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Organization:

Title:

Comments: In an effort to stay informed, we attended three Forest Planning meetings and participated in one webinar. After careful consideration, we are opposed to the addition of any new Wilderness areas for the following reasons:

1. The Salmon-Challis National Forest presently includes an inventory of proposed wilderness areas that have not been acted upon. The simple act of recommending an area for wilderness consideration changes the way this area can be used and managed without formal congressional action. The Salmon Challis currently consists of more than 1.3 million acres of designated wilderness. This community can't afford more wilderness areas.
2. The wilderness evaluation process was initiated by identifying areas greater than 5,000 acres without roads. As we started examining these areas, we found numerous roads unidentified by the Forest but obviously being used for recreation and firewood gathering. Many of these focal areas, although listed as roadless, are not and should not be considered as future wilderness.
3. Some of the focal areas contain "Cherry Stem" boundaries around roads that actually protrude into the interior of the proposed wilderness. Not only does this not meet the true intent of a designated wilderness area but it shines a spotlight on the entire process. The decision to create a Cherry Stemmed boundary within a proposed focal area calls to question the motives of the planning team. Upon questioning Forest Service Staff, concerning the Cherry Stemmed road boundary into the Stein Mountain area, we were told that they were just following the rules. The Stein Mountain area is not roadless by any means. The road to the fire lookout is only one of many. A decision was made to draw the focal area boundary around the road leading to the fire lookout at the top of Stein Mountain. Why? This is an important seasonally manned Fire Lookout collocated with federal, state, county and local emergency radio repeaters. The radio communications of first responders fighting fires, crime and treating medical emergencies are transmitted by repeaters located on this mountain top. This infrastructure is not conducive to a wilderness area.  
In general, the initial inventory of focal areas selected for consideration as wilderness included many areas with obvious non-wilderness characteristics. Unfortunately, this fact has caused and/or contributed to considerable distrust in the forest planning process.
4. We know that grazing allotments are located within many of the focal areas. Wilderness designations would forever negatively impact the use of these areas by ranchers. As our local economy depends on ranching, wilderness designations would be akin to the loss of logging and the closing of saw mills.
5. From a management perspective, Wilderness declarations tie the hands of the Forest Service and removes many tools from their toolbox. Fuel reduction practices and firefighting will not happen within the designated wilderness areas exposing adjacent residential areas to extreme fire danger.
6. The tools and methods for managing fish and wildlife are also limited in wilderness areas. We all saw what happened when a helicopter landed in the Frank Church to collar/track wildlife. Who can predict the results of future limitations on the management of fish and wildlife?
7. The aged population is currently at its highest level in human history. As we get older, our ability to recreate changes. We rely on modern conveniences, with wheels, to access our favorite places to picnic, camp or hunt. Designating more wilderness will adversely affect our older and handicapped/disabled population.

We are concerned that our access to the forest and how we are able to recreate will be adversely affected by further wilderness designation. Additionally, our economy is fragile and never really recovered from the logging restrictions and saw mill closures. Any negative influence on ranching and farming would severely impact this community.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,

David Schuler

Judy Schuler