5-14-1971

Letters re: Dean Ridge Road in the Flathead Area

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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Dear Senator Mansfield:

This is in further response to your April 21 letter and the enclosed correspondence from Mr. Clifton R. Merritt.

Enclosed is copy of a map showing the area under consideration and its reference to the South and Middle Forks of the Flathead River.

The entire Flathead River, including the South, North, and Middle Forks, will be studied under provisions of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Our management decisions for the Flathead River are and will continue to be in full accordance with Section 12 (a) of the Act.

There are 20 miles of road along the South Fork River extending from the head of Hungry Horse Reservoir to Bunker Creek. From the Spotted Bear Ranger Station, 10 miles of road have been built along the Spotted Bear River. The road to be built is an extension of the existing Spotted Bear Road. The area to be reached by this road has no direct relationship on classification of either the South and Middle Forks as Wild Rivers. The upper 50 miles of the South Fork, which is off the map, is in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area. The Middle Fork drainage will not be entered by the project.

The Spotted Bear River area was considered as an addition to the Bob Marshall Wilderness during intensive studies from 1955 to 1960. The then Secretary of Agriculture's decision was that the area would best serve overall needs under full resource management program. The proposed road extension and timber harvest plans are a part of the multiple use management program that was begun in 1960 and carried on to date.
Wildlife species in the area are elk, grizzly bear, and goat, as Mr. Merritt says. The habitat of these species and the effects of the road and subsequent timber harvest were considered in the plan to develop the area. Our planning has been directed toward reducing any impact on wildlife. We have proposed a cooperative study by the Montana Fish & Game Department and the Forest Service to determine the effects of roads on wildlife and fisheries. If problems should arise, we feel that a cooperative action consisting of road closures, season adjustments, and other steps to protect the wildlife can be taken. This could include measures to mitigate sportsman pressure, which seems to be Mr. Dunkle’s reason for opposing the road.

In most instances, the habitat of elk, especially, can be improved by timber harvest which generally results in increased forage. In the adjacent Bob Marshall Wilderness, a downward trend of elk is the result of protection, which has created a dense forest cover containing little game food.

The timber volumes and values in the Spotted Bear drainage are very high. The elevational range of 4,000 feet to 7,000 feet includes the optimum timber-producing elevation on the Flathead National Forest. The planned road will provide access to about 130 million board feet of overmature timber that should be harvested, and to many additional millions of board feet of timber needing cultural treatment.

The road building will take place during the construction seasons of 1970 and 1971. We are confident during the 2-year period prior to any timber harvest that joint measures can be taken and developed with the Montana Fish & Game Department to mitigate any possible adverse effects of development in the Spotted Bear River drainage.

If we can be of further assistance, please let us know.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

NEAL M. RAHM
Regional Forester

Enclosure
Honorable Mike Mansfield
United States Senate

Dear Senator Mansfield:

This is in further reply to your letter of May 21, 1970, concerning the Dean Ridge Road project, and jointly signed by Congressman Arnold Olsen and Senator Lee Metcalf.

Regional Forester Neal Rahm's letter to you dated May 14, 1970, reflects the considerations being given to the area. This conforms to the four points on management from the Bitterroot National Forest appraisal which you referred to. In addition, Mr. Rahm advises us that the proposed Road was first flagged in 1963. Discussions for its construction were held at annual meetings for review of timber harvesting plans for the ensuing five years. Each meeting was advertised as public sessions inviting all interested persons to attend.

As also pointed out, the delay in timber harvesting for two years is entirely due to road construction activities requiring that long to complete before timber can be harvested.

We feel that Mr. Rahm's letter, plus the question and answer sheet sent you by Deputy Forest Supervisor Dale Thacker, indicates the planning in depth has been carried out on this project, and that it should move ahead as planned.

Sincerely,

EDWARD P. CLIFF
Chief, Forest Service
In reply to your request for information on the Dean Ridge road, the following is submitted:

1. **Multiple Use**

Q. What does multiple use management mean?

A. Management of the resource complex of water, timber, wildlife, forage and recreation opportunities in a manner that harmoniously blends two or more of these resources, each with the other, without impairment of the productivity of the land, for use and benefit that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people.

