

August 24, 2007

The Honorable Senator Gordon Smith
One World Trade Center
121 SW Salmon Street, Suite 1250
Portland, OR 97204

Dear Senator Smith:

Mt. Hood National Forest is a treasure for all Americans, and the pride of Oregon. We greatly appreciate your efforts to protect its unique landscapes and to provide quality recreational opportunities for the public. We are writing today to request your help in ensuring that world-class recreation, healthy watersheds, and vibrant wildlife are top priorities during the current Mt. Hood National Forest Travel Management Plan (TMP).

One critical issue threatens these priorities and has brought together local recreation and conservation organizations: **Mt. Hood's crumbling road system.** Key recreation areas are off-limits due to road failures. Drinking water for hundreds of thousands of Oregonians is unnecessarily at risk. The Forest Service has an opportunity to address these issues in the TMP. If the issue is not adequately addressed through the TMP process, it will eventually require Congress to step in and impose expensive post-road failure recovery measures like those needed in Washington. We request your assistance in compelling the supervisor of the Mt. Hood National Forest to sit down with local constituents and deal with this critical issue now, in preparation for the TMP process, before the problem becomes any larger. In addition, please lend your strong support for the Legacy Road and Trail Remediation language contained in the Interior Appropriations bill as passed by the U.S. House of Representatives.

As you know, the road network of the National Forest System is extensive, totaling some 380,000 miles. Years of decreasing budgets and inadequate maintenance has led to an infrastructure that threatens river systems and denies access to popular recreation areas. Last November's rains provided a stark reminder of the costs of retaining a large and unmaintained road network in the Pacific Northwest. Within Mt. Hood National Forest, key recreation destinations were cut off by road blowouts, spawning habitat for threatened fish was destroyed, and **Portland's municipal drinking water source was shut down** due to heavy sedimentation. Every winter that passes without addressing this critical problem increases the risk of catastrophic road failure and higher repair costs.

In the state of Washington the Forest Service delayed, and the results have been disastrous. The Forest Service estimates it will take \$300 million or more to stabilize the road infrastructure, and concerns about Clean Water Act violations have prompted the State's Department of Ecology and others to request Congress to intervene and provide emergency funding. Washington provides a looking glass into the fate of Oregon's watersheds with only one difference -- Oregon's forests contain three times the miles of road as our neighbors to the north.

- In 1998, the Forest Service Chief laid out an agenda for the agency that focused on road issues, and every forest responded with the creation of an Access and Travel Management plan (ATM). Mt. Hood's ATM determined that nearly half (49%) of the forest roads could be closed or decommissioned. In 2003, Mt. Hood completed a GIS map-based roads analysis, echoing the ATM's recommendations. And the Forest Service Roads Rule (36 CFR § 212.5) adopted stating, "Responsible officials *must* review the road system on each National Forest and Grassland and identify the roads on lands under Forest Service jurisdiction that are no longer needed..." **The problem has been well identified and action is overdue.**
- Despite this most recent direction, Mt. Hood National Forest is moving forward with the Travel Planning process with a singular focus on creating Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) playgrounds, and not completing the required analysis of decommissioning unnecessary roads. **Even more disturbing is that the Forest Service has not committed any planning resources toward the maintenance or improvement of recreational access for the growing demands of hikers, bikers, paddlers, and others.**

- The greater Portland-metro area is expected to double in population in the next 20 years. Mt. Hood National Forest, already one of the most visited in the country, is going to experience an increase in use that will either make it a model of recreation and quality-of-life management, or an overcrowded network of unmaintained roads and trails. **We believe that the Travel Planning mandate is the best opportunity to achieve this vision before it has to be addressed through emergency road funding and federal legislation.**

The Forest Service is increasing its budget for timber production, yet access to key recreation areas like McNeil, Riley, and Lost Creek Campgrounds; the Ramona Falls Trailhead, and the Salmon-Huckleberry Wilderness is closed due to a lack of funds to make road repairs. These areas are icons of Mt. Hood National Forest's outstanding recreational opportunities.

Thank you for your timely attention to this matter. We will continue to offer our ideas, services, and field data to the Forest Service. In the meantime, we respectfully request your assistance in compelling the supervisor of the Mt. Hood National Forest to sit down with local constituents and deal with this critical issue now, in preparation for the TMP process, before the problem becomes any larger. His contact information is:

Gary Larsen, Forest Supervisor
 Mt. Hood National Forest
 16400 Champion Way
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 Phone (503) 688-1750

In addition, please lend your strong support for the Legacy Road and Trail Remediation language contained in the Interior Appropriations bill as passed by the U.S. House of Representatives.

Sincerely,

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