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NATIONAL FOREST RECREATION VISITATION AND THE RECREATION VALUE OF ROADLESS RULE RESCISSION

Oct 6, 2026

BLUERIBBON COALITION

A companion analysis to the recreation use value literature review, Docket FS-2025-0001

164.2M	$8.9B	$89M	95%	17.8–26.1M
NATIONAL FOREST RECREATION VISITS, FY2024	VALUE OF ROAD-DEPENDENT RECREATION A YEAR	VALUE A YEAR OF EACH 1% OF THAT USE RETAINED OR RESTORED	OF NATIONAL FOREST SITE VISITS OCCUR OUTSIDE DESIGNATED WILDERNESS	OHV VISITS A YEAR, MOST DEFENSIBLE RANGE (7.1M REPORTED)

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

National forests received 164.2 million recreation visits in FY2024, and nearly all of it depends on forest roads, whether the visitor rides, hikes, fishes, camps or hunts. Paired with the Forest Service's own valuation study (Bowker et al. 2009), road-dependent recreation is worth about $8.9 billion a year: $7.2 billion from road-reached hiking and non-motorized boating, and $1.7 billion from OHV, camping and hunting. Each 1 percent of that use that rescission retains or restores is worth about $89 million a year.

Non-motorized visitors are the largest group the road network serves. Hiking, fishing, biking and non-motorized boating account for 111.5 million activity participations, about 15 times the reported OHV figure, and 95 percent of national forest site visits occur outside designated wilderness. Trailheads, river put-ins, fishing access and dispersed campsites are reached by road, so the 2001 Rule's limits on road construction and reconstruction affect these users at far greater volume than they affect riders.

The largest uncertainty is off-highway vehicle (OHV) use. The FY2024 Interagency Recreation Visitation Data Report does carry a Forest Service OHV figure, 7.1 million visits, but it is 4.3 percent of national forest visits against 28.4 percent on BLM lands. Several lines of evidence show the Forest Service number understates motorized use as the interagency report itself defines it:

- The interagency OHV category includes four-wheel-drive vehicles and snowmobiling. The Forest Service's own visitor survey (NVUM) tracks those in separate categories, including "driving for pleasure," which 20.3 percent of national forest visits involve.
- 46 of 114 national forest reporting units report OHV at under 2 percent of visits, and six report zero, while forests that do capture motorized use, such as Manti-La Sal (32.9 percent), match or exceed BLM levels in the same state.
- Applying BLM ratios from the same states to national forest camping or total visitation produces estimates three to five times the reported figure.

Four extrapolation methods put national forest OHV use at 11.5 to 37.9 million visits a year. The most defensible range, built from the Forest Service's own survey categories, is 17.8 to 26.1 million visits, 2.5 to 3.7 times the reported figure. At the Bowker et al. (2009) regional OHV values, the central estimate is worth about $1.1 billion a year, against $361 million at the reported figure.

Roughly 44.8 million acres of inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) fall under the 2001 Rule, 23 percent of the National Forest System, once Idaho and Colorado (governed by their own state rules) are set aside. The analysis does not estimate how many visits rescission would add. It gives the agency the per-visit values, the visitation base, and the per-percentage-point benefit it needs to make that estimate, and asks it to do so.

DATA SOURCES AND HOW THEY FIT TOGETHER

The analysis joins three federal datasets and one valuation literature. Each supplies one term of the benefit calculation set out in Section 9 of the literature review: visitor days times a matched per-day value.

SOURCE	WHAT IT SUPPLIES	NOTES
FY2024 Interagency Recreation Visitation Data Report (FICOR, June 2026)	Visits by unit and by 11 activity categories for BLM, USFS, NPS, Reclamation, USACE and FWS	Required by EXPLORE Act Section 132(f). Table A gives totals for 114 national forest units; Table B gives activity participation.
Forest Service NVUM national summaries, FY2013–2017 and FY2005–2009	Detailed activity categories, and the share of visits naming each as the primary activity	Used to crosswalk NVUM categories to the interagency categories and to avoid double counting.
Forest Service IRA acreage summary (2001 Rule, Appendix A)	IRA and National Forest System acres by state	58.5 million IRA acres nationally.
Recreation Use Value Evidence Supporting Rescission of the 2001 Roadless Rule (companion literature review)	Per-day net economic values, 2025 dollars	Bowker et al. (2009) regional values from NVUM data are used throughout.

