this access threat, I fully support designating the Lionhead area in CGNF under an alternative preservation classification, such as a Backcountry Area, a National Recreation Area, or a National Conservation Area. Ultimately, I support a plan that allows for both a high level of natural resource conservation in addition to allow continued bike access.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best regards,

Colton Stiffler