

WHEREAS, the Central Idaho Wilderness Act of 1980 (1980 Act), as well as the commitments, compromises, and values underlying its enactment, recognized the importance of maintaining the airstrips existing at the time of enactment to provide necessary access for public use and enjoyment, and for administration and management of the fish and wildlife, and other resources within the wilderness; and

WHEREAS, the 1980 Act specifically recognized the importance of airstrips as a means of providing such access, and directed that the federal government:

“shall not permanently close or render unserviceable any aircraft landing strip in regular use on national forest lands on the date of enactment of this Act for reasons other than extreme danger to aircraft, and in any case not without the express written concurrence of the agency of the State of Idaho charged with evaluating the safety of backcountry airstrips;” and

WHEREAS, on several occasions since 1980, the U.S. Forest Service has acted to close or to render unserviceable certain airstrips within the scope of this provision, without recognizing the state’s role or otherwise proceeding based on incorrect information; and

WHEREAS, U.S. Forest Service has sought to identify Dewey Moore, Mile Hi, Simonds and Vines airstrips as “emergency use” – ostensibly not for closure to non-emergency use, but to limit their use by pilots without suitable experience, skill, or equipment; but this identification has created confusion as to these airstrips’ status; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Forest Service’s “emergency use” identification apparently has been used, both to call for prosecution of pilots with suitable equipment, skill and experience using the airstrips for the access purposes for which they were intended, and to argue against the performance of maintenance to keep the airstrips serviceable; and

WHEREAS, while these and other backcountry airstrips may pose unique challenges for pilots, the Federal Aviation Administration and Idaho Division of Aeronautics have used designations or warnings for other wilderness and backcountry airstrips other than “emergency use” to give pilots such advice; and

WHEREAS, continued availability of these strips for use by fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft for public and state and local government use is required by the express terms and underlying compromises and commitments of the 1980 Act; and

WHEREAS, the Idaho Transportation Board’s primary concern is to ensure safety by advising pilots of the unique challenges and skills necessary for using airstrips within the Frank Church Wilderness Area.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Idaho Transportation Board does not concur with the closure of the airstrips, known as Dewey Moore, Mile Hi, Simonds, and Vines, on national forest system lands in the Frank Church Wilderness, and expressly finds that they should remain open to aircraft, both fixed wing and rotary wing; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Idaho Transportation Board opposes the closure or rendering unserviceable any airstrips within the wilderness within the scope of Section 7 of the Central Idaho Wilderness Act of 1980 (part of which is copied above); and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Idaho Transportation Board directs the Idaho Transportation Department to work with the U.S. Forest Service, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, the Idaho Department of Lands, county government, and private aviation users. The parties shall discuss ways to ensure maintenance of all airstrips within the Frank Church Wilderness so they are not rendered unserviceable; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Idaho Transportation Board directs the Idaho Transportation Department to work with the Federal Aviation Administration and the U.S. Forest Service to determine an appropriate portrayal of these open airstrips on maps and navigational charts to advise pilots of the unique challenges and skills necessary for using airstrips within the Frank Church Wilderness Area.