

**STATEMENT OF CHRIS FRENCH
DEPUTY CHIEF, NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOREST SERVICE**

**Before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS, FORESTS, AND MINING**

Regarding

S.3427 —MODERNIZING ACCESS TO OUR PUBLIC LANDS

September 16, 2020

Chairman Lee, Ranking Member Wyden and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to share the Department's position on S. 3427, the Modernizing Access to Our Public Land Act.

S. 3427 would direct the Department of the Interior, the Forest Service, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to jointly develop and adopt interagency standards to ensure compatibility and interoperability among federal databases for the collection and dissemination of outdoor recreation data related to federal lands.

Specifically, the bill would require the Department of the Interior, the Forest Service, and the Corps of Engineers to digitize and publish geographic information system mapping data that includes:

- federal interests, including easements and rights-of-way, in private land;
- status information as to whether roads and trails are open or closed;
- the dates on which roads and trails are seasonally opened and closed;
- the types of vehicles that are allowed on each segment of roads and trails;
- the boundaries of areas where hunting or recreational shooting is regulated or closed; and
- the boundaries of any portion of a body of water that is closed to entry, is closed to watercraft, or has horsepower limitations for watercraft.

USDA supports the goal of enhancing access to National Forest System lands by providing the specified data digitally for online use by the public. The Department would like to work with the bill's sponsor and the committee to address some remaining issues posed by this bill.

Some of the information and classes of data are currently available and accessible in the Forest Service's databases, including easements and rights-of-ways, and whether and when roads and trails are open or closed to various classes of motorized vehicles. Additionally, the Sportsmen's Access to Federal Land provisions in the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act (Public Law 116-9) requires annual reporting of NFS lands temporarily or permanently closed to hunting, fishing or recreational shooting under the Act but does not require the closures to be provided in digital form for use in online mapping.

Currently, the Forest Service does not maintain information on water bodies that are closed to watercraft or have horsepower limitations.

Additionally, on water bodies where states, counties, or other governmental entities have jurisdiction over watercraft use, it would be exceedingly difficult for the Forest Service to build and keep current an accurate database of those restrictions. We recommend the bill language clarify that the agency not be required to collect and compile information on watercraft restrictions imposed by other governmental entities.

We additionally recommend the date for reporting be changed to allow upward reporting after the end of the fiscal year, so that units can prioritize keeping facilities open for public use and maintaining preparedness for emergency response such as wildfires during summer and early fall.

That concludes my testimony, Mr. Chairman. I would be happy to answer any questions you or the Subcommittee members have for me.