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Comments:

The Southern Shenandoah Valley Chapter (SSVC) and Charlottesville Chapter of the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club would like to comment on the proposed relocation of the western portion of the Narrowback Trail (Trail #432) onto a sustainable grade and construction of a new segment of trail that would connect to the Wolf Ridge Trail parking lot. Our Chapters do not have an objection to the relocation, and indeed, approve of any trail becoming more sustainable. However; there are several points that should be taken into consideration.

1. Parking: It is not mentioned in the current proposal if the current parking area for the Narrowback Trail will be closed. Will additional parking spaces be added at the Wolf Ridge Trail parking lot to accommodate the possibility of additional vehicles that relocating this trail will bring to the area?

2. There should be a plan for routine maintenance to be done on the new trail section. Trails soon become overgrown and unusable if no one is doing routine maintenance such as removing blowdowns and clipping back vegetation.

3. We are concerned that the new route will increase bike speed and subsequently threaten hiker safety. We have found that shared-use trails with fast-moving mountain bikes can put hikers at risk. Many of the hikers in our chapters will no longer hike on the multi-use trails on Shenandoah Mountain because they have had near misses and startling encounters with mountain bikers riding at high speeds. Are there some educational measures that can be taken to help ensure the safety of both mountain bikers and hikers using the trails?

4. With the relocation of the Narrowback Trail, the loop which SSVC leads a group hike on once a year would now be 13.5 miles long instead of 9. We don't usually lead group hikes that long. We feel that the extra length could be prohibitive to many hikers and, if possible, would like to see the old trail remain open to hikers only in order to keep the shorter hiking loop as an option. We believe the portion of the trail to be closed is currently used more by hikers than by mountain bikers. While we believe this relocation is a wonderful improvement for mountain bikers, it could deter hikers; although the new trail might appeal to some hikers who want to take a short hike from Tilman Rd. to the crest of Narrowback and back the same way.

5. We understood the "no new net maintenance" policy of the FS required other miles of trails to be decommissioned to add new trails. Does the decommissioning of the old .63 mile of the Narrowback trail allow for the addition of 3 miles of new trail under this policy? Are you planning to close other trails to offset the additional increase of this trail mileage? If so, which trails would be closed?

6. Many hikers in our chapters enjoy the native flora of the National Forest when we hike. We are seeing non-native invasives starting to take hold and spread in new areas where we have never seen them before, displacing native plants. Will precautions be taken to minimize introduction of non-native invasives during trail construction?

7. Would you please add PATC-SSVC, PATC-Charlottesville and PATC Supervisor of Trails to your mailing list for North River District scoping notices so that we can be made aware early on of any proposals to build or relocate trails.

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Thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment on the relocation proposal. We would like to see this project approved so that all can benefit from it.