

Chapter 2: Public Participation, Issues and Alternatives

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews the public involvement process, identifies issues, and describes and compares three alternatives considered for management of motorized and non-motorized travel. A summary of effects by alternative is also displayed at the end of this chapter.

2.2 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SUMMARY

Ashland Ranger District Travel Management EIS public participation is summarized in this section. The summary describes public involvement, identifies persons and organizations contacted during preparation of the EIS, and specifies time frames for accomplishing goals in accordance with 40 CFR 1506.6

Public involvement includes the steps necessary to identify and address public concerns and needs. The public involvement process assists agencies in: (1) broadening the information base for decision making; (2) informing the public about the Proposed Action and the potential impacts that could result from the project; and (3) ensuring that public needs are understood by the agencies.

Public participation is required by NEPA at three specific points: the scoping period, review of the Draft EIS, and receipt of the Record of Decision. The 2005 Motorized Travel Rule also specifies that there must be public involvement in the process of designating motorized routes and trails.

Table 2-1 lists the public meetings conducted in conjunction with the process to date.

2.2.1 PUBLIC SCOPING

Scoping is a process used to help identify specific areas of concern related to the proposal during the early portion of the detailed environmental analysis. The initial scoping document (see Project Record) for this project was distributed on November 26, 2007 to approximately 237 individuals, government agencies, tribal governments, news media, businesses, and organizations that have shown interest in projects on the Custer National Forest, and in particular on the Ashland Ranger District. The scoping document provided information on the purpose and need for the project, described the proposed action, and asked for comments. A news release inviting comments was placed in the Billings Gazette (Billings, MT) on November 27, 2007. News releases were also sent to local newspapers including the Miles City Star, Independent Press, Powder River Examiner, Outlook, and Yellowstone County News. These media efforts helped to publicize the proposal and comment period. Interested parties were asked to comment within 30 days. Due to technical issues that delayed placing the scoping document on the Forest's web page for several days, the comment period was extended and additional 15 days, which ended January 25, 2008.

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Public meetings were held in Ashland, Broadus, Miles City, and Billings, Montana in December 2007 to discuss the scoping document (see Table 2-1).

Table 2-1. Summary of Public Meetings

Location	Date/Time	Number of Attendees
Proposed Action Scoping Meetings		
Ashland, MT	December 11, 2007, 6:00-8:00 pm	28
Miles City, MT	December 12, 2007, 6:00-8:00 pm	5
Billings, MT	December 13, 2007, 6:00-8:00 pm	25
Broadus, MT	December 17, 2007, 6:00-8:00 pm	6

In response to these efforts, just over 60 letters, personal comments, emails, or phone calls were received. The analysis of electronic, written, and verbal comments preliminarily identified several potential issues. Three of these issues were identified as significant and were used to formulate elements of the alternatives (see Issues section below).

2.2.2 NOTICE OF INTENT

A Notice of Intent (NOI) was published in the Federal Register on September 5, 2008. The NOI identified that when the Draft Environmental Impact Statement was distributed, the public would have a 45-day comment period from the date when the Environmental Protection Agency publishes the Notice of Availability in the Federal Register. Also, a news release will be provided to local news media at the beginning of the 45-day comment period on the Draft EIS. The Draft EIS will be made available to interested parties identified in the updated District Travel Management Planning EIS mailing list.

2.3 SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

One purpose of scoping is to identify the significant issues that should be analyzed in depth within an EIS (40 CFR 1501.7). The significant issues become the focus of the analysis and guide alternative development. All public scoping comments were considered by the interdisciplinary team and Responsible Official, and are documented in the project record.

As a result of reviewing and analyzing agency and public responses, the following significant issues were identified. These were used to develop the range of alternatives and are analyzed in detail in Chapter 3.

2.3.1 RECREATION

Concern about motorized recreation opportunities. Reductions in the amount of routes available for motorized use could reduce the opportunities available for motorized recreation, diminish the ability to retrieve big game using motorized routes, and reduce dispersed camping opportunities. Alternative A was developed to respond to this issue.

Indicators:

- Acres in rural, roaded natural, and semi-primitive motorized ROS settings within the District.

- Miles of motorized system roads and trails to be designated on the District.

Concern about non-motorized recreation opportunities. Increases in the amount of routes designated for motorized use could reduce the quality of non-motorized recreation experiences, reduce opportunities for non-motorized big game hunting opportunities, and reduce opportunities for solitude, away from noise generated by motorized vehicles. Elements of Alternative B were developed in response to this issue.

Indicators:

- Acres in semi-primitive non-motorized settings within the District, including inside and outside of Hiking and Riding Areas.
- Acres in semi-primitive non-motorized settings within the District during big game hunting seasons, including inside and outside of Hiking and Riding Areas.

Concern about opportunities for off-highway vehicle operation. The use of unlicensed off-highway vehicles on roads is not consistent with State of Montana motor vehicle laws. Designating roads (as opposed to motorized mixed use roads or motorized trails) would limit opportunities for off-highway vehicle use. This issue was used in designing Alternatives A and B.

Indicators:

- Miles of mixed use system roads in the project area.
- Miles of motorized system trails in the project area.

Concern about impacts on personal recreation experiences. The Forest Service and commenters recognized the potential for travel management changes to not only impact individual's personal experiences and connection to forest lands, but it also has the potential to increase or decrease conflict between forest users, particularly between motorized and non-motorized uses. Alternative B was developed in part to address concerns such as these.

2.3.2 CULTURAL RESOURCES

Concern about protection of archeological sites, traditional cultural properties, and traditional practices. Actions associated with designation, such as converting non-system routes to system routes, have the potential to adversely impact the scientific, traditional, cultural, and intrinsic values of archeological, cultural, and historic sites. In addition, proposed actions could have an adverse effect to certain areas of traditional importance to local tribes.