All visitation figures are FY2024 visits from the interagency report unless noted. A visit is one person entering federal land or water for recreation. Because one visit can include several activities, activity figures overlap and do not sum to total visits.

WHAT THE FY2024 INTERAGENCY REPORT SHOWS FOR NATIONAL FORESTS

National forests drew 164.2 million visits in FY2024, twice BLM's 80.8 million, and OHV use is where the two estates differ most. Hiking is twice as common on national forests, while camping, hunting and sightseeing take somewhat larger shares on BLM land, but the OHV gap is far wider than any other: 28.4 percent of BLM visits against 4.3 percent of national forest visits.

ACTIVITY (INTERAGENCY CATEGORY)	USFS VISITS (MILLIONS)	USFS % OF VISITS	BLM VISITS (MILLIONS)	BLM % OF VISITS
Hiking, walking, running	80.0	48.7	19.2	23.8
Sightseeing (includes scenic driving)	70.2	42.7	42.6	52.7
Other recreation (snow sports, shooting, riding, climbing)	67.8	41.3	31.8	39.3
Camping	17.1	10.4	15.1	18.7
Fishing	14.0	8.5	6.9	8.6
Biking	11.3	6.9	7.7	9.5
OHV use	**7.1**	**4.3**	**22.9**	**28.4**
Hunting	6.3	3.8	8.7	10.7
Boating, non-motorized	6.2	3.8	7.4	9.2
Boating, motorized	3.7	2.3	2.5	3.1

> Source: FICOR, FY2024 Interagency Recreation Visitation Data Report, Table 1 and Table 2. Interpretation and education rows omitted.

The Forest Service reports 7.1 million OHV visits; OHV use is not missing from its data, but it is reported at a level that is hard to reconcile with its other activities. On BLM land, OHV visits are 1.5 times camping visits and 2.6 times hunting visits. On national forests, OHV visits are 0.4 times camping and 1.1 times hunting. Hunters and dispersed campers are the users most like OHV riders in where they go and how they get there, so a gap that size points to a measurement difference rather than only a difference in the land.

NON-MOTORIZED RECREATION DEPENDS ON THE SAME ROAD NETWORK

Most national forest recreation is non-motorized, and nearly all of it begins with a drive on a forest road. Hiking, fishing, biking and non-motorized boating account for 111.5 million activity participations on national forests in FY2024, about 15 times the reported OHV figure. Trailheads, river put-ins, fishing access points, dispersed campsites and hunting units are reached by vehicle, so the condition and extent of the road system governs access for these users as much as for riders.

The Forest Service's own survey data support this:

- Designated wilderness, the setting most closely associated with roadless recreation, received 8.8 million of 188.3 million national forest site visits, 4.7 percent. The other 95 percent of site visits occur at developed sites or in the general forest, the roaded landscape (NVUM FY2013–2017, Table 1a).
- Nearly half of national forest visits come from people living within 50 road miles of the forest, and a bit under a quarter from people traveling more than 200 miles. NVUM measures that distance in road miles because visitors arrive by vehicle.
- Visitors rate road condition 4.5 on a 5-point importance scale, the same as signage and parking lot condition (NVUM FY2013–2017, Table A-1).
- Even wilderness users depend on roads. In the Englin and Mendelsohn (1991) study the literature review lists as contrary evidence, overnight hikers bore a measurable cost for each added mile of dirt-road approach to the trailhead. Read alongside the access-restriction studies, that is evidence that the length and condition of the approach road changes the value hikers get from a trip.

