

Fallen Bear Recreation Report

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Introduction

The St. Joe Ranger District, Panhandle National Forest is proposing the Fallen Bear project. This project is not a recreation resource project; however recreation resources exist within the project boundary and can be affected by the implementation of the project's alternatives. The recreation resources found within the analysis area/project boundary are Haggerty Trail 5 and its trail head, Blackjack Trail 86 and its corridor, forest roads used for recreational travel, Conrad Crossing Campground and dispersed camping sites on forest roads. The ROS classes for the analysis area/project area are Roded Natural and Roded Modified. Part of the St. Joe Wild and Scenic River corridor is located at the southern edge of the project boundary. Scenic Forest Highway 50 is within 300 feet of the project boundary. There is no congressionally designated Wilderness or inventoried roadless areas within the immediate foreground (0 to 300 feet) of the project boundary. Photos 1, 2, and 3 show the current typical landscape that can be found in the analysis area/project boundary.

The analysis area/project boundary, the project's outer perimeter, was used for determining direct and indirect effects. The scope of the cumulative effects analysis includes recreation resources found in both the analysis area/project boundary and the land found 300 feet outward from the analysis area/project boundary perimeter.

Purpose and Need of the Project

A full discussion of the purpose and need can be found in the Fallen Bear Environmental Assessment.

Alternatives

Refer to the Fallen Bear Environmental Assessment for the full details of all alternatives including alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed study.

Issues

None of the alternatives proposed for this project area are recreation based; however, some of the proposed harvest units and corresponding road activities would affect the recreation experience. Conrad Crossing Campground is on the southeastern edge of the project area. There are no units or other activities proposed in this project that would affect this campground, so it is not discussed in the effects analysis. There is also a historic trail (Whitetail Trail 41) leading from Conrad Crossing Campground that has largely disappeared. This trail has been abandoned due to impacts from past harvest units and roads along with lack of use; it will not be discussed further. Issues pertaining to the potential for increased OHVs in the area were addressed by road closures of various types. The effects each alternative has on the designated ROS class's appropriate criteria are analyzed in the Environmental Consequences section of this report. Design Features are included to protect existing trails, dispersed sites and the current recreation experience.



Photo 1. View of FS Road 50 and the St. Joe Wild and Scenic River next to the project boundary

Regulatory Framework

Authorities to manage recreation come from the general laws related to National Forest management, e.g., the Multiple Use-Sustained yield Act of 1960, the Wilderness Act (1964), the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (1968) and the National Forest Management Act (1976) the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (1964), the Architectural Barriers Act (1968), the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), National Trails System Act (1968) and the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resource Act (1974). In addition, many specific federal regulations (Code of Federal Regulations), policies (Forest Service Manuals and Handbooks listed below) and other technical manuals and papers direct management of the recreation resource for the Forest Service.

Picture 2. On FS Road 1223 looking into Unit 40



Picture 3. Dispersed camping on FS Road 1231



Forest Wide Management Direction

Idaho Panhandle National Forests Forest Plan: Recreation Goals as identified in the Forest Plan pages II-I & 2 include:

1. Provide for the projected use of developed recreation areas. Complete the development of new sites as budget becomes available.
2. Provide for a variety of dispersed recreation opportunities.
3. Provide opportunities for people to be involved in Forest management activities and supply information enabling visitors to better enjoy National Forest lands.
4. Manage special areas for the unique qualities that precipitated their designation: i.e., Wild and Scenic Rivers, Scenic Areas, Botanical Areas, etc.

Recreation Objectives and Standards identified in the Forest Plan pages II-3 and 24 indicate, in part, that the Forest will continue to provide a share of outdoor recreation needs in relation to other public and private entities, provide for the projected use of developed recreation areas with development of new sites as budget becomes available, to provide for a variety of dispersed recreation opportunities, to pursue opportunities to increase and improve the recreation trail system, and to continue and increase cooperative trail programs with organizations, clubs, and other public agencies. Forest Service recreation programs will strive to be complementary with other public and private programs. Off-site interpretation and environmental education will be encouraged. Recreation planning and operations will be coordinated with other federal, state, local, and private recreation managers.

