

Executive Summary

The Wilderness Society, working in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service's Methow Valley Ranger District, has conducted a collaborative public outreach process regarding current and future uses of the 608-mile road system in the Chewuch watershed. The Forest Service manages over 90 percent of the land in this watershed, which provides water for agriculture, fish and people, as well as supporting robust and diverse recreation. The objectives of this partnership are to provide opportunities for early public involvement in developing an updated transportation plan and generate information about where and how the public is using roads in the watershed.

Conducted between December 2010 and August 2011, the outreach effort has several components: (1) individual meetings with knowledgeable local residents; (2) a public meeting about conservation and recreation activities in the Chewuch watershed; (3) two field trips to look at road conditions and issues in different parts of the watershed and obtain information about road usage; (4) an online survey to gather data about road usage; and (5) a public workshop to review road maps and obtain additional information about road usage.

The multi-part outreach effort yielded a wealth of information, including nearly 400 remarks about road usage and management. Survey responses indicate that roads are being used for a wide variety of activities, such as hiking, camping, cross-country skiing, wildlife viewing, biking, firewood gathering, horseback riding, snowmobiling and hunting. The most popular destinations in the Chewuch watershed by survey respondents are trails and trailheads, followed by streams and rivers, roads, campgrounds, lakes and mountains. Usage is fairly well distributed around the watershed, but heaviest on the main paved roads, such as along the river and near Eightmile Creek.

Several themes and issues emerged from comments and discussions:

- Roads are important for multiple-use management of the forest and the watershed.
- The area's four-season recreational opportunities are the lifeblood of the local economy, and roads provide essential access to recreational experiences and destinations.
- Salmon recovery is a priority consideration; divergent views exist about road impacts on salmon habitat and populations.
- Where necessary and possible, road closures and re-openings should be designed to allow continued recreational access and to minimize costs.
- Some recreational users are interested in taking on more responsibility for maintaining roads and trails in the area.
- Partnerships may hold the key to satisfying the public's desire for a well-maintained and managed road system while reducing Forest Service road maintenance costs.

With continued public involvement, outreach and partnerships, we are optimistic that the Forest Service will be able to work together with diverse community members and stakeholders to develop a successful new transportation plan for the Chewuch.