

Ravalli County Off Road User Association

P.O. Box 72, Hamilton, Montana 59840

Date: December 28, 2007

Dear RCORUA member,

As you are no doubt aware, the Bitterroot National Forest has issued their "Proposed Action" for the BNF Travel Plan. This is the first step in a long, complicated NEPA process, which will eventually result in a map upon which routes for motorcycles and ATVs will be specifically designated. When this Travel Map is finalized, motorized travel on any route not specifically included on the map will be illegal. It will also be illegal to camp anywhere outside Wilderness Areas except at locations identified by the Forest Service and shown on the Travel Map. It is during this phase of the process (The Scoping process in NEPA language) when we have the greatest opportunity to influence the contents of this Travel Map. RCORUA, as an organization, has invested a great deal of time, effort, and your money in an all-out attempt to provide input at this stage of the Travel Planning process, but it is also very important that each member of the organization participate by writing their individual letter in response to the Travel Plan. An hour or so on your part can produce a letter that can really make a difference in how the Travel Map looks at the end of the process. Your attendance to the public meetings scheduled for the second week of January would also be helpful.

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with a "shopping list" of both general and specific issues that RCORUA has identified based upon the Proposed Action that we support or do not support. We urge you to go through these "shopping lists", pick out those issues that you feel strongly about, and write a letter to the Forest Service telling them what you want to see in the Travel Plan.

Your comments/letters must be received by the Forest Service no later than January 31, 2008. Be sure you identify your comments/letters as being in response to the Proposed Action of the BNF Travel Plan. You can mail or hand deliver your letters to:

Travel Management Planning Team
Stevensville Ranger District
88 Main St.
Stevensville, MT 59870.

If you prefer, you can email your comments to comments-northern-bitterroot@fs.fed.us . Again, be sure to identify your comments specifically in response to the Proposed Action of the BNF Travel Plan.

As you begin to browse through our "shopping list" of issues, you may want additional information concerning the Proposed Action. You can get a CD containing all the documentation, including maps, for the Proposed Action from any BNF District Office or go any of the public libraries to view the maps and proposal. RCORUA is preparing extensive comments from the Association, and we can email these documents to you by request to dkthomps@flash.net . If you have a specific question regarding the Travel Plan or need a printed copy of RCORUA's comments call Marsha Waliser at 363-2292, Mike Jeffords at 544-5027, or Dan Thompson at 624-9824. If you need assistance in writing your letter or putting it into proper form, call Dan Thompson at 642-9824.

The following dates, times, and places are for the public meetings given to us by the Forest Service: All meetings are scheduled from 6PM to 8:30PM:

Jan 9 Darby Clubhouse
Jan 10 Stevensville Methodist Church
Jan 15 Hamilton at Bitterroot River Inn.

Keep your eye on the Ravalli Republic for possible changes to dates, times, and locations, or call one of your handy-dandy Association Officers to confirm.

Remember – Only You Can Prevent Forest Closures!!

General Comments: The Proposed Action issued by the Forest Service contains the following objectionable aspects:

- Camping outside Wilderness will be restricted to designated locations, the “300-foot” rule will no longer apply; RCORUA strenuously opposes any further restrictions to dispersed camping
- 364 more miles of roads and trails will be closed to all motorized vehicles; RCORUA believes this closure agenda is contrary to the intent and policies of the Travel Management Rule; we advocate a “no net loss” be developed as the Preferred Alternative in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement
- 45% of the routes currently available to motorcycles will be closed
- 20% of the routes currently available to snowmobiles will be closed
- Given the rapid growth of OHV use in the Forest, how does the Forest Service propose to accommodate this growth by reducing routes and areas available to these vehicles?
- “Utility Vehicles” are excluded from all trails and many roads; RCORUA urges the inclusion of these vehicles in the Travel Plan
- Out of 166 miles of OHV routes RCORUA recommended for motorized designation, less than 17 miles were included in the Proposed Action; RCORUA recommends that all of the routes recommended be included unless there are documented resource or user-conflict reasons for closure
- Many roads will be closed simply because they “come close to” or access Wilderness Areas, in contradiction to existing laws, regulations, and policies; this is a shallow and transparent attempt to create more pseudo-Wilderness and RCORUA emphatically opposes this practice
- Many trails will be closed because they access Recommended Wilderness Areas or Roadless Areas in contradiction to existing laws, regulations, and policies; again, this is an attempt to create more “wannabe” Wilderness
- No distinction is made between logging roads dedicated to ATV use and ATV trails, creating the false public impression that there are 717 miles of trails currently available for ATV use; RCORUA recommends that ATV roads and ATV trails be documented and tabulated separately
- Trails in the area of the Proposed Stony Mountain Recommended Wilderness Area are to be closed (Burnt Fork drainage), even though this area is not yet approved as Recommended Wilderness nor are the rules for management of Recommended Wilderness yet established

