



AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION

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Lesley W. Thompson
Forest Supervisor
Lewis and Clark National Forest
P.O. Box 869
Great Falls, MT 59403-0869

Dear Supervisor Thompson:

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), is the world's largest aviation association representing more than 404,000 individual pilots and aircraft owners nationwide. Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments to the Lewis and Clark National Forest Travel Management Plan.

General aviation aircraft offer safe, efficient and environmentally friendly access to our nation's remote and backcountry regions. The Lewis and Clark National Forest Travel Management Plan identifies two locations for new aircraft landing sites. AOPA strongly encourages the U.S. Forest Service to move ahead with the development of these landing sites.

General aviation and backcountry airstrips are important transportation assets. In addition to allowing access for visitors, backcountry airstrips save lives by providing general aviation aircraft options for a safe landing in the event of an in-flight emergency while over otherwise unforgiving landscape. Furthermore, backcountry airstrips provide a means to provide supplies to campers, assist in search and rescue efforts and can be used by aircraft involved in wildlife conservation and aerial firefighting.

Generally speaking, backcountry airstrips are utilized by pilots with exceptional skill and aircraft capable of operating on unimproved airstrips. These aircraft operators have the utmost respect for the environment and operate in such area to enjoy the beauty of their surroundings.

Once established, a landing strip is relatively maintenance free and unlike off-road vehicles, aircraft operations do not damage the soil and the "footprint" of the landing strip remains relatively small and does not expand over time.

The benefits from aviation are nearly limitless and should be recognized in this travel management plan. AOPA strongly encourages the Forest Service to move forward with the establishment of these new backcountry landing strips in the final Travel Management Plan.

Sincerely,

Roger Cohen
Vice President
Regional Affairs