

April 22, 2011

Hon. Harris Sherman
Under Secretary, Natural Resources and Environment
Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W., Room 240 E Whitten
Washington, DC 20250

Re: Extension of Proposed Rulemaking Comment Period

Dear Under Secretary Sherman:

The undersigned multiple use and local government organizations are writing to you to request an extension of the deadline for comments on the National Forest System Land Management Planning Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (76 Fed. Reg. 8480, Feb. 14, 2011). As you know, multiple uses on federal lands, such as grazing, timber, recreation and mining, employ many thousands of individuals across the Nation. The members our organizations represent are, therefore, intensely interested in the Forest Service's land management planning process and the Proposed Rule.

The Notice of Proposed Rulemaking requests comments by May 16, 2011. We request that you extend that comment period by 90 days. The initial comment period doubtless seemed adequate when first proposed by the Forest Service, but intervening events and a further review of the issues clearly substantiate the need for more time.

We understand how long the Forest Service has been attempting to update and revise its planning regulations. Previous efforts include the 2008 Final Rule, the 2005 Final Rule, the 2000 Final Rule, and the 1982 Final Rule. Thus, for nearly three decades, the Forest Service has attempted to formulate planning rules that will stand the test of time. Each step along the way, judicial challenges and policy changes have resulted in alterations and a new round of rulemaking. The Forest Service is to be commended for attempting once again to implement the requirements of the National Forest Management Act through updated planning regulations that can be widely accepted. However, as has been amply demonstrated over the last 30 years, this process is complex and difficult and requires additional time for the public, including the multiple use organizations, to comment on the current proposed rule. Additional time should help the interested public refine its views, which can only lead to a better final rule by the Forest Service that would withstand future challenges in court. Given the decades of effort to date, an additional 90 days for further public review is warranted.

The content of this proposed rule also merits additional time. There are numerous issues of interest and importance to our multiple use organizations that need to be thoroughly vetted within the community so that a thorough and helpful set of comments can be provided to the Forest Service. These issues include the proposed changes to the "viability" provision in the 1982 regulations; the proper approach and methodology for considering scientific information; the implementation of the proposed

three-step process of assessment, development/revision/amendment and monitoring; the level of participation by private landowners in the planning process; the level of coordination with local governments recognized as required by the agency; provisions for sustaining social, economic, and ecological systems; resource management; and the development, funding, and staffing of future monitoring protocols. These issues have the potential to impact nearly all aspects of the land and resource use activities conducted by our members, and we need additional time to thoroughly vet those issues among our respective memberships.

The Forest Service is to be commended for holding a series of public meetings to discuss the proposed planning rule. However, the last of those public meetings occurred on April 7, 2011 in Phoenix, roughly two-thirds of the way through the current comment period. In order for attendees to digest the information received in these March and April public meetings and to revise comments based on those meetings, more time is needed than the five weeks remaining following the last of the public meetings.

Finally, we have learned through the public meeting process that the Forest Service has apparently convened a group of external scientists to review and provide advice to the agency regarding the proposed planning rule. It is unknown to us whether this is the same panel as the U.S. Forest Service Science Forum that issued a report dated March 29 - 30, 2010 as prepared by Booz Allen Hamilton. There does not appear to be any information yet available on the Forest Service website or otherwise regarding the more recently convened scientist advisory group.

We need additional time also to obtain and review information about the more recently convened scientist group and any recommendations or other comments it provides to the Forest Service and USDA regarding the proposed rule or related issues. The identity of members of this group of scientists remains unknown to us; thus we are unaware of any participation by scientists affiliated with our associations or scientists from fields related to our industries. It is disconcerting that we are unable to identify the scientists in our search to date or the particular opinions authored by those scientists so that we may evaluate them from our perspective. We have been told by Forest Service personnel that the names of these scientists and their input may be available in late April or early May, which would be just days prior to the currently scheduled close of the comment period. We will need additional time to evaluate the qualifications and perspectives of the scientists, and the substance of their comments and recommendations.

In conclusion, we request on behalf of our respective members an additional 90 days in which to provide comments on the 48-page Federal Register Notice which includes the EIS and the numerous additional documents provided on the planning rule website. We also need additional time to review information that has not yet been

posted on the website and made available to the public, but which we anticipate perhaps just days prior to the currently scheduled closing of the comment period. If you have questions about this request, please do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you for your attention to our request.

Alaska Forest Association
All-Terrain Vehicle Association
American Council of Snowmobile Associations
American Forest & Paper Association
American Forest Resource Council
American Loggers Council
American Motorcyclist Association
Americans for Responsible Recreational Access
Associated Logging Contractors
Associated Oregon Loggers, Inc.
American Sheep Industry Association
Arizona Cattle Growers Association
Arizona Public Lands Council
Arizona Wool Growers Association
Association of National Grasslands
Black Hills Cattlemen
Black Hills Forest Resource Association
BlueRibbon Coalition
California Cattlemen's Association
California Wool Growers Association
Colorado Cattlemen's Association
California Forestry Association
Colorado Timber Industry Association
Colorado Wool Growers Association
Forest Resources Association
Guardians of the Range
Idaho Cattle Association
Idaho Wool Growers Association
Intermountain Forest Association
Kentucky Forest Industries Association
Minnesota Forest Industries
Missouri Forest Products Association
Montana Logging Association
Montana Public Lands Council
Montana Stockgrowers Association
Montana Wool Growers Association
Montana Wood Products Association
Motorcycle Industry Council

National Cattlemen's Beef Association
National Marine Manufacturers Association
National Mining Association
Nevada Cattlemen's Association
Nevada Wool Growers Association
New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association
New Mexico Wool Growers, Inc.
Off-Road Business Association
Oregon Cattlemen's Association
Oregon Women In Timber
Public Lands Council
Recreational Off-Highway Vehicle Association
South Dakota Campground Owners Association
South Dakota Cattlemen's Association
South Dakota Grasslands Coalition
South Dakota Public Lands Council
Specialty Equipment Market Association
Specialty Vehicle Institute of America
United Four Wheel Drive Associations
Utah Cattlemen's Association
Utah Wool Growers Association
Virginia Forest Products Association
Washington Cattlemen's Association
Wyoming Stock Growers Association
Western Business Roundtable
Wisconsin Paper Council
Wyoming County Commissioners Association

cc: United States Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack
USDA Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell
Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee Chairman Jeff Bingaman
Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member Lisa Murkowski
U.S. House of Representatives Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings
U.S. House of Representatives Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member Ed Markey
USDA Forest Service Assistant Director for Planning Ecosystem Management Coordination Ric Rine