



July 29, 2009

Deb Mucklow
District Ranger
Spotted Bear Ranger District
PO Box 190340
Hungry Horse, MT 59919

RE: Removing the tri-motor airplane wreckage from Big Prairie

Dear Deb:

Wilderness Watch is providing these comments in response to the scoping letter on the request to remove the remaining pieces of the Ford Tri-Motor airplane from the vicinity of Big Prairie in the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

As you probably know, this isn't the first time a proposal like this has surfaced. It was rejected in the past and should be again. The fact that the district is now promoting the project suggests serious slippage in its wilderness stewardship program.

Wilderness Watch supports removing the pieces of aircraft from the Wilderness, however we oppose the project as proposed. The use of aircraft or any other motorized or mechanized equipment for the task would violate the Wilderness Act, Department of Agriculture regulations, and Forest Service policy.

The Wilderness Act prohibits the use of aircraft in Wilderness unless such use is necessary to meet the minimum requirement for preserving the Wilderness. What remains of the plane has lain where it is for more than 70 years. Removing it is not necessary for preserving the Wilderness, and even if it was the use of motorized equipment is not the minimum required to remove it. If removing the wreckage is the minimum requirement, it can be packed out in pieces by pack stock or backpack.

In addition, the central mandate of the Wilderness Act is to protect the area's wilderness character, which the Forest Service's framework for monitoring wilderness character shows would be harmed by any use of motor vehicles. This requirement alone precludes the use of a helicopter for removing the wreckage. Removing the wreckage could enhance the area's wilderness character, but that doesn't change the fact this potential benefit can be achieved by non-motorized means.

Department of Agriculture regulations also prohibit the landing of aircraft in Wilderness including airlifting materials, supplies or persons from aircraft, unless such use is necessary to meet minimum requirements for protecting the area. Again, removing the wreckage is not necessary, and, even if it was, the use of motor vehicles is not the minimum required.

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