



Coconino County Sheriff's Office

Bill Pribil, Sheriff

February 10, 2012

Andy Tobin, Speaker of the House
Arizona State Legislature
1700 W. Washington, Room 221
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Dear Representative Tobin,

The United States Forest Service implemented a new travel management plan for the Coconino and Kaibab National Forests, along with many other national forests across the nation. I think the plan unjustly restricts our citizens from the full enjoyment of their national forest and will have an adverse impact on tourism and recreational opportunities in Arizona.

Several years ago the Forest Service began preparations for this “taking” of public lands from our citizens. As a result of the Forest Service’s new travel management plan, motor vehicle travel in the forest is greatly restricted and is allowed on a significantly reduced number of designated roads, trails and special use areas. It restricts hunters from using their all terrain vehicles, except for elk retrieval in five designated areas. It restricts dispersed camping with vehicles to only 300 feet off the roadway on only designated and again limited roads. The Forest Service is converting hundreds of square miles of forest land to “wilderness” status by fiat. They will be closing hundreds of miles of roads in our forests that have been open to the public for decades.

I am opposed to this travel management plan for two reasons. The first is from a public safety standpoint. The Western States Sheriff’s Association is adamantly opposed to this over reaching rule change on our national forests. Reducing camping opportunities and condensing campers into fewer areas will lead to increased conflicts that will require law enforcement response and intervention. The Forest Service will be making criminals out of families that have camped or enjoyed areas of the forest for generations but are now restricted due to the new travel management plan.

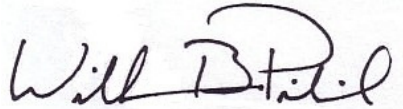
The second reason is out of concern for our citizens and their rights to enjoy their national forests. We have thousands of visitors to our forest each year. I would put forward that citizens flock to our national forests for the solitude of nature, not to be clustered into high density camping areas. Many of our visitors are not able to hike due to age or disabilities. These new rules now prevent them the full enjoyment of our forest. These new rules will also impact many of our state’s hunters. Only elk hunters are allowed use of ATV’s to retrieve their game. Once again many of our state’s hunters are older and are unable to hike in order to hunt game. Without the use of ATV’s, they virtually will be prevented from pursuing their sport.

I understand the Forest Service's need and desire to manage forest resources, but the forests are our public lands meant for the enjoyment of all of our citizens. While certain areas may need to be closed for protection of habitat during parts of the year, an example being temporary closures during bald eagle nesting, this new approach to forest management is a disservice to our citizens. The current travel management plan is complete overkill on the part of the federal government.

I ask that you look into what is occurring in Northern Arizona and across our nation in terms of forest management. Please lend your support to a more moderate travel / use management plan; a plan that would not create criminals out of people who want to enjoy their national forests.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns. If you would like to discuss this further with me, please contact me at (928) 226-5008 or bpribil@coconino.az.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Will B. Pribil". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "W".

William B. Pribil, Sheriff

Cc: Arizona Governor Jan Brewer, United States Senator for Arizona John McCain, United States Senator for Arizona Jon Kyle, Arizona members of the Congressional Delegation, Speaker of the Arizona House of Representatives Andy Tobin, the Arizona State Senate President Steve Pierce, members of the Arizona State Legislature, the Western States Sheriff's Association, the Arizona Sheriff's Association