NON-MOTORIZED ACTIVITY (FY2024)	USFS VISITS (MILLIONS)	PRIMARY-ACTIVITY VISITS (MILLIONS)	VALUE PER DAY, 2025 $	ANNUAL VALUE, PRIMARY BASIS
Hiking, walking, running	80.0	43.4	$162 (Bowker et al. 2009, national)	$7.0 billion
Fishing	14.0	8.1	not valued in the review	—
Biking	11.3	7.5	not valued in the review	—
Non-motorized boating	6.2	3.4	$45–$58 (Chapagain et al. 2021)	$155–$199 million

> Primary-activity visits apply the NVUM FY2013–2017 share of participants naming each activity as their main one (hiking 54 percent, fishing 58 percent, biking 66 percent, non-motorized water 55 percent). Camping and hunting, also largely non-motorized and road-reached, are valued with the access-dependent uses in the valuation section.

The point is not that every hiking visit gains from rescission; a new road near a particular trail can lower some hikers' experience, and Section 8 of the literature review addresses that. The point is that the road network the 2001 Rule freezes in place serves non-motorized visitors at far greater volume than motorized ones. Pathway 3 in the literature review, keeping existing routes usable through reconstruction, protects trailhead, campsite and river access for all users. Each 1 percent of road-reliant hiking that is retained or restored is worth about $70 million a year at the Bowker national value. Visitors who are older or have mobility limitations reach the forest only by vehicle, so for them road access is a precondition for any recreation at all.

THE OHV GAP: WHY THE REPORTED FOREST SERVICE FIGURE UNDERSTATES MOTORIZED USE

The Forest Service's 7.1 million OHV visits appear to capture only part of what the interagency report defines as OHV use. The report does not say how each agency built its activity figures, so the evidence below is inferential, but three independent signs point the same way.

The category definitions do not match. The interagency report defines OHV use to include dirt bikes, ATVs, UTVs, four-wheel-drive vehicles, sandrails and snowmobiling. NVUM splits motorized use across five categories. In the FY2013–2017 national summary, 2.9 percent of visits involved "OHV use," 3.0 percent motorized trail activity, 1.4 percent snowmobiling, 0.4 percent other motorized activity, and 20.3 percent driving for pleasure. The reported 4.3 percent is consistent with the first one or two NVUM categories, not with all motorized use. Driving for pleasure, which includes high-clearance and four-wheel-drive travel on forest roads, most likely lands in the interagency "sightseeing" category, which lists scenic driving.

Forest-level reporting is uneven. The median national forest reports OHV at 3.3 percent of visits. 46 of 114 units report under 2 percent, and six report zero: Apache-Sitgreaves, Columbia River Gorge, El Yunque, Midewin, Ottawa and Six Rivers. Apache-Sitgreaves and Six Rivers manage designated motorized route systems under the Travel Management Rule (36 CFR part 212, subpart B), so a zero there reflects reporting, not use. Where forests do capture motorized use, shares reach BLM levels:

NATIONAL FOREST	REGION	FY2024 VISITS	OHV VISITS	OHV %
Manti-La Sal	4 (UT)	958,639	315,566	32.9
Siuslaw	6 (OR)	1,975,993	477,092	24.1
Fishlake	4 (UT)	343,538	76,898	22.4
Ozark-St. Francis	8 (AR)	1,286,730	259,900	20.2
Wallowa-Whitman	6 (OR)	346,483	69,540	20.1
Humboldt-Toiyabe	4 (NV)	1,331,825	241,759	18.2
Idaho Panhandle	1 (ID)	2,804,525	494,628	17.6

Similar users, different ratios. In the same states, BLM records OHV visits at 0.9 to 2.0 times camping visits; national forests record them at 0.2 to 0.7 times. Hunters and dispersed campers share OHV riders' reliance on backcountry roads, so the ratio of OHV use to those activities should not differ by a factor of three or more between neighboring federal lands.

EXTRAPOLATING NATIONAL FOREST OHV USE: FOUR METHODS AND RESULTS

Four methods put national forest OHV use at 11.5 to 37.9 million visits in FY2024, 1.6 to 5.3 times the reported 7.1 million. The NVUM crosswalk, built only from Forest Service data, gives the recommended range of 17.8 to 26.1 million.

