

United States  
Department of Agriculture

Forest Service



Flathead National Forest

December 2003

# Amendment 24

## Winter Motorized Recreation



# Final Environmental Impact Statement



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### *Final Environmental Impact Statement*

Flathead National Forest  
Flathead, Lake, Lincoln, and Missoula Counties, Montana

December 2003

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**Abstract:** Six alternatives for managing winter motorized recreation on the Flathead National Forest were identified and analyzed, including a “no action” alternative (Alternative 1). Additional alternatives were considered but not given detailed study. The range of alternatives defines different ways to respond to issues. Activities in each alternative include defining the area where snowmobiling would or would not be allowed. None of the alternatives propose motorized access in places where it has not traditionally occurred, and all action alternatives decrease the area open to winter motorized use.

**Alternative 1 - No Action Alternative.** - No amendment to the Forest Plan would be initiated at this time. The snowmobiling season within the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem would be open from November 15 through March 15. Winter motorized access would be programmatically allowed on 1,142,000 acres of the Forest.

**Alternative 2 - (Proposed Action)** - Winter motorized access would be based on the Settlement Agreement Maps, which allow snowmobiling in some portions of MA 2A and prohibit snowmobiling in some portions of MA 2B. Winter motorized access would be allowed on 784,400 acres. The snowmobiling season within the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem would be open from November 15 through March 15.

**Alternative 3** -- Winter motorized access would be allowed on 793,600 acres. Snowmobiling would be allowed in some portions of MA 2A and prohibited in some portions of MA 2B. Using Alternative 2 as a base, acreage was added to Alternative 3 to allow local access between parcels of privately owned land and to consolidate use polygons. The snowmobiling season within the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem would be open from December 1 through April 30.

**Alternative 4 - (Environmentally preferred)** - Winter motorized access would be limited to 763,500 acres to better meet wildlife needs. The snowmobiling season within the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem would be open from December 1 through March 31 to reflect typical bear denning season in northwest Montana.

**Alternative 5** - Winter motorized access would be prohibited in Management Area 2A across the Forest, and allowed in Management Area 2B. Winter motorized access would be allowed on 1,035,600 acres. The snowmobiling season within the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem would be open from November 15 through March 15.

**Alternative 6- (Preferred)**- Winter motorized access would be allowed on 787,150 acres. Snowmobiling would be allowed in some portions of MA 2A and prohibited in some portions of MA 2B. Using Alternative 2 as a base, acreage was added to Alternative 6 to allow local access between parcels of privately owned land and to consolidate use polygons. The snowmobiling season within the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem would generally be open from December 1 through March 31, with individually identified areas with extended dates for spring snowmobile use.

The full text of the FEIS and Maps of the Alternatives are on the CD-Rom attached to the inside back cover of this document. Open the readme.txt file on the CD for instructions. The FEIS and the Maps of the Alternatives are available online at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/flathead/>, as well as local libraries.

### **Notes and Disclaimers to Reviewers:**

**Comments:** A precedent established in court obliges reviewers participating in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process to alert the Forest Service to their concerns in a meaningful way. Another legal precedent has been set that has established that environmental objections may be waived if they are not raised until after completion of the Record of Decision.

Reviewers should provide the Forest Service with their comments during the review period of the environmental impact statement. This will enable the Forest Service to analyze the comments at one time and to use information acquired in the preparation of the decision. Reviewers have an obligation to structure their participation in the National Environmental Policy Act process so that it is meaningful and alerts the agency to the reviewers' position and contentions. Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDC, 435 U.S. 519, 553 (1978).

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If a map contains contours, these contours were generated and filtered using the Digital Elevation Model (DEM) files. Any contours generated from DEMs using a scale of less than 1:100,000 will lead to less reliable results and should only be used for display purposes.