

Mr. Gary Larsen  
Supervisor, Mt. Hood National Forest  
16400 Champion Way  
Sandy, OR 97055

Dear Supervisor Larsen:

I am interested in the current efforts underway in the Mt. Hood National Forest to address travel and access management planning. As you are aware, transportation in and around the Mt. Hood National Forest is a priority and concern for me. From 2003 to the present, you and your staff have been critical partners in our efforts to highlight issues and address problems pertaining to the Forest's nearly 3,500 miles of roads and the major corridors that lead to and from the Forest. The Mt. Hood Stewardship Legacy Act, which passed the House of Representatives in 2006, attempted to provide a foundation and guidance for future transportation planning and included provisions addressing recreation access, roads decommissioning, and long term travel management.

A significant amount of visioning, research, data analysis, and planning has already been completed regarding the state of Mt. Hood's road system. In 1998 the Mt. Hood Forest completed an Access and Travel Management Plan (ATM), which determined that 49% of the forest roads could be closed or decommissioned. Later in 2003, Mt Hood completed a GIS map-based roads analysis which confirmed these findings. The Forest Service announced in 2005 a new Travel Management rule to identify and designate roads, trails and areas that are open to motor vehicle use to forge a sustainable system of routes for motorized use in the future. This appeared to be an opportunity to build on previous work, incorporate public involvement and local collaboration, and determine a sustainable approach to managing Mt. Hood's roads and trail systems.

I am troubled that to date, the heart of the Mt. Hood Travel Planning process is focused on the proposal of numerous Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) playgrounds, some of which would be routed adjacent to existing or proposed wilderness. For example, the proposed LaDee OHV area would include a road that runs between the existing Salmon Huckleberry and proposed Roaring River Wilderness areas. In addition, the Bear Creek area appears to overlap the proposed Middle Fork Wild and Scenic River boundary and lies in close proximity to the proposed Elk Cove/Mazama Wilderness area. Locating OHV routes immediately next to wilderness elevates the potential for illegal OHV entry into wilderness areas, a problem that has already been documented in the Salmon-Huckleberry Wilderness.

I am deeply concerned that by focusing on planning new OHV routes at the expense of a broader roads analysis, we risk losing the opportunity to create a sustainable travel network and address the gathering threat that Mt. Hood's deteriorating road infrastructure presents to drinking water for thousands of Oregonians, recreation access in a popular urban forest, and wildlife habitat.

I urge you to use the Travel Management Planning directive as an opportunity to address the Forest's roads system in a bold framework, and to incorporate NEPA analysis of the existing road network in your process. This step will create a framework from which to prioritize

infrastructure projects and investment in association with many future forest activities and to plan projects such as new OHV routes in the context of a broader roads analysis.

While I am aware that subsequent budget cuts eliminated Mt. Hood National Forest roads staff, I applaud the collaboration you have undertaken to date with the public and numerous community groups and urge you to continue your partnership with them in this endeavor.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. I look forward to your response and to working with you to address these critical issues in the Mt. Hood National Forest. If you have questions, please contact Hillary Barbour in my Portland office at 503-231-2300.

Sincerely,

Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress

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