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February 26, 2004

The Honorable Ann Veneman, Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
14th and Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Veneman:

We write in support of preserving backcountry airstrips in Idaho. We are concerned by the U.S. Forest Service's recent Record of Decision (ROD) that restricts use of four airstrips in the Frank Church - River of No Return (FC-RONR) Wilderness Area.

Dewey Moore, Mile-Hi, Simmonds, and Vines airstrips have been used by aviators for over twenty years. These backcountry airstrips provide citizen access to unique areas of the wilderness and serve a vital purpose in emergency operations.

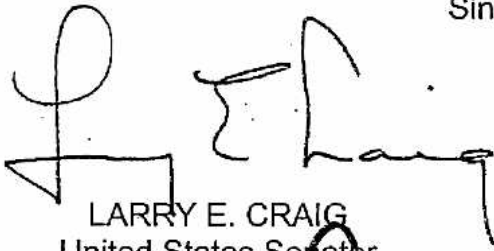
Restricting the public use of these airstrips is contrary to the legislation authorizing the FC-RONR. The authorizing statute, PL 96-312, calls for the express written consent of the Idaho state aviation agency prior to closing or rendering unserviceable any airstrip in the Wilderness Area.

In this case, the Idaho Director of Aviation is on record, stating the agency's desire to keep the airstrips open. The appeal of the ROD by the Division of Aviation supports maintaining all airstrips. Additionally, the Idaho State Legislature has passed two resolutions outlining their support for keeping the airstrips open.

Our offices are aware of on-going appeals to the recent ROD, including an appeal filed by the Idaho Transportation Department. It is our understanding that corrective action can be taken to ensure that access to these airstrips is maintained. A positive resolution to these appeals should meet the July 2001 written commitment received from the Secretaries of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Interior on access to backcountry airstrips. This agreement stating support for the airstrips was included in the Senate floor debate on the FY2002 Agriculture Appropriations Act on July 12, 2001.

We support the airstrips and strongly encourage you to maintain full access for all Idaho pilots.

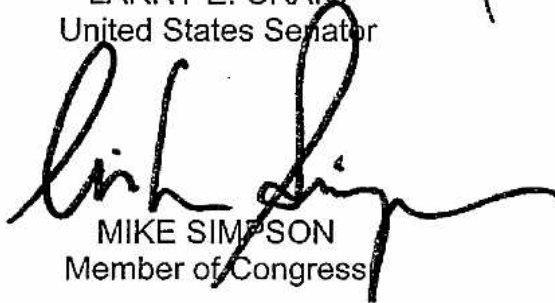
Sincerely,



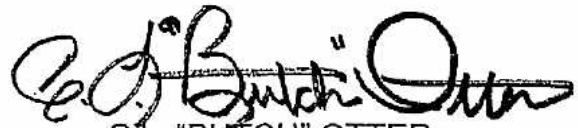
LARRY E. CRAIG
United States Senator



MIKE CRAPO
United States Senator



MIKE SIMPSON
Member of Congress



C.L. "BUTCH" OTTER
Member of Congress