

# *Swan View Coalition* Nature and Human Nature on the Same Path



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Dear Editor;

Flathead Forest Supervisor Chip Weber ignores the advice of his own staff and grizzly bear experts, suggesting we consider all recreational activities to have an equal basis of risk when deciding whether to promote them. His staff and other bear experts note in their Board of Review recommendations against trail running and mountain biking that negative encounters between bears and bikers are “disproportionately high” compared to those with hikers.

Mr. Weber instead uses Wikipedia data on bear-caused human deaths that is not adjusted to be proportional to the frequency of the recreation type. He’s trying to make it look like walking and hiking are the more dangerous activities when they are instead simply among the most popular. He goes on to urge people to take risks according to their own values and to “own the consequences of your choices.”

Consequences, however, are not equal. When someone drowns in a river, the government doesn’t drain the river. When someone tangles with a bear, too often the government kills the bear that was simply defending itself or its cubs.

The current debate is not about ending trail running or mountain biking in bear habitat. It is about the Forest Service’s duty to educate the public about how speed increases the risk of injury or death to people and bears. It is about not issuing commercial permits for foot and bike races that instead send exactly the wrong message to forest visitors.

Supervisor Weber is in the process of building another 79 miles of mountain bike trails in bear habitat and encouraging reckless behavior on those trails. He is also rewarding his private trail-building partners with permits to commercially promote irresponsible behavior on those trails. Then he’ll wrongly blame “too many bears” for the conflicts that ensue. That is not leadership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized.

Keith J. Hammer  
Chair