

Appendix E

Site-Specific Forest Plan Amendment

Elk Habitat Potential for Management Areas

B1, B2, A3, C1, C6, AND C8S

Introduction

This section addresses the potential consequences of removing statements of management direction (standards) contained in the current Clearwater National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (USDA 1987). The direction proposed for removal is identified in Chapter 2. The purpose and need for amendment is discussed in Chapter 1 and Appendix E of this DEIS.

The Clearwater National Forest Plan was completed in 1987, at a time when trail vehicles were few and the travel planning focus was almost completely on roads and highway vehicles. Since then, motorized vehicle use has grown dramatically. Modern vehicles such as snowmobiles, ATV's and even motorcycles have capabilities that could not have been envisioned in 1987. The Forest Plan also contains some conflicting information regarding the intent for management of certain areas, particularly those that were roadless at the time of the plan adoption and remain so today. In order to implement a travel plan the Forest Plan will need to be amended.

The Forest Service is proposing to remove current Forest Plan elk habitat potential standards and adopt direction included with the proposed Travel Management Plan. The existing standard for elk habitat potential as related to the effects of roads in backcountry Management Areas (MA's) is not achievable, and/or could be in conflict with the concept of establishing travel planning areas and route-by-route management direction.

The 100% elk habitat potential standard for MA's B1, B2, A3, C6, C1, and the 75% standard for C8S are proposed for modification because they are not achievable and would no longer be meaningful given the direction included in the proposed Travel Plan. In the proposed Travel Plan, the Forest Service would identify specifically how each existing road and trail would be managed in these 6 MA's. No new roads or trails are proposed for construction in the Travel Plan and no new roads or trails are anticipated in the foreseeable future. All other existing MA direction, goals, objectives, guidelines, and other standards for these MA's would remain unchanged.

The Forest Service proposes to remove the 100% and 75% elk habitat potential standard primarily because, once it has been determined in the Travel Planning process where motorized use will be allowed, the need for any additional road/trail analysis will become

moot for this project. Any future projects proposed in these MA's would need to complete a new site-specific NEPA analysis that would include an evaluation of wildlife habitat and security needs based on best science at that time. The Forest Service has found implementation of this standard to be problematic because the habitat effectiveness model must consider the effects of motorized access of permanent roads that were in place during the FP process. Some of these roads are major permanent access roads or highways. It is, therefore, not possible to achieve the standard as an absolute but is more appropriately considered as a desired future condition or goal in these MA's.

The identified standards have not, in and of themselves, resulted in ground disturbance or environmental effect. Similarly, the proposal to remove them would not directly result in ground disturbance or environmental effect. Only when site-specific projects are proposed can potential environmental consequences be meaningfully evaluated.

However, because these standards limit management activity or require maintenance of specific conditions, there is concern that their removal from the Forest Plan would allow the Forest Service to pursue actions in the future that would result in adverse environmental effects.

Affected Environment

The Resources Planning Act (as amended by the National Forest Management Act) sets forth a process for developing, adopting and revising land and resource management plans for the National Forest System. Resultant plans are to provide multiple use and a sustained yield of goods and services from the National Forests in ways that maximize long-term net public benefits in an environmentally sound manner (36 CFR 219.1, 1982).

The Clearwater Forest Plan provides management direction at two scales: Forest-wide and by Management Area. Forest-wide direction consists of goals, objectives, standards and guidelines that apply across the Forest. At this scale, they are very broad and generally identify the goods and services that the Forest Service intends to manage for. Standards and guidelines are intended to be an indicator of policy or conduct. MA's are mapped zones within the Forest that have specific characteristics and capabilities that lend themselves to management for particular goods and services. There are 18 MA's distributed across the Forest. Each one contains goals that outline the management emphasis and standards that guide how resources are to be managed within that area. The proposed amendment would affect the following six MA's: B1, B2, A3, C1, C6, and C8S. These MA's emphasize wildlife and fish habitat or recreational and wilderness opportunities. Existing conditions are such that it is not possible to achieve the existing Forest Plan standards. A Forest Plan amendment is required to reflect the existing condition.

