

WildEarth Guardians * Bark * Cascadia Wildlands * Center for Biological Diversity * Center for Sierra Nevada Conservation * Colorado Mountain Club * Conservation Congress * Conservation Northwest * Cottonwood Environmental Law Center * Earthjustice * Energy Justice Network * EPIC * Forest Issues Group * Friends of the Bitterroot * Friends of the Clearwater * Friends of the Kalmiopsis * Friends of Living Oregon Waters * Friends of the Wild Swan * Grand Canyon Trust * Great Old Broad for Wilderness * Cascadia Broadband, Central Oregon Bitterbush Broadband, South Park Broadband, Willamette Broadband of Great Old Broad for Wilderness * Hells Canyon Preservation Council * High Country Conservation Advocates * Idaho Conservation League * Kentucky Heartwood * Kettle Range Conservation Group * Klamath Forest Alliance * Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center * The Lands Council * Los Padres ForestWatch * Native Fish Society * New Mexico Wilderness Alliance * North Cascades Conservation Council * Northwest Environmental Advocates * Oregon Wild * ORV Watch Kern County * Pacific Crest Trail Association * Pacific Rivers Council * Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) * Southwest PEER * Quiet Use Coalition * Rocky Mountain Recreation Initiative * San Juan Citizens Alliance * San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council * Save Our Canyons * Sheep Mountain Alliance * Sierra Club, Oregon Chapter * Soda Mountain Wilderness Council * South Umpqua Rural Community Partnership * Swan View Coalition * Umpqua Watersheds * Upper Gila Watershed Alliance * Western Environmental Law Center * Western Resource Advocates * White Mountain Conservation League * Wild Virginia * The Wilderness Society * Wilderness Workshop

June 5, 2014

The Honorable Rob Bishop
Chairman
House Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation
123 Cannon Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Raúl Grijalva
Ranking Member
House Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation
1511 Longworth
Washington DC 20515

CC: The Honorable Peter DeFazio; The Honorable Greg Walden

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva:

Please accept this letter on behalf of the 61 undersigned organizations and our members expressing our concerns about HR 4272, which will be discussed in your committee on June 10, 2014. This bill, introduced by Representative Walden (R-OR), threatens to tie the hands of Forest Service managers across the country who work to protect public safety and recreational experiences for everyone on federal lands, and would undo nearly a decade of public involvement and environmental review. It also endangers protections for drinking water resources, wildlife, and other key forest resources by returning our national forests to a state of lawless motorized cross country travel and by preventing the Forest Service from timely mitigation and restoration of road impacts.

This bill, if passed, would prevent the Forest Service from enforcing or implementing the off-road vehicle management plans (i.e. "travel plans") recently completed for nearly all 155 National Forests in the country as part of the 2005 Travel Management Rule. These plans were developed to reduce harm to public lands when vehicles created their own routes – often in sensitive or unstable areas. After tossing aside these management plans, the Forest Service would then be required to garner the approval of local county officials before modifying motorized use on federal public lands. This places previously unheard of veto power over federal public lands management in the hands of local officials.

The Forest Service has spent the last nine years intensively engaging the public, including local government, to develop off-road vehicle management plans that protect resources while also providing

recreational access. The purpose of these plans is to designate access for motorized vehicles on a system of roads, trails and areas while reducing conflict and environmental damage and ensuring the safety of forest visitors. Under these plans, motorized vehicles can use any of the routes designated by the Forest Service on a map that is updated annually to reflect new information or changing conditions. This law would prevent the Forest Service from implementing any management actions relating to roads or trails if the local county was not in complete concurrence with the actions.

Travel plans are also intended to help ensure the Forest Service can continue to provide consistent, safe and reliable recreational access for all Forest users while minimizing the impacts of the overall system of National Forest roads. The Forest Service finds that 80% of the recreational use of national forest roads occurs on less than 20% of the road system. Implementation of the Travel Management Rule helps the agency define an optimal road system within its multiple use mandate. An optimal road system is both affordable and provides needed recreational and resource management access, while reducing impacts to vital resources like clean drinking water and critical wildlife habitat.

The Travel Management Rule was adopted under the Bush Administration, in part because damage and conflict from off-road vehicle use was out of control. Unmanaged off-road vehicle use was identified by the Forest Service as one of the top four threats facing America's national forests. At the time, many off-road vehicle riders agreed that rules for motorized recreation were necessary.

Representative Walden's bill (HR4272) prohibits the Forest Service from further implementing or enforcing the motorized road, trail, and area designations made in off-road vehicle management plans. Stopping implementation of these management plans means road signs will not be installed, maps showing the public where the roads and trails are located will not be printed, and roads that are eroding and causing drinking water pollution and harming fish populations will not be fixed. Essentially, this bill would undo any progress towards an economically manageable and sustainable motorized road and trail system that National Forests have made in the last decade.

The undersigned organizations recognize the importance of having well-designed road and trail systems for recreation and have consistently advocated for increased funds for the Forest Service to implement and enforce the off-road vehicle management plans and to fully maintain an optimal road system for all users. If passed, this bill will result in degraded access, increased user conflict, increased water quality degradation, and increased taxpayer expense. We respectfully request that this bill, and the ideas within it, be rejected.

Sincerely,



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bark

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