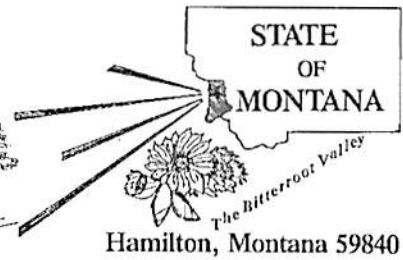


COUNTY OF RAVALLI



RAVALLI COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

215 S. 4th Street, Suite A

Hamilton, MT. 59840

406-375-6500

commissioners@rc.mt.gov

May 29, 2015

Julie King
1801 North First
Hamilton, MT. 59840

Dear Julie,

The Board of Ravalli County Commissioners (BCC) held a scheduled meeting on 26 May 2015 to discuss filing an objection to the draft Record of Decision (ROD) on the Bitterroot National Forest Travel Management Plan. The Board approved sending a letter objecting to the process and the non-compliance with the CFR's, policies, and directives which outline the requirements for coordination, communication and meaningful participation from local government, solicited by the Forest Service. The Board is also challenging the decision that Ravalli County has no standing in the objection process. Following are facts and documentation that provide support and the basis for this objection.

On September 12th 2014, Deputy Chief Leslie Weldon issued a Memorandum to Regional Foresters regarding Public Involvement in the Travel Management Rule. The entire letter supports the need for public involvement; however, two statements require communication and partnership between local government and the Forest Service be solicited (by the Forest Service). The first quote from Ms. Weldon's requiring this participation is the Forest Service "**must** re-engage the public in the process by holding regular meetings with local officials, such as sheriff's offices and county commissioners" and the second reference to this requirement is "It is vital that **forests continue to listen to, and solicit input from local officials** and the public at large." Ms. Weldon makes it very clear that the Forest Service must solicit input from local government. The Forest Service did not solicit input or make an attempt for local government to participate cooperatively or in any meaningful way with the Forest Service.

The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) also requires coordination with local government. 36 CFR 219.4 (a)(3)(b) titled *Coordination with other public planning efforts* states: "The responsible official **shall coordinate land management planning with** the equivalent and related planning efforts of federally recognized Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, other Federal agencies, and State and **local governments.**" 36 CFR 219.4 (a)(2) states that National

Forest System plan review shall include consideration of the following criteria as expressed in local plans and policies:

- (i) The compatibility and interrelated impacts of the plans and policies
- (ii) Opportunities for the plan to address the impacts identified or to contribute to joint objectives
- (iii) Opportunities to resolve or reduce conflicts, within the context of developing the plan's desired condition or objectives.

The Ravalli County Board of Commissioners, after holding a number of public meetings and considering hours of public comment, adopted via resolution 2978, the Ravalli County Natural Resource Policy (RCNRP). This policy has been submitted to the Forest Service as a policy to be considered when developing or revising National Forest Land plans or policies. The RCNRP was developed to ensure that local government would have a documented and adopted policy that would allow meaningful participation with Federal agencies, especially when Federal policy is being developed or revised. The RCNRP outlines Goals and Objectives important to Ravalli County under some of the following criteria: Water, Grazing, Road and Trails (Access and Transportation), Endangered Species, Wildlife, Law Enforcement, etc. The Forest Service has officially received this plan and has failed to meaningfully coordinate with local government and the adopted policy.

Other sections in the Code of Federal Regulations require Federal agencies to work with local government. 40 CFR 1506.2 (b) states: Agencies shall cooperate with State and local agencies to the fullest extent possible to reduce duplication between NEPA and State and local requirements, unless the agencies are specifically barred from doing so by some other law. Except for cases covered by paragraph (a) of this section, such cooperation shall to the fullest extent possible include:

- (1) Joint planning processes.
- (2) Joint environmental research and studies.
- (3) Joint public hearings (except where otherwise provided by statute).
- (4) Joint environmental assessments.

Through codes, policy, and directive letters, it is clear that local officials, elected by the citizens in that jurisdictional area, should have not only standing, but a seat at the decision-making table. This seat at the table can be represented as cooperation, collaboration, coordination or communication, but it is clear that federal agencies must solicit local government input and coordinate with local plans and policies.


The Ravalli County Board of County Commissioners would respectfully request that the determination of standing be over-turned and the Forest Service uphold their requirement for meaningful communication with local government on important decisions in the National Forest located in their jurisdiction.


Sincerely,
BOARD OF RAVALLI COUNTY COMMISSIONERS


Jeff Burrows, Chairman

 5-29-15
Doug Schallenberger, Member


J.R. Iman, Member


Ray Hawk, Member


Greg Chilcott, Member

Cc: Tom Tidwell, Leslie Weldon, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, D.C., 20250
David Schmid, Federal Building, P.O. Box 7669, Missoula, Montana 59807-7669

Senator Steve Daines, 320 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, DC 20510
Senator Jon Tester, 311 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, DC 20510-2604

Representative Ryan Zinke, 113 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515

Governor Steve Bullock, P.O. Box 200801, Helena MT 59620-0801
Attorney General Tim Fox, PO Box 201401, Helena, MT 59620-1401

Senator Fred Thomas
Senator Pat Connell

Representative Nancy Ballance
Representative Ron Ehli
Representative Theresa Manzella
Representative Ed Greef