Q. Is Wilderness a part of Multiple Use Management?

A. Yes. It is so stated in Section 2 of the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act.

Q. Is total Multiple Use Management being applied to the Flathead National Forest?

A. No. Certain areas have been removed from total Multiple Use Management by Congressional action. Others have been removed by administrative decisions. Other areas are being reserved until studies are completed. The attached graph illustrates this. Appendix I.

Q. How does this affect Dean Ridge Road?

A. In 1954-55, local groups proposed that Bunker Creek, the Spotted Bear River and portions of the Middle Fork be included in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. At that time the Regional Forester selected a team to study the area from the standpoint of all uses including Wilderness classification. This report was submitted to and reviewed by the Regional Forester and his staff. The Chief of the Forest Service and his staff, and finally by the Secretary of Agriculture.
In 1959 the Secretary of Agriculture made the decision that the area would best serve the overall needs of the public under full Multiple Use Management.

Development of the area was begun in 1960 with progressive timber sales and road construction up the Spotted Bear River. Activity now is approximately 10 miles up the river. The proposed road is an extension of this development.

Q. Where is the Dean Ridge project located?
A. The area is about 10 miles East of Spotted Bear Ranger Station. (See area map) Appendix II.

Q. Has the contract been awarded for the Dean Ridge Road and what is the amount of the contract?
A. Yes. The contract was awarded December 11, 1969, to Ureco, Inc. of Columbia Falls. The bid price was $461,237.00. Work is scheduled to start on June 8, 1970.

Q. Is this road going into the Middle Fork of the Flathead drainage?
A. No. The road is entirely within the Spotted Bear River drainage.

Q. Are there any plans for constructing any roads in the Middle Fork drainage?
A. There are no roads planned for construction with the exception of the Challenge Cabin area. The Middle Fork drainage is in a hold status and no roads will be built until an intensive study is made of the drainage, including the Wild River Study. It is expected that the studies will be completed in a two to three year period.

Q. Does this road have any effect on the Wild River Studies in either the South Fork or the Middle Fork?
A. No. This road is on the Spotted Bear River and is not included in the Wild River study.

Q. When will the first timber sale be made?
A. The first sale is scheduled in the Dean Ridge area in two years. It will take this long to complete the present road contract.

Q. Would the timber harvest on the Flathead National Forest be affected if the road is not built?
A. The annual allowable cut would have to be reduced by 5.1 million feet. Our inventories show that the volume of over-mature timber is
129 million board feet which should be harvested within the next 30 - 35 year period. This road will provide the opportunity for intensive management such as planting, thinning and salvage that is necessary to maintain a healthy growing forest.

Q. If the Dean Ridge Road is not built, what will the economic impact on the Flathead Valley be?

A. This would result in a reduction of the annual timber harvest on the Flathead National Forest by 5.1 million feet. It is estimated by the Department of Labor that a million board feet of timber creates 7.5 man years of employment. The annual loss in employment would be 38 man years or $360,000 in salaries. In addition, the 25% stumpage return to the county would be reduced by $19,000. Total annual loss would be approximately $400,000 per year.

Q. What effect will road construction and timber harvesting have on wildlife?

A. Properly located and constructed roads do not effect wildlife. It is people that use the roads that create the problems. We have proposed a cooperative study by the Montana Fish and Game Department and the Forest Service to determine the effect of road use on wildlife and fisheries. If problems arise, action consisting of road closures, season adjustments and other methods can be used to protect the wildlife.

Fisheries will not be effected since the road is a considerable distance from the river and streams except where it crosses Whitcomb Creek.

Timber cutting, thinning, etc. will benefit big game. Carrying capacity will be increased because of the increase in forage production. This could then become an area that could be manipulated outside the Bob Marshall Wilderness for late fall and early spring range.

Q. What are the Multiple Use benefits derived from construction of the road into the Dean Ridge area other than harvesting the timber?

A. Recreation, forage for wildlife, but most important, water yield.

Nineteen per cent (19%) of the power produced below Hungry Horse Dam is due to water that originates behind Hungry Horse Dam. This water is used for power production 20 times on it's way to the Pacific. Proper timber harvest and cultural timber programs can significantly increase water yield while at the same time allow for management of the timber resource. Only 40% of the entire South Fork drainage is available for Multiple Use Management because
60% is classified as the Bob Marshall Wilderness and the Jewel Basin Hiking Area.

