July 30, 2014

James Peña, USFS Associate Deputy Chief
Brian Ferebee, USFS Acting Associate Deputy Chief (after Aug. 3)
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Mr. Peña and Mr. Ferebee,

We write to share with you the national press coverage that the Shoshone National Forest’s Francs Peak/Wood River roadless area received last week. You can read the July 17, 2014 National Geographic story, “Absaroka-Beartooth Front: Yellowstone’s wild front porch” at http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2014/07/17/absaroka-beartooth-front-yellowstones-wild-front-porch/.

In highlighting the collective pride Americans have for Yellowstone National Park, the article extols an adjacent, little-known gem—the Francs Peak/Wood River roadless area—as a place whose wild character, remarkable backcountry values and wildlife habitat is second to none. It is clear Francs Peak/Wood River is a national treasure. It lacks only one thing: adequate safeguards so that it persists for future generations in the same wild state as people experience it today.

The area boasts of a phenomenon unique in the Lower 48 states: namely, the astounding number of grizzly bears (upwards of 20, 40 and sometimes even 60 on any one day) that can be observed feeding on droves of high-protein army cut-worm moths found under the rocks and boulders of Francs Peak. The article is correct that this phenomenon is only possible “because people long ago recognized what the wild values of this part of the world mean to our cultural fabric.”

Today, managing the Shoshone on behalf of the American people, the Forest Service has the opportunity to set a framework that will determine the fate of Francs Peak/Wood River for the next 20 years or more. Unfortunately, appearing for the first time in the final revised forest plan, this potential wilderness area is slated for summer and winter motorized recreation.

As illustrated by the numerous and diverse stakeholders who objected to this decision, most people agree that motorized use is inappropriate here. 79 percent of Wyoming residents who commented on the draft forest plan opposed more motorized access and development on undeveloped wild lands on the Shoshone National Forest, and 90 percent of Wyoming residents who wrote about wilderness
asked for wilderness recommendations for priority areas including Francs Peak/Wood River. According to the Forest Service’s own evaluation, of the 34 potential wilderness areas on the Shoshone National Forest, Francs Peak/Wood River is one of the three highest rated. This area is deserving of a wilderness recommendation.

We ask you to reconsider your decision to allow recreational OHV and snowmobile use in this area. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the future of Francs Peak/Wood River in any resolution meetings the Forest Service might facilitate in response to the objections filed. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisa McGee
Wyoming Outdoor Council

Scott Christensen
Greater Yellowstone Coalition

Sarah Walker
Wyoming Wilderness Association

Peter Aengst
The Wilderness Society

Connie Wilbert
Sierra Club

CC: Joe Alexander, Forest Supervisor
    Dan Jiron, Regional Forester