Management Area Direction

The management area prescriptions describe the general theme, desired condition and standards and guidelines for the area. The management areas (MAs) and management area direction as it pertains to recreation include MAs 1, 4, 9, 12 and 16. The complete descriptions can be found in the Forest Plan.

Design Features

- I. The design features listed below are to be implemented when any of the action alternatives are implemented project wide in order for there to be minimal effect to the recreation resources and no effect to the ROS classes in the project boundary.
 - a. A recreation specialist would be consulted to determine if additional project level assistance is needed during project implementation.
 - b. Dispersed recreation sites off of open roads e.g. Road 1223 at the junctions of Roads 1231, 1223UD, 1223UM, that would be temporarily eliminated during logging would be restored or rehabilitated including removing slash and logs. During operational use proper signage will be posted informing forest users of the temporary closure of the site due to project implementation.
 - c. Where new road construction or reconstruction crosses Trail 86 and Trail 5, the trail would be reconstructed where the tread is destroyed and permanent signs would be installed to direct hikers to the trail location.
 - d. In areas where logging traffic may interfere with recreational traffic warning signs would be placed to inform visitors of logging activities.
- II. The following design features would be specific to the project areas that fall within 300 feet of the recreation sites listed in the introduction of this report. Upon implementing these design features during the implementation of the action alternative there would be no effect to the recreation resource's ROS classes (glossary 2, Landscape Aesthetics, A Handbook for Scenery Management).

- a. Blackjack Trail 86 and Haggerty Trail 5 corridors would be protected where tread exists. The Trails Coordinator would flag the corridors of the trails where tread is not evident prior to harvesting or road construction. Slash and logs would be removed from the trail corridor and/or trail heads.
- b. Avoid placing skid trails within 100 feet of recreation sites (e.g. dispersed sites, trails) where practical.
- c. Temporary closures of recreation sites to public use would be set up to minimize public exposure to operational safety hazards. Closures may include roads, trails, dispersed camp sites, other recreation sites, or larger geographic areas depending on operational hazards.

Affected Environment

Methodology for Recreation Analysis

The scope of the effects analysis is limited to the recreation resources in the various ROS classes found within the project's analysis area/boundary boundary. However, the scope of the cumulative effects analysis includes recreation resources found in both the analysis area/project boundary and the land found 300 feet outward from the analysis area/project boundary perimeter. This analysis used the ROS classes assigned during Forest Plan development as the baseline for this recreation assessment. The ROS 1986 Book calls for recreation management to be compatible with the recreation opportunity spectrum objective of the area. Since ROS is used to plan what and where types of recreation occur, changes in the ROS's criteria are analyzed when determining the effects of alternatives.

Visitors choose specific settings for their recreation activities in order to enjoy desired experiences. These settings vary throughout the entire forest and therefore the project boundary. Photos 1, 2, and 3 show the current typical landscape that can be found in the analysis area/project boundary. The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is a classification system that describes different outdoor recreation settings across the Forest using seven standard classes that range from primitive, undeveloped settings to urban, highly developed settings. Attributes typically considered in describing the settings are size, scenic quality, type and degree of access, remoteness, level of development, social encounters, and the amount of on-site management. By describing existing recreation opportunities in each class, ROS helps match visitors with their preferred recreation setting. ROS can also be used to plan how areas should be managed for recreation in the future (USDA Forest Service 1986). Changes in ROS classes affect the recreation opportunities offered. Possible changes in the ROS class's various criteria were analyzed and are documented in this report.

Recreation resource management, using the recreation opportunity spectrum, is based upon the experience opportunities provided by the following attributes: physical, social, managerial settings of the land and the recreation activities that occur in those settings (ROS Book 1986, pg. II-13). Criteria and standards for all attributes of each ROS class have been developed and can be found in the ROS Book 1986. It is possible to estimate the nature of changes that will occur in the recreation opportunity spectrum's class as a result of other changes in other land use (ROS Book 1986, p. III-39). When analyzing effects to recreation resources, "short term" is considered the time passing during the implementation of the project and "long term" is considered 1 year after the project has been implemented for the purpose of this report.

The existing condition of the ROS class's recreation resources is determined as meeting or not meeting its current designation through an on-the-ground-visual reconnaissance and input from the recreation specialist. Only the immediate foreground from the recreation resources in the project area is taken into

consideration when determining the existing condition of the recreation resource's ROS class for the purpose of this analysis. For projects of this size it is rare that the ROS class would actually change.

