

Forest Access For All
PO Box 48
Baker City, Or 97914



Dear Honorable Members of the House Committee Natural Resources, Subcommittee on public lands and environmental issues

Forest Access For All of Baker City would like to give our support of Forest Access in Rural Communities (FAIR) Act – H.R. 4272

Our members, the local residents of Eastern Oregon, Western Idaho, South Eastern Washington as well as groups of citizens across the United States have been involved in the Travel Management Planning Process to keep national forests open for both Subsistence and Recreational uses. Our communities are very dependent on an Open Forest system to access the needed resources that keep our rural communities resilient and vibrant as we struggle through difficult Socio-economic times our nation has been experiencing.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) was created with good intentions to make sure the “human environment” was considered in all federal actions to address our federal agencies decisions affected human beings. NEPA has been amended and re-interpreted repeatedly over the last 34 years due to “policy by litigation”. NEPA is now a powerful tool to eliminate the human element from all Federal lands. The Travel Management Plan is essentially an accessory tool in accomplishing that very goal.

Our region of the state encompasses an area roughly the size of Virginia at 49,000 sq. miles with a population of roughly 100,000 residents. We have seen a substantial reduction in our main industrial economic engine of the timber industry over the last 30 years that has drastically reduced our abilities to facilitate the vibrant communities we desire.

One of the greatest assets we have to keeping our communities as resilient as we would like is our freedom to access the natural resources of our regions. When decisions are spearheaded and implemented by federal mandates and not by local residents, Federal Land Managers tend to protect their perceived responsibilities to the central government in Washington D.C. are not as concerned with the impact of their decision on the local residents of the areas they are making decisions around.

FAFA’s position is that County Administrations are the cornerstone of civil governments. When rural communities are allowed to partake in a process that allow them to not only engage, but affect a positive outcome for their families and residents, positive stewardship can take place that not only allows for effective landscape level management, but also leads to the resilient communities we all strive for. Over the last several years, our group and members have attempted tirelessly to be engaged in Forest Service decisions that affect the local residents, the local economy, ecology and lifestyle. The Travel Management Rule and the current Forest Plan Revision Proposal for the Blue Mountains are two such examples and residents have been met with stone walling, bullying and being marginalized from the process.

The residents of Eastern Oregon and rural communities across the West must have a majority voice when it comes to how local resources are stewarded, and how accesses to those resources are managed. Our members are regular and responsible users of the forest, and often have been sustaining their lives from these forests for generations.

It is troubling to see how local communities lose their voice in the process, as access to the forests around them and they know well is restricted – often due to decision made by bureaucrats in Washington D.C. that may have never seen the roads they are closing. We have seen firsthand how this played out with the travel

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management planning process on the Wallowa Whitman National Forest.

Members of our organization and others across Eastern Oregon dedicate hundreds of hours of time to travel and inventory roads, corresponding with US Forest Service Staff, incorporating that information in to comments for the Forest Service, only to have that information largely ignored and popular trails, family hunting and camping spots are closed.

This bill would require the U.S. Forest Service to consult with, and get approval from, affected counties before altering access to National Forests, which we feel are strong starting points for counties to affectively manage the Health, Safety and Welfare of the residents they elected to represent and protect.

By requiring approval from local government, this legislation will ensure the communities most affected by these access changes have a fair say in their access to public land.

Forest Access For All appreciates the opportunities over the past several years to provide input on forest access issues to the Subcommittee and on this legislation. We look forward to continuing to work with your Subcommittee to assist in getting this legislation signed into law.

Sincerely,

John D. George
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