

A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

Hello all and thank you for the opportunity to introduce myself and a few of my friends to a cause we all hold dear to our hearts, that being the continued open access to our lands (American Lands). My name is John George and I come from a small town in the mountains of Northeastern Oregon and have been working with friends and family to engage the US Forest Service (USFS) and our local congressional staff in regards to implementation of the Travel Management Rule that is balanced and takes into consideration the traditional and cultural uses of our rural communities into account and allows us to continue our lives unabated from unnecessary regulation and grief.

Roughly this time last year the Wallowa Whitman National Forest (WWNF) released its Record of Decision (ROD) for the WWNF Travel Management Plan (TMP). The previous forest supervisors had been told numerous times the public did not want additional road closures as over half of the 2.3 million ac National Forest (NF) had been locked up as Wilderness or National Recreation Area designation. With subsequent Roadless designations through the late 80's and early 90's that locked up further ground, along with special management designations for watershed protection, and experimental forest uses, locking up additional lands and far exceeding 50% of the forest to a "non-motorized use or limited use" category.

After the release of the ROD Forest Access for All (Baker Oregon) and Citizens for Balanced Use (Gallatin Gateway, Montana) banded together to inform the public how to appeal of the ROD. Much, if not all the credit goes to Kerry White of CBU and Carrie Matthews of FAFA for the withdrawal of the ROD as the mass appeals from the public they helped organize and pressure from our Representative Greg Walden gave the USFS reason to withdraw the decision.

I have been engaging with Forest supervisors and congressional staff on the matter and will continue to do so. The forest service has failed on numerous fronts to take a hard look at social/economic issues on a local level, has misrepresented their own studies to gin up conflict in users groups that does not exist, allowed small minority opinion groups to dictate how the majority will access their lands, allowed employees to publicly shame citizens in an attempt to silence them, and allowed employees to slant the ROD in a way to only justify their desired outcome and not look at the entirety of the situation, to just name a few.

We now are preparing for the next round of meetings, discussions, comments and appeals (if needed). I have been working to get the word out to every person and group that we need their help. Only through a considerable effort can we keep the WWNF and Malheur NF open to everyone. The WWNF is now asking for individuals and groups that are interested in keeping up to date with their actions in regards to the TMP to fill out a request form, even if you have already requested before, and get it to them. My gut tells me this is a twofold effort: A) to facilitate outreach to the public, both as a legitimate effort and a show of "see we tried" & B) a way to take the pulse of the situation to assess if things have settled down enough to start back up. I desperately need everyone that wants to keep our lands open to join with us in Northeastern Oregon to send in a request for both email and mailed notification. The link for the Newsletter and request information is:

http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5411652.pdf

I appreciate this opportunity to write to y'all and look forward to gaining your trust and working with you in the future to address these similar issues across the west.

John D. George

Bates, Oregon

John is being too modest. This is how we first heard from John. Note all the people he included in his email below to the Wallawa-Whitman Forest Service person... This was the first barrage over the bow, so to speak....

Shirley, ALAA President