1. **NVUM crosswalk (recommended).** Add to each region's reported OHV visits the NVUM national snowmobiling share (1.4 percent of visits) and 25 to 50 percent of the driving-for-pleasure share (20.3 percent), the portion assumed to occur on high-clearance and four-wheel-drive roads. The 25–50 percent band is this analysis's assumption; the agency can replace it with its own road maintenance-level and traffic data.
2. **Camping ratio.** Multiply each western region's camping visits by the BLM OHV-to-camping ratio in the same states. Eastern regions and Alaska are held at reported levels because BLM has little comparable land there.
3. **Hunting ratio.** The same method with hunting. This is the lowest result because national forest hunting is itself proportionally lower than on BLM land in several states.
4. **Share of visits (upper bound).** Apply the BLM OHV share of total visits in the same states to each western region. BLM land includes open desert and designated OHV areas with few national forest equivalents, so this is a ceiling, not an estimate.

FOREST SERVICE REGION (BLM BENCHMARK STATES)	FY2024 VISITS	REPORTED OHV	NVUM CROSSWALK	CAMPING RATIO	SHARE OF VISITS	BLM OHV SHARE IN BENCHMARK STATES
1 Northern (MT)	11.26	0.70	1.43–2.00	0.83	2.37	21.0%
2 Rocky Mountain (CO, WY)	35.75	1.41	3.72–5.54	4.45	9.88	27.6%
3 Southwestern (AZ, NM)	19.32	0.53	1.79–2.77	1.32	5.52	28.6%
4 Intermountain (UT, ID, NV)	21.36	1.51	2.90–3.98	6.21	6.16	28.8%
5 Pacific Southwest (CA)	23.02	0.74	2.23–3.40	5.35	9.83	42.7%
6 Pacific Northwest (OR, WA)	19.32	0.78	2.03–3.01	2.46	2.68	13.9%
8 Southern	20.70	0.81	2.15–3.20	0.81	0.81	—
9 Eastern	11.74	0.61	1.37–1.97	0.61	0.61	—
10 Alaska	1.69	0.02	0.13–0.22	0.02	0.02	—
National total	**164.17**	**7.12**	**17.75–26.09**	**22.07**	**37.89**	
Share of USFS visits		4.3%	10.8–15.9%	13.4%	23.1%	

Visits in millions. The hunting-ratio method totals 11.48 million (7.0 percent) and is not shown by region. BLM benchmark shares are FY2024 OHV visits divided by total visits for BLM units in those states; the BLM Oregon figure covers Oregon and Washington.

The NVUM crosswalk lands in the middle of the other methods, and the camping-ratio method, which uses no NVUM data at all, falls inside its range. That agreement between independent methods is the main reason to treat the reported figure as a floor.

VALUING ACCESS-DEPENDENT RECREATION ON NATIONAL FORESTS

Recreation that depends on national forest roads is worth about $8.9 billion a year at the literature review's per-day values: $1.7 billion from OHV, camping and hunting, and $7.2 billion from road-reached hiking and non-motorized boating. Each 1 percent of that use retained or restored by rescission is worth about $89 million a year; on the narrower motorized-and-dispersed base alone, about $17 million.

The calculation follows Section 9 of the literature review: visits × the share for which the activity is the primary purpose × a region-matched value per day. Counting only primary-activity visits avoids valuing one visit several times, and treating each such visit as one activity day understates multi-day camping and hunting trips. Both choices make the figures conservative.

REGION	OHV (CENTRAL ESTIMATE)	CAMPING	HUNTING	MOTORIZED AND DISPERSED SUBTOTAL
1 Northern	$89	$11	$57	$157
2 Rocky Mountain	$242	$28	$46	$315
3 Southwestern	$119	$15	$19	$153
4 Intermountain	$179	$36	$50	$266
5 Pacific Southwest	$125	$36	$9	$170
6 Pacific Northwest	$112	$28	$15	$155

REGION	OHV (CENTRAL ESTIMATE)	CAMPING	HUNTING	MOTORIZED AND DISPERSED SUBTOTAL
8 Southern	$142	$28	$157	$328
9 Eastern	$89	$20	$42	$151
10 Alaska	$8	$2	$1	$11
Total	**$1,104**	**$204**	**$396**	**$1,705**

