

United States Senate

Aug 29, 2018

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AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND
FORESTRY
APPROPRIATIONS
ENERGY AND NATURAL
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HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
INDIAN AFFAIRS

Ms. Victoria Christiansen
Interim Chief
United States Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250-1111

Dear Interim Chief Christiansen:

I am writing to request that the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) allow all members of the general public an opportunity to provide comment on the Blue Joint and Sapphire Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) closure to mountain biking on the Bitterroot National Forest in the recently initiated 45- day objection period, as required by a U.S. District Court decision in *Bitterroot Ridge Runners Snowmobile Club et al. vs. United States Forest Service et al.* These closures are a real example of how outdated land designations, alongside Congress's failure to act on publicly driven recommendations from the USFS, are hurting the recreation and outdoor economy.

As you are aware, the recent U.S. District Court decision upheld new restrictions (est. 2016) that prohibit motorized and mechanical uses on over 100 miles of trails and 100,000 acres in the Bitterroot National Forest. This decision by the court further facilitates the management of these landscapes as de-facto Wilderness, despite that these areas were deemed not suitable for wilderness designation as determined by your public evaluation process.

I believe the recent 45-day objection period is insufficient for two reasons. First, the 2009 DEIS did not indicate the addition of 62 miles closed to bicycle use in the WSAs and therefore interested parties had no reason to file comments regarding the closures at the time. Second, the regulations at 36 CFR 218.5 were finalized in 2013, well after the 2009 DEIS was issued. While I appreciate the USFS testimony in support of S. 2206, the *Protect Public Use of Public Lands Act*, I believe that the court ruling and the subsequent USFS's decision to limit public comment is a step backward for recreational use of our public land.

I introduced S. 2206 after hearing from the Montana State Legislature, local county commissioners, and dozens of organizations representing tens of thousands of Montanans. Unfortunately, 40 years of D.C. paralysis has blocked access and use of Montana's public lands. With over 80 percent of Montanans recreating on their public lands, rivers, and lakes, and Montana's outdoor recreation economy accounting for over \$7 billion in consumer spending, we should be facilitating more participation in public land management and encouraging more recreation on public lands, not less.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator