

SYLVANIA WILDERNESS BIKE TRAIL PROPOSAL

28 JAN 16

POSITION PAPER

UPPER PENINSULA ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION

Comments on Wilderness Lakes Bike Trail System Project

Dear Ms. Jackson and Mr. Holland
U.S. Forest Service Supervisors Office
Ironwood, MI

In general, the Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition (UPEC) supports the need for more non-motorized trails. However, we oppose the proposed reopening of the old Whitefish Road, creating a crushed rock, 12-15 foot wide bike trail, along the border of Sylvania Wilderness.

Historically, the Whitefish Road was open to street-legal vehicles until sometime in the early-mid 1990s. At that time, the District Ranger at Watersmeet decided to close the road, to reduce impacts to the adjacent Sylvania Wilderness from all types of vehicles (both cars/trucks, and the illegal use by ATVs and snowmobiles that was occurring). We supported that decision. Over the past 20+ years, the old road surface has broken down, trees are now growing in the old road and within the adjacent road right-of-way, and the area is returning to its natural landscape. Despite the barriers erected at each end of the road, some illegal ATV and snowmobile use continues to occur on the old roadbed. If the old road were to be cleared again for a major bike trail, it is likely that this illegal use would increase. With the lack of adequate funding for law enforcement, we don't see how the Forest Service would be able to effectively stop such illegal use.

UPEC also has serious concerns with the spread of invasive species. Volunteers spend considerable time and effort each year removing invasive plants from Sylvania Wilderness. Some of these invasives were introduced when ATVs used Whitefish Road and the seeds spread into the wilderness. Great strides have been made in controlling invasives and reopening Whitefish Road would undoubtedly create a new avenue for introduction of more

invasives, such as garlic mustard, European swamp thistle, bull thistle, Japanese barberry, and more. We also expect invasive earthworms will also be moved around the Forest via the wheels of vehicles (including bikes).

In summary, a bike trail right along the edge of Sylvania Wilderness is, in our view, inappropriate. It made sense to close the road years ago to protect the wilderness and it makes sense to keep it closed, especially considering the road is returning to a natural state.

Thank you for considering our input on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Nancy Warren
Acting President

Copy to:
Tony Holland, Acting District Ranger
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Watersmeet, MI 49969

"As the longest serving environmental organization in Michigan's U.P., the Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition (UPEC) strives to preserve the unique cultural and natural resources of the Upper Peninsula, through public education, the promotion of sound land stewardship, and reasoned dialogue with communities, governments, industries and others with whom we share this land." - UPEC Mission

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