Millions of 2025 dollars per year. OHV uses the midpoint of the NVUM crosswalk (21.9 million visits). Per-day values are Bowker et al. (2009): Interior West for Regions 1–4 (OHV $108, camping $31, hunting $63), Pacific for Regions 5, 6 and 10 (OHV $92, camping $31, hunting $41), national for Regions 8 and 9 (OHV $110, camping $34, hunting $98). Bowker et al. do not report Alaska separately; Pacific values are used. Primary-activity shares from NVUM FY2013–2017: OHV 48 percent, camping 38 percent, hunting 85 percent.

USE	ANNUAL VALUE, 2025 $	VALUE OF 1 PERCENT
OHV, as reported (7.1 million visits)	$361 million	$3.6 million
OHV, NVUM crosswalk range (17.8–26.1 million)	$895 million–$1.31 billion	$9–$13 million
OHV, share-of-visits ceiling (37.9 million)	$1.88 billion	$19 million
Camping and hunting	$600 million	$6 million
Hiking (road-reached), national value	$7.04 billion	$70 million
Non-motorized boating	$155–$199 million	$1.6–$2.0 million

The hiking figure uses Bowker et al.'s national value because the literature review does not carry regional hiking values; the agency's own regional estimates should replace it. Fishing (14.0 million visits) and biking (11.3 million) are road-reached at similar volumes but have no value in the review, so they add to the access base without adding dollars here.

CONNECTING VISITATION TO INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREAS

The 2001 Rule governs about 44.8 million IRA acres, 23 percent of the National Forest System, and those acres are concentrated in the western states where BLM data show motorized use running at 14 to 49 percent of visits outside Alaska. Idaho (9.3 million IRA acres) and Colorado (4.4 million) are managed under their own state roadless rules and are excluded from these totals.

STATE	NFS ACRES (THOUSANDS)	IRA ACRES (THOUSANDS)	IRA SHARE OF NFS LAND	BLM OHV SHARE OF VISITS, SAME STATE
Alaska	22,083	14,779	66.9%	7.5%
Montana	16,893	6,397	37.9%	21.0%
California	20,698	4,416	21.3%	42.7%
Utah	8,179	4,013	49.1%	24.7%
Wyoming	9,238	3,257	35.3%	20.2%
Nevada	5,833	3,186	54.6%	48.9%
Washington	9,214	2,015	21.9%	13.9% (OR/WA office)
Oregon	15,658	1,965	12.5%	13.9% (OR/WA office)

STATE	NFS ACRES (THOUSANDS)	IRA ACRES (THOUSANDS)	IRA SHARE OF NFS LAND	BLM OHV SHARE OF VISITS, SAME STATE
New Mexico	9,327	1,597	17.1%	29.9%
Arizona	11,255	1,174	10.4%	27.8%

IRA acres from the Forest Service acreage summary (2001 Rule, Appendix A); BLM shares from the FY2024 interagency report. The listed states hold 42.8 million of the 44.8 million affected IRA acres.

IRAs themselves receive little road-based use, because they are largely unroaded. The recreation effect of rescission runs instead through the road network at and around their edges, in three ways that match the literature review's pathways:

- **Access (Pathway 1).** Roads that cannot be built or extended across IRA boundaries limit where trailheads, dispersed campsites, hunting access and designated motorized routes can be placed. This affects hikers, anglers, hunters and campers as much as riders.
- **Disturbance avoided (Pathway 2).** Fire and smoke losses fall on all visitors, motorized or not, and the Gellman et al. (2025) smoke estimate was measured on campers.
- **Existing routes kept usable (Pathway 3).** The ban on reconstruction applies to existing roads inside IRAs, including roads that serve as the approach to trailheads and river access. The NVUM data in the non-motorized section show these users are the large majority of national forest visitors.

The analysis does not estimate how many visits rescission adds or keeps. IRA share of land overstates the share of use affected, since visits concentrate on roaded ground, and the agency holds the road-level data needed to do better. The per-percentage-point values above are designed for that step: the agency estimates the change in visits, and the table converts it to dollars.

