

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Witness Testimony

TESTIMONY OF
SAFARI CLUB INTERNATIONAL

Before the Subcommittee on Forest and Forest Health
Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives

on March 4, 1999
10:00 a.m. Room 1324

On an
OVERSIGHT HEARING
on the
FOREST SERVICE ROADS MORATORIUM

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Chairman Chenoweth and Members of the Subcommittee:

Safari Club International is an organization representing a broad spectra of sportsmen. Madame Chairman thank you for focusing this hearing on access, one of the greatest problems that sportsmen have today is access. Madame Chairman the greatest threat to the future of hunting is sufficient access for those who are not of substantial means. We now have an agency that proposes to curtail that access.

I appear here today as the consultant for Governmental Affairs for Safari Club International. In my 16 years in Congress I served on the committees responsible for forest management in both the Agriculture Committee and the Resources Committee. I have seen good management and I have observed bad management. I have seen good proposals and bad proposals. The proposal to unilaterally close roads is a bad proposal for sportsmen and other recreational users. The proposal is so bad that it must have the dedicated professionals in the Forest Service shaking their heads. As a matter of fact, professionals bold enough to do so are expressing opposition. And many who are not bold enough are privately expressing resentment of the agenda for lock-up and lock-out.

At Missoula, Montana on February 6th, 1999 in an AP wire story, Chief Dombek equated recreationists and sportsmen to the timber industry and grazing. He stated, "The recreation industry needs to take note, they need to look at some of the issues the timber industry ran up against 20 years ago. The side boards for recreation are no different than those for timber or grazing or any other use". In the same delivery he

expressed satisfaction at the reduction of timber harvest by 70% during the past ten years. Can we extrapolate that the Chief wants to see a similar reduction in recreational use?

The road closure effort is not a timber issue as the Administration has been trying to spin. This is a reduction in hunting opportunity, a reduction in recreational use and be termed a recreation/hunter access issue. The Chief congratulated those managers who proposed banning cross-country travel with all-terrain vehicles. Their proposal would limit ATV use to established roads and trails. Then of course, they propose to eliminate as many roads and trails as possible. This of course means ATV's would be a thing of the past, even for game retrieval. It also has serious implications for snowmobiles.

The agenda of lock-out is not new. I recall, approximately fifteen years ago a coalition of privileged users set down on paper the goals and agenda they wanted to achieve on public lands.

1. Eliminate timber harvest
2. Eliminate as many roads as possible
3. Eliminate all mechanical/motorized use
4. Secure all the wilderness possible
5. Eliminate horses
6. Eliminate hunting
7. Establish limits of human intrusion (Forest Service - limits of acceptable change)

Because access on public lands is important to recreation, to good game management and to sportsmen, we have to question if the proposal to eliminate access on public land is a political decision. The evidence that answers that question seem to indicate a strong yes. Of the seven items listed on the agenda, five have and are being accomplished. The purists have not achieved two of the goals, eliminating hunting and eliminating horses. However, given the ever increasing regulations and requirements on horses in the wilderness and the protection of designated species, they are moving in the direction of elimination.

And by the way Madam Chairman, I have received rumors that the public land managers are trying a new concept. That is that all public lands are off limits unless posted open.

We have to question what happened to the validity of the Forest Management Plans that everyone participated in and that the taxpayers spent hundreds of millions of dollars on.

We have to ask if the Forest Service is repudiating the credibility and credentials of its own personnel and the validity of its own findings. These were the professionals who evaluated watersheds, wildlife sensitive areas, recreational needs and validity of roadless and wilderness designations. The Forest Service does all of this prior to building a road or even establishing a trail.

We as sportsmen question the intent of a suddenly conceived or politically instigated concept that the bureaucracy must invoke a moratorium and involve themselves in a new round of evaluations of existing access to property owned by the general public.

If the Forest Service must persists in this duplicative effort, then sportsmen should have the opportunity to participate in a hearing on every forest. When ill feeling all ready exists about being denied access, then to deny the opportunity for input is an insult to sportsmen, the elderly, the handicapped and the family oriented recreationist. We want to insure that this new effort does not further erode an already diminishing access to recreational opportunity on public lands.

Increasingly sportsmen are coming up against pole gates, barriers and no motorized vehicles signs when they arrive at the edge of public property. This committee should demand to know how many miles of roads have been closed in the past ten years and how many pole gates and tank barriers have been put up in the past ten years.

In an effort to justify further road closures the Forest Service implies that hunting in the forest system is having a negative impact on wildlife. They contend that access has led to "increased pressure on wildlife species from hunters and fishers." My experience has been that the Forest Service consults extensively with state wildlife agencies and that the jurisdiction of wildlife and hunting is primarily a state right and responsibility. Because the Forest Service allegation appears in their public document, because it impugns the role of hunting in conservation and because it denigrates the capability of state wildlife management, I would suggest this Committee require the Forest Service to name even one state wildlife agency that is not fulfilling their obligation We know of none and resent the fact that this ill thought out statement is being used to justify closures considerations that could be harmful to sportsmen and to wildlife management.

The reason SCI is alarmed is that the public lands of the Forest Service are a destination for hunters in our country. Over 16 million days of hunting occurs annually in the National Forest. For many of these hunters and sportsmen the only opportunity to hunt is on the public land. Safari Club International is committed to insuring access in the forest for this group of sportsmen. We are gratified to have worked with both federal public land mangers and State Fish and Game officials. We hope we can do so again in an attempt to find reasonable solutions.

In closing Madame Chairman let me quote from Bruce Babbitt, in a February 1996 press release:

"Many American don't realize what an enormous contribution hunters, anglers, and recreational shooters make to conservation of our natural resources. In fact, these individuals are among the Nation's foremost conservationists, contributing their time, money, and other resources to ensuring the future of wildlife and its habitat. Under the Federal Aid program alone, a total of more than "5 billion in excise taxes has been a total of more than to support state conservation programs."

This statement should be handed personally to Chief Dombek with the question; Do you really want to curtail one of the greatest conservation success stories of all time?

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