Indicators:

- Number of Traditional Cultural Properties – Culturally Sensitive potentially affected on the District.
- Number of cultural landscapes potentially affected on the District.
- Number of traditional cultural properties potentially affected on the District.

2.3.3 WILDLIFE

Concern about disturbance of wildlife and impacts to wildlife habitat. Human use associated with system and non-system road and trail designation has the potential to disturb wildlife through noise

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and visual effects. Human use can disrupt activities such as foraging habits, resting location selection and duration, nesting, and denning. In addition, changes in road densities can affect the quality of wildlife habitat. The Forest Service identified and analyzed the effects of travel management alternatives on federally threatened, Forest Service sensitive, big-game, and other wildlife species and their habitat.

Indicators:

- Effects determinations for federally listed threatened or endangered species, Forest Service sensitive species, Custer National Forest management indicator species, and other species of concern.
- Deer and Elk – Motorized Route Density and Percent secure habitat within deer and elk habitat on the District.
- General wildlife – Percent of land unit that is core wildlife habitat based on motorized and non-motorized routes on the District.

2.4 OTHER ISSUES

The Council on Environmental Quality Regulations Implementing the National Environmental Policy Act states that agencies should discuss, “only briefly issues other than significant ones” (40 CFR 1500.4[c]). The following issues were determined to not be significant issues because they did not drive development of alternatives or major components of alternatives, there were no significant effects associated with the proposed actions, or both.

2.4.1 WATER QUALITY, FISHERIES, AND AQUATICS

The action of adding routes to the system has the potential to influence water quality indirectly through on-site erosion and sediment delivery to streams. Actions can also influence water quality and channel processes as a result of improper route location.

Indicators:

- Miles of actions that reduce risks on routes within the project area.
- Miles of actions that increase risks on routes within the project area.
- Effects determinations for listed Forest Service sensitive species and other species of concern.

2.4.2 SOILS

Adding routes to the transportation system on high and medium risk soils could increase the potential to compact, displace, or erode soils such that there is a loss of soil productivity.

Indicator:

- Miles of motorized routes by high/very high and medium erosion hazard rating on the District.

2.4.3 *VEGETATION*

Concerns have been expressed about the effects of designating routes on native and rare vegetation found on the District. Designation of additional system roads and trails, along with the associated dispersed vehicle camping, has the potential to cause ground disturbance that could lead to noxious weed establishment and/or encouraging spreading.

Indicators:

- Acres and Percent of potential vegetation impacts by moderate risk category for motorized routes on the District.
- Weed susceptible Acres within designated road corridors within the project area.
- Total weed infested Acres within motorized route potentially affected corridor.
- Effects determinations for listed Forest Service sensitive species and other species of concern.

2.4.4 *ECONOMICS*

The functional economic area that surrounds the District consists of Rosebud County and Powder River counties in Montana and the immediate surrounding counties. For the two-county functional economic area evaluated, the total economic effects of recreation overall, and specifically recreation tied to motorized and non-motorized activities, are very small compared to the total economic activity in the area. Though changes in use attributable to the alternatives outlined in the economic report are difficult to estimate (see Project Record), the dominance of hunting as a recreation choice and the expectation that the number of hunters using the District is not expected to change as a result of the alternatives (see Chapter 3 Recreation) means that the proposed travel management changes would have little effect on the overall economy of the two-county area.

Given this information, no further discussion of this issue is included in the EIS.

2.4.5 *AIR QUALITY*

There is concern that the addition of routes to the transportation system may lead to an adverse impact on air quality. Encountering motorized use emissions and fugitive dust on Forest roads and trails could have an undesirable effect on the quality of a recreational experience. These effects are typically transitory in nature and not long lasting. There are typically good air dispersion characteristics and low inversion potential across the District. In addition, traffic is generally at lower speeds that result in less dust generation.

Air quality across the District is considered good to excellent. All areas within and immediately adjacent to the District currently meet all state and federal air quality standards (MTDEQ, 2008). The nearest Montana non-attainment area for particulate matter is Lame Deer, MT (approx. 30 miles west) and Laurel, MT (approx. 150 miles west) with sulfur dioxide concerns.

The Northern Cheyenne Reservation is a non-federal Class 1 Area under the 1977 Clean Air Act. This area is located west of the Ashland District and prevailing winds are from the southwest. The nearest areas of non-attainment are Lame Deer, MT for particulate matter (approximately 30 miles west) and Laurel, MT for sulfur dioxide levels (approx. 140 miles west). Implementation of any of

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the alternatives is expected to maintain air quality conditions due to 1) good dispersion characteristics across the District, 2) low inversion potential across the District, 3) low emissions from vehicles relative to other potential sources, and 4) reduced or equivalent route miles open to motorized vehicles under all alternatives compared to the existing condition. Compliance with State and Federal air quality standards would occur under all alternatives. Given this information, no further discussion of this issue is included in the EIS.

2.4.6 HIKING AND RIDING AREAS (MANAGEMENT AREA J)

A concern was identified regarding motorized recreation within the Hiking and Riding Areas (HRA) on the District and the potential that motorized activities have to diminish the characteristics of those areas. There are three HRAs on the District – the Cook Mountain, King Mountain, and Tongue River Breaks HRAs. There are currently 20.6 miles of system routes within the HRAs. The Forest Plan prohibits public motorized use of these areas, but allows some management activities including motorized vehicle use associated with grazing activities (USDA Forest Service 1987). The existing routes are used infrequently for administrative purposes.