LIMITS OF THE ANALYSIS AND HOW TO ANSWER CHALLENGES

The findings are built to be checked, and each limit below points to data the Forest Service holds.

LIMIT OR LIKELY CHALLENGE	RESPONSE
The interagency report does not explain how the Forest Service built its OHV figure, so the undercount is inferred.	Three independent lines of evidence agree (category definitions, forest-level reporting, BLM ratios). The request is that the agency disclose its crosswalk and correct the figure, not that it accept this estimate.
BLM land is more open and more OHV-oriented than national forests.	That is why the BLM share-of-visits method is labeled a ceiling and not recommended. The recommended NVUM crosswalk uses only Forest Service data.
The NVUM shares are from FY2013–2017 and national.	They are the most recent national summary retrieved for this analysis. Current-round, forest-level NVUM data would sharpen every figure and should be used.
The 25–50 percent share of driving for pleasure on high-clearance roads is an assumption.	It is stated as one and bounded. Road maintenance-level mileage and traffic counts can replace it.
Visits are not activity days.	Valuing only primary-activity visits as single days understates multi-day camping, hunting and backpacking trips, so the error runs toward lower values.
The Bowker et al. (2009) values are from early NVUM data; hiking uses a national value; Alaska uses Pacific values.	These are the agency's own sponsored estimates and the basis of the literature review. Updated regional values would replace them directly.

LIMIT OR LIKELY CHALLENGE	RESPONSE
New roads can reduce some hikers' experience (Englin and Mendelsohn 1991).	Agreed at the site level, which is the case for forest-level decisions rather than a national prohibition. The same study shows the approach road's condition affects hiker welfare, which Pathway 3 addresses.
IRAs have few visitors, so rescission affects little use.	The benefit runs through roads at IRA edges and existing roads inside them, not through use inside unroaded ground. The per-percentage-point values do not assume any share of use is inside IRAs.
BLM state figures were compiled from the report's PDF tables.	They capture 22.8 million of BLM's 22.9 million reported OHV visits (99.5 percent). Forest Service figures match the report's agency totals exactly. FICOR's promised machine-readable data package will allow exact replication.

REQUESTS TO THE FOREST SERVICE

1. Disclose how the FY2024 Forest Service activity figures were derived from NVUM, including which NVUM categories were assigned to the interagency OHV, sightseeing and other-recreation categories.
2. Re-estimate national forest OHV use under the interagency definition, including four-wheel-drive travel on high-clearance roads and snowmobiling, and correct units reporting zero OHV use where designated motorized routes exist.
3. In the final cost-benefit analysis, quantify the recreation benefits of rescission for both motorized and non-motorized users, recognizing that hikers, anglers, campers, hunters and boaters reach the forest by road.
4. Use current, forest-level NVUM data for forests with IRAs under the 2001 Rule to estimate the visits that depend on roads at IRA edges and on existing roads inside IRAs.
5. Convert those visits to dollars using region-matched, study-specific values, reported as ranges, following the method in this analysis and Section 9 of the companion literature review.
6. Work through FICOR under EXPLORE Act Section 132 to align OHV reporting across agencies so future interagency reports are comparable.

SOURCES

- Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation. June 2026. FY 2024 Interagency Recreation Visitation Data Report. Tables 1, 2, A and B.
- USDA Forest Service. 2018. National Visitor Use Monitoring Survey Results, National Summary Report, data collected FY2013 through FY2017. Tables 1a, 10 and A-1.
- USDA Forest Service. 2010. National Visitor Use Monitoring Results, National Summary Report, FY2005–FY2009. Table 10.
- USDA Forest Service. Roadless Areas: Acreage Summaries (2001 Roadless Rule, Appendix A).
- Companion literature review: *Recreation Use Value Evidence Supporting Rescission of the 2001 Roadless Rule* (Oct. 6, 2026), for Bowker et al. (2009), Chapagain et al. (2021), Englin and Mendelsohn (1991), Gellman et al. (2025) and the benefit-transfer method.

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