Great Old Broads FOR Wilderness

Apr 6, 2026

Dear Tom Schultz, Chief of the U.S. Forest Service,

I write to you as a member of Great Old Broads for Wilderness' National Advocacy Committee and a retired U.S. Forest Service wilderness ranger with 30 years of service as a field going wilderness ranger. I have trained and certified hundreds of employees and volunteers to use crosscut saws to clear trails, both before and after my service as an employee of the U.S. Forest Service.

Soon after I retired in 2018, I joined Great Old Broads for Wilderness and other organizations as a declarant to sue the Region 2 Regional Forester for his decision to allow chainsaws throughout the Weminuche Wilderness and South San Juan Wilderness. This decision endangered the undeveloped quality of Wilderness character in 658,108 acres of congressionally designated wilderness in violation of the Wilderness Act of 1964.

Section 4.c. of the Wilderness Act specifically prohibits the use of motorized equipment, therefore the prohibition on the use of chainsaws by anyone.

The lawsuit was successful when the Regional Forester rescinded his decision. Funds were raised to hire crews using crosscut saws to clear trails in the two wilderness areas. Volunteer partners also contributed significantly to clearing trails with crosscut saws and axes. These efforts and accomplishments show that the public is strongly supportive of wilderness and preserving wilderness character. People are willing and able to show up and act to protect wilderness.

I believe, from both my experience and after consulting with many Forest Service experts, that it is more efficient, economical, and true to the wilderness experience to use traditional, nonmotorized tools to clear trails. This experience of supporting a lawsuit and working with partners to raise funds and encourage and train volunteers to use crosscut saws continues to uphold my belief that we can have both the wilderness character we deserve and access to wilderness.

Some outfitter and guide organizations are now arguing that permission should be granted for outfitters to use chainsaws in wilderness. Great Old Broads for Wilderness opposes this change for the following reasons:

> This change is not necessary. It has been proven that traditional non-motorized tools used by trained and skilled sawyers can accomplish the goals of maintaining access to wilderness and preserving wilderness character.
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> Wilderness is a place for humility and restraint, not for increased human control. Outfitters and guides must show their clients the values of wilderness and demonstrate how wilderness is

undeveloped natural wild space for primitive recreation, solitude and non-human species. It is a place where guides can emphasize that wildness is the basic element of the wilderness experience.

Noise of motorized equipment adversely affects wildlife within the habitat they have evolved. This change of policy would cause widespread loss of habitat for animals that depend on the quiet of wilderness.

A change to a blanket permission allowing outfitters and guides nationwide to use chainsaws in wilderness is a direct violation of Section 4c of the Wilderness Act. Section 4.c. of the Wilderness Act specifically prohibits the use of motorized equipment, therefore the prohibition on the use of chainsaws by anyone. Authorization to use chainsaws in wilderness is sometimes granted in specific situations and for specific amounts of time, determined on a case-by-case basis and not a blanket nation-wide authorization. Reference Forest Service manual section 2326.12. for information about the Forest Service policy on criteria for granting permission for motorized use.

The proposed authorization elevates a class of people with outfitter guide permits above other users, and it would lead to further challenges to the Wilderness Act, continuing the gradual destruction of the Act itself. We oppose the whittling away of the Wilderness Act in any way.

I, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, and our grassroots members and local broadbands across the nation DEMAND that you stop this unjustified effort to evaluate and potentially authorize the use of chainsaws for trail and camp clearing by outfitter and guides in wilderness.

Sincerely,

Anne Dal Vera

Anne Dal Vera,
Great Old Broads for Wilderness National Advocacy Committee and U.S. Forest Service Wilderness Ranger, retired.

Reba Elliott,
Executive Director, Great Old Broads for Wilderness

Cc: Senator John Hickenlooper
Senator Michael Bennett
Representative Joe Neguse