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My family and I enjoy outdoor recreation on land managed by the U.S. Forest Service throughout the Northern Region. I have a major concern about how this Region is proposing to manage almost 4 million acres of Recommended Wilderness Areas (RWA) in Montana.

According to the Regional Forester's Office, all RWAs will be immediately closed to motorized vehicles upon completion of the Revised Forest Plan. I believe such management of RWAs is not only unwise but unlawful.

Areas recommended for Wilderness should be managed on a site-specific basis, not a "one size fits all" regional policy. Recreational uses in each area should be managed pursuant to the individual Forest Plan with consideration of the current uses and overall goals and objectives for each area.

Current procedures have not allowed for adequate site-specific analysis. According to the agency's current planning documents, these areas will be closed to motorized use upon the completion of the Forest Plans. However, under the new Forest Service planning regulations, the program-level Forest Plan revision procedures will not include site-specific analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act necessary to support closure of existing uses in these areas.

There is nothing in law, regulation or recent court decisions that require U.S. Forest Service to prohibit motorized access in RWAs. To the contrary; recent court rulings suggest the agency should continue motorized uses in areas previously authorized for motorized use. Indeed, court rulings explicitly reject any claim the agency is compelled to restrict motorized access.

It should be noted that most of these RWAs currently have motorized use occurring in them. It seems to me, that if motorized uses don't preclude the Forest Service from recommending them as designated Wilderness, then the management criteria resulting from that conclusion should allow motorized uses where appropriate.

Recreation in RWAs should be managed pursuant to site-specific planning based on the current condition and needs of the recreating public.

I respectfully request that your staff look into this matter immediately.

Signature _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____