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum was reviewed to determine classification of the land parcels. The ROS setting indicators demonstrate access, remoteness, size, visual characteristics, site management, visitor management, social encounters and visitor impacts (Project Planning ROS Users Guide Chapter 60, USFS, 1987). ROS setting indicators have the potential to change with changes in land ownership.

An overview of recreational use was developed through first-hand knowledge from recreation personnel and public input. The analysis emphasizes anticipated changes in recreation opportunities and uses. The analysis (direct, indirect and cumulative) for the recreation resource is quantitative where possible, e.g. miles of road lost, feet of trail impacted. In addressing miles of road lost for motorized travel, the analysis assumed that roads currently barriered were NOT being used at this time. Also, roads that go from being open to being barriered in the alternative will be assumed NOT to be available for ATVs (worst case). The analysis is also qualitative, e.g. value of trail is diminished by additional road crossings.

Effects to the Wild and Scenic St. Joe River follow direction that limits effects to within ¼ mile of the river (IPNF Forest Plan p. III-52; Appendix Z, St. Joe Wild & Scenic River Management Plan).

To assist with the analysis the following USDA handbooks were used: National Forest Landscape Management, Volume 2, Chapter 8, Recreation (Agriculture Handbook No. 666); and the ROS users Guide, United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service. In addition, National Forest Landscape Management Volume 2, Chapter 1 (Agriculture Handbook 701) and Chapter 5, Timber (Agriculture Handbook No. 559), Landscape Aesthetics (A Handbook for Scenery Management, Agriculture Handbook Number 701) and National Forest Landscape Management Volume 2, Chapter 4, Roads (Agriculture Handbook Number 483).

Existing Condition Recreation Resources

Recreation activities in the Fallen Bear Project include driving for pleasure, ATV and motorcycle riding, hunting, camping, snowmobiling, hiking, fishing, wildlife viewing and gathering forest products (berries, rocks, firewood, mushrooms). There are recreation developed sites within the analysis area/project boundary. The recreation resources found within the analysis area/project boundary are Haggerty Trail 5 and its trail head, Blackjack Trail 86 and its corridor, dispersed camp sites, roads currently used by ATVs, and Conrad Crossing Campground. The Old Montana Trail is a historic trail that is no longer on the trail system and is not discussed further in this report. There would be no effect to Conrad Crossing Campground, so it is not discussed in the Environmental Consequences section. The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classes for the project area are Roaded Natural and Roaded Modified.

The Haggerty Trail is a single track trail open to hikers and motorized traffic. The lower sections are single track only and some of the upper sections are accessed by ATVs at this time. It is 5.1 miles in length, begins at Forest Highway 50 and ends at Blackjack Trail 86. Some of the Haggerty Trail traverses rough-steep terrain. The entire trail is useable. The middle and upper sections have been impacted by logging and are popular hunting destinations.

The Blackjack Trail 86 is a single track trail at the bottom up to the road junction in Section 34. This bottom section can only be used by hikers at this time. From this point it is currently used by motorcyclists up to Black Jack Peak. From Black Jack Peak up to Float Saddle it is an old roadway that is used by ATVs. It is 5.4 miles in length, begins at Forest Highway 50 and ends on Road 391 at Float Saddle. Some of the trail traverses rough-steep terrain and has been impacted by logging activity including road crossings. Blackjack Trail 86 has missing tread throughout parts of its bottom corridor.

ATVs are a common site within this area with users primarily enjoying traveling down logging roads.

Some of these roads are gated with access available behind the gate and some are barriered with the intent for no motorized access. Some of the barriered roads are presently being used by ATVs.

Conrad campground is located at the southeastern edge of the project boundary. It is used by the public. It is situated next to the St. Joe Scenic River which adds water features to the camp ground along with the natural sound of water to the environment. The camp ground is accessible by Forest Highway 50.

Parts of the corridor of the St. Joe Scenic River are within the analysis area/project boundary but the river itself is not within the project area. The river is a designated Wild and Scenic River. The St. Joe Scenic Byway (Forest Highway 50) borders the project boundary but is not within the project area. The part of the byway that is next to the project boundary is flanked by the Wild and Scenic River on one side. At times there are dramatic slopes and vistas along the St. Joe Scenic Byway. However, most of these open vistas do not allow for views into the proposed project area.

