



Protecting Montana's wildlife,  
land, waters and hunting & fishing  
heritage for future generations.

July 17, 2017

The Honorable Jon Tester  
US Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Steve Daines  
US Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Greg Gianforte  
US House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Reassignment of Yellowstone District Ranger on the Custer-Gallatin National Forest

Dear Senator Tester, Senator Daines, and Representative Gianforte:

The Montana Wildlife Federation (MWF) is our state's oldest wildlife conservation and sportsmen's organization. For 81 years we have worked to ensure abundant wildlife, healthy habitat and public access to enjoy our public fish and wildlife resources.

Public access to public lands and waters is paramount to Montana's hunters, anglers and other recreationists. When public routes that lead to public land are restricted, it essentially privatizes our public lands. This results in a loss of public opportunity to enjoy these lands. It also causes problems for the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks to properly manage wildlife and protect private property owners from wildlife impacts to farming and ranching operations.

The east side of the Crazy Mountains on the Custer-Gallatin National Forest is one place where public access has been severely restricted by barriers on public roads and trails. Recently, officials in the Forest Service chose to reassign Yellowstone District Ranger Alex Sienkiewicz to a different position and conduct an investigation into his activities in support of public access.

Given the importance of public land access issues to Montanans, MWF sent the enclosed letter to the Forest Service requesting more information on the Sienkiewicz reassignment and investigation. Since the focus of this investigation appears to be on public access, it is important that the public receive clear answers why Sienkiewicz was reassigned, why he is being investigated, and the timeline for resolution of this matter.

Sienkiewicz' reassignment is particularly alarming given the present uncertainty in staffing and budgeting with the U.S. Forest Service and other federal land management agencies. The Administration's fiscal year (FY) 2018 budget proposes deep cuts that will severely impact national forest management in Montana and nationwide:

- The Forest Service is targeted for an overall reduction of almost \$1 billion, a cut of 16 percent from FY 2017, along with a workforce reduction of 1800 employees.
- While the National Forest System appears to be slated for a slight increase, this is due to the reassignment of Hazardous Fuels into this program; every other National Forest System line item is targeted for decreased funding, including planning, law enforcement, recreation management, wildlife and fisheries, grazing management, and monitoring.
- Forest Service activities under the Land and Water Conservation Fund – a crucial tool for expanding public access – are allocated only \$8 million nationwide, an 88 percent reduction from FY 2017.

The Forest Service and other land management agencies are already operating under severely limited budgets and with inadequate staff positions to do existing work. Further deep cuts will only cripple these agencies and make it harder for civil servants to carry out their duties.

Reassigning a district ranger in this budget context raises real concern about how the agency will be able to continue to protect and enhance public access. We are concerned that this case could cause more people to become emboldened to block public access to public lands, which would ultimately aggravate conflicts between public land users and adjacent private landowners.

Instead of removing staff and cutting budgets, the Forest Service needs to receive more support in its efforts to protect public access and work collaboratively to resolve disputes over public roads and trails. Working collaboratively with stakeholders, with adequate resources, is the only way that the agency will be able to secure enduring solutions that protect public access and private property.

Sincerely,



Dave Chadwick  
Executive Director

enclosure