

Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Setting the Record Straight

In both planning documents and public statements, the BLM claims to balance protection with access on the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. These claims don't hold water. The facts show BLM decisions open an area set aside for its solitude and scenic characteristics to recreational airplanes, jetboats, and two track roads which will both harm the Monument and set a bad precedent for other national monuments managed by the BLM.

Airstrips

CLAIM: The BLM claims it is reducing the number of backcountry recreational airstrips in the Monument from ten to six.

FACT: The BLM is authorizing six **NEW** backcountry recreational airstrips in the Monument.

EVIDENCE: Airstrips never legally existed: Former BLM Lewistown Field Manager Dave Mari (retired 2004) stated at a 2006 public scoping meeting that “almost no one in BLM ... knew these ‘airstrips’ had ever existed” and “were all but forgotten, or they were developed in trespass.”

Prior to the Monument plan, the airstrips have never been authorized or permitted by the BLM and have never been subject to a NEPA review. In fact, none of the airstrips are on record or registered with the Federal Aviation Administration. It is disingenuous to refer to them as “existing” airstrips.

PROBLEM: Authorizing a highly dense system of landing strips catering to a very small user base creates a bad precedent for other lands set aside for their remote and scenic character. Of all 15 National Monuments in the United States, only one other has an airstrip officially open to public use. This airstrip, in Escalante-Grand Staircase National Monument, serves the village of Boulder and straddles the boundary of the Monument.

In addition, the RMP actually allows additional "improvements" of these airstrips, such as wind socks, tie downs, etc.

Roads

CLAIM: The BLM's new road system designates 293 miles of road within the Monument “open yearlong” to motorized use, 111 miles open seasonally to motorized use, and closes approximately 201 miles of roads.

FACT: The BLM artificially inflated its road base by defining roads to encompass user-created two-tracks. By claiming to voluntarily limit and close roads that were not designated official roads in the first place, they have only made this decision look good on paper.

EVIDENCE: Wrong definition for road: The BLM uses the following definition for roads in the Monument: “A road is a linear segment that can be created by passage of vehicles (two-track); constructed; improved; or maintained for motorized travel.” Had the BLM adopted a more typical agency definition of roads in their assessment, the starting point would have not have been artificially inflated, and the BLM would be ‘closing’ fewer roads.

PROBLEM: Wildlife remains at risk from dense road systems which fragment wildlife habitat. In a study conducted by The Wilderness Society, forty “percent of occupied elk habitat in the Monument is laced with routes at a density of 0.8 miles/mile. Scientific literature indicates that elk habitat is completely lost at this density.”

Further, historic and cultural artifacts remain at risk from the official BLM road network because the agency did not complete an inventory of potentially affected historic and cultural resources as required under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). In fact, the agency concedes that “only a small fraction of the Monument has been systematically inventoried for cultural sites.”

Wild & Scenic River

CLAIM: The BLM has closed portions of the Wild & Scenic Stretch of the Missouri River to motorized use.

FACT: The BLM’s river closure is so confusing and limited that it will lead to enforcement and management problems and will not protect the river resource for its primary user group, paddlers and floaters.

EVIDENCE: Confusing Restrictions: From June 15th – Sept. 15th the following rules are in place, as stated by the BLM: “Between river mile 52 and river mile 84.5 no upstream motorized travel is allowed and downstream motorized travel is allowed only at a no-wake speed. Between river mile 92.5 and 149, no motorize travel (upstream or downstream) is allowed Sunday through Wednesday and downstream motorized travel is allowed only at a no-wake speed Thursday through Saturday.”

The **vast majority of users are quiet recreationists**. In 2004, according to BLM, there were 1,294 people who used this lower section of the river. Eighty-one motorized users launched at Judith Landing in 2004. However, 69 of those users took back out at Judith Landing which means that they did not continue downstream. As such, *only 12* motorized users went downstream toward the Kipp Recreation Area. In 2004, therefore, only 12 of 1,294 individuals used this section of the river to motor downstream at no-wake speed.

PROBLEM: The BLM is not complying with its duty to protect and enhance the natural quite and solitude of the primitive, wild segment of the river by accommodating a very small number of motorized users.