There are dispersed campsites throughout the analysis area/project boundary and project area. Several are located at a wide spot just before a gated or barriered road. See Photo 3 for an example of the dispersed campsites found in the project boundary.

In general, most of the proposed activities are within the Roaded Modified (RM) ROS class. The criteria for meeting the current ROS class of RM exist and in some cases surpass the typical characterization of this classification. Roaded Modified is characterized by substantially modified environments except for campsites. Roads, landings, slash and debris may be strongly dominant from within yet remain subordinate from distant sensitive roads and highways. Interaction between users and evidence of others may be moderate on roads, but there is little evidence of others or interaction at camp sites. The area is managed in such a way that few on-site controls are present except for gated roads. Conventional motorized use is allowed and incorporated into construction standards and design of facilities.

The analysis area/project boundary also has Roaded Natural (RN) ROS class within it. The criteria for meeting the current ROS class of RN exist and in some cases surpass the typical characterization of this classification. In general, the portion of the analysis area classified as Roaded Natural does follow and in some areas surpasses the typical characterization of this classification. The physical setting is characterized by natural appearing environments with moderate evidences of the sights and sounds of man. Such evidence usually harmonizes with the natural environment. Interaction between users may be low to moderate, but with evidence of other users prevalent. Resource modification and utilization practices are evident, but harmonize with the natural environment. Conventional motorized use is provided for in construction standards and design facilities (ROS Book 1986, pg. II-32). This area is within ½ mile of a road and modifications range from being easily noticed to strongly dominant. Structures are generally scattered and may include power lines, roads and buildings. The social setting is described as moderate to high frequency of visitor contacts on roads and low to moderate on trails and away from roads. The management setting includes onsite signage and traffic controls that are noticeable but harmonize with the natural environment.

All of the criteria for the various ROS classes found in the project area are currently being met. This is the baseline information used to determine effects to the recreation resources' ROS classes.

Environmental Consequences

No Action

Recreation activities (driving for pleasure, ATV and motorcycle riding, hunting, camping, snowmobiling, hiking, fishing, wildlife viewing and gathering forest products including berries, firewood, mushrooms, etc.) would continue. Trails would not be affected. Motorized vehicle access would not change. The St.

Joe Wild and Scenic River Corridor would not be affected. Dispersed campsites would not be affected. Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classes would not change.

Direct and Indirect Effects of Alternatives B and C

The Wild and Scenic St. Joe River is just outside of the southern boundary. The southern tip of one harvest unit proposed for commercial does fall within the quarter mile boundary of the Wild and Scenic corridor. It cannot be viewed from the corridor due to the topography, distance and intervening forest. Also this unit meets the VQO of retention (please see the visuals section). There would be no negative effects to the Wild and Scenic River corridor. There are no indirect or cumulative effects to the Wild and Scenic River Corridor.

All of the proposed road construction and units (except one commercial thin unit) are within the Roaded Modified part of the project area. The area is already well-roaded and timber harvesting is evident. None of the proposals would change any criteria for the ROS classes that would promote a change. Therefore there are no changes to the ROS classes from any alternative.

Both action alternatives would temporarily displace three popular dispersed camp sites that are just forward of barriered roads (Roads 1223UM, 1223UD, 1231) that would be utilized for harvest operations. This displacement could be over a fairly long time (2-8 years) depending on timber markets and how quickly the purchaser opens the road for use and then closes it back and rehabilitates the site. These camp sites are primarily used during hunting season, but they have devoted clientele. Design features require restoring/rehabilitating the sites after harvest operations.

Alternative B proposes units that would directly affect Haggerty Trail 5. Unit 96A, a clearcut with reserves, borders the trail. With design features being followed, the trail itself would be protected. There would be minimal effect to the seen area for people traversing the trail through that unit. There are two road crossings of this trail currently and these roads will be reconstructed. Since the crossings already exist and design features require protection of the trails, there would be no additional effects to the Haggerty Trail. Both action alternatives include a precommercial thinning unit on the boundary of Trail 5. This activity would not affect this trail. There would be no direct or indirect effects to this trail.

