



File Code: 1950

Date: April 3, 2006

Kaniksu Winter Travel Plan
Idaho Panhandle National Forests
Comments Requested by April 30, 2006

Dear Interested Party,

The Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF) is beginning a review of winter travel on National Forest System lands on the Bonners Ferry, Priest Lake and Sandpoint Ranger Districts. The outcome will be an updated travel plan for over snow travel on the three districts. I would like to give you the opportunity to participate and provide comments.

Under guidance provided by the 1987 Forest Plan, the majority of National Forest System lands are open to vehicular travel and a wide variety of recreation opportunities are available. Travel is regulated through road/trail restrictions and area restrictions, which are shown on the 2004 Visitor Map for the Kaniksu National Forest portion of the IPNF. The map is available at the Ranger District offices and the Forest Headquarters in Coeur d'Alene. Additional information about the IPNF Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) and other forest topics can be found on the IPNF website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/ipnf>.

This northern part of the IPNF is highly important to a broad and growing population of year-round recreation users. The area also contains habitats important to many wildlife species, including some listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Our goal for this travel plan update is to evaluate the suitability of areas for over-snow winter travel on the three ranger districts in a manner that integrates the social and economic aspects of winter uses with the needs of wildlife and consideration of other natural resources. Analysis will consider consistency with existing laws, regulation, agency policies, and Forest Plan components including social and wildlife issues. We will also look at existing uses, resource conditions, and facilities such as roads and trails.

We know that many of you have already given us input on winter travel and recreation on the National Forest as part of the public involvement for other projects on the IPNF. We appreciate that information and will include it as we continue this analysis. This is an opportunity for us to bring you up to date on the 2004 IPNF/Kaniksu Visitor Map and developments since it was published, and for you to let us know of any new thoughts you might have. Being familiar with the current travel restrictions will aid in your commenting.



We have begun to identify and gather information for the analysis. Your input is important to ensure we have adequately considered current public uses, needs and concerns. At this stage we recommend your comments focus on the following:

- 1) Existing information that you believe is relevant for us to consider. Please provide references, sources or copies if you have them available.
- 2) Comments about specific areas, recreation uses, or other resources of concern (e.g. scenery, wildlife, etc.). The following questions may help in developing comments. What are your types of winter recreation uses and what areas do you use? Are there travel management changes you believe are needed to improve the quality of your recreation experience? What are the issues you believe are important for us to consider in the winter travel planning and why? Do you have ideas on how to address those concerns? Do you have comments or recommendations on the current travel management and restrictions?

We can best use your comments if we receive them by **April 30, 2006**. The more specific your comments are in terms of relevant information, desired conditions or areas of concern the more helpful they will be. Over the next few months, we will carefully review all of the information gathered, identify factors that may limit what actions can be considered (i.e. the decision space), and then we will develop a proposal.

Once a proposed action is developed, we will share that with the public through additional scoping notices and public comment opportunities. Your comments will be used to identify significant issues and alternatives that should be considered. Once those have been determined, an environmental analysis will be conducted to evaluate the potential benefits and effects of alternative management strategies. Those findings will be documented in the Kaniksu Winter Travel Plan Environmental Assessment which will be provided to interested members of the public, other agencies, and organizations for additional review and commenting. We will also at a later time, most likely in the fall, be scheduling public meetings in the communities of Bonners Ferry, Sandpoint and Priest Lake. If you wish to be notified of future comment periods and public meetings please identify that in your response.

After hearing from the public and finishing all of the analysis, I will make a decision that updates the current travel plan by identifying unrestricted or restricted areas or routes for over-snow winter travel. The decision will be limited to where, when and how winter travel occurs. It will not include authorization of new improvements.

When submitting comments, please include your name, address, telephone number, and the organization you represent (if any); the subject title (i.e. Kaniksu Winter Travel Plan) on which the comment is being submitted; and facts and reasons specific to this proposal for us to consider.

Please send written comments to the attention of Greg Hetzler at the Sandpoint Ranger District, 1500 Highway 2, Suite 110, Sandpoint, ID 83864; comments can also be submitted electronically in MSWord or RTF format to comments-northern-idpanhandle-

sandpoint@fs.fed.us; faxed to the Sandpoint office at (208) 263-6670; or hand-delivered during office hours Monday through Friday between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

I have attached an optional form that you may use in submitting comments and updating contact information, including e-mail addresses. Where practical we encourage use of electronic means to improve our efficiency. In order to stay on the mailing list for the Kaniksu Winter Travel Plan please either return this form, submit written comments, or contact Greg Hetzler directly.

As further information is developed for public review it will be posted on our web page at <http://www.fs.fed.us/ipnf/eco/projects.html>. If you have any questions during this comment period or wish to discuss the travel plan please contact Greg Hetzler, the project leader, at (208) 263-5111

Sincerely,



RANOTTA K. MCNAIR
Forest Supervisor

Comments received on the proposed project (including names and addresses of those who comment) will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection. We can accept and consider comments submitted anonymously; however, people who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision (36 CFR 215).

Any person may request that we withhold submitted comments from the public record (pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d)) by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. However, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. We will inform the requestor of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality. If the request is denied, we will return the submitted comments and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted, with or without name and address, within a specified time.

