

United States Senate

June 15, 2018

COMMITTEES
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND
FORESTRY
APPROPRIATIONS
ENERGY AND NATURAL
RESOURCES
HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
INDIAN AFFAIRS

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

Thank you for your commitment to more active management and increased public access to our National Forest lands. As we work together to facilitate more public access to public lands, I call your attention to and urge your consideration of reopening certain airstrips within the Bob Marshall Wilderness complex in Montana, consistent with the Wilderness Act.

The airstrips worth your consideration include the Bartlett Creek, Basin Creek, Big Prairie, Holbrook, Black Bear, Dannaher Meadows, Pretty Prairie, Gates Park and Schafer Meadows, constructed by the U.S. Forest Service in the late 1920s and 1930s. Currently, Schafer Meadows is the only available airstrip within this 1.5-million-acre complex. Aviation provides one of the lowest forms of environmental impact and I believe reopening a few of these airstrips will provide needed access to these areas for hikers and backpackers alike, bolstering Montana's \$7 billion outdoor recreation economy.

As you know, the Wilderness Act of 1964 provided the Secretary of Agriculture with the authority to permit access to these airstrips. Specifically, Section 4(d)(1) states; *Within wilderness areas designated by this Act the use of aircraft or motorboats, where these uses have already become established, may be permitted to continue subject to such restrictions as the Secretary of Agriculture deems desirable.* Further, I also understand that the Recreational Aviation Foundation has committed to providing the labor and expenses necessary to reopen and maintain these facilities going forward, thus there should be a limited strain on U.S. Forest Service resources and taxpayers. I believe this public-private partnership will help ensure both increased public access to this one-of-a-kind wilderness complex and environmental stewardship going forward.

Thank you for your consideration and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator