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Statement by Somer Treat, Read by Chip Weber to the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee June 25, 2019

THE FOREST SERVICE - FLATHEAD NATIONAL FOREST-MONDAY, JULY 1, 2019

My name is Somer Treat and I live in West Glacier, Montana. I have spent most of my life living in, or directly adjacent to, public lands. I built my forever-home bordering the Flathead National Forest, and most of my windows capture 360-degree views of the trees between me and the mountains of Glacier National Park and the Great Bear Wilderness. In the last 3 years my appreciation for access to public lands has turned into something different. I now value my time spent running the trails with a passion which is hard to put into a simple statement.

Exactly 3 years ago my husband, Brad Treat, was killed during a head-on encounter with a grizzly bear while riding a mountain bike on the Flathead National Forest just minutes from our house. A grizzly bear stepped out of the woods just as Brad rode down the trail and he was killed instantly from the impact and by the natural response of the bear. His death is a perfect illustration of a time-and-chance accident. Both Brad and the bear were doing the right thing, at the right time, in the right place.

Beyond being the victim of the event, Brad was a Federal Law Enforcement officer whose duty it was to protect the very area where this event happened. In his professional life, Brad protected public lands and in his personal life he lived to recreate on them; it was his career and his lifestyle. Because of this unique set of circumstances, both his life and death, and consequently my life, are at the center of a politicized debate focusing on recreation and bear habitat. I have lived with the outcome of these events, and I have a uniquely personal perspective I can give to the topic of recreating on public land with bears. It has defined my life.

From the time I became aware of his death, I have fought to honor Brad's life, not sensationalize the circumstances in which he died. I have especially fought against any association or focus with an agenda, clear or subtle, that would attempt to limit recreation or grizzly bears on public land.

As a daily user of public land, I assume the responsibility of how I use it. It is my decision to experience the trails and mountains as I wish, and my job to do so knowing I share them with other humans and wildlife of all types. I step off the pavement and accept personal responsibility for my actions and for the setting I have engaged. It is up to me to choose if I run on the trails, and I do so, fully knowing the risk I take.

Two weeks after Brad died the Flathead National Forest reopened the trail system behind my house for public use. The first thing I did was run the same trail we had the day Brad died, the same trail he was riding when his accident happened. It was the same trail we ran together for decades. This was MY choice, it was my therapy. It was how Brad and I chose to live our lives.

I have done the same thing, every single day for the past 3 years...I haven't missed a run. I am privileged to be able to do it. I run through the forest now with a different passion and appreciation for what I have. I climb mountains, I bike over enchanted ground, I run in the woods - with the bears - because I still can. I saw a grizzly bear last week on my morning run; I felt the fantastic tingle inside my soul, the feeling of knowing I still get to experience THIS.

Let me be clear, this magic tingle feeling was the core of Brad's existence. It defined his professional life, and how he spent his personal time on public lands. The final perfect moments of Brad's life were spent doing exactly what he believed in.