

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 18, 2010

The Honorable Tom Tidwell
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Chief Tidwell:

As the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) develops a formal draft National Forest System land management planning rule (the Rule), we write to reaffirm our strong support for public access and recreation on national forests. We believe that any such rule must not impose new burdensome regulations or create new obstacles that could ultimately reduce recreational opportunities on these lands.

Each year, millions of American families visit our national forests to learn about the history of our country and to see nature's treasures. These Americans also visit the national forests to enjoy recreational activities, including camping, hiking, horseback riding, hunting and fishing, mountain biking, and off road and other motorized recreation, which helps promote a healthy and active lifestyle. Not only does recreation generate important revenue for the USFS, but many rural and outlying communities depend on revenue generated from tourists visiting our forests. To that end, we are pleased USFS has heeded the call of the public on recreation issues by recognizing its importance and value, and identifying it as a separate stand alone issue in the Rule draft concepts. Preserving the natural wonders in the national forests and allowing public access and recreation on these lands is important.

However, we have concerns that the Draft Recreation Approach (DRA) posted online includes terms we think are vague and ambiguous, which could lead to reduced recreational opportunities on USFS lands. For example, the DRA specifies recreation must be "(environmentally and fiscally) sustainable." These are broad concepts that can be difficult to define. Because stakeholders may be unable to agree on definitions, this could hamper individual forest supervisors' ability to develop land management plans that include robust and diverse access and recreation provisions. Other terms, such as "ecosystem services" and "stressors," throughout the other concept drafts are also not adequately defined, which could overwhelm local land managers with the need to do exhaustive research, making the already lengthy and complicated planning process more complex and time consuming—and this impacts not just recreation proposals. These inadequately defined terms could lead to endless litigation of the Rule itself or individual USFS land management plans. In essence, we could have analysis paralysis that denies the public access and the ability to recreate in their national forests.

It is important to note the Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960 and the National Forest Management Act both require that USFS manage lands for a variety of purposes, with "outdoor recreation" listed first. Through enactment of these bills, Congress clearly recognized the importance of access and recreation in our national forests. Since then, Congress has passed

other laws, including the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act, which require USFS land managers to take into account the environmental impacts of how national forests are managed. These laws already address many of the issues proposed in the draft concepts in a comprehensive fashion.

As USFS develops the Rule, we believe it should be simple, unambiguous, and allow individual national forest officials the flexibility to manage these lands based on local needs and input. We also believe that any rule proposal must either eliminate or clearly define vague terms that could lead to endless litigation and interpretation. Finally, we encourage USFS to ensure any national planning rule that is proposed allows for robust and diverse public access to and recreation on our national forests so current and future generations can enjoy their public lands.

Thank you for attention on this important matter. We look forward to working with you as the U.S. Forest Service continues to develop a new National Forest System land management planning rule.

