

Scott Jones

Board of Directors

Colorado Off Highway Vehicle Coalition

Testimony on Opportunities for Outdoor Recreation on Public Lands

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Good Morning. My name is Scott Jones and I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Colorado Off Highway Vehicle Coalition and Vice President of the Colorado Snowmobile Association and a lifelong outdoor enthusiast. I would like to thank the Committee members for providing this opportunity to testify regarding opportunities for sustainable motorized recreation provided by public lands. These recreational opportunities often range far beyond simply riding our equipment and include wildlife viewing, hunting and fishing activities, the need to shed the rigors of a busy week with some exercise to satisfying the simple need to get away from the day to day life with good friends. The recreational resources provided by public lands are of increasing importance as more and more people are drawn to urban centers, and the public lands are relied upon for the sole source of recreation. Recreational usage of public lands increases concern for proper management and stewardship of the resources in these areas. We believe this stewardship insures the recreational experience currently provided to the public by outdoor recreation remain available for generations to come.

While the economy has slowed many OHV recreationalists have continued to utilize resources that are available to them locally and regionally. Last year over \$33 billion was spent on outdoor recreation equipment. OHV recreation provided over a billion dollars in positive economic impact and resulted in over 12,000 jobs in the state of Colorado alone. Many of the economic impacts are disproportionately located in small mountain towns, which would simply disappear without the income provided from those who are utilizing recreational opportunities on adjacent public lands. Many of the other industries, such as mining and forestry, that have historically supported these communities has simply disappeared.

Research into the economic impacts of the Paiute Trail system in Utah and the Hatfield & McCoy trail system in West Virginia have found significant positive economic impacts on communities surrounding these trail systems. Both trail systems have provided over a 7 million dollar positive impact to surrounding counties and over \$600,000 in associated tax revenue to those counties. These communities that have struggled severely to maintain basic economic viability for a long time after the industries that once supported the communities have closed.

The tax revenue that is made available for state and local governments as a result these economic impact from OHV recreation is often overlooked. These revenues are paid with little complaint from recreationalists seeking to access public lands. This simply cannot be said for a lot of other taxes.

The economic impact from OHV recreation takes a lot of different forms in addition to the purchase of the machines that are ridden and safety equipment needed, motorized users also require trucks and

trailers to move their equipment and most users are staying in hotels and motels and buying parts and accessories for their equipment. Research has found that approximately 1/3 of recreational users in Colorado are including a hotel or motel stays and associated meals as part of their OHV recreational experience and vigorously utilizing available restaurants after a day of riding.

In addition to the positive economic impacts, motorized recreational users in Colorado have developed a paid annual registration program to provide funding to partner with the Forest Service and BLM to improve and maintain public lands experiences. Most states have programs similar to the Colorado OHV registration program. These moneys are leveraged with funds from the Recreational Trails Program and volunteer hours to maintain sustainable recreation on the forest. Recently a Colorado report was that totaled volunteer hours for all groups of public lands users. This report found that motorized recreation was the largest source of volunteer hours for forest management, this volunteering has resulted in strong partnerships with district employees which can help a wide range of issues that may not be directly related to recreational usage of the areas such as search and rescue.

Last year the Colorado OHV registration program generated over 5 millions of dollars that directly benefitted all users of public lands with on the ground management of all recreation through a wide range of projects. This included purchase of equipment and funding statewide teams of federal employees dedicated to trail maintenance, directly supporting and partnering with law enforcement agencies, development of parking lots, kiosks and restrooms. The registration funds also provided signage and sound testing equipment to promote voluntary compliance with sound standards and preparing and producing maps designating legal area usages and extensive educational programs and programs targeting the sustainable usage of the forests.

Registration monies have also funded partnerships with the Forest Service's Research Station and Fish & Wildlife Service for the reintroduction and management of endangered or threatened species on to the public lands. Colorado OHV enthusiasts are working with the FWS to determine best available science for the management of the lynx in conjunction with recreational usage of the habitats and possibly the wolverine on public lands in Colorado.

While the economic impacts of OHV recreation are relatively simple, the planning process for public access can be very complex. We are aware planning for usages of the public lands is never going to be easy given the wide range of competing interests in usage of the forest lands. Unfortunately the process has become so complex that most users of the forest are simply overwhelmed by the complexity which results in limited participation and a lot of frustration. This is unfortunate as participation in planning for the forest fosters stewardship in the public lands and forms strong relationships with local land managers, which can be invaluable for a lot of issues.

While roadless area designations may serve a commendable purpose in theory by trying to provide a dispersed recreational experience to all users of the forest often roadless designations are misapplied and in manners that directly contradict the clear language of the rule. These misunderstandings can be the result of the numerous court proceedings and variations on the rule that have been developed over the years to something as simple as misunderstanding the name, as roads can and do exist in roadless

areas and trails for dispersed motorized recreation are to be protected by the roadless area designation. Simply mentioning the term roadless area will elicit a collective groan from all users of the forests.

I have had the privilege of working with the facilitators in the development of the new Colorado Roadless rule proposal. The meeting facilitators had come to a rather stunning conclusion in the developing the public hearings for the proposed rule. All user groups simply wanted consistency in the rule and something that could be easily applied.

The complexity added to a planning process by a roadless designation often outweighs the benefits obtained from a roadless area designation in comparison to management decisions for the area made under existing forest plans and determinations. Roadless areas are often designated under a land management category that is designed to protect and preserve dispersed recreation. We believe that the new Colorado roadless rule is a step towards providing clarity and consistency in planning for roadless areas we also believe any reductions in roadless area designations are welcome to the users of the public lands as any reduction in roadless areas will result in expanded multiple usage of the forests.

We believe that Rep McCarthy's proposed wilderness and roadless area release legislation is a great first step in reducing the confusion and frustration to forest users that the roadless area designation invokes. The Forest Service has already prepared the research to determine significant portions of designated roadless areas are not available for more protective designations. Releasing these areas would expand multiple usage and the associated economic benefits without reducing existing Forest Service budgets as is proposed with the purchase of additional lands under the Presidents Great Outdoors initiative.

Unfortunately the new FS planning rule does not streamline the planning process as a lot of new theories and standards are introduced into the planning process. We believe the new theories and standards will result in significant expenses as unit level as representatives attempt to deal with the new standards and rules. Many key terms are poorly defined, such as what level restoration activities will be deemed complete. The end result of these limited definitions is Courts will be forced to determine what the correct standard for each term is. Despite the expanded costs to be incurred under the Plan no funding resources are identified to assist with coverage of these costs in the short term. This will significantly tax the already strained budgets of the units as they have been forced to deal with the massive beetle kill epidemic that has plagued the rocky mountain region.

We would ask that land managers be allowed to do what they know how to do best. Their management has allowed the public lands to be managed to provide recreation to this generation and this generation would like to provide the same recreational opportunities to the following generation and protect the economic benefits that the public lands provide to all users

I would like to thank the committee members for providing this opportunity to discuss recreational usage of public lands and would welcome any questions you may have.