The standards proposed for replacement pertain to travel management, or road facilities. The standards are proposed for removal because they would no longer be meaningful given the direction included in the proposed Travel Plan. The Forest Service proposes to remove the standards primarily because once it has been determined on which routes

motorized use will be allowed, the need for a road density analysis or standard will become moot. In addition, the Forest Service has found implementation of these standards to be problematic for the following reasons:

- The habitat effectiveness model must consider the effects of motorized access on permanent roads. It is not possible to achieve the standards in these MA's.
- In many areas, the existing (or baseline) habitat effectiveness does not meet current Forest Plan standards, and due to Forest Plan goals and objectives for other resources, it is not desirable to close enough motorized routes to meet the standards.
- 3) Some Forest Plan standards provide procedural direction to use certain methodologies or publications in environmental analysis (e.g., analysis for transportation needs will be integrated into resource area analysis). This requirement does not emphasize that the most current scientific techniques and information should be used.

Direct and Indirect Effects

There are no direct environmental consequences of amending the Clearwater Forest Plan to remove the existing standards. The direction does not constitute project- or activity-specific decisions, and therefore does not result in ground disturbance. These standards, as applied, essentially require that the effects of open roads and trails that are adjacent to or on the perimeter of habitat units, and inclusionary travel routes be considered when evaluating Elk Habitat Effectiveness (EHE) for MA's.

Alternative A - No Action

Under Alternative A, there would be no amendment to the Forest Plan. The elk habitat effectiveness standards would not be removed. Cross-country motorized uses would not be restricted. All existing motorized access would continue.

In the future, site-specific amendments to the Forest Plan may be needed if the Forest Service proposes management activities that involve motorized access in areas that do not meet Forest Plan standards. Currently, however, no projects are planned that would require site-specific amendments to the standard.

Alternatives B, C, and D

Under Alternatives B through D, the 100% EHE standard in MA's B1, B2, A3, C6, C1, and the 75% standard for C8S would be removed from the Forest Plan. Implementing the Forest Plan amendment would have no direct effects on elk habitat effectiveness. The consequences, for the most part, would be dependent on the Travel Plan alternative selected for management of specific routes. In MA B1 there would be no motorized uses designated within the MA. Perimeter or boundary roads and trails would remain open to

motorized uses and the effect on elk habitat would remain unchanged from the existing condition. In MA's A3, B2, C1, and C6, motorized uses would be designated in the Travel Plan. The amount of trails open to motorized uses varies by alternative, and is displayed in Chapter 2. The wildlife goals and objectives for management in these MA's is to provide for "optimum amount of habitat factors, including security, to permit elk use at the maximum potential for that site." Removing the standards would not have any direct/physical/on-the-ground effect to elk habitat. Habitat security would be evaluated using the best available science. The effects of the action alternatives on elk habitat would be different for each alternative due to the different routes that would be designated for motorized use, not because of the Forest Plan amendment. Additional information on the effects of the action alternatives on elk habitat and security can be found in Chapter 3 of the DEIS.

Cumulative Effects

The Elk Habitat Effectiveness (EHE) standards of the existing Forest Plan relate to a model that is primarily driven by the impacts of roads and motorized use of the Clearwater National Forest. The amendments to the Forest Plan to remove this direction are connected to the proposals for management of specific roads and trails. This will be the principal decision that determines which routes will be open and which will have restrictions to motorized use.

Consistency with Laws, Regulations, Policy, and Federal, Regional, State and Local Land Use Plans (including the Forest Plan)

The NFMA regulations contain a provision that allows for amending Forest Plans [36 CFR 219.10(f), 1982]. The Forest Service is proposing an amendment to remove direction that is dated, is open to misinterpretation, and/or could be in conflict with the concept of establishing forest-wide, travel planning area, and route-by-route management direction. For amendments, the NFMA regulations require the decision-maker (the Clearwater Forest Supervisor) to determine whether the proposal would result in a significant change to the Plan based on an analysis of the objectives, guidelines and other contents of the Plan. If the amendment is determined to be not significant, then the Forest Supervisor may implement the amendment following appropriate public notification and satisfactory completion of NEPA procedures. If the amendment is determined to be significant, the Forest Service should follow the same procedure as that required for development of a Forest Plan. One way to determine significance is to assess the magnitude of change resulting from the proposed amendment to the goods and services projected to be provided by the Forest Plan. The goods and services to be considered include recreation, scenery, water, fish and wildlife habitat, threatened and endangered species habitat, timber, fire protection and cultural resources. Information on the effects of the Travel Plan alternatives on these goods and services is discussed throughout the DEIS.