

**Backcountry Horsemen * Framing our Communities
Idaho Chapter – Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
Idaho Conservation League * Idaho Rivers United
Mark Agee Excavation
National Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
Nez Perce Tribe
Sierra Club Idaho Chapter * Trout Unlimited
Wildlands CPR * Winter Wildlands Alliance**

February 25, 2011

Congressman Mike Simpson
Chairman House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee
2312 Rayburn House Office Building
District of Columbia 20515-1202

Dear Congressman Simpson:

We write to congratulate you on your appointment as the Chair of the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee and to bring to your attention the importance of the Forest Service's Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation Initiative (Legacy Roads and Trails) program.

The Legacy Roads and Trails program is an important example of federal funds that are launching a restoration economy in the rural West. This financially responsible program saves taxpayer money, creates jobs in rural communities, improves recreational access, protects drinking water supplies, and enhances fish and wildlife habitat. Idaho received \$11.4 million in Legacy Roads and Trails funding for national forest watershed restoration from FY08 through FY10. This money provides high-wage, high-skill, green jobs and helps stabilize rural economies, especially as timber markets continue to falter.

National forests have always been an important source of jobs in rural, forested communities. Declines in the timber harvests have caused serious economic challenges in these regions but Legacy Roads and Trails dollars stimulate local economies. Forest Service economists estimate that for every \$1 million spent on forest watershed restoration 12 direct jobs and 12 indirect jobs have been created.¹ Therefore, Legacy Roads and Trails projects are estimated to have created over 270 jobs in Idaho over the last three years.

¹ Response coefficients used for job creation estimates were created by the Forest Service Washington Office economists for American Recovery and Reinvest Act funding and applied to Legacy Roads and trails funding.

For example, in central Idaho, Legacy Roads funds are a crucial match to partnership dollars provided by the Nez Perce Tribe Fisheries Watershed Program and Bonneville Power Administration to restore salmon habitat. The work performed as a result of this dynamic partnership provides jobs for Nez Perce and other Idaho citizens within the Tribe's ceded territories, including professional level specialists, local equipment contractors and laborers. The desired outcome of these projects - better habitat and more fish - also translates into more jobs to benefit Idaho's growing recreation-based economy, and a better quality of life for Nez Perce and other Idahoans.

Additionally, there are numerous problems created by the Forest Service's oversized and deteriorating road system that have a profound impact on water quality, aquatic health and wildlife habitat and connectivity. Roads are the main source of sediment to water bodies and those sediments threaten to degrade the quality of drinking water for millions of Americans. Road-caused sedimentation from runoff and landslides is also one of the least publicized but most prolific of the human-caused impacts on coldwater fish. At least 15 different direct negative effects from sedimentation have been demonstrated to impact trout and salmon, ranging from stress, altered behavior, reductions in growth and direct mortality.

In addition, roads cause significant wildlife habitat fragmentation, degrading habitat, reducing connectivity, and impacting hunting success. Studies show that elk habitat security and elk habitat effectiveness are both significantly higher in roadless areas and other areas with low road densities. Therefore, Legacy Roads and Trails funding is also important for maintaining and improving elk habitat. In Idaho, the Forest Service is responsible for approximately 32,600 miles of road that can cause water quality and habitat problems if not appropriately managed.

In the first three years of the Legacy Roads and Trails program the following projects have been completed in Idaho:

- 675 miles of road has been maintained or improved
- 1158 miles of trails have been maintained or improved
- 218 culverts have been improved for aquatic species passage
- 40 bridges have been constructed or reconstructed
- 310 miles of road have been decommissioned

Forest roads are known to degrade quickly, usually within 5 to 7 years of construction or maintenance. Due to the vast backlog of maintenance and reclamation work, it has been estimated that the FS needs approximately \$5 billion to rehabilitate its system. The Legacy Roads and Trails program is systematically addressing this problem in national forests across the country and as a result reduce the liability to America's taxpayers through a long-term reduction in maintenance and mitigation costs.

We respectfully request \$90 million for Legacy Roads and Trails in Fiscal Year 2012 as it is good for people, fish, wildlife and the land. We realize that these are difficult economic times but request your support to maintain the existing funding level of this program and continue to provide jobs in rural communities while improving fish and wildlife habitat in Idaho's magnificent back and frontcountry.

We look to your support for the Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation program and would appreciate the opportunity to talk to you and your staff further about program.

Sincerely,

Bethanie Walder
Executive Director
Wildlands CPR

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