Alternatives A and B would reduce the overall miles of motorized routes by 11.4 miles within HRAs, compared to the No Action Alternative. None of the alternatives would cause irreversible or irretrievable effects to the existing characteristics of the HRAs. All of the alternatives would comply with existing law, regulation, and policy. Since public motorized use is not currently allowed within the HRAs and the action alternatives would reduce the administrative routes by 11.4 miles, this issue will not be analyzed further in the EIS.

2.4.7 ENFORCEMENT

Public comment related to law enforcement issues focused on enforcing regulations, providing more law enforcement presence, and providing the public with signing and education. These comments tended to concentrate on motorized activities on the forest, and were raised by both motorized and non-motorized recreationists. A number of comments highlighted impacts associated with the lack of enforcement, such as resource damage and diminished recreation experience for other forest visitors. Some comments suggested that there was a need for additional law enforcement personnel to handle the increase of motorized use on the forest.

In 2005, the Motorized Travel Rule changed the legal authority for regulating off-route travel of motor vehicles. The final rule modified regulations in 36 CFR 295 which historically governed the management of OHVs on National Forests. In addition, the rule changed the enforcement authority for motor vehicle restrictions from 36 CFR 261 Subpart B: Special Orders to the Subpart A: General Prohibitions section, making motor vehicle violations in the future a strict liability infraction. This change relieves the Agency of the posting and signing requirements of 36 CFR 261 Subpart B and authorizes map notification to be the enforcement tool in the future. The decision mandates that Districts and administrative units complete a travel management review with public involvement to designate motorized roads, trails, and areas and produce Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) that identifies these designations (36 CFR 212.56). Once this is completed, travel management restrictions may be enforced under Subpart A without being required to post and maintain prohibition signs in the field. This change is expected to improve enforceability of motor vehicle operation violations.

In addition, the text on the MVUM will include standardized information on the purpose and content of the map as well as a statement about motorized vehicle operator's responsibilities and fines. The text states, "It is prohibited to possess or operate a motor vehicle on National Forest System lands on the Ashland Ranger District other than in accordance with these designations (36 CFR 261.13). Violations of 36 CFR 261.13 are subject to a fine of up to \$5,000 or imprisonment for up to 6 months or both (18 U.S.C. 3571(e))."

Currently, there is one full-time Law Enforcement Officer (LEO) stationed on the Custer National Forest. The District also has permanent staff trained as Forest Protection Officers (FPO). FPOs have limited law enforcement authority and responsibilities compared to LEOs, but are capable of issuing citations for travel management violations associated with the prohibition created under the 2005 Motorized Travel Rule found at 36 CFR 261.13. Changes in the budget to facilitate increases in law enforcement capability can be accomplished through changes in allocations within Forest budgets, securing additional budget funding from within the Northern Region, or supplementing budgets with grants and similar funds.

Changes in Forest priorities to increase law enforcement capability would most likely occur through two options. First, the Forest can determine which programs, such as developed recreation, travel management enforcement, wildlife, etc., should be emphasized and allocate the funds to accomplish objectives related to those priorities. Another method is to prioritize the work of existing permanent staff so that there is increased emphasis on enforcement of travel management violations.

Given this information and the fact that law enforcement is an administrative rather than biophysical aspect of travel management planning, no further discussion of this issue is included in the EIS.

2.5 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

In response to agency and public issues, two action alternatives were developed. Alternatives A and B were analyzed in detail along with the No Action Alternative. A general description of each of the alternatives is provided below.

Tables 2-2 and 2-3 are intended to provide readers with comparative information about the alternatives that is not strictly focused on changes from no action. For the action alternatives, the figures in the tables represent the total miles available under each table category if that alternative is implemented. The figures used for the No Action Alternative represent the current miles for each of the categories listed.

Table 2-4 summarizes important features and rationale for each of the alternatives. Detailed information on the alternatives is displayed on the comparison maps (see Map Package) and in the route specific tables provided in Appendix C.

2.5.1 ALTERNATIVE A (EXISTING CONDITION)

The Custer National Forest (Forest) developed Alternative A in response to multiple public comments expressing a desire to designate most or all of the motorized routes identified in the 1999-2000 inventory of the District for public motorized use. This alternative consists of routes identified during the 1999-2000 inventory, excluding:

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1. Routes that have been decommissioned, obliterated, or are otherwise unavailable for public motorized use based on documented decisions since 2000.
2. Routes for which the Forest Service has no legal right-of-way for public use. This is necessary to be in compliance with the 2005 Motorized Travel Rule guidance and to make this alternative viable for implementation. These routes were either identified as candidates for decommissioning/obliteration or, if an administrative need was identified, they were proposed for administrative use only. This affects 74 miles of routes.
3. Existing administrative routes, which would remain administrative use only (61 miles).

Consequently, Alternative A includes designating the majority of both system and non-system routes on the District for public motorized use. Primary motorized travelways would either be designated as roads, or where appropriate, as mixed motorized use roads. For the most part, all other routes would be designated as motorized trails. To maximize motorized opportunities, no season of use would be designated on any routes, and motorized trails would be designated for use by all motor vehicles. This alternative approximates the existing condition (e.g. motorized use of existing system and non-system routes).

Designation of motorized trails under this alternative is intended to: 1) expand opportunities for motorized recreation opportunities, and 2) more accurately describe the characteristics and nature of these routes. In other words, routes proposed to be motorized trails do not display characteristics typically associated with roads, such as surfacing, engineering, and prescribed clearing widths. In many cases, the routes were not engineered, do not have any surfacing which has resulted in rutting and no defined drainage, and they may become impassable when wet.

This alternative includes the following types of actions (see Appendix C for route specific actions):

- Add non-system routes as system roads or motorized trails (126 miles – 123 miles for public motorized use and 3 miles for administrative use).
- Do not designate existing system roads for public motorized use or administrative due to no legal public right-of-way or within a Hiking and Riding Area (22 miles).
- Identify system roads for administrative use due to no legal public right-of-way (44 miles).
- Convert system roads to motorized trail (492 miles).
- Designate system roads for mixed motorized use (37 miles).

The 2001 Tri-State OHV Decision authorized dispersed vehicle camping within 300 feet of motorized routes on the District. During the past seven years, the District has not observed unacceptable adverse impacts from this activity that warrants proposing a change to this activity under this alternative.

The tables at the end of this section provide a summary of the elements associated with this alternative (Table 2-4) and a summary of alternative mileages (Tables 2-3 and 2-4). Appendix C provides a list of the route specific actions proposed under this alternative.

This alternative largely reflects an alternative submitted by a combination of organizations that partnered together to develop the alternative (further described in section 2.6.1). Some elements in the partnership's proposal were not included in Alternative A because they were not consistent with guidance related to the 2005 Motorized Travel Rule (e.g. designation of roads with no legal right-of-way).

2.5.2 ALTERNATIVE B (PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE)

Alternative B consists of designating a system of motorized routes that provides the public with motorized recreation opportunities, while addressing resource concerns and recreation opportunity concerns. Primary travelways included in this alternative would be designated as roads, or where appropriate, as mixed motorized use roads, and, for the most part, all other routes would be designated as motorized trails. Designation of motorized trails under this alternative is intended to: 1) expand opportunities for motorized recreation opportunities, and 2) more accurately describe the characteristics and nature of these routes. In other words, routes proposed to be motorized trails do not display characteristics typically associated with roads, such as surfacing, engineering, and prescribed clearing widths. In many cases, the routes were not engineered, do not have any surfacing which has resulted in rutting and no defined drainage, and they may become impassable when wet.

The Forest Service followed this general screening process to develop this alternative:

1. System and non-system routes for which the Forest Service did not have a legal right-of-way for public motorized use were evaluated to determine if administrative use was needed. If needed, the routes were proposed for administrative use, if they were not needed they were identified as candidates for decommissioning or obliteration.
2. Recent decisions on actions within the District were reviewed to insure that any decisions about roads were incorporated.
3. The remaining system and non-system routes were evaluated to determine if there was an administrative, utilization (including recreation), resource, or protection need for the route. If a need existed, system routes were proposed for designation and non-system routes were proposed to be added to the system and designated. If no need was identified, system routes were identified as candidates for decommissioning and non-system routes were identified as candidates for obliteration.
4. At the same time, the Forest Service also assessed whether routes were parallel with each other, i.e. routes that were within ½ mile of each other. Where parallel routes existed, only one route was selected for public motorized designation.
5. Finally, based on public input, a season of use that limited motorized travel in key wildlife security habitat areas during big-game hunting seasons was developed. The purpose of this measure was to provide additional wildlife security and increase opportunities for non-motorized hunting. District personnel identified routes within Forest Plan Management Area D (wildlife emphasis areas) and proposed to enhance wildlife security and non-motorized hunting opportunities during Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks archery and rifle big-game hunting seasons – September 1 to November 30.

This alternative includes the following types of actions (see Appendix C for route specific actions):

- Add non-system routes as system roads or motorized trails (56 miles – 18 miles for public motorized use and 38 miles for administrative use).
- Do not designate existing system roads for public motorized use or administrative use (75 miles).
- Identify system roads for administrative use due to no legal public right-of-way (44 miles) or other resource or administrative concerns (47 miles).
- Convert system roads to motorized trail (392 miles).
- Designate system roads for mixed motorized use (37 miles).
- Designate system motorized trails with a season of use (18 miles).

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The 2001 Tri-State OHV Decision authorized dispersed vehicle camping within 300 feet of motorized routes on the District. During the past seven years, the District has not observed unacceptable adverse impacts from this activity that warrants proposing a change to this activity under this alternative.

Alternative B includes the designation of a combination of roads, mixed motorized use roads, and motorized trails. Because the biophysical effects of mixed motorized use roads and trails are identical, the mix of those types of routes in Alternative B could be changed in the Final EIS in response to public or internal comments related to social or management considerations without altering the biophysical effects, and as long as the overall miles are the same.

The tables at the end of this section provide a summary of the elements associated with this alternative (Table 2-4) and a summary of alternative mileages (Tables 2-3 and 2-4). Appendix C provides a list of the route specific actions proposed under this alternative.

2.5.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

The No Action Alternative consists of designation of the existing system roads¹ on the District. This is different from Alternative A (existing condition) which proposes to designate both existing system and non-system routes. The No Action Alternative also includes the existing vehicle types and seasons of use currently in force on the District (see Table 2-4 for details).

Designation of the existing network of system roads would not require any further NEPA and represents the starting point for any proposed changes to the routes or areas available for public motorized use. Based on this information, no action was determined to be designation of the existing system roads and trails.

System roads that the Forest Service does not have legal right-of-way for public access to use will be included in this alternative, unlike the action alternatives. This is because not designating these system roads would constitute an action, which would be inconsistent with the premise of the No Action Alternative.

¹ The decision to use existing system roads as the foundation for no action stems from 2005 Motorized Travel Rule guidance, including the following:

- The *Travel Management: Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use* guide prepared by the Forest Service to aid in implementing the 2005 Motorized Travel Rule affirms that the starting point for travel analyses is the current network of system roads.
- The *Motor Vehicle Route and Area Designation Guide* (version 111705) states, “There is no need to initiate a NEPA process to designate those NFS roads, NFS trails, and areas on NFS lands that are already managed for motor vehicle use where that use will continue unchanged, or to retain existing restrictions on motor vehicle use.”

