

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

Statement

**TESTIMONY ON
ACCESS TO NATIONAL FORESTS
BEFORE THE
U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FORESTS AND FOREST HEALTH
AUGUST 12, 2000
Submitted by:
Stormy Sims on behalf of
Americans for Responsible Recreational
Access (ARRA)**

First, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to present my thoughts in regards to our Forest and Forest Health. My name is Stormy Sims. I am a resident of Norman, Oklahoma and serve on the State Trails Advisory Board in Oklahoma as the Motorcycle / ATV representative. I am also on the State Parks Board in Oklahoma. I used to live in Arkansas and served on the State Trails Council here. I am the Oklahoma partner for the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (NOHVCC). I have recreated in numerous National Forest throughout the country over the past 30+ years on OHVs (off-highway vehicles - motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles and snowmobiles), hiking and on horseback. I have used both the Ozark and Ouachita National Forest extensively over the years with my family and friends. I am an off-road motorcycle instructor with the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF). In my professional life, I am the Quality Assurance Manager for a manufacturing company in Oklahoma City. I am giving testimony on behalf of the Americans for Responsible Recreational Access (ARRA).

ARRA is an alliance of organizations representing more than 25 million Americans who share a love and enthusiasm for the great outdoors including our nation's public lands and waterways. ARRA is committed to the responsible use and wise management of our natural resources. And, ARRA is committed to ensuring that all Americans, regardless of age or physical status, will have access to those lands owned by the American people. It is with these concerns in mind that we have sought this opportunity to participate in this important hearing.

I am testifying before you today because we am very concerned with the direction of the Forest Service management of our public land has taken with recent policies, including the recent Roadless Policy. In most cases forest users are conservationists too, who care about preserving our wild lands for future generations. However, preservation and conservation mean different things. In the past, public land has belonged to the "public". We had access to it. We could travel across most all of it with only a few areas that were off limits. We have taught people to respect the land. This is what the average person thinks when someone asks them if they are in favor of protecting our wild lands, and they respond yes unaware it really means

they may no longer have access to it or at least limited access. Where there are legitimate concerns of safety or environmental impact, land closure of individual areas to protect sensitive sites and the public welfare is valid. But to declare millions of acres of land off-limits to recreational use runs counter to the mission entrusted to the U.S. Forest Service. This is especially disturbing since it is being done without the proper input of Congress or the public. The pressure to provide a land legacy by President Clinton is unacceptable.

All my life I have been aware of the different degree to which people use our parks and public land. Some like to come for the day and have a picnic, some like to camp out and stay the weekend. Some like to use the not so easy to reach areas because of the solitude, while some like to take a paved road to a more accessible area. Some like to walk there, some like to ride their bicycles, some like to take a boat or OHV. It is our land and we should have a right to be able to access it, to recreate on it, and especially to be able to go out there and inspect the results of current and future management. Congress has already recognized outdoor recreation as a vital and important part of the multiple use of our national resources. Not only is it a significant national industry in terms of economic impact, but it serves as a healthy and family-oriented activity for all ages. The wide range of outdoor recreation offers constructive and educational challenges for youth, a welcome outlet for city dwellers, encouragement for physical fitness for both able-bodied and disabled individuals, and a spiritual outlet for those of all ages, creeds and races. With the problems that we are facing with youth and crime, it is important to provide a resource that allows families to recreate together.

There has been a Federal commitment to multiple use with numerous Acts and executive orders passed to ensure the proper management of the resources. These include the 1960 Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act, the National Forest Road and Trails System Act of 1964, Executive Order 11644 in 1972, and Executive Order 11989 in 1977. These Acts and Orders provided the guidelines and authority to manage the forest without the need for any additional directives.

Another problem with the Roadless Policy, is the inability of the lay person to understand the short and long term effects. Most people do not print off and read the Federal Register, therefore they do not fully understand some of the potentially devastating effects that this policy would have. They do not understand some of the complex interdependency on other yet to be decided policies. They do not understand the effect a lack of a precise definition of things such as a "road" could have. Concurrent development of documents being prepared simultaneously could have far-reaching effects as changes are made in other documents. The sheer volume of this material makes it difficult for the people in the Forest Service to fully understand, let alone the normal user of the forest.

The outdoor recreation industry has a good record of promoting environmental responsibility and safety. This includes member education, public service advertising, public awareness programs, and educational workshops for minimizing environmental impact. In addition, many of our public lands depend on revenues generated by access fees for much needed operations and maintenance expenses.

Specifically, as trail users of the forest, we want to use our land responsibly, therefore we want to work with the Forest Service to plan for recreational opportunities and not just recklessly use this resource. I am concerned that any restrictions will cause users to recreate in uncontrolled areas causing more damaging impact. When the use is on trails or roads, those trails / roads can be monitored, maintained and controlled. With tight restriction, more concentrated use will occur causing more impact on the trail / roads. The use needs to be distributed throughout the forest and not concentrated to a reduced area. The roads / trails also serve an important need in case of medical emergencies or fighting wildfires or just access to manage the forest health. The need and desire for motorized access in the forest continues to grow. Recreation use

figures have shown a decline in the use of Wilderness areas and now constitutes only about 2 % of the total use of the forests. We certainly do not need more areas of less use when recreational use is increasing.

Some OHV facts include that more than 15 million Americans enjoy the benefits of OHVs. A conservative estimate of economic impact of off-highway motorcycle and all-terrain vehicle market was \$18 billion in 1998. This does not even include the impact of jeep / 4-wheel drive market. The manufacturers of off-highway motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles meet the EPA regulations for EPA noise emission standards. This industry promotes safe and responsible use through the numerous public awareness campaigns, workshops, and training courses.

In summary, ARRA would like to encourage you to take action to prevent the proper planning process from being circumvented by hidden agendas and make decisions based on a balance between protecting the environment and serving the public need. The National Forests belong to all the people and should be managed providing for the needs of the people. We need to help bring back the Forest Service back to it's motto of "Caring for the Land and Serving the People".

Thank you for your valuable time.

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