

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 7, 2026

The Honorable Michael Boren
Under Secretary, Natural Resources and
Environment
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Tom Schultz
Chief of the U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Under Secretary Boren and Chief Schultz:

We write to highlight key issues and principles regarding the Administration's proposed revision of the 2005 Travel Management Rule. For years, the current rule has successfully balanced the use of motorized vehicles with other uses on public lands—ensuring that motorized use in our forests is managed responsibly, centering forest-level decision-making with state and local input, and protecting the environment. Many of the proposed changes in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's recently published Notice of Intent (NOI) would significantly alter the overarching framework that protects our lands and waters and supports our nation's wildlife, clean water, and outdoor recreation economy.

Our national forests serve a wide range of users, including hunters, anglers, hikers, horseback riders, motorized recreationists, livestock operators, outfitters, and local communities. Based on more than twenty years of experience with the Travel Management Rule in place, we know that these uses can coexist when travel management decisions are made thoughtfully and with meaningful input from the people who know these landscapes best. The 2005 Travel Management Rule was developed to allow motorized use within our national forests as a form of recreation while avoiding conflicts among users, damage to wildlife habitat or water resources, disturbance to cultural resources, and the need for new maintenance. Two decades later, these priorities are more critical than ever.

For these reasons, we urge you to ensure that any revisions to the 2005 Travel Management Rule maintain the following core principles:

- *Provide Meaningful Guidance that Helps Avoid Environmental Impacts:* For over 20 years, the Travel Management Rule has provided a framework that helps protect fish and wildlife habitat, riparian areas, water quality, and cultural resources. The Administration's proposal to presume that routes are open, unless required to be closed, could lead to networks of user-created trails—with significant implications for wildlife, water, and vegetation. We urge the administration to examine the types of environmental impacts that the 2005 Rule responded to, and to ensure that any final rule minimizes negative impacts to habitat and ecosystems across the National Forest System.
- *Center State, Tribal, and Local Input:* Travel management decisions should continue to be informed by robust public engagement and local input. Communities, Tribal Nations, recreationists, permittees, and other stakeholders should have a meaningful say in how they access and use their public lands. The 2005 Travel Management Rule ensures that

Forest Service designations of trails and routes happen close-to-the-ground with robust local input. This core tenet should be maintained. Coordination with state and Tribal wildlife managers is particularly essential to benefit species and to support hunting access.

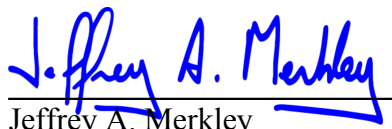
- *Consider Impacts to All Types of Recreation and Uses:* Durable, well-informed travel management decisions are critical to sustaining America's \$1.3 trillion outdoor recreation economy. The existing Travel Management Rule has helped reduce conflicts between public land uses such as camping, hiking, hunting, and grazing. Many visitors to our National Forests wish to recreate in a quiet, non-motorized environment; a Travel Management Rule that helps avoid conflicts between uses will ultimately benefit our outdoor recreation economy.
- *Ensure Adequate Resources for Maintaining all Open Trails and Roads:* The Forest Service should consider the long-term cost of properly maintaining, staffing, and administering its transportation system before adding new routes or expanding motorized use. Expanding the system without the resources necessary to maintain it would risk increasing the already significant road and trail maintenance backlog.
- *Continue to Provide Clear Information:* The agency should continue to clearly identify where motorized travel is permitted. Clear designations, accurate Motor Vehicle Use Maps, user education, adequate signage, and reasonable enforcement are essential for visitors, land managers, and our natural resources. We support using technology to improve public access to information, including continued modernization and digitization of Motor Vehicle Use Maps.
- *Maintain Flexibility that Incorporates Public Input:* Individual routes may warrant reconsideration where local conditions justify it. The current rule allows for modifications to the road and trail system through a public process and requires annual updates to the Motor Vehicle Use Maps. We believe this public input is essential to maintain.

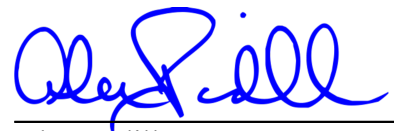
We urge the Forest Service to approach these revisions with those principles in mind and to work closely with Congress, Tribal Nations, state and local governments, and the broad range of stakeholders that depend on our national forests. We stand ready to work with you to ensure that any final rule gives land managers the tools to keep our forests accessible, safe, and healthy for generations to come.

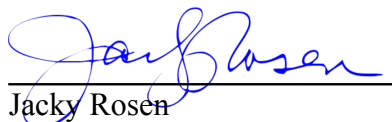
Sincerely,

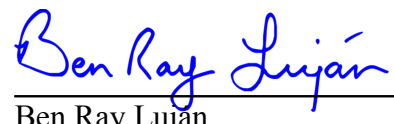

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United States Senator


Martin Heinrich
United States Senator


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Alex Padilla
United States Senator

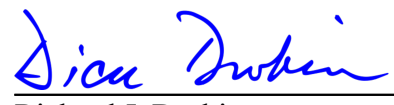

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