Both action alternatives propose harvest units, road reconstruction and new road construction that would affect the Blackjack Trail 86 corridor. Alternative B has one new road crossing, one road reconstruction that crosses the trail corridor, two commercial thin units, one seed tree unit and one shelterwood unit that would affect the bottom part of the trail corridor in Section 3. Harvesting and road construction/reconstruction would affect approximately 1,500 feet of this trail. Following the design features, such as protecting the corridor and rebuilding destroyed tread at road crossings, would help alleviate effects from the harvesting. Effects from harvest units would diminish with time for the hiker, but the new road construction would result in one more road crossing.

Alternative C has one new road crossing and one road reconstruction that would cross the trail corridor, one commercial thin unit, one seed tree unit, and one shelterwood unit that would affect the bottom part of the trail corridor in Section 3. Harvesting and road construction/reconstruction would affect approximately 2,200 feet of this trail. Following the design features, such as protecting the corridor and rebuilding destroyed tread at road crossings, would help alleviate effects from the harvesting. Effects from harvest units would diminish with time for the hiker, but the new road construction would result in one more road crossing.

Motorized vehicle access would be reduced with implementation of any action alternative; these two alternatives are essentially the same in this respect.

For Alternative B, vehicles over 50 inches wide would have 10.3 fewer miles of road to travel. Vehicles less than 50 inches wide would have 25.5 fewer miles of road to travel.

For Alternative C, vehicles over 50 inches wide would have 10.4 fewer miles of road to travel. Vehicles less than 50 inches wide would have 25.6 fewer miles of road to travel.

Cumulative Effects of Alternative B and C

Effects from past, present or reasonably foreseeable future actions would not occur at the same place and time as the minor effects from this project on the Wild and Scenic River. New road construction in Alternatives B and C would have cumulative effects to the value of Trail 86. The new road construction would result in one more road crossing for a trail that already has several crossings. In the eyes of many hikers, this reduces the value of this trail.

Compliance with the Forest Plan and Other Regulatory Direction / Conclusions

Management Area 12 (National Wild & Scenic River System) provides direction to continue to maintain and improve big game winter range, provide a full spectrum of river-related recreational experiences, maintain existing water quality, protect fish habitat and meet visual quality objectives. For wildlife, water, fisheries and visual quality objectives please see the corresponding sections of the environmental assessment. This project does not affect the spectrum of recreational experiences available on the St. Joe River and therefore complies with this direction.

This project would comply with Forest Plan direction because design features for providing for public safety and protecting existing trails are incorporated in the alternatives, and the proposed units are within the Roded Modified portion of the project area. The project area would continue to provide for variety of dispersed recreation and opportunities for the public to enjoy their National Forests with any of the alternatives.

Definitions

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) - is a system developed by the Forest Service that classifies recreation settings on National Forest lands according to their physical, social, and managerial characteristics. These ROS settings are formally applied to National Forest lands and not adjacent private lands. However, the presence and condition of private lands influence the ROS settings assigned to National Forest lands.

Roded Natural (RN) – Opportunity to affiliate with others in developed sites but with some chance for privacy. Self reliance of outdoor skill of only moderate importance. Mostly natural appearing as viewed from sensitive roads and trails. Interaction between users at camp sites is of moderate importance. Some obvious on-site controls of users. Access and travel is conventional motorized including sedan, trailers, RVs, and some motor homes. Vegetative alteration is done to maintain desired visual and recreational characteristics. The area is characterized by natural appearing environments with moderate evidences of the sights and sounds of man. Such evidence usually harmonizes with the natural environment. Interaction between users may be low to moderate, but with evidence of other users prevalent. Resource modification and utilization practices are evident, but harmonize with natural environment. Conventional motorized use is provided for in construction standards and design facilities (ROS Book 1986, pg. II-32).

Roded Modified (RM) - Area is characterized by substantially modified environments except for campsites. Roads, landings, slash and debris may be strongly dominant from within yet remain

subordinate from distant sensitive roads and highways. Interaction between users and evidence of others may be moderate on roads, but there is little evidence of others or interaction at camp sites. The area is managed in such a way that few on-site controls may be present except for gated roads. Conventional motorized use is allowed and incorporated into construction standards and design of facilities.

References

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