



Saving Wilderness.
Changing Lives.

Dear Friends and Volunteers,

We'd like to bring an urgent matter to your attention with a **deadline of August 26th**. The US Forest Service (USFS) in Washington has released a proposal to reduce public input and reduce environmental analysis on public lands decisions.

Public involvement is currently a requirement under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which has been in place for 49 years. These proposed changes are being lobbied as a benefit to the public thru lower costs to the taxpayer, streamlined decision making and speeding up the commercial development of public lands (e.g. mining, logging, drilling, expanding ski areas, etc.).

However, the record is very clear: these changes fit a long-standing historical pattern that primarily benefits corporate interests and excludes access by the American public, dating back to before the formation of the U.S. Forest Service in 1905. A recent example is the [Proclamation for modifying Bears Ears National Monument](#) in which there is no mention of additional protections for public access or recreation. The three directives outlined in that proclamation focus on the sale and disposition of public lands pertaining to mining, drilling and commercial interests.

Public input and community engagement in public land decisions have historically been and continue to be vital counterbalances to powerful corporate interests, who spend large amounts of money lobbying the government for control over these lands to the exclusion of public access.

Friends of public land groups before us fought long and hard to make sure public input was included as a vital component in the management of federal lands. Your voices are so important. Visits to public lands are at historical highs and funding already has a huge deficit. This proposal's intentions are clearly outlined for the purpose of reducing or eliminating government directives that provide for federal land usage accountability to all of us, including forests, mountains, grasslands, lakes, rivers, camping areas, ski resorts, roads, trails and much more. This affects everyone that enjoys public lands.

What actions can you take?

We encourage you to send an email before August 26th and in your own words to nepa-procedures-revision@fs.fed.us. Important note: your email doesn't have to be very detailed, however keep in mind the USFS has been rejecting form letters from the first round of comments.

Sincerely,

-IPWA Board of Directors

References and Quotes:

From the Proposal: *"The changes proposed place emphasis on right-sizing public*

engagement opportunities and allow for discretion and flexibility in our scoping and public engagement mechanisms. This approach will allow the Agency to concentrate resources on projects that are potentially more complex or have greater public interest. Increased discretion and flexibility can provide more transparency, provide timelier responses to public needs, and accelerate decision making.”

Also, from the Proposal: *“The direct benefits of the proposed rule are, therefore, reduced costs and time spent on environmental analysis, where costs include those incurred by the Forest Service as well as by proponents or the public engaged in the environmental analysis process.”*

The actual proposal: <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=FS-2019-0010-0001>

Access Funds viewpoint: <https://www.accessfund.org/take-action/campaigns/take-action-us-forest-service-attempting-to-silence-american-public>

USDA News Release (extending deadline):

<https://www.fs.fed.us/news/releases/usda-forest-service-extends-comment-period-draft-regulations-management-national>

NPR Article, On Public Lands, Visitors Surge While Federal Management Funds Decline:

<https://www.npr.org/2019/03/31/708051277/on-public-lands-visitors-surge-while-federal-management-funds-decline>
