

Secretary Rollins
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Chief Tom Schultz
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

RE: Travel Management Rulemaking - Notice of Intent

Dear Secretary Rollins and Chief Schultz:

I am writing to urge that the Forest Service retain the existing Travel Management Rule and abandon the proposed changes described in the August 24, 2026 notice (91 FR 54686), which will undermine locally driven travel management decisions and threaten wildlife, clean water, cultural resources, and the many ways Americans experience national forests and grasslands.

Travel management is essential for basic public-land management. It establishes clearly mapped and dependable systems of roads, trails, and areas for motorized access and does so in a way that minimizes damage to watersheds, harassment of wildlife, and conflicts with other recreational uses. Just as communities have streets, sidewalks, bike lanes, and rules of the road, the Forest Service needs clear standards governing where motorized vehicles can travel.

People visit public lands to experience mountains, forests, rivers, wildlife, solitude, and open space, not to find every hillside crisscrossed with vehicle tracks or hear the noise of engines. Access means little if the destination has been damaged, wildlife has disappeared, streams have been degraded, and peaceful trails have become motorized thoroughfares.

The changes outlined in the Forest Service's Notice of Intent would dismantle core elements of the current protective framework and replace them with an "open unless closed" presumption, essentially creating a motorized free-for-all. The proposal would put greater pressure on land managers to justify closures and repeatedly reconsider those protections, eliminate existing criteria for minimizing resource damage and conflicts among recreational uses and with other public land users, and potentially expand cross-country motorized use through new exemptions. The result would be more uncertainty, conflict, and resource damage.

The proposal also ignores a basic reality: the Forest Service already struggles to maintain its existing road and trail system. Expanding motorized use without addressing the Forest Service's \$9 billion road maintenance backlog, \$300 million trail maintenance backlog, and \$229 million recreation backlog would place even greater strain on an already overburdened system, driving up maintenance costs while increasing erosion and water-quality impacts, safety risks, wildlife disturbance, and conflicts among recreational and other public-land users.

These proposed changes cannot be viewed in isolation. They come as the Administration is also moving to rescind the Roadless Rule and roll back other longstanding safeguards for our national

forests and public lands. Taken together, these actions represent a systematic dismantling of the rules and policies that have guided public-land management for decades. America's public lands belong to everyone, and the Administration has a responsibility to maintain the ecological integrity of the nation's forests, not dismantle the safeguards necessary to keep ecosystems intact for current and future generations.

The existing Travel Management Rule provides a common-sense framework for balancing competing demands. It provides for motorized access while giving local land managers the tools to protect wildlife, clean water, cultural resources, and other recreational opportunities.

For these reasons, I urge the Forest Service to:

- Retain the existing requirements to designate where motorized vehicle use is appropriate rather than adopting an "everything is open unless closed" direction;
- Maintain strong criteria requiring travel-management decisions to minimize damage to soils, watersheds, vegetation, disruption of wildlife habitat, and conflicts among recreational uses;
- Preserve the ability of local land managers to tailor travel decisions to local landscapes, and to close roads, trails, and areas that need to heal from off-road vehicle damage;
- Ensure meaningful public involvement and environmental review before changing travel designations or expanding motorized access;
- Maintain clear and enforceable authority to restrict or close motorized use when necessary to protect public safety and natural and cultural resources; and
- Prioritize maintaining sustainable access on system roads and trails before expanding a transportation network the agency lacks resources to maintain.

In sum, I strongly urge the Forest Service to retain the existing Travel Management Rule without change and abandon the changes outlined in the Notice of Intent.

Sincerely,

[First Name] [Last Name]