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Comments:

Chugach

My name is Jake Allen, I have been recreating in the Chugach National Forest for the last seven years. I am in the military and was fortunate enough to be stationed in Alaska where I spent my summers mountain biking and fishing on the Kenai Peninsula and riding snowmobiles in the winter to access the wilderness. The attraction to Alaska was mainly the recreational opportunities to be had on public lands. I especially enjoy boating, hiking, and hunting in Prince William Sound, a place that makes you feel alive!

Recently, snowmobile technology has improved and allowed us to push deeper and more safely into the forest than ever before. The new machines are quieter and more fuel efficient, having less of an impact on the environment than ever before. Whittier, Placer River, Skookum, Johnson Pass, Groundhog Creek, Carter Lake, Lost Lake, Snow River, Palmer Creek, 20-mile, Trail Lake, Grandview, Grant Lake, are all places my friends and I regularly use snowmobiles to recreate. Prior to the closure in 2002, I've heard stories of access to Center Creek in Johnson Pass as well. This is an area that I would like to see reopened to motorized use, along with Skookum Drainage after April 1st. The reasoning for Skookum is the snow is typically too soft for both crust skiers and fatbikers to enjoy the area during the afternoons of long spring days but would lend well to snowmobiled that float on soft snow.

One thing that the Proposed Alternatives in the EIS do not address are the importance of, use of, and creation of new motorized access corridors such as South Fork of Snow River and 20 mile drainage. This is a modern forest management tool that could be utilized to allow motorized users to access other areas of the forest such as Mills Creek while keeping a "buffer" between other user groups. The EIS does not mention proximity of non-motorized users to the road system. I have never seen a non-motorized user more than 5 miles off of the road system in 35 years of recreating in the Chugach National Forest. The exception to this would be heli-skiers, but they are technically utilizing a motorized vehicle for access.

I am strongly opposed to losing any acres of the Chugach National forest to motorized use. Alternatives C and D as detailed in the EIS are not acceptable and at a minimum we should be able to maintain the areas we have today. As such, I am in support of Alternative B. Additionally, I don't feel it is appropriate to recommend any more acreage for Wilderness designation in this forest plan beyond what was recommended in 2002. This has the potential to displace snowmobilers in areas that we have enjoyed recreating in, some of which are extremely difficult to access without a snowmobile, boat, or helicopter. In addition, snowmobiles pose little to no impact on the forest when they operate in areas that have adequate snow cover.

Warmer winters have affected snowpack at lower elevations in the Chugach National Forest. The EIS and proposed plan do not bring solutions forward to address this issue. For example, Lost Lake (via Primrose or Firehouse Trail) is often closed to motorized use when there is adequate snow cover 500' up the trail. Construction of a slightly wider "winter route" trail could solve the issue. At other locations in the forest such as Johnson Pass, motorized use could be restricted to an existing road or trail until a point is reached with adequate snow cover. These corridors would drastically reduce the overall impact of motorized use by allowing direct access to riding areas at higher elevations.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and your willingness to maintain dialogue with all different user groups of the forest! I believe that the Chugach National Forest can be adequately managed in a multi-use fashion, keeping opportunities for all user groups to recreate! This part of the process, while time consuming, is extremely valuable. I believe we were put on this earth to enjoy the wonders and beauty that it holds. It is sad to me that it is even an option to block people from the freedoms of exploring and witnessing their own lands.