

DOUG LAMALFA

1ST DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0501

March 1, 2019

Ms. Vicki Christiansen
United States Department of Agriculture
United States Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250-1111

RE: Plumas National Forest Over Snow Vehicle Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Ms. Christiansen:

I'm prompted to write this letter after several constituents have brought to my attention their concerns with the Over Snow Vehicle (OSV) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) released by the Plumas National Forest (PNF). After reviewing these concerns, and the documentation provided by the PNF and members of the public, I have come to conclude that the intention is not to enhance user experience on the forest for OSV users, but to drastically reduce access to our public lands.

Several members of my staff are avid snowmobile riders and familiar with many of the areas historically used by OSV operators within the PNF. Alternative 2, the preferred alternative drafted by the PNF, eliminates several key areas used by OSV operators in places where the local communities have worked to expand winter recreation and tourism. Many of these proposed closures create pockets eliminating access points to get from one region to another via OSV. In general, Alternative 2 would result in a loss of over 282,000 acres of public lands access for riders, negating the spirit of the Travel Management Act, and the mission of the US Forest Service.

Examples of some of the proposed closures include:

- The area surrounding Lake Davis. The City of Portola, along with several community leaders have been working for over a decade to enhance OSV recreation in this area. Now would be the time to work with community leaders to implement this.
- The area surrounding Jamison, Rock, and Grass Lakes. The DEIS proposed closing this area because of its eligibility as a Wild and Scenic River. The Wild and Scenic River Act was to preserve a river from dam construction, as was the case for designating the Middle Fork of the Feather River which this watershed feeds. This area is not threatened by the

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possible construction of a large hydro-electric dam, nor will there be a Wild and Scenic River Act designation while I serve as Representative.

- The Clear Creek and Black Gulch area. This area is just east of the 23,000 plus acres of the Bucks Lake Wilderness area that is popular for non-motorized recreation. Just north of this area is prime terrain for many of the youth riders from the community of Quincy just down the road. A closure in this area for OSV operators would eliminate access to tens of thousands of acres in years with heavier snow fall.

An even greater concern is the creation of buffer zones and crossing points along the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT). In referencing the PCT Management Plan, the Plan only ever calls for non-motorized buffers or crossings when the trail is specifically managed for cross country skiing and snow-shoeing. The PCT through the Sierras is not managed for these activities, and the PCT Association even recommends the public not use the trail during winter due to the potential for avalanche and other safety concerns. I also note that of the five Forests that have gone through the OSV DEIS process here in Region 5, the PNF is the only one recommending a buffer zone. Should a zone be created, there is a large portion of the PCT that divides the Tahoe and Plumas National Forests. One side would have this enacted buffer while the other side would not. Consistency in this instance between the National Forests would be common sense.

As for PCT crossings, these look good on paper, but each winter in the Sierras provides for unique snow conditions on the ground. A careful OSV operator is going to pick the safest route to cross the PCT with little concern for what a map may dictate. This is if the rider can even find the trail as there is no signage visible in winter conditions, and GPS data provided by each National Forest, and the United States Geological Survey shows different locations for the trail. Couple this with the fact that there is little to no use of the trail in winter conditions, and these added rules stop making sense.

As you review the proposed DEIS, I ask that your staff consider these concerns, and those of the local OSV community seriously, and truly provide enhanced OSV user opportunities on the Plumas National Forest instead of eliminating access and opportunities to a certain class of users.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Doug LaMalfa".

DOUG LAMALFA
Member of Congress

CC:

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