DALE S. THACKER
Deputy Forest Supervisor

Encls.
FLATHEAD N.F. LAND USE

2,355,300 ACRES

LIMITED MANAGEMENT AREAS
HIGH AREAS
LAKES & STREAMS
HIGHWAYS
445,500 A. 19%
MANAGED PRIMARILY FOR:
WATERSHED
RECREATION
WILDLIFE

CLASSIFIED AREAS
ROB MARSHALL
MISSION MOUNTAINS
JEWEL BASIN
784,000 A. 33%
MANAGED PRIMARILY FOR:
WILDERNESS RESOURCE
RECREATION

GENERAL FOREST AREA
932,500 A. 41%
MANAGED PRIMARILY FOR:
TIMBER
FORAGE
WATER
WILDLIFE
RECREATION

STUDY AREAS
MIDDLEFORK
WILD RIVER STUDIES
193,300 A.
7%

APPENDIX I
June 11, 1970

Mr. Neal Rahm
Regional Forester
U. S. Forest Service
Missoula, Montana 59801

Dear Neal:

As you know, at the present time there is a great deal of discussion about the desirability of the Dean Ridge Road construction project proceeding in the Bitterroot National Forest.

My mail has been heavy on this subject and generally divided between proponents who represent the construction-timber cutting interests, who are concerned about payrolls and the lumber industry; and the conservationists, who are concerned about the effect this may have on local elk herds and the proposed designation of the Middle Fork of the Flathead River as a wild river. In view of this controversy, I would appreciate it if you could provide me with some additional information.

Now that the contract for the construction of the Dean Ridge Road has been let, when is it anticipated the road project will be completed? What is the total cost of the project? What effect will the Dean Ridge Road have on the current elk migration route through this section of the National Forest? How soon does the Forest Service plan to advertise for timber cutting in the South Fork of the Flathead River? Will the Dean Ridge Road have significant use other than for timber cutting?

Insofar as the Bob Marshall Wilderness, which is in this general area, is concerned, will the Wilderness Act prohibit any road construction in this area?

Any additional observations you may care to make at this time would be appreciated.

With best personal wishes, I am

Sincerely yours,
Honorole Mike Mansfield  
U. S. Senate  
Washington, D. C. 20510

Dear Senator Mansfield:

I am pleased to provide the additional information requested in your letter of June 11.

The Dean Ridge Road contract calls for completion of the three road segments and bridge by the fall of 1971 at a bid price of $461,237.

Our observations and study of the general area have failed to identify specific elk migration patterns crossing the country to be opened up. Elk do use the area during especially severe winters.

We have offered to work with the Montana Fish and Game Department to plan for the impact of increased public access on the elk and fish of the area. There will, of course, be added "people pressures" on both. To any action which may be programmed by the State, we can add such measures as temporary road closures.

The Flathead National Forest proposes to offer its initial timber sale utilizing the new road about 2 years from now. Prospective purchasers will not be able to travel over the road until the 1972 field season. The first logs will be hauled over the road in 1973. This sale will be within the Spotted Bear River drainage rather than in the South Fork.
The Dean Ridge Road will, of course, facilitate administration and protection of this portion of the Flathead National Forest. Public use during the summer months will include fishermen and sightseers. The road will open up some interesting views of the rock reefs found in this general area. Other recreationists will use the route as an approach to the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Unless the road is closed administratively through agreement with the Montana Fish and Game Department, it will be used by hunters each fall. In time, additional campgrounds will be needed to supplement the existing facilities at Beaver Creek and Spotted Bear.

The Wilderness Act prohibits road construction within the Bob Marshall Wilderness and other Wildernesses.

Some of the local opponents of the road have questioned its economic worth. They have asked why an investment of $461,237 is justified. The Flathead National Forest's fact sheet, which you have, uses one approach to answering. Annual direct contributions from wages and the 25% Fund will approximate $400,000. Another meaningful approach is to consider the addition to the Gross National Product generated by the annual timber harvests. Economists would translate the annual stumpage returns into nearly a $2 million addition to the GNP.

I know that opening any new area will generate many questions about our decision. Please ask for any additional information which you would find helpful.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

NEAL M. RAHM
Regional Forester