EXHIBIT 7
DATE 2.11.05
HB HJ 18

Chairman and members of the Committee

My Name is Greg Munther and I reside in Missoula. As background, I spent 32 years in the Forest Service, most of those 32 years working on 4 National forests in Western Montana, and I served as the District ranger for the 300,000 acre Ninemile Ranger District for more than 10 years.

The principle and most contentious issue I encountered during this time was management of Roads. There are many people on both sides of the issue. Simply, in the 1970s and 1980s the Forest Service built a lot of roads which in some places exceeded 5 or 6 miles of road per square mile of land. These roads were principally built for one reason..... to harvest timber. Once the timber had been removed, many of the remaining roads became a liability. They continue to contribute sediment to our waters, are a vector for spread of noxious weeds, and reduce quality of big game habitat. Too many open roads mean shorter hunting seasons or limited permits As a avid lifelong hunter, I am too aware of what too many open roads do to hunting opportunity. On the Targhee Forest in eastern Idaho, the elk season was reduced from 44 days to 5 days because of too many roads left open. After closing a lot of roads, the managers have been able to partially restore hunter opportunity to what is now 15 day season. Being able to close some roads or even obliterate some unneeded roads is an essential tool that allows land managers to continue to provide for the needs of water, trout, wildlife, and management of the spectrum of natural resources. And being able to close some roads allows other needed roads to be built for timber management and thus stay within an overall acceptable road density.

And open roads require maintenance that collectively costs incredible money. Something over 380,000 miles of road exist on National Forest lands alone, and nationally there is something like an 8 to 10 billion dollar backlog of road maintenance costs. According to the Forest Service, there is a 669 million dollar backlog in Montana (2002 dollars). Obviously there are more roads than taxpayers can afford to manage. Simply, being able to close or obliterate some roads must remain in the toolbag of land managers. Managing the number of open roads allows scarce road maintenance dollars to be spent on roads that make sense to keep open....those that hunters and hikers need to reach trailheads or main haul roads for logging.

None of the land managers I know are trying to create "defacto Wilderness" as the bill suggests, but are simply trying to reduce the density of roads on a landscape to manage for resource values and reduce maintenance costs while providing reasonable motorized access. Getting to the National Forest has become difficult in places and land managers I know are also working hard to maintain the public use of roads and trails that provide access TO our public lands as old roads and trails passing through private land to the Forests are threatened with closure by landowners.

This bill is misguided and misdirected. For these reasons, I urge you to table HJ 18

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