



MONTANA NATIVE
PLANT SOCIETY
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March 6, 2021

To: Members of the Montana State House of Representatives

Regarding: House Bill 418, Establishing the Public Lands Access Act

From: Montana Native Plant Society, Gretchen Rupp, President (e-mail; beesgrmt@gmail.com)

We are writing on behalf of over 700 members of the Montana Native Plant Society (MNPS). The Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving, conserving, and studying Montana's native plants and plant communities, and educating the public about the values of our native flora and its habitats. We are expressing our concerns with regard to House Bill 418, "Establishing the Public Lands Access Act."

We do not support HB 418 with regard to public land access for the following reasons;

- 1). Opening up unused, substandard routes and trails with questionable existence on the landscape, will promote noxious weed infestations and in many cases cause severe erosion impacts to native plant communities on public lands. This corresponds with a compounding economic impact to manage weed infestations and address soil erosion issues. In some cases rare plants or sensitive plant communities will be detrimentally impacted.
- 2). Allowing unplanned access on substandard roads with overgrown vegetation will correspond with an increased risk of fire.
- 3). In addition, Federal Agencies have recently completed extensive and detailed travel management plans on public lands. These efforts have included many public meetings and careful identification and deliberation over individual access routes. The proposed legislation thwarts these comprehensive efforts and public participation. This legislation is a thinly disguised ruse to disregard these in-depth analysis efforts. The travel management plans accommodate multiple use on public lands and, provide resource protection to watersheds, native plant communities and wildlife habitats.

House Bill 418, “Establishing the Public Lands Access Act,” does not represent the best interests of Montana public land use or resource protection.

Sincerely,

Gretchen Rupp
MNPS President

/S/Elizabeth Bergstrom
Elizabeth Bergstrom
MNPS Conservation Committee Co-Chair