

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

BRIAN SCHWEITZER
GOVERNOR



JOHN BOHLINGER
LT. GOVERNOR

December 13, 2005

Dear Commissioner:

I want to thank the many county commissioners who took the time to travel to Helena on November 28th to participate in a roundtable discussion on management of National Forest inventoried roadless lands. Most in attendance rose early and braved icy roads to get to Helena, and I appreciated the dedication.

For those of you who weren't able to attend, I'd like to try to share what I heard, and to update you on a development or two.

Initially we discussed the scope of what I've asked the counties to provide. I explained that I've limited the scope essentially to identifying a compelling need for any site-specific new roads in the inventoried roadless because I think that's as much as we can expect to successfully address given our limited resources and tight timelines. I believe all were in general agreement that we don't need a lot of new roads, and that the Forest Service should be focusing on doing the best job possible of maintaining existing roads with the maintenance funding available to them, however inadequate that funding may be.

I also pointed to the language in my letter to the President that asserted my intent to retain some level of flexibility in management of roadless lands as future needs become apparent. Several of the commissioners who attended the roundtable expressed concerns about unhealthy forest conditions and high fuels accumulations. Many commissioners have worked closely with the Forest Service on individual projects and in Forest Plan revision. I suggested that all parties continue to do just that; in no way do I intend that the petition I ultimately offer should impede that ongoing process.

I view this petition as an opportunity for the state of Montana to provide input to the Forest Service on roadless lands. After hearing what you told me in November—that we likely don't need many new roads—my thinking is that it will include identification of some road segments that would answer immediate needs. Additionally, it may incorporate a framework for helping to make informed decisions addressing future needs.

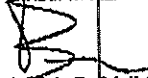
I am aware that some roadless lands do in fact have roads, some historic and some created more recently. Several commissioners indicated that the continued use of some of these roads is important to public access and hoped that the Montana petition might prevent loss of access. While I agree we do not want to lose access, I consider the issue to be outside the scope of this undertaking, and intend to defer these decisions to local, site-specific travel planning.

A number of commissioners also expressed concern over my request for their input by January 1. I appreciate that this task may require considerable effort on your part, so I have extended the deadline for your input to March 1, 2006.

Finally, as you engage your constituents on this issue, I would ask that you document the time and place of all public meetings you conduct, and provide me that information when you submit your recommendations. Beyond being a requirement of the rule [Section 294.14 (a)(7)], most public officials, myself included, place great importance on stakeholder input, and I wish to make it evident that in Montana we have taken great pain to hear all perspectives.

Again, thank you all for your hard work, and I look forward to continued dialogue on management of our valuable roadless lands.

Sincerely,


BRIAN SCHWEITZER
Governor