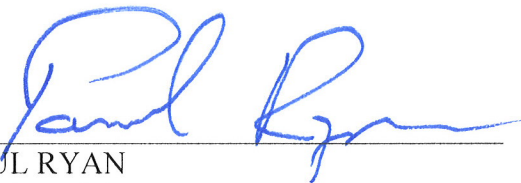
Sincerely,



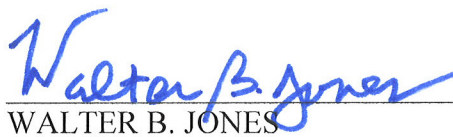
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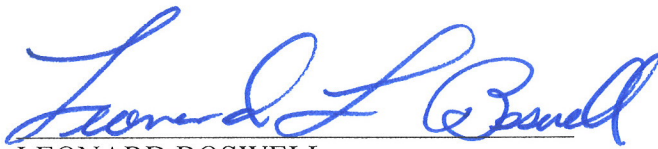
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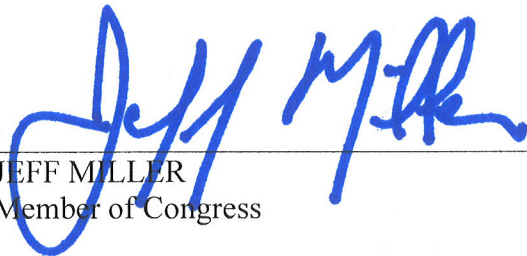
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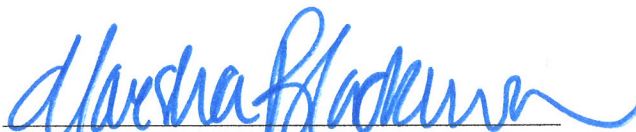
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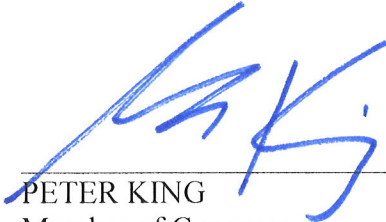
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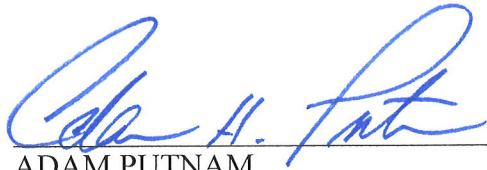
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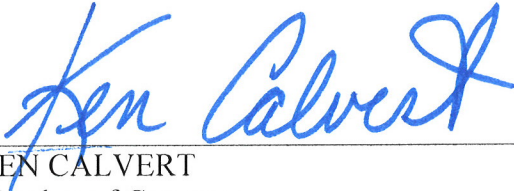
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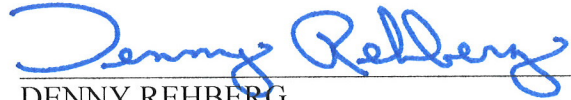
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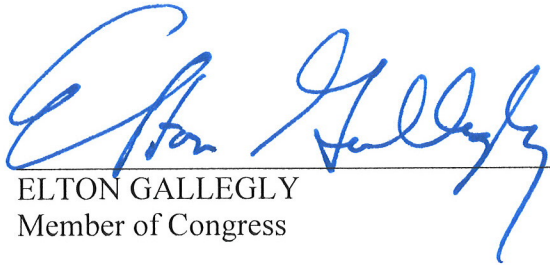
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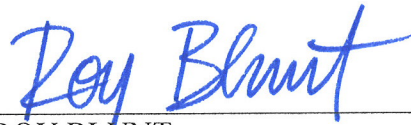
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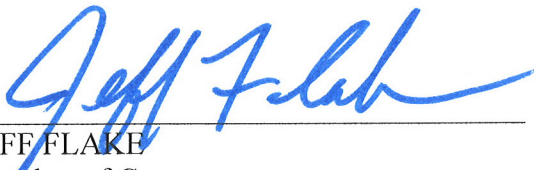
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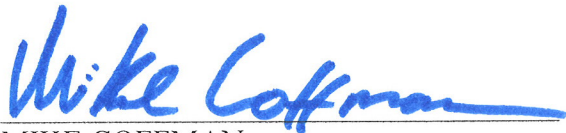
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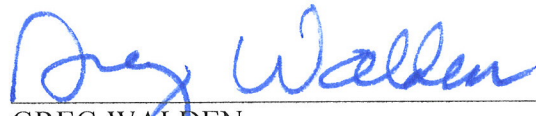
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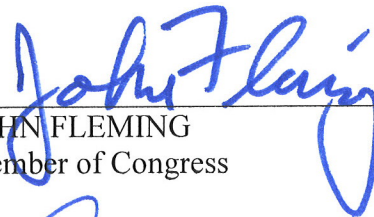
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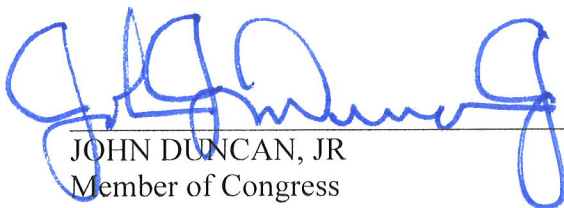
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