Specific Comments: Following is a list of comments relative to specific roads and trails:

- The Sapphire Crest Trail, Trail 313 should be designated for motorized use from the Anaconda-Pintlar Wilderness boundary northward to Eightmile; Trail 313 from the A-P Wilderness boundary to Abundance Saddle should be designated for ATV travel; Trail 313 from Abundance Saddle to Eagle Point for motorcycle travel; Trail 313 from Eagle Point to Threemile for ATV travel; Trails 308 and 313 from Threemile to Eightmile for motorcycle travel; Trail 329 must remain open for ATV travel since it provides access to the northern portions of Trail 313
- In the Chain-of-Lakes area, Trails 39, 313.5, 330, and 331 should be designated for ATV travel; furthermore the “temporary” closure in the vicinity of Abundance Saddle should be re-opened for ATV travel
- We will accept the closure of Trail 103 from the Warm Springs Campground to the Trail 205 intersection as well as the closure of Trail 404 to accommodate stock users, provided the remainder of the Warm Springs routes (specifically Trails 177, 205, 103 to Overwhich Falls) remain open to motorcycles
- Motorcycle trails in the Blue Joint area should remain open; Specifically Trails 614, 627, and 137 should continue to be available for single track vehicles; there are no laws, rules, or policies currently in effect that allow closure of these routes to motorized travel
- The Piquett Creek Trail, Trail 675, should remain open for motorcycles; this trail has been shared by motorcycles and stock users for many years with few conflicts; it forms the backbone of a series of attractive loops for both motorized and stock users and should remain open for shared use
- We support the designation for ATV use of the Palisades trail system (Trails 44, 88, 86, and 41) as shown in the Proposed Action

Write that letter now!! Get your friends and family to write letters!! Attend the meetings!! The Forest belongs to the public, and the only way we can stop Forest closures is to participate!! It’s time to just say “no” to more Forest closures!!

Sincerely,
Marsha Waliser, President

SAMPLE LETTER

Date

Your Name

Your Address

Your City, State, Zip

(Optional)Your Phone number

Travel Management Planning Team

Stevensville Ranger District

88 Main St.

Stevensville, MT 59870

Travel Management Planning Team,

I am writing to you in response to the Proposed Action for the Travel Plan which the Forest Service published last September.

[Tell the Forest Service how you like to use the Forest. Do you enjoy driving your car, truck, motorcycle, or ATV on Forest roads and trails? Do you go into the forest as a family? Do you camp, hunt, fish, hike?]

[What are your issues? Are you concerned that less and less of the Forest is available to you and your family? Are you concerned that your children and grandchildren could be “locked out” of the Forest? Do you think we already have enough restrictions on our Forest activities? Tired of being told where you can and cannot go by anti-access “environmentalists”? Think we have enough Wilderness? Think crowding too many people into smaller and smaller areas is bad for the Forest? Do you wonder how the Forest Service proposes to deal with the “OHV” issue by closing roads and trails? Think “Quiet Users” have enough space already?]

[Be specific about what you would like in the Travel Plan. Do you like the idea of being able to camp only at designated locations? Do you think ATV use for game retrieval during hunting season is appropriate? Do you think more roads should be open during hunting season to better disperse hunters in the Forest? Which roads? Do you think some roads and trails should be designated for use by “Utility Vehicles”? Want to keep the Sapphire Crest trail open? Chain of Lakes routes? Wonder why so few “user-defined” trails were included in the Proposed Action? Is your favorite trail included?]

[Closing statement. This is where you summarize your letter in a single sentence or two. You might say something like “The Proposed Action represents the anti-access agenda of a few vocal and frequently litigious special interest groups and does not meet the needs of the public.” Or “I recommend that the Forest Service develop a “no net loss” policy for the Preferred Alternative of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.”

Sincerely,

Your Name