

File Code: 1950

Date: May 19, 2008

Dear Reviewers:

I am writing this letter on behalf of both the Salmon-Challis and the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forests, which are working together on the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST) from Miner Creek to Goldstone Pass; enclosed for your review is an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the Miner to Goldstone portion of the CDNST. This segment of trail is located southwest of Wisdom, Montana and east of Salmon, Idaho in the Beaverhead Mountains of the Bitterroot Range.

Initial scoping for the project occurred in March of 2004. Scoping on the Idaho side of the Continental Divide was limited as the trail was expected to stay largely on the Montana side of the divide. Public comment caused us to consider detailed alternatives that cross the divide and develop portions of the CDNST on the Salmon-Challis National Forest in the head of Wimpy and Pratt Creeks. Consequently, we are hoping for more involvement from interested parties in Idaho.

Alternative 4 is currently the agencies preferred alternative. This designation indicates we are leaning toward this alternative, but it does not mean we are locked in on Alternative 4.

Two other ongoing decision-making processes have added confusion to this CDNST analysis process; they are forest planning and travel management.

First, forest planning on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest is nearing completion. A Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and proposed Forest Plan are available for public comment through the end of April. Until the decision on the new Forest Plan is made, the 1986 Beaverhead Forest Plan provides the management direction for this CDNST project. There are substantial differences between the existing Forest Plan and the proposed Forest Plan; this is most apparent in changes to motorized travel in the Miner to Goldstone CDNST project area. The new Forest Plan would restrict motorized travel in much of the project area on the Montana side of the divide; however, neither the new or old Forest Plans affect the location decision on the CDNST in the project area. The EA discusses the new plan and its implications for this project in more detail.

Second, the Salmon-Challis National Forest is conducting travel management planning that may impact the CDNST near Goldstone Pass in the head of Pratt Creek and Wimpy Creeks. The current proposal for the CDNST from Goldstone Pass to the Continental Divide above Cowbone Lake is to be non-motorized. The Beaverhead-Deerlodge will soon be addressing travel management on the Wisdom Ranger District. It is unlikely this travel planning will have much impact on the CDNST as the Forest Plan provides clear travel direction for the project area.

Forest planning or travel management may or may not modify a decision for this CDNST project. Consequently, it is important that we receive your complete comments on this EA so that the two Forest Supervisors can make an informed decision on this project.

We recognize this proposal and subsequent decision is complex; the EA contains considerable information. Dennis Hilliard, Ranger on the Leadore District of the Salmon-Challis National Forest and his staff would be glad to help you with the Idaho segment of the trail. On the Beaverhead-Deerlodge



National Forest (BDNF), please direct your questions to Noelle Meier (Forest Recreation Specialist) at the BDNF Supervisor's Office in Dillon, Montana at (406) 683-3932.

Comments are invited on this proposal. The Responsible Officials for this project will consider all public comments before making a decision. In order to retain your administrative appeal rights, you must provide timely, substantive written, oral, or electronic comments during this 30-day comment period, and each individual or representative from each organization must either sign the comments, or verify their identity upon request. Comments must be postmarked or received within 30 days from the date the legal notice is published in the *Montana Standard* newspaper. We expect the legal notice to be published on May 29, 2008.

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 may be submitted in writing, orally, or through electronic means.

Send written comments to: Noelle Meier, BDNF, 420 Barrett, Dillon, MT 59725, Subject: CDNST: Miner-Berry-Goldstone. Those wishing to comment by telephone should contact Noelle at (406) 683-3932, or by fax at (406) 683-3855.

Electronic comments may be submitted to comments-northern-beaverhead-deerlodge@fs.fed.us. The subject line must contain the name "CDNST: Miner-Berry-Goldstone". Acceptable formats are MS Word, Word Perfect or RTF. For electronically mailed comments, the sender should receive an electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive this acknowledgement of their comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

Hand-delivered comments must be time and date imprinted at the BDNF Supervisor's Office by the close of business on the 30th calendar day following publication of the legal notice in the newspaper of record. Office hours for submitting hand-delivered comments are 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday. Oral comments may be provided at the BDNF Supervisor's Office during normal business hours via telephone or in person by the last day of the comment period. Written comments must be postmarked by the Postal Service, e-mailed, faxed, or otherwise submitted by 11:59 p.m. by the last day of the comment period.

To request a copy of the EA, contact the BDNF Supervisor's Office, 420 Barrett, Dillon, MT 59725, telephone (406) 683-3900, or email: cmartin@fs.fed.us. Thank you for taking the time to review this EA; we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



DARREN OLSEN
Acting Wisdom District Ranger

Enclosure