

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Kootenai NF
Fortine RD

P.O. Box 116
Fortine, MT
59918

4-4-93

Caring for the Land and Serving People

Reply to: 2700

Date: 4-27-93

Don Fleck
P.O. Box 1575
Eureka Mt 59917

Dear Don,

Thanks for sending me your letter concerning the Ten Lakes Wilderness Study Area. I can understand your confusion relating to this matter, as the designation of the area as a Wilderness Study Area, where the goals of retaining the "wilderness characteristics and values, allow natural ecological processes to continue, maintain the opportunity for primitive forms of recreation..." are clearly stated in the Kootenai Forest Plan. But the Plan also states under Recreation Standards, that "Snowmobile use is presently permitted... That use may continue unless it is determined to conflict with grizzly management or other wildlife standards." These decisions were made after the Forest Service had analysed comments from Fish and Game personnel, district biologists, and after the proposed plan received the scrutiny of the public. When the Forest Plan was signed in 1987, it was accepted that the Ten Lakes would be managed as a wilderness, with the exception of the use of snowmobiles.

(Snowmobile use has increased considerably since the Plan was signed, and I realize that there is a strong feeling among many people that the Ten Lakes is losing its wilderness character and is actually being damaged by the use of snowmobiles. The cutting of trees to make a travel corridor (the "swath") near Therriault Pass has been the most obvious action to take place. In order to prevent future occurrences of this type, we are patrolling the Ten Lakes in the winter and summer to inform the users of this area of their responsibilities in protecting both plant and wildlife species.

I wish there was some way I could tell you that we have a quick and easy way to address your concerns, but we don't. The existing Plan is what we use to guide us in the management of the Forest, and until the new plan is given to us, we will continue to use what we have. We will monitor snowmobile use in the Ten Lakes, we will do all we can to insure wildlife and plant populations are not negatively impacted, and we will allow snowmobiles to continue using this area until it is designated wilderness or the Forest Plan is modified.

Your interest in the management of the Ten Lakes is greatly appreciated, and I hope you will continue to give us your input. If you have further concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Jane P. Kollmeyer
District Ranger