Table 2-2. Summary of miles² of roads and trails by alternative.

Route Designation		Alternative A	Alternative B	No Action	
National Forest System Roads and Trails	<i>Designated for public motorized use</i>	Road: All types allowed (motorized mixed use)	37	37	0
		Road: Highway legal vehicles	101	101	676
		Trail: All types allowed	612	405	0
	<i>Subtotal</i>		750	543	676
	<i>Administrative use only</i>		92	175	61
	<i>Total Miles of System Routes</i>		842	718	737
<i>Not designated</i>		22	75	0	
Non-System Routes	<i>Not converted to system roads or trails</i>	19	90	146	
<i>Total Miles of Routes not designated</i>		41	165	146	
Total		883	883	883	

Table 2-3. Miles of system roads and trails designated for public motorized use by proposed season of use designation for each alternative.

Season of Use	Alternative A	Alternative B	No Action
Yearlong	750	525	676
December 1 – August 31 (Provide Non-Motorized Hunting)	0	18	0
<i>Total</i>	750	543	676

² Comparison between tables may not be exact due to rounding error.

Table 2–4. Summary of Elements for Each Alternative

Element	Alternative A (Existing Condition)	Alternative B (Preferred Alternative)	No Action Alternative
Type of Vehicle Designations	<p>In general, primary travelways would be designated as system roads, which are only available for use by highway-legal vehicles.</p> <p>The majority of high clearance vehicle (Maintenance Level 2) roads would be converted to system trails open to all motor vehicles.</p> <p>A limited number of roads would be designated as mixed motorized use where connections between proposed motorized trails were important.</p> <p>(The map package provides a display of the type of vehicle designation for each route.)</p>	Same as Alternative A.	System roads would be designated for use by highway legal vehicles.
Season of Use Designations	Season of use for all designated routes is yearlong.	<p>Season of use for all designated routes is yearlong except for the following seasons of use.</p> <p>December 1-August 31 – Eighteen miles of routes in three locations would have this season of use to provide additional wildlife security and to increase opportunities for non-motorized hunting. See Appendix C and the map package for the specific routes involved.</p>	Same as Alternative A.
Dispersed Vehicle Camping Designations	Access for dispersed vehicle camping would be allowed within 300 feet of all designated system roads and motorized trails on the District.	Same as Alternative A.	Same as Alternative A.
Administrative Use	Roads identified for administrative use are not designated for public motorized use due to the lack of legal right-of-way for public access. Some existing administrative use roads exist at administrative sites and based on past decisions. Appendix C includes all non-system roads that would be converted to system roads and identified for administrative use, as well as any additional system roads that would be identified for administrative use.	Same as Alternative A.	Roads identified for administrative use are not designated for public motorized use based on policy (administrative sites) and past land management decisions. This alternative includes only those roads currently identified for administrative use.

2.5.4 ELEMENTS COMMON TO ALL ALTERNATIVES

2.5.4.1 Administrative Exemptions

Exemptions to off road travel as described in 36 CFR 212.51(a) would be allowed. Exemptions include administrative activities such as law enforcement, fire, emergencies, military operations, noxious weed control, permit activities, and other official business purposes. All such use requires authorization from the appropriate Line Officer, detailing when, where, who, and under what circumstances motorized travel would be allowed.

2.5.4.2 Administrative Sites

System roads associated with administrative sites will not be designated for public motorized use, except those roads that provide access to visitor services.

2.5.4.3 System Roads with Forest Service Maintenance Obligations

System roads that the FS has a legal obligation to maintain will not be removed from the system, but may or may not be designated for public motorized use.

2.5.4.4 Roads Under Permit

In instances of special use permits for ingress/egress to private inholdings, a road will generally be designated for public motorized use when the Forest Service has road maintenance responsibilities. In instances of road use permits, a road may be closed to public use when the permit holder is assigned road maintenance responsibilities.

2.5.4.5 No Legal Right-of-Way for Public Access

Routes that the Forest Service has no legal right-of-way for public motorized access will not be designated for public motorized use.

2.5.4.6 Designated Routes Required to be Part of the National Forest System

In accordance with the 2005 Motorized Travel Rule, only system routes can be designated for public motorized use. If motorized routes that are currently non-system roads are desired for motorized use, an action is required to add them to National Forest transportation system.

2.5.4.7 Dispersed Vehicle Camping Authorized Only on National Forest System Lands

Under Alternatives that allow access for dispersed vehicle camping within 300 feet of a motorized route, access is only authorized on NFS lands, not on private, state, or other federal lands that may be within 300 feet of designated routes.

2.5.4.8 Implementation

In order to implement this project, the 2005 Motorized Travel Rule requires the Forest to make a Motor Vehicle Use Map available to the public, free of charge. The Forest also expects to install signs on all designated routes, undertake an estimated two year education campaign regarding new travel management direction and rules, and patrolling. These activities, other than publishing the MVUM, may vary in extent subject to the availability of funding.

Until the Record of Decision (ROD) for this project is implemented, the current decisions for the existing network of system roads remain in effect. The ROD and its implementation will supercede the existing network of motorized system roads when the Motor Vehicle Use Map is published and any associated orders are in place.

Sign purchase and installation is a one time cost, but the remaining costs such as patrolling and Motor Vehicle Use Map production would be incurred annually. Annual funding levels are subject to variation.

