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First name: Ron

Last name: Normandeau

Organization: Recreational aviation foundation

Title: MT Liaison

Official Representative/Member Indicator:

Address1: 317 Montana Landing

Address2:

City: Polson

State: MT

Province/Region:

Zip/Postal Code: 59860

Country: United States

Email: Rnormandeau@theraf.org

Phone: 406-883-3826

Comments:

Dear Planners,

This is the Second Comment I am submitting addressing the (AIRFIELDS) section of the Proposed Action Document to the new Forest planning activity.

To refresh your memory, the following three paragraphs appeared in a previous comment to this document.

I am a retired employee of the U.S. Forest Service, Region One, Engineering, now engaged in a lifelong passion, recreational flying, and I function, now, as the MT. State Liaison for the Recreational Aviation Foundation.

I find your section entitled, Airfields, Aircraft Landing Strips (AIRFIELDS) troublesome from a management standpoint. The theme of this section essentially removes any consideration of airstrips in transportation planning for the next 20 to 25 years.

The Forest Plan, as the umbrella under which all other plans (timber, wilderness, recreation, travel, etc.) are developed, provides the guidance, parameters, and restrictions on to the latitude these plans may embrace. As such, to develop a plan that, essentially prohibits any consideration of aircraft access to the national forest, presents a major road block to future optional solutions to an increasing public demand for access.

Airstrips are the third leg of the USFS transportation system and provide a means of access to remote areas in lieu of roads or trails. As such, airstrips should be an option available for managers who are dealing with an increasing public access requirement and have limited funds to provide the needed dispersion.

Addressing the section titled (AIRFIELDS):

Should you reconsider your stated position on the (Airfields) section, may I suggest some statements for Desired Conditions, Standards, Guidelines, and Suitability.

DESIRED CONDITIONS (FW-DC-Airfields)

01 Airfields provide access for recreation and administrative activities in areas where road construction is not suitable or determined not to meet management area criteria.

02 Airfields provide continued access to areas where road profiles are removed, but an administrative requirement continues to exist.

03 Airfields provide for the dispersion of recreation activities into areas of the forest that are underutilized, and the requirement exists to manage overcrowding at popular facilities.

04 Airfields function as internal trailheads providing access to trail sections rarely used and areas of uncommon scenery.

OBJECTIVES (FW-OBJ-AIRFIELDS):

- 01 Airstrips are considered as an option for forest access in lieu of road construction.
- 02 Airstrips accomplish providing access to area for administration, fire control, and recreation opportunities.
- 03 Construction and maintenance of airstrips provides reduction in overall transportation costs.

STANDARDS (FW-STD-AIRFIELDS):

- 01 Airstrips are planned, constructed, and maintained to standards established by Forest Service Aviation.
- 02 Airstrips provide a safe approach and departure avenue to access the runway.
- 03 Construction and maintenance maintains the natural condition of the landing area.

GUIDELINES FW-GDL-AIRFIELDS):

- 01 Airstrips are placed to enhance access while not detracting from the natural condition of the area.
- 02 Construction and maintenance is accomplished through volunteer agreements with pilot organizations.
- 03 Closed road surface may be used as runway in areas of road removal.

SUITABILITY (FW-SUIT-AIRFIELDS):

- 01 Airstrips will be determined based on the desired conditions applicable to those lands.

Justification:

The reason for airfields on NFS Land in the beginning was the extreme distances traveled by horseback to accomplish administrative activities such as Fire Lookout resupply, trail maintenance, fire suppression, emergency rescue, and administrative site maintenance. Over the years, since the 1930's, road construction for inholding access, logging, and administrative site access has provided an access network that reduced the reliance on the airplane. But these activities are still supported by airfields on the Flathead NF, Nez Perce-Clearwater NF, Helena-Lewis and Clark NF, and Tonto NF to name just a few supporting and utilizing airstrips.

With the requirement to reduce road density on national forests, an increased congestion on forest roads by recreationists, and a continued administrative requirement on remote landscapes, the airplane and airstrips still have a utility. They also provide a recreation dispersion to areas of prime recreation opportunities that are at present underutilized.