

## National Forest Management Act: Sample Letters to the Editor

The following are samples of letters to the editor you can use as a guide to write a letter to your local paper and help call for strong safeguards for our national forests. Be sure to personalize your letter with your own experiences or by highlighting the key role of healthy public lands in your state. Remember to include your e-mail address, phone number and town. And don't forget to keep it brief. Most newspapers have strict word limits of 200 words or less. For more information, please visit [www.defenders.org/ourforests](http://www.defenders.org/ourforests).

### Attended a Field Hearing

Why would the Forest Service hold a public meeting on its proposed national planning rule and not actually allow for public discussion? Citizens like me who took time off work to the meeting in [redacted] were not allowed to offer their comments and were told instead to put their thoughts in writing. It seems like every question the Forest Service didn't want to answer was met with a request to "put it in writing."

**Comment [LU1]:** TIP: Include the location of the meeting you attended.

**Comment [LU2]:** TIP: Include a specific example like: "We were only allowed to ask questions, but when I asked a question, they didn't actually answer but said..."

Our national forests have been a treasured American legacy since they were established more than a century ago. Healthy forests provide vital habitat for fish and wildlife, safe drinking water, and recreational opportunities for millions of Americans. The meeting did not make me confident that these resources will be protected under this new policy.

**Comment [LU3]:** TIP: Add examples of wildlife that depend on healthy forests or important watersheds in your state.

Just as the Forest Service didn't want to hear our comments at this meeting, the rule itself appears to leave the public few avenues for holding local officials accountable. It gives too much discretion to the Forest Service, claiming public input on individual forest decisions will balance that discretion. However, if this meeting was an example of what public participation will be like, I worry we are going to be in real trouble.

### Wildlife

The United States is the most ecologically diverse nation on earth with three quarters of America's major land and wetland habitats found in our national forests. In fact, our national forests provide habitat for more than 5,000 species of fish and wildlife, including iconic animals such as pronghorn antelope, bison, bighorn sheep, elk and cutthroat trout.

**Comment [LU4]:** TIP: discuss wildlife found on national forests in your state.

I am like the millions of others who visit our national forests to catch a glimpse of some of this magnificent wildlife. In fact, in 2006, wildlife watching contributed \$45.7 billion to the U.S. economy. Additionally, some \$76 billion is spent each year on hunting and fishing.

**Comment [LU5]:** TIP: share a favorite wildlife experience on a national forest.

Unfortunately, the Obama administration's proposed forest-planning rule does not require strong wildlife standards that would maintain native wildlife populations for all species. This rule must be strengthened to ensure my children and grandchildren are able to have the same experiences I have been blessed to have on our national forests.

## Clear Accountability/Best Available Science

I am concerned that the proposed national forest planning rule, now up for discussion, is much more focused on what the Forest Service *intends* to do rather than what forest managers *must* do to manage our nation's forests. The proposed rule also requires forest managers to simply "consider" the best available science, but does not require them to base their decisions on it.

It seems to me that simply having good intentions, combined with no requirement to use the best available science, is a slippery slope. I fear that this a lack of direction and accountability will result in **wildlife, water, and healthy forests** **paying the price** while special interests pressure forest managers.

All of us who treasure our national forests should call on the Forest Service to strengthen this rule. The final policy should lay out clear requirements for forest managers to maintain healthy populations of fish and wildlife through using sound science. And there should be a way that the public can hold them accountable if they do not.

## Recreation

The U.S. Forest Service manages 175 national forests and grasslands spread across 193 million acres. These magnificent landscapes provide millions of people, like me, with incredible outdoor recreation opportunities. I am just the latest in a long line of outdoor enthusiasts in my family who have **hiked, fished and camped** in these breathtaking landscapes.

I was disappointed to see the lack of enforceable wildlife, habitat and water quality standards in the Obama administration's recently proposed forest-planning rule. These standards give people like me the ability to hold the Forest Service accountable for maintaining healthy forests and wildlife. Without them, poorly planned development could jeopardize the **places we love**.

I want to share the experiences I've been fortunate enough to have on our nation's forests with my children and grandchildren. I want them to be able to hike the same paths, fish in the same streams, and marvel at the diversity of life around us as I have. If this is going to happen, the administration must strengthen the proposed rule to reflect this kind of long-term thinking.

## Water

I'm one of the nearly 66 million Americans who live in **communities** that draw water from national forests. Approximately 3,400 public water systems in 33 states depend on national forest watersheds for water supplies. Industry and agriculture also count on forest waters. The value of these watersheds to our state will only increase as scarcity becomes a larger problem due to increased consumption and changes in our climate.

I am disappointed to see that the Obama administration recently released a national forest planning-rule that lacks clear protections to ensure clean water and healthy watersheds. The rule must be strengthened to guarantee safe, clean water and to keep these vital places safe from political whims and development pressures.

Clean water is the most vital resource that we have and we need to protect it for today, and for generations to come.

**Comment [LU6]:** TIP: Provide an example of how special interests have trumped best available science in a decision in your state as an example of how lack of clear accountability can lead to bad decision-making.

**Comment [LU7]:** TIP: talk about specific examples of activities you have enjoyed in national forests that you have visited.

**Comment [LU8]:** TIP: mention a specific concerns or problem you have experienced during your trip in a national forest.

**Comment [LU9]:** TIP: mention if your community or nearby communities rely on national forest watersheds.