2.6 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT DROPPED FROM DETAILED ANALYSIS

Federal agencies are required by NEPA to rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives and to briefly discuss the reasons for eliminating any alternatives that were not developed in detail (40 CFR 1502.14). Public comments received in response to the Proposed Action provided suggestions for alternative methods for achieving the purpose and need. Some of these alternatives may have been outside the scope of travel management, duplicative of the alternatives considered in detail, incorporated into alternatives considered in detail, determined to be components that would cause unnecessary environmental harm, or are already addressed by law, regulation or policy. Therefore, a number of alternatives were considered, but dismissed from detailed consideration for the reasons summarized below.

2.6.1 PARTNERSHIP ALTERNATIVE

This commentor-submitted alternative was intended to maximize motorized recreation opportunities on the District, and would have included designation of the majority of the routes in the District. Fourteen organizations partnered to develop this alternative. The organizations are:

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| Treasure State ATV | Great Falls Trail Bike Riders Association |
| Rimrock 4X4 Inc. | Park City Recreation Association |
| Treasure State Alliance | Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Association |
| Billings Motorcycle Club | Families For Outdoor Recreation |
| Laurel Rod and Gun Club | Magic City 4 Wheelers Inc. |
| Colstrip ATV Association | Great Falls Trail Bike Riders Association |
| Colstrip Gun Club | Park City Recreation Association |
| Citizens for Balanced Use | Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Association |
| Custer Rod and Gun Club | Families For Outdoor Recreation |

Alternative A is similar to this alternative; however the alternative included designation of routes for which the Forest Service has no legal right-of-way for public access. Consequently, the alternative, as submitted, has been dropped since it does not comply with the 2005 Motorized Travel Rule guidance.

Alternative A is intended to reflect the concerns identified in the submitted alternative while also complying with the 2005 Motorized Travel Rule guidance.

2.6.2 SEPARATE MOTORIZED AND NON-MOTORIZED USES

The public suggested separating or zoning motorized and non-motorized use on the District to reduce user conflicts. Zoning areas by type of use or similar management prescription is more appropriate for land management planning. This analysis is focused on the designation and use of motorized routes (roads and trails), rather than prescriptive land use direction that would require a significant amendment of current Forest Plan land use direction which is beyond the scope of this analysis.

2.6.3 ESTABLISH TRIGGERS FOR ROUTE CLOSURES

Commenters suggested that “triggers” and responses should be established “when user created routes are illegally established”, or if there are excessive resource impacts. First, the Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) establishes those routes available for public motorized use. Any use that is not in compliance with the MVUM is illegal. No additional trigger is necessary to enforce public motorized use on the District.

The 2005 Motorized Travel Rule requires National Forests to monitor the effects of travel management decisions and use in accordance with Forest Plans where decisions are implemented. The Forest Plan for the Custer includes monitoring of travel management decisions. This travel management decision, whichever alternative is selected, would be implemented in compliance with the Forest Plan. This monitoring is intended to serve as the trigger for changing or modifying travel management decisions due to unacceptable resource impacts.

2.6.4 ADMINISTRATIVE ROUTES BE DESIGNATED FOR PUBLIC MOTORIZED USE

There are multiple reasons why routes are proposed for administrative use only. They include concerns such as vandalism of facilities or cultural resources and lack of a legal right-of-way for public use. However, there may be a need for occasional administrative use of the route for activities such as maintaining facilities. Maintaining these routes for administrative use is especially important where disposal of the route would then have required cross-country vehicle travel, a practice discouraged by the agency, to accomplish the administrative work.

It is neither practical or, in some cases, in compliance with agency guidance to allow public use on routes identified for administrative use.

2.6.5 DO NOT DESIGNATE ROAD #4797

One commenter indicated that road #4797 should not be designated because it goes through riparian areas and across a dam. Field observations indicate that the route does not go through any riparian areas. The route does cross a portion of the dam for the Three X Bar Reservoir. This route has gone over the dam for many years and there are no signs of rutting or other cause for concern based on field observations of both engineering and range staff on the Forest. Given this information and the importance of this route for access to the area, the Forest does not intend to modify or create an alternative based on this comment.

2.6.6 *ROUTES SHOULD NOT BE DESIGNATED ON HIGHLY ERODIBLE SOILS, RIPARIAN AREAS, WETLANDS, WET MEADOWS, AND EPHEMERAL PONDS*

There are bands of highly erodible soils throughout the District. Numerous routes intersect these bands for varied distances. It would not be practical to eliminate all routes or portions of routes on highly erodible soils, and have a functioning network of routes to adequately administer, utilize, and protect District lands and resources.

The District has attempted to avoid designating routes that may have adverse impacts on soil, hydrologic, or aquatic resources, although short portions of routes may traverse some of the features mentioned in the comment. In some cases, hardening, surfacing, or other measures are in place to minimize impacts. Locations of route segments that would be improved by implementing similar measures will be considered for addition to the list of opportunities contained in Appendix D of the environmental document. Finally, the effects of route designation on the resources mentioned above will be evaluated and disclosed in the environmental document.

2.7 COMPARISON OF EFFECTS

Tables 2-6 and (found at the end of the chapter) provides a summary of the effects of implementing each alternative. Information in Table 2-6 is focused on activities and effects where different levels of effects or outputs can be distinguished quantitatively or qualitatively among alternatives.

2.8 MONITORING

Information collected through monitoring and through public user groups and individuals will be used in evaluating and revising travel management decisions. The designations identified on the motor vehicle use map are subject to revision based on this information.

The goal of travel management monitoring is to determine how well travel management is working and what is not working, and to help identify what changes are needed in travel management or monitoring methods. Monitoring and evaluation tell how travel management decisions have been implemented and how effective the implementation has proven to be in accomplishing the desired outcomes.

