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Ravalli County Commissioners

Dear Interested Party,

I want to take this opportunity to update you on the status of the Bitterroot National Forest's travel planning project, which we began last fall. The intent of the project is to address summer and winter motorized recreation use on the Forest as directed by the Forest Service's 2005 Travel Management Rule. Our goal is to develop a motor vehicle use map that will designate which trails, roads, and areas will be open to motorized use.

In September 2007, the Forest released a document that identified a starting point for discussion with the public. This starting point, or proposed action, outlined proposed changes to existing motorized recreation use on specific roads, trails, and areas within the non-wilderness portion of the Forest.

From September through February of 2008, we held several open houses to provide information about the project and to receive your comments. We received many letters, e-mails, comment forms, telephone calls, and personal visits representing a wide-range of thoughts, suggestions, and recommendations. We have read each and every comment. To show some of the different views held by users of the Bitterroot National Forest, I would like to share the following comments with you:

"We are very conscious...that the National Forest is not only a playground for people, it is critical habitat for a myriad of terrestrial and aquatic species...we believe assuring fish and wildlife habitat needs are met should be paramount to other travel plan considerations." (Letter 489)

"We have a large percentage of retired and senior citizens and many of these folks enjoy getting out in the forests, and can no longer do so on foot, and thus use OHVs to provide them that opportunity." (Letter 517)

"As non-motorized users we have some sympathy for motorized travel concerns...they do need places to recreate in an appropriate and lawful manner. Because of differing philosophies and usages we are concerned about resource damage and the issue of safety between motorized and quiet users." (Letter 507)

"Over the years I have covered thousands of miles of forest via my ATV. The panorama of beauty I have seen was breathtaking each time I rode. I am heart sick to think that I will be

able to see less of my beautiful forest...It seems unbelievable that we have millions of acres of forest and yet we are restricted to a very paltry amount of accessible miles. " (Letter 261)

"I believe that motorized vehicles are appropriate on roads that can be maintained and monitored and trails should be for non-motorized recreation." (Letter 463)

The comments are being placed in a database that, when complete, will be available for public review on the Forest's web page (see below). In addition, they will be used to develop alternatives to the starting point we shared with you last fall. The environmental, social, and economic effects of these alternatives will be analyzed and compared in a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS). The DEIS should be ready for public review and comment in March, 2009. After the public has commented on the DEIS, we will update our analysis and address comments we received in a final environmental impact statement (FEIS). I hope to issue a decision based on the analysis in the FEIS in late 2009.

I want to thank you for your continued interest in the travel planning project. I realize that this process has required a significant investment of your time. I appreciate that investment and know that it will help us produce a better travel plan in the end.

For additional information, please contact Dan Ritter, Stevensville District Ranger, at (406) 777-5461, or Chris Fox, the project's team leader, at (406) 777-7415. You can also log onto the Forest's website at www.fs.fed.us/r1/bitterroot, and click on Travel Planning Update under Current Information on the right hand side of the page.

Sincerely,

DAVID T. BULL
Forest Supervisor