

# OUTDOOR ALLIANCE



June 6, 2014

The Honorable Rob Bishop, Chairman  
House Subcommittee on Public Lands and  
Environmental Regulation  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Raul Grijalva, Ranking Member  
House Subcommittee on Public Lands and  
Environmental Regulation  
1329 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

## **Re: Travel Management and The Forest Access in Rural Communities Act, H.R. 4272**

Dear Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, and Members of the Committee:

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of five national, member-based organizations, including Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, and Winter Wildlands Alliance, that represents the interests of the millions of Americans who paddle, climb, mountain bike, hike, and backcountry ski and snowshoe on our nation's public lands, waters, and snowscapes.

We understand that the Committee has scheduled a hearing on the Forest Access in Rural Communities Act, H.R. 4272 on June 10. This bill has significant implications for the United States Forest Service's ability to conduct travel management.

As we see it, the travel management process, while not perfect, has worked well – and continues to work well – in creating common-sense access for motorized and non-motorized users to enable a wide range of recreational experiences by way of designating different types of routes, trails and areas on each national forest unit. The process, put in place under the Bush Administration through the 2005 Travel Management Rule and supported by motorized and non-motorized organizations alike, facilitates active public engagement from the whole spectrum of recreational users *and* local government entities to establish management plans that ensure recreational access while conserving and protecting our world-class public lands.

Travel management planning is a Forest Service priority, and will continue to be a crucial component of the agency's recreation program in the coming year. This is evident in its FY15 budget, travel plans under development that govern year-round motorized use, and ongoing work to optimize the forest road system so it will be less costly to taxpayers, while ensuring multiple-use access and reducing environmental damage. Outdoor Alliance has consistently advocated for sufficient funding for the Forest Service to implement and enforce the travel plans and to maintain an optimal road system for all users.

As we understand it, Forest Access in Rural Communities Act, H.R. 4272 would cease the implementation and enforcement of the Travel Management Rule across the entire National Forest System. It would also require consultation with, and concurrence of, affected counties through the NEPA process. Coordination with a variety

of governmental entities, including counties, is already an established requirement of the travel management planning process (36 CFR §212.53). From our experience, this consultation already has been, and should continue to be, an important part of developing travel plans because local knowledge and input deserves meaningful consideration. However, requiring the concurrence of affected counties before the Forest Service can make travel management determinations on national forests would upset the careful balance between local access needs and overarching Forest System management objectives. Investing some additional resources in heightened community engagement and collaboration for all planning activities pursued by the Forest Service might be a more effective approach to ensuring that local sentiments and values are well represented. Similarly, adequate resources devoted to our recreation infrastructure backlog, forest roads and trails could help ensure access and recreational opportunities for locals, and visitors, alike.

An effort to stop the implementation and enforcement of the Travel Management Rule and prevent the Forest Service from carrying out the travel management plans recently completed for nearly all 155 National Forest Units – which seems to be the practical impact of the policies contemplated in HR4272 -- would negate the good-faith work of thousands of community volunteers and millions of federal dollars that have gone into completing travel plans over the last decade. Travel management is a critical tool to secure recreational access to our public lands for all Americans; restricting the ability of the Forest Service to proactively manage public land would likely increase user conflict and hurt recreational access for everyone.

Thank you for considering our perspectives on this matter.

Best regards,

Adam Cramer  
Executive Director  
Outdoor Alliance

cc: Brady Robinson, *Executive Director*, Access Fund  
Michael Van Abel, *Executive Director*, International Mountain Bicycling Association  
Mark Menlove, *Executive Director*, Winter Wildlands Alliance  
Mark Singleton, *Executive Director*, American Whitewater  
Wade Blackwood, *Executive Director*, American Canoe Association  
Martinique Grigg, *Executive Director*, The Mountaineers  
Lee Davis, *Executive Director*, The Mazamas