

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 9/28/2026 2:22:56 AM

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I use the Blue Mountains forests for recreation, but my concerns extend well beyond my own recreational use. I am deeply concerned about families and individuals who rely on these forests to help meet basic household needs. Many local families have gathered firewood, hunted for food, collected forest products, and used these lands for generations. If motorized access is reduced, some of those people may no longer be physically or financially able to reach the resources they depend on for food and heat.

The people I have met who live this way generally respect the forest and take their responsibility as stewards seriously. Their knowledge comes from years of living, working, and raising families here. The Forest Service should recognize that knowledge and analyze how the proposed plan could affect these households. The DEIS does not adequately measure the value of firewood, wild game, gathered foods, and other forest resources to local families, or the cost to those families if access becomes more limited.

I am also concerned about wildfire and emergency response. Eastern Oregon has experienced destructive fires that have caused severe damage to forests, homes, private property, and local communities. Roads and motorized access allow firefighters, emergency personnel, and land managers to reach fires, medical emergencies, and other incidents quickly. Maintaining multiple usable routes can also give firefighters and other responders safer ways into and out of an emergency area, including alternate routes if fire behavior, weather, fallen trees, or other conditions make their original route unsafe. Responders should not be placed at additional risk because the road or route system leaves them with only one way in or out.

Roads and motorized access also provide residents and forest users with alternate evacuation routes when their usual road is blocked or threatened by fire. Residents may need access to reach and protect their homes or private property when it is safe and lawful for them to do so. A forest plan that creates direction supporting future road closures or access restrictions must disclose how those changes could affect initial attack, responder safety, medical response, evacuation, and the ability to reach injured or medically distressed people.

I am aware of local situations where closed or inaccessible roads made it difficult to reach people who needed medical care, and some people did not survive. I cannot say what the medical outcome would have been under different circumstances, but delayed or obstructed access during an emergency can have serious consequences. The Forest Service should evaluate that risk before adopting plan components that may influence future access decisions.

These are public lands, and people who have responsibly used them for generations should not lose motorized access because other individuals misuse the land. The better response is stronger enforcement against people who dump garbage, damage resources, leave campsites in poor condition, or otherwise abuse the forest. The agency should hold those individuals accountable instead of imposing broad restrictions on responsible families who rely on the forest and care for it.

I ask the Forest Service to revise the plan to:

1. Recognize household reliance on firewood, wild game, gathered foods, and other forest resources.
2. Analyze how each alternative and its plan components could affect motorized access to those resources.
3. Protect existing public motorized access and traditional methods of reaching and retrieving household resources.

4. Analyze the effects of access restrictions on wildfire response, responder safety, emergency medical response, evacuation, and public safety.
5. Use focused enforcement against damaging conduct instead of broad restrictions that burden responsible forest users.
6. Include local residents and multigenerational forest users in access planning because their experience and knowledge are valuable to responsible forest management.