

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 4, 2020

Vicki Christiansen, Chief
USDA Forest Service
Sidney R. Yates Federal Building
201 14th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Chief Christiansen:

The Wallowa Whitman National Forest is seeking capital improvement project (CIP) funds to improve road conditions on the Marble Creek Pass Road in Baker County, Oregon. We are writing in support of the Wallowa Whitman National Forest's Marble Creek Road CIP request.

If implemented, a CIP for Marble Creek Road will improve emergency response and access to public lands within the Baker City Watershed, which is jointly managed by the United States Forest Service and Baker City. Baker County routinely suffers from frequent droughts, making the Baker City Watershed fire-prone. A high intensity fire in this watershed -- and the resulting predicted levels of sediment in the city's water system -- would be catastrophic. Moreover, Marble Creek Pass Road is the only publicly accessible route through the Baker City Watershed. In its current, mostly dilapidated state, the road cannot support large, dual-wheeled fire vehicles, restricts recreation access, and is a barrier to Baker City upgrading their pipeline.

Given Marble Creek Pass Road's current state of disrepair, both Baker City and Baker County leaders have expressed concerns about the potential for a high intensity wildfire in the community's designated watershed and impacts to their water supply. While working through a multi-stage solution for reducing fuel loads in and around the watershed -- including public and private lands -- it became clear that the condition of the historic Marble Creek Pass Road is a significant barrier to restoration efforts. Funds from the Capital Improvements Project and the subsequent restoration work would provide greatly needed access for hazardous fuels reduction treatments to reduce impacts from a large fire.

We greatly appreciate the work that the Wallowa Whitman National Forest staff have been doing to make safeguarding the Baker City Watershed a priority. Your staff have been in regular contact with our offices and working with the community to meet their needs.

In addition, we want to recognize the partnership and collaboration between the Wallowa Whitman and recreation partners in the community. The Forest Service's partnership with Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort is creating opportunities for outside recreation, helping students

learn to love winter sports and the forest, and supporting a growing recreation economy around hiking, biking and camping. Restoration of the Marble Creek Road will not only support community and firefighter safety, it will also improve access for recreation visitors to a remarkable and stunning landscape.

Again, we thank you for following through on the request we made to you to work with the community to protect this watershed. We encourage your full and fair consideration of the Wallowa Whitman's request to the Capital Improvement Program. Your support for this important project would be greatly appreciated and significant for this small, rural community.

Sincerely,



RON WYDEN
United States Senator



JEFFREY A. MERKLEY
United States Senator