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## Helena Hunters Successfully Defend Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest Travel Plan

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Late last week, the Helena Hunters and Anglers Association (Helena Hunters) received a [favorable order](#) in a case in which the group intervened to defend the U.S. Forest Service's Divide Travel Plan for the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest. Motorized off-road vehicle interests had challenged the travel plan over route closures along the Continental Divide, many of which Helena Hunters advocated for to protect big game habitat and security. The court held in favor of Helena Hunters and the Forest Service.

"I have been very fortunate to hunt elk in the Divide area for almost fifty years and want to ensure that others have the same opportunity" said life-long resident Doug Powell. "Lately, all types of recreation in the area have increased so much that wildlife are being displaced to private land, especially during hunting season. So, by restricting travel routes along the Divide as the travel plan does, elk and other wildlife that live there won't be displaced to areas where hunting opportunities are less."

Recently retired Forest Supervisor Bill Avey signed the Record of Decision for the Divide Travel Plan on March 1, 2016. The intent of forest travel planning is to provide an adequate motorized route system while minimizing potential adverse effects to forest resources. Forest resource values and issues of particular concern to Helena Hunters include wildlife seasonal habitat requirements, reduction of duplicative and dead-end travel routes, minimizing erosion and sedimentation that impact water quality and fisheries habitat, and maintaining quality hunting environments.

"Many of the 144 miles of motorized roads and trails the Forest Service rightly closed were created illegally and in roadless areas, recommend wilderness areas, or sensitive wildlife areas along the Divide landscape," said Marlee Goska, staff attorney at the Western Environmental Law Center who represented the group. "This area is extremely important for wildlife, including big game, threatened grizzly bears, and much of it is lynx critical habitat. The court made the right call in rejecting all of the motorized vehicle groups' claims in this case."

Hunters and Anglers Association has been actively involved in the Divide travel planning process since its inception. The travel plan rightly includes maintaining critical mule deer winter range, provisions of fall security for big game, protecting wildlife movement corridors along the Continental Divide, and ensuring that year-long habitats within four Inventoried Roadless Areas within the planning area remain non-motorized.

"All of our members are passionate about the Divide country. We feel vindicated by the court's decision, and optimistic for the improved travel plan's positive impacts on wildlife," said Helena Hunters and Anglers President, Steve Platt.

"Few agencies have more history or meaning to us than the Forest Service with its colorful and courageous

genesis out of the corporate exploitive era of the late 1890s and early 1900s,” said Helena Hunters member Gayle Joslin. “The Helena National Forest was in fact, one of Theodore Roosevelt’s ‘Midnight Forests’ – one of 21 National Forests that he and his staff created out of western public lands. Roosevelt himself proclaimed that these wild places would be reserved ‘for those yet unborn in the womb of time.’ We are those unborn souls he was referring to, and we answered the call of responsibility to be involved in the future of our public lands.”

Platt noted that “HHAA members have been active participants in Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest planning for more than 40 years, and we plan to stay engaged for at least 40 more.”

Helena Hunters and Anglers Association is an all-volunteer organization dedicated to conserving and restoring fish and wildlife to all suitable habitats, and safeguarding all natural resources as a public trust, vital to our general welfare. HHAA promotes the highest standards of ethical conduct and sportsmanship.

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