

## **THE IMPACTS OF THE FOREST HIGHWAYS PROGRAM ON WILDLIFE AND WILDLIFE HABITAT: A GROWING THREAT<sup>TWS</sup>**

Christopher Servheen, USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, College of Forestry and Conservation,  
University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812, grizz@umontana.edu

Gayle Joslin, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Helena Area Resource Office, Helena, MT 59620-0701  
gjoslin@mt.gov

We believe the Federal Highway Administration's Forest Highway Program will have serious, ongoing detrimental impacts on wildlife, fisheries, and ecosystems across public lands in the west and operates contrary to ongoing efforts to assure healthy ecosystems. About 29,000 mi of State and local roads are designated as Forest Highways in the United States. The Forest Highway Program is promoted to provide "safe and adequate access to and through National Forest System (NFS) lands for visitors, recreationists, resource users, and

others that is not met by other transportation programs.” The term “Forest Highway” means a forest road under the jurisdiction of, and maintained by, a public authority and open to public travel. Forest Highways are to “assist ...economic development and promote tourism and travel.” The 2003 budget for Forest Highways was \$162.4 million. USDA Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth identified 4 threats to national forests and grasslands: (1) fire and fuels, (2) invasive species, (3) loss of open space, and (4) unmanaged recreation. The Forest Highways Program will directly contribute to increases in all these categories. Motorized access management is one of the most contentious issues in public land management. The impacts of Forest Highway Program paving and “improvement” on public lands will (1) increase traffic and traffic speeds, increase recreational impacts through developments like campgrounds, (2) increase direct wildlife and fish mortality due to increased human presence, and (3) fragment populations and habitats. Impacts will be more serious where public lands are intermingled with private lands. Paving forest roads in areas of intermingled ownership will likely increase subdivision, with all its well-known problems, as people find it easier to commute to and from homes on high-speed, paved roads. We suggest that application of the Forest Highways Program be reconsidered. We believe that this program and funding for this program should properly be viewed as a threat to healthy ecosystems and healthy wildlife communities rather than a benign program to assist rural and community economic development.