

## **7 Facts You Need to Know in Order to Address the Next Wilderness Proposal Involving Your Riding Area.**

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Wilderness proposals from various advocacy groups frequently assert that there are numerous benefits resulting from the addition of public lands to the Wilderness system. The US Forest Service has released extensive new research contradicting these assertions. Often discussions with our elected officials take a far more favorable turn for multiple use recreation, when the officials realize the benefit of Wilderness accrues to a very small portion of the public users and negatively impacts many important issues that are being faced by the USFS throughout the country. This new research includes conclusions that:

1. **There is no need for additional Wilderness for recreational usage.** 20% of USFS trails are in Wilderness areas<sup>1</sup> and these areas receive only 4% of all visitor days to USFS lands.<sup>2</sup> Routes in Wilderness areas are difficult and exceptionally expensive to maintain due to strict management limitations.<sup>3</sup> Teams of horses and mules can move large amounts of materials but are not cost effective when compared to a pick-up truck, as the maintenance equipment cannot be left on the mules overnight.

2. **The Government Accountability Office recently identified that motorized users are the only ones who pay to play on USFS trails** and even with this funding only 25% of all routes are financially sustainable due to high percentages of routes in Wilderness.<sup>4</sup> If motorized funding is not available for management of dispersed recreational opportunities, the resources available to maintain any trail greatly diminish and possible impacts expand.

3. **The true economic driver for local economies is multiple use recreation on public lands.** USFS comparisons of user group spending profiles made as part of the National Visitor Use Monitoring process estimate the motorized user spends 2-3 times the amount of money spent

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<sup>1</sup> See, United States Government Accountability Office Report GAO-13-618; **Forest Service Trails; Long- and Short-Term Improvements Could Reduce Maintenance Backlog and Enhance System Sustainability**; June 2013 at pg 30. Complete report is available here: <http://www.gao.gov/assets/660/655555.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See, USDA Forest Service; **National Visitor Use Monitoring Results USDA Forest Service National Summary Report Data collected FY 2008 through FY 2012** Last updated 20 May 2013; at pg 8.

<sup>3</sup> See, United States Government Accountability Office Report GAO-13-618; **Forest Service Trails; Long- and Short-Term Improvements Could Reduce Maintenance Backlog and Enhance System Sustainability**; June 2013 at pg 30.

<sup>4</sup> See, United States Government Accountability Office Report GAO-13-618; **Forest Service Trails; Long- and Short-Term Improvements Could Reduce Maintenance Backlog and Enhance System Sustainability**; June 2013 at pg 30.

by non-motorized users.<sup>5</sup> This compounds the possibility of negative economic impacts to local communities from significantly lower levels of visitation after Wilderness designations.

4. **Many Wilderness proposals erroneously rely on the newly released Outdoor Industry Association Report that concluded that \$646 billion is annually spent on outdoor recreation.**

Wilderness proposals frequently assert this was the result of quiet use recreation. This is simply incorrect as the 2012 OIA study included motorized usage in their analysis.<sup>6</sup> Previously versions of the OIA study attempted to only include non-motorized usage.

5. **A recent USFS report to Senator Udall specifically stated that Wilderness areas are a significant factor contributing to poor forest health and the outbreak of mountain pine beetle throughout the western US.**<sup>7</sup>

This position has been repeatedly stated by Colorado State Forest Service, who has found management restrictions in Wilderness Areas have caused significant outbreaks of Spruce Beetle infestations.<sup>8</sup> USFS guidelines for management and protection of watersheds identify the critical need for active management of watersheds to insure water quality.<sup>9</sup> This management is impossible in a Wilderness area. Limited forest management is specifically identified as a major factor negatively impacting endangered species such as the Canadian lynx.<sup>10</sup>

6. The critical need for motorized access to multiple use recreation was recently identified by the National Shooting Sports Foundation which found that a lack of motorized access was the

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<sup>5</sup> See, USDA Forest Service; White and Stynes et al; **Updated Spending Profiles for National Forest Recreation Visitors by Activity November 2010** at pg 6.

<sup>6</sup> See, Outdoor Industry Association; **The Outdoor Recreation Economy; Take it outside for American Jobs and a strong economy**; 2012 report.

<sup>7</sup> See, USDA Forest Service; **Review of the Forest Service Response: The Bark Beetle Outbreak in Northern Colorado and Southern Wyoming**; September 2011; at pgs i, 5, 12. Complete report is available here: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/barkbeetle/home/?cid=stelprdb5340741>

<sup>8</sup> See, Colorado State Forest Service; **2012 Report on the Health of Colorado's Forests; Forest Steward Ship through Active Management**; at pg 5. A copy of this report is available here: <http://csfs.colostate.edu/pdfs/137233-forestreport-12-www.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> See generally, Executive Summary; **PROTECTING FRONT RANGE FOREST WATERSHEDS FROM HIGH-SEVERITY WILDFIRES AN ASSESSMENT BY THE PINCHOT INSTITUTE FOR CONSERVATION FUNDED BY THE FRONT RANGE FUELS TREATMENT PARTNERSHIP**. A complete copy of this report is available here. [http://www.pinchot.org/gp/Colorado\\_watersheds](http://www.pinchot.org/gp/Colorado_watersheds)

<sup>10</sup> See, Interagency Lynx Biology Team. 2013. **Canada lynx conservation assessment and strategy. 3rd edition**. USDA Forest Service, USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, USDI Bureau of Land Management, and USDI National Park Service. Forest Service Publication R1-13-19, Missoula, MT. 128 pp. at pg 75.

largest single barrier to those wanting to hunt and fish.<sup>11</sup> A lack of multiple use access is also identified as a significant limitation to herd management and herd health.<sup>12</sup>

7. Agency inventories and determinations on possible designations of Roadless Areas are not management decisions but are rather inventories of characteristics of that area. Roadless areas are still governed by multiple use management and changes to management require NEPA analysis or Congressional action. There are significant limitations on the scope of the Roadless Rule as it only applies to new road construction or major reconstructions. Trails, even those over 50 inches wide, are not impacted by the Roadless Rule. Many areas that are involved in citizen Wilderness proposals have been inventoried and found to be unsuitable for Roadless designation and this should weigh heavily against any suitability for Wilderness designation.

The next time you are faced with a new Wilderness Proposal that is impacting your riding area, please let your elected officials know you don't support the proposal and substantively provide them with copies of the reports identified above. Good science does not support Wilderness designations, and makes a balanced discussion of the issue far more achievable.

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<sup>11</sup> See, National Shooting Sports Foundation; **Issues Related to Hunting Access in the United States; Final Report** November 2010 at pg 7, 13, 56.

<sup>12</sup> See, National Shooting Sports Foundation; **Issues Related to Hunting Access in the United States; Final Report** November 2010 at pg 11.