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Comments:

As someone that is relatively new to the unique wonder that is exploration of the backcountry, recreational use of the Chugach National Forest is now an indispensable part of being a Southcentral Alaskan. Like many Alaskans, I now consider my motorized (snowmachine) and non-motorized (ski, snowshoe) excursions into the Chugach a fundamental trademark of my favorite season in Alaska. As someone with full-time year-round employment, it is crucial that I have access to recreational areas near my home in Anchorage. These areas include but are not limited to Turnagain Pass, Placer River, Skookum, Johnson Pass, Grandview, Trail Lake, Lost Lake, Snow River, Nellie Juan (South Fork of the Snow River Corridor) Resurrection Pass, and Whittier. Alternatives C and D severely restrict motorized use within close proximity to the Anchorage/Mat-Su area, and are therefore absolutely unacceptable. Alternative B seems to be the least restrictive and the best choice of all Alternatives, but with some minor modifications. I recommend that the additional land above and to the southwest of Whittier along the boundary of the WSA proposed as "winter motorized allowed" in Alternative C be brought over and included in Alternative B as an access corridor to the Blackstone area.

It is not appropriate to recommend additional acres (beyond the 1.4M acres recommended in 2002) suitable for Wilderness designation in this Forest plan. Any further acres designated as "Wilderness" will limit winter recreation opportunities and displace motorized users. Close access to backcountry recreation is not only convenient, but also allows for less time on the road for many Anchorage/Mat-Su residents, which is safer and more environmentally responsible. As a beginner, it is safe and responsible for me to only recreate in areas that I know are well-traveled by the experienced, safety-minded backcountry community of Southcentral. This community, which includes snowmachines, skiers and snowboarders, heli-ski operators, snowshoers, hunters, trappers, and fishermen, are experienced and prepared to operate in the harsh Alaskan backcountry and are therefore a crucial safety net for everyone working and recreating in the Chugach. Our trails serve as emergency access routes for first responders to any motorized or non-motorized incident. It goes without saying that motorized access is especially important when it comes to the crucial short moments in an emergency incident that could stand between life and death.

A wide and diverse recreation use plan is crucial in catering to all the many uses of the Forest. Motorized access corridors such as the South Fork of the Snow River and 20-Mile drainage can be used as a modern forest management tool to allow for motorized users to access other areas such as Mill Creek while keeping a "buffer" between other use groups.

In addition to the restriction of access, this Plan and EIS lack a forward-thinking perspective on addressing the effect of warmer winters on user access in Alaska. For example, Lost Lake (via Primrose or Firehouse Trail) is often closed to motorized use when there is adequate snow cover 500 feet up the trail. Construction of a slightly wider "winter route" trail could solve this 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 with adequate snow cover.

I urge the Forest Service to carefully consider the safety and beloved pastimes of Alaskans when reviewing this plan.