

2012 KNF Management Plan Comments

From Rep. Mike Cuffe,

House District 2,

P.O. Box 624,

Eureka, MT. 59917

Telephone 406-293-1247 or 889-5777

Email: mike@mcuffe.com



To Kootenai National Forest Planners:

The following are in addition to comments I am submitting along the Sen. Chas Vincent and Rep. Jerry Bennett. These are my personal observations, feelings, concerns, thoughts and opinions.

Let me begin by noting that I am a lifelong resident of Lincoln County with family roots in the area going back to the early 1880s, and I have a definite prejudice to use the forest without spoiling it, in fact to keep it healthy through management practices.

During my campaigns for state legislature, I have made a lot of door to door visits, and I have done a lot of listening to the folks. Most frequent concerns are government regulations, environmental limitations, economic impacts, as well as how those things all fit together with the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

I appreciate the years of hard work that has gone into this document, but I am disappointed in the result, particularly in regard to further restrictions and lack of choices in alternatives. It appears there is a real bias in place towards a hands off management policy, which really means little or no management and practically no encroachment by man. Last year we saw the wolf delisted from the Endangered Species list by an act of Congress because federal managers were failing, and courts were ruling by technicality rather than by justice and common

sense. Let us learn from that, and let us base our decisions on good solid data that will stand up in court challenges.

Specifically, I find it unreasonable that all alternative management plans include Wild and Scenic River designations where none occurred before. I am disappointed that communities were not consulted. I see no need for such designation and question why the designation comes forward on every alternative. Why lock in a very restrictive designation instead of managing it as has been done in the past. Is this a common sense management plan? Do those streams actually meet the criteria? If management is too restricted, are we setting USFS up for future litigation such as the issue coming up right now in the Bitterroot Valley due to watershed degradation from wild fire.

Specifically, I see no need to create additional Wilderness Area, especially when proposed areas don't meet established criteria based on size, prior usage, description and location. The people of Lincoln County voted against creating additional Wilderness Area. Yes, some legislative proposals have been made in a desperate effort to create some logging jobs while adding wilderness that doesn't meet established standards, but that is ill advised and a desperate effort to deal with the lack of alternatives. There is no justification for turning logged or mined areas into wilderness areas or wilderness study areas. Why are these in listed alternatives.

In the 1970s, as editor of The Western News I helped review the extensive inventory reports of the units on KNF. Today's proposed management plan alternatives seem to be taking a sizeable leap away from factual scientific analysis. As an example, the current management plan makes reference to the possibility of rare plants existing. What? Would it not be just as accurate to say that the possibility of Sasquatches being sighted in the area exists? It is more accurate to state that no known rare plants have been found. That is how facts were presented in the past. Suggesting that rare plants might exist could lead to someone deciding to plant some just as was done with the wolf. Or we could say that the possibility of a rare mineral necessary to future existence of mankind might be found so mining activities should be allowed.

There are other data inconsistencies and or inaccuracies which may lead to lawsuits, such as a stream in Johnson's Draw up Pinkham Creek which has never been there in my lifetime. That is a place I hunted and worked in since the late 1950s.

An issue not addressed is motorized access for Homeland Security which is big enough that Congress is currently dealing with it legislatively.

I also question why one alternative appears to have been written by an interest group outside the KNF management team. Specifically, I refer to Alternative C and Defenders of Wildlife. How does that happen?

Finally, I suggest that commercial harvest of timber receive greater emphasis. Logging isn't a sin. Traditionally, it was a customary way of life for folks in this area even preceding formation of the national forest system, and some of those folks were part of my family. The economic needs and traditions should be a serious part of this plan. The limitation of only 30 million board feet should be larger. Although various competing management activities may make a larger volume impossible at this time, giving it a more serious priority in the plan will be important over coming years should some of the other competing activities be reduced. I am a former mill operator and owner, and I can say with certainty that 30 million BF will create few jobs. The likelihood of anyone trying to establish an operation on that volume is extremely slim, at best those logs will continue to be moved outside the county for processing. Traditionally, the ability to use the wealth of the land is what brought and kept people to this area. It is what made this nation great. Now Lincoln County is reduced to begging for money to support schools and care for roads. That is not traditional. It is not the customary way of living.

Also, there seems to be, in USFS planning, a predisposition to not just preserve but to restore land to something thought to exist in the days prior to settlement. I opposed this notion when it first came to light during early 1990s and the one size fits all restoration management for the entire Columbia River basin drainage. I chaired a community committee to study and comment on that plan. I continue to oppose it today. Man, communities, and commercial activity are a legitimate

part of us and the Kootenai National Forest. Logging, recreating with motorized units to access national forest lands, mining and grazing are legitimate activities and usages. They should be given more allowance within the alternatives.

I thank you for this opportunity to participate in this planning process. I ask that you develop an additional alternative or to revise existing alternatives according to the above. I know others are submitting more detailed and specific comments. I hope they are given serious consideration and that the people of Lincoln County with their traditional customs and lifestyles, and future, be included in planning.

I do appreciate your efforts, and I hope you will take a little more time to improve upon the final product in order to avoid potential problems in the future, especially if this stands for 30 years or so like the previous plan.

Sincerely,


Rep. Mike Cuffe,

Montana House District 2