

# **Recreation, Wilderness, and Range**

# Introduction

The Cooney McKay Project Area is characterized by the checkerboard ownership of the Swan Valley. This ownership pattern has lead to a dispersed pattern of recreational activities within the project area and in the adjacent Bob Marshall Wilderness, located outside the project area. There are no Range