



# NORTH DAKOTA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

October 15th, 2024

To: Dakota Prairie Grasslands Management Team  
U.S. Forest Service  
2000 Miriam Circle  
Bismarck, ND 58501

**Subject: Comment Letter on the Dakota Prairie Grasslands Travel Management Plan**

Dear Dakota Prairie Grasslands Management Team,

On behalf of the North Dakota Wildlife Federation (NDWF), I am writing to provide comments on the Dakota Prairie Grasslands Travel Management Plan. The NDWF represents thousands of hunters, anglers, and wildlife enthusiasts across North Dakota who are dedicated to conserving and protecting our natural resources. We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the development of a plan that balances public access with wildlife conservation and land stewardship.

The Dakota Prairie Grasslands offer invaluable habitat for wildlife, critical ecosystem services, and essential opportunities for North Dakota residents to engage in quiet, non-motorized recreation such as hunting, fishing, and birdwatching. It is with this in mind that we submit the following recommendations:

## **1. OHV Use Concern in the Badlands**

The NDWF is particularly concerned about the growing use of off-highway vehicles (OHVs) in the Badlands region of the Dakota Prairie Grasslands. The unique and fragile landscapes of the Badlands are home to many sensitive species and play a crucial role in North Dakota's outdoor heritage. Unregulated or extensive OHV use can cause habitat fragmentation, soil erosion, and wildlife disturbance.

We recommend that OHV use be directed to designated main roads only, with clear restrictions on off-road travel in order to protect the natural environment. Limiting motorized access to established roads will help safeguard wildlife habitat, opportunities for quiet recreation, while still providing public access to these areas.

## **2. "Access To, Not Access Through" Public Lands**

The NDWF advocates for an approach to public land management that emphasizes "access to, not access through." This principle reflects our commitment to ensuring the public can reach and enjoy these lands, but without compromising their ecological integrity. North Dakota has limited secure wildlife habitat and opportunities for quiet, non-motorized recreation, and we believe these values should be prioritized over expanding motorized access.

We urge the Forest Service to ensure that large, contiguous tracts of habitat remain undisturbed by excessive road networks, thus preserving critical areas for wildlife and quiet recreation.

### **3. Closing Superfluous Roads, Especially Around Inventoried Roadless Areas**

As part of maintaining habitat connectivity and minimizing the human footprint on the landscape, the NDWF strongly supports the closure of superfluous roads to motorized travel, particularly in areas surrounding Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs). These road closures should focus on enhancing wildlife security and protecting remote areas that are increasingly rare in the state.

We understand and respect the importance of allowing ranchers with grazing leases to maintain vehicle access to necessary areas for managing their operations. We support a system that ensures ranchers' needs are met while closing unnecessary roads that fragment habitat and disturb wildlife.

### **4. Improved Signage for Roads Leading to State Trust Lands**

One of our concerns is the potential for sportsmen and women to unknowingly violate State Trust Land rules due to insufficient signage. To avoid such situations, the NDWF would like to see the US Forest Service and State Trust Lands Department work together to improve signage on roads that lead into State Trust Lands. Clear identification of open and closed roads would help inform the public and reduce unintentional infractions.

By enhancing road signage and providing clear information on travel restrictions, we can support responsible public land use and help ensure compliance with state regulations.

### **5. Protection of Wildlife Habitat and Support for Non-Motorized Recreation**

The NDWF continues to support the protection of wildlife habitats across the Grasslands. By restricting motorized access and promoting non-motorized recreation like hiking, birdwatching, and hunting, the Forest Service can help ensure that these areas remain havens for wildlife and outdoor enthusiasts alike.

We recommend:

- Limiting motorized access to designated roads and trails only, particularly in sensitive habitats and riparian areas.
- Expanding non-motorized trail networks in areas where wildlife disturbance is minimal.
- Enhancing public education efforts to promote responsible land use and conservation.

### **6. Ongoing Monitoring, Adaptive Management, and Public Outreach**

Lastly, we encourage the Forest Service to establish a framework for ongoing monitoring and adaptive management of the Travel Management Plan. This will ensure the Plan can respond to changing conditions and new conservation challenges over time. In addition, public outreach and education on responsible OHV use, habitat protection, and non-motorized recreation should be prioritized.

We would also like to reiterate our willingness to collaborate with the Forest Service to develop outreach initiatives and educational programs that foster a greater understanding of the ecological value of the Dakota Prairie Grasslands.

In conclusion, the NDWF supports a Travel Management Plan that strikes a balance between public access and the conservation of North Dakota's precious wildlife habitats. By preventing unlawful road and trail construction, closing superfluous roads, and prioritizing non-motorized recreation, we can ensure that these landscapes remain accessible and enjoyable for future generations.

Thank you for considering our comments. We look forward to working together to protect and preserve the Dakota Prairie Grasslands. Please feel free to contact us if you require further information or would like to discuss these recommendations in more detail.

Sincerely,

John Bradley  
Executive Director  
North Dakota Wildlife Federation  
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