



File Code: 1950-1

Date: June 9, 2008

Dear Friends of the Gallatin National Forest:

In December of 2006, the Forest Service (Gallatin National Forest) published a decision for a Forest Travel Management Plan. In that decision [Record of Decision (ROD), page 55], we indicated that we believed that mountain bikes should be prohibited on trails within the Lionhead recommended wilderness area but withheld making that decision at the time because the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) did not present an alternative for public comment that would have precluded mountain bikes in this area. While this oversight was corrected by modifying Alternative 6 in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), we did not believe that it would be appropriate to make a decision to prohibit mountain bikes without first providing a public comment opportunity. Therefore we are now seeking comments on this planned modification to the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan.

The Lionhead recommended wilderness area straddles the Continental Divide along the Idaho/Montana border west of Hebgen Lake in the southwest part of the Gallatin National Forest. It extends onto the Targhee National Forest in Idaho. The Gallatin Forest Plan (USDA 1987) recommended adding 22,800 acres of the 32,780-acre roadless unit (Gallatin portion) to Wilderness. This recommendation has been in most of the Montana Wilderness bills introduced as legislation in the 1990s, but Congress has not acted to designate the area as Wilderness. The area includes trails in the Mile Creek, Sheep Creek, Watkins Creek and Coffin Creek drainages that access several cirque basins and small lakes. These trails, and others within the recommended wilderness, are now prohibited to motorcycle and ATV use as a result of the decision for the Gallatin Forest Travel Management Plan. The Travel Plan also prohibited snowmobile use within this area.

I am currently preparing to make a decision on whether mountain biking should be prohibited in the Lionhead recommended wilderness area until such time that Congress acts on the current Forest Plan recommendation or a revised Forest Plan concludes that these areas have some other higher, better use than as wilderness. An affirmative decision would modify the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan to prohibit mountain biking within this area. More specifically, mountain biking would be prohibited on the following system trails:

Coffin Lakes Trail #209
Mile Creek Trail #214
West Fork Watkins Creek Trail #216
Sheep Lake Trail #218



Mountain biking would also be prohibited on any non-system trail and for off-route travel within the recommended wilderness area. In other words, this modification of the Travel Plan would close the entire area to mountain bike use.

Providing Comments

In addition to the public comments we receive, I will base my decision on the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan FEIS (October 2006). This FEIS is posted on the Gallatin National Forest website at: http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/gallatin/travel_planning.

Comments will be accepted until July 18th, 2008. To be most helpful, comments should be substantive and specific to the mountain bike prohibitions being considered for the Lionhead recommended wilderness. They should include: (1) name, address, telephone number, and organization represented, if any; (2) title of the action (i.e. "Lionhead Bike Prohibition"); (3) specific facts and supporting reasons for me to consider; and (4) signatures.

Written comments should be sent to:

Gallatin National Forest
Attn: Steve Christiansen
P.O. Box 130
Bozeman, MT 59771

Electronic comments can be e-mailed to: r1_gallatin_comments@fs.fed.us. Enter the phrase "Lionhead Bike Prohibition" in the subject line. Comments may also be faxed to (406) 587-6758. If you have questions please contact Steve Christiansen at (406) 587-6750 or Kimberly Schlenker at (406) 587-6743.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address.

Sincerely,

/s/ Mary C. Erickson
MARY C. ERICKSON
Forest Supervisor