The travel management monitoring plan will be tiered to Forest Plan monitoring activities. Each year's monitoring plan will be adapted as needed based on changing needs, findings, and budget levels. The results of the monitoring plan will be evaluated annually, and based on the findings, potential solutions will be developed and adjustments to the motorized use map may be made.

Implementation monitoring will be based on compliance with the Travel Management decision. Effectiveness monitoring may be conducted by sampling a range of projects from the entire Ashland Ranger District as outlined in the Forest Plan monitoring section. The Forest will utilize an adaptive monitoring plan to allow flexibility for changing budgets and staff levels and for monitoring results. The following table outlines Forest Plan criteria for evaluating the effects of effects of off-road vehicle use and damage.

Table 2-5. Forest Plan Monitoring Items Relevant for Travel Management

Monitoring Item	Data Source	Monitoring Objective	Variability Which Would Initiate Further Evaluation	Corrective Measures
Off-road-vehicle use and damage and Travel Plan effectiveness. (A-3).	Travel Plan (violation and incident reports, number of variances granted).	To determine compliance with travel plan direction (and, therefore, effectiveness in achieving resource protection objectives). To assist in determination of effectiveness of restriction methods, public understanding of travel plan direction.	Conflicts with Forest Management Area goals.	Review situation for change in implementation techniques such as signing, barriers, public contacts, etc.

If, based on monitoring pursuant to 36 CFR 212.57, the Forest Supervisor or other responsible official determines that motor vehicle use on a National Forest System road or National Forest System trail or in an area on National Forest System lands is causing or will cause considerable adverse effects on public safety or soil, vegetation, wildlife, wildlife habitat, or cultural or historic resources associated with that road, trail, or area, the Forest Supervisor or other responsible official shall immediately close that road, trail, or area to motor vehicle use until the official determines that such adverse effects have been mitigated or eliminated and that measures have been implemented to prevent future recurrence.

2.9 FOREST SERVICE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The Forest Service preferred alternative is Alternative B. Alternative B is the “preferred” alternative based on Responsible Official and interdisciplinary team deliberations. This alternative provides the road system necessary for the administration, utilization, and administration of the District. It also appears to respond best to the significant issue of providing a range of recreation opportunities, by providing more non-motorized hunting opportunities than Alternative A or the No Action Alternative while still maintaining ample opportunities for motorized recreation. Environmental impacts would also generally be reduced under Alternative B when compared to Alternative A and the No Action Alternative.

The Responsible Official (the Custer Forest Supervisor) may select any combination of travel management actions as presented and analyzed within this document.

Table 2-6. Comparison of Effects by Alternative

Feature	Alternative A	Alternative B	No Action Alternative
Recreation			
Motorized Recreation Opportunity			
Acres of Roaded Natural ROS (During SOU ³ /Outside SOU)	114,108/NA	114,027/114,027	116,928/NA
Acres of Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS (During SOU/Outside SOU)	353,204/NA	350,498/339,722	354,851/NA
Miles of motorized roads and trails (During SOU/Outside SOU)	750/NA	543/525	676/NA
Non-Motorized Recreation Opportunity			
Acres of Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS (During SOU/Outside SOU)	34,947/NA	37,735/48,509	30,480/NA
Opportunity for Off-Highway Vehicle Operation			
Miles of Mixed Use System Roads	37	37	0
Miles of Motorized System Trails	612	405	0
Total Miles available for Off-Highway Vehicle Operation	649	442	0
Cultural Resources			
Number of Sites potentially affected (directly and indirectly)	178	113	N/A
Number of Cultural Landscapes potentially affected	0	0	N/A
Number of Traditional Cultural Properties – Culturally Sensitive potentially affected within the project area.	31	19	N/A
Wildlife			
Threatened or Endangered Wildlife Species			
Number of species with No Jeopardy	1	1	1
Number of species with potential to effect, but not likely to adversely affect.	1	1	1
Number of species with potential to effect, and likely to adversely affect	0	0	0
Sensitive Wildlife Species			
Number of Species with Beneficial Impact	0	0	0
Number of Species with No Impact	13	13	13
Number of Species with potential to effect individuals or Habitat but will not Likely Contribute to a trend towards Federal Listing or Loss of Viability to the Population or Species	9	9	9
Number of Species likely to result in a trend to Federal listing or loss of viability	0	0	0
Management Indicator Species			
Number of Species with Positive Effects	0	0	0
Number of Species with Neutral Effects	16	16	16
Number of Species with Negative Effects	0	0	0
Elk			
Motorized Route Density (miles per square mile) (SOU/Non-SOU)	1.09/NA	0.83/0.80	1.00/NA
Percent secure habitat within elk habitat	28.33/NA	36.25/37.69	24.90/NA
General Wildlife			
Percent of Land Unit that is core wildlife habitat (based on motorized routes)	22%	28%	18%

