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Comments: Statement in Support of Aviation and Airstrips in the Blue Mountains National Forests Land Management Plan

I respectfully request that aviation and airstrips be formally recognized and included in the revised Land Management Plan for the Blue Mountains National Forests. Aviation is a historic, practical, and cost-effective component of access, transportation, and recreation in these forests. Inclusion will ensure the safe and continued availability of this critical resource for both public and agency use.

Historic Use

Aviation has played an important role in the Blue Mountains since the 1930s, with both commercial and private activity supporting the region. From early fire detection flights to present-day recreation and access, aviation has long been part of the fabric of forest use. For this reason, "aviation" should be added to the list of approved activities within the plan.

Management and Maintenance

Local and national aviation organizations have worked in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service to develop and implement Airstrip Integrated Operations and Maintenance Plans, such as those already established on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. These collaborative programs are proven, cost-effective models that leverage volunteer resources to maintain airstrips, saving agency funds while keeping facilities safe and functional. The same approach can be extended across all three Blue Mountains forests.

Transportation Infrastructure

Airstrips are part of the U.S. Forest Service's national transportation system, just as roads and trails are. They serve multiple essential purposes, including:

Supporting federal and state land management activities

Providing staging areas for wildfire detection, suppression, and recovery efforts

Enabling recreational, hunting, and backcountry access

Supporting emergency medical evacuations and search and rescue operations

Offering access to private in-holdings

Facilitating commercial activities that strengthen rural and local economies

For these reasons, the plan should explicitly recognize airstrips as part of the transportation infrastructure and include them in management considerations.

Objectives

We respectfully request that the list of objectives be expanded to include "Maintain Airstrips." This will ensure continuity of access and proper stewardship of these facilities.

Dispersed Usage

Airstrips provide unique and low-impact opportunities for dispersed backcountry recreation. By connecting aviators with remote parts of the forests, they enhance public enjoyment while dispersing use across a broader landscape.

Aesthetics and Wildlife

Airstrips are visually consistent with open meadow landscapes, blending naturally into their surroundings and providing additional habitat for wildlife. Peer-reviewed scientific studies confirm that aircraft noise has no detrimental effect on wildlife populations, further demonstrating that airstrips are compatible with ecological values.

Conclusion

The continued recognition and maintenance of airstrips is vital to the safe, effective, and sustainable use of the Blue Mountains National Forests. Aviation provides historic, economic, recreational, and emergency benefits that align with the Forest Service's multiple-use mission. I urge you to include aviation and airstrips in the revised Forest Plan to preserve this critical resource for generations to come.

Respectfully submitted,
Chad Brinkerhoff