

Dear U. S. Forest Service Chief Thomas Tidwell,

I have been involved in the planning process for the Shoshone Forest Plan as a meeting participant and as a letter-writer for several years. Much of the process has been interesting and positive. The Forest Service personnel have been helpful and accessible. There is much to be appreciated in the final draft of the new plan. I do not want to seem ungrateful for the efforts and the good work of the Forest Service, but I do wonder about one apparent change in direction from the past and from past statements. That has to do with four-wheeled and motorized use in the Shoshone. I understood that expanding wilderness areas was unlikely in today's political climate, but I did not expect the Forest Service go in the opposite direction opening up the Francs Peak and Wood River areas to motorized travel. And when asked the reason for the change, it all seems to come down to the "squeaky wheel" form of governance rather than the long range good of the Forest. You have clearly heard all of these arguments many times over. I would like to stress only a couple of points.

In my career as a school administrator I always looked at the long term logic of any suggested change-- what will this look like in ten years, twenty years, and further? If we add this facility, what is it going to cost the school in the next 50 years? If we add this foreign language, what precedent are we setting for other subject areas? Etc. I trust the Forest is looking long and hard at the long term implications of expanding motorized use in a national forest that is not well suited, because of the wildlife populations and the rugged, fragile terrain, to that use. If this addition is okay, what will the next step be? If there is no red line now, will there ever be one? The logic of this change is incredibly dangerous to the long term mission, as I understand it, of the Forest Service.

Second, I understand the four-wheeling population wants to have choices. Any quick survey of the Big Horn Basin, the Big Horn Mountains, and the Pryor Mountains will reveal many great four-wheeling areas, trails, and roads where the conflicts with wildlife are fewer and the terrain is less fragile. Has the FS actually inventoried those other resources and opportunities?

Third, most members of the four-wheeling population are thoughtful and careful, but the hard truth is that a significant minority are not. I know the Northern Shoshone pretty well and I can take you to a number of areas where illegal four-wheeling is going on. Some of the trails go right past "No Motorized Travel" signs. The worst actually cuts a FS trail six miles from the trailhead. And those tracks, once laid down, are an open invitation to further use. Local FS personnel acknowledge this illegal use and admit they do not have the staff to enforce FS rules. Before the Forest Service opens new areas to four-wheeled travel, it truly must add the personnel and budget to police the areas already open to motorized travel to see if it can enforce its regulations to minimize the negative impacts of motorized travel. This is not just a matter of numbers; these men and women must have the authority and the will to be law enforcement agents. Only after that is done successfully should the Forest Service consider adding more area

I hope the Forest Service will return to its former protections of the Francs Peak and Wood River areas. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
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