³ SOU = Season of Use

Table 2-6. Comparison of Effects by Alternative

Feature	Alternative A	Alternative B	No Action Alternative
Water Quality, Fisheries, and Aquatics			
Miles of actions that reduce risks to water resources within the project area	59	201	0
Miles of actions that increase risks to water resources within the project area	121	17	0
Sensitive Fish and Amphibian Species			
Number of Species with No Impact or Beneficial Impacts	3	5	3
Number of Species with potential to effect individuals or Habitat but will not Likely Contribute to a trend towards Federal Listing or Loss of Viability to the Population or Species	2	0	2
Number of Species likely to result in a trend to Federal listing or loss of viability	0	0	0
Recreational Fish Species and Rare Macroinvertebrates			
Number of Species with No Impact or Beneficial Impacts	0	2	0
Number of Species with potential to effect individuals or Habitat but will not Likely Contribute to a trend towards Federal Listing or Loss of Viability to the Population or Species	2	0	2
Soils			
High/Very High Erosion Hazard Rating			
Miles of Motorized Routes designated for public use	484	338	428
Medium Erosion Hazard Rating			
Miles of Motorized Routes designated for public use.	252	196	239
Vegetation			
Moderate Risk Areas - Motorized Routes			
Acres Potential Frequent Use Areas (% of Project Area)	20 (Trace)	10 (Trace)	20 (Trace)
Acres Potential Infrequent Use Areas (% of Project Area)	773 (Trace)	403 (Trace)	686 (Trace)
Miles in Moderate Risk Area	9	4	8
Weeds Susceptibility			
Weed Susceptible Acres within designated road corridor	62,717	46,665	57,606
Weed Infestation			
Total Infested Acres within Motorized Route potentially affected corridor	1869	1646	1811
Sensitive Plants			
Number of Species with No Impact	2	2	2
Number of Species with potential to effect individuals or Habitat but will not Likely Contribute to a trend towards Federal Listing or Loss of Viability to the Population or Species	1	1	1
Number of Species likely to result in a trend to Federal listing or loss of viability	0	0	0

NA = Not Applicable

Table 2-7. Summary of Changes in Effects Compared to the No Action Alternative

Feature	Alternative A	Alternative B
Recreation		
Motorized Recreation Opportunity		
Acres of Roaded Natural ROS (During SOU ⁴ /Outside SOU)	Reduced by 2820 acres/ Reduced by 2820 acres	Reduced by 2901 acres/ Reduced by 2901 acres
Acres of Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS (During SOU/Outside SOU)	Increased by 1647 acres/ Increased by 1647 acres	Increased by 4353 acres/ Reduced by 15,129 acres
Miles of motorized roads and trails (During SOU/Outside SOU)	Increased by 74 miles/ Increased by 74 miles	Reduced by 133 miles/ Reduced by 151 miles
Non-Motorized Recreation Opportunity		
Acres of Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized ROS (During SOU/Outside SOU)	Increased by 4467/ Increased by 4467 acres	Increased by 7255/ Increased by 18,029 acres
Opportunity for Off-Highway Vehicle Operation		
Miles of Mixed Use System Roads	Increased by 37 miles	Increased by 37 miles
Miles of Motorized System Trails	Increased by 612 miles	Increased by 405 miles
Total Miles available for Off-Highway Vehicle Operation	Increased by 649 miles	Increased by 442 miles
Resources		
Number of Sites potentially affected (directly and indirectly)	Increase of 178 sites potentially affected	Increase of 113 sites potentially affected
Number of Cultural Landscapes potentially affected	None affected	None affected
Number of Traditional Cultural Properties-Culturally Sensitive potentially affected within the project area.	Increase of 31 properties potentially affected	Increase of 19 properties potentially affected
Wildlife		
Threatened or Endangered Wildlife Species		
Number of species with No Jeopardy	No change; no species jeopardized	
Number of species with potential to effect, but not likely to adversely affect.	No change; Actions are not likely to adversely affect the single species analyzed	
Sensitive Wildlife Species		
Change from the No Action Alternative	No Change; Actions are not likely to result in a trend to Federal listing or loss of viability	
Management Indicator Species		
Change from the No Action Alternative	No Change; Actions are not likely to negatively effect species	
Deer & Elk		
Motorized Route Density in miles per square mile (SOU/Non-SOU)	Density increase by 9% / Density increase by 9%	Density decreases by 17% / Density decreases by 20%
Percent secure habitat within elk habitat (SOU/Non-SOU)	Increase of 3% / Increase of 3%	Increase of 11% / Increase of 13%
General Wildlife		
Percent of District that is core wildlife habitat (based on motorized routes)	Increase of 4%	Increase of 10%
Water Quality, Fisheries, and Aquatics		
Water Quality		
Miles of actions that reduce risks on routes within the project area	59 miles of actions reducing risks	201 miles of actions reducing risks
Miles of actions that increase risks on routes within the project area	121 miles of actions increasing risks	17 miles of actions increasing risks

⁴ SOU = Season of Use

Table 2-7. Summary of Changes in Effects Compared to the No Action Alternative

Feature	Alternative A	Alternative B
Sensitive Aquatic Species		
Change from No Action Alternative	No change	Changes two species from May Impact to No Impact
Recreational Fish Species and Rare Macroinvertebrates		
Change from No Action Alternative	No change	Changes species from May Impact to No Impact
Soils		
High/Very High Erosion Hazard Rating		
Miles of Motorized Routes designated for public use	Increase of 56 miles	Decrease of 90 miles
Medium Erosion Hazard Rating		
Miles of Motorized Routes designated for public use.	Increase of 13 miles	Decrease of 43 miles
Vegetation		
Moderate Risk Areas - Motorized Routes		
Acres Potential Frequent Use Areas	No Change	Decrease of 10 acres
Acres Potential Infrequent Use Areas	Increase of 87 acres	Decrease of 283 acres
Miles in High Risk Area	Increase of 1 miles	Decrease of 4 miles
Weeds Susceptibility		
Weed Susceptible Acres within designated road corridor	Increase of 5111 acres	Decrease of 10,941 acres
Weed Infestation		
Total Infested Acres within Motorized Route potentially affected corridor	58 additional acres	165 fewer acres
Sensitive Plants		
Change from No Action Alternative	No change; Actions are not likely to result in a trend to Federal listing or loss of viability	

Chapter 2: Public Participation, Issues and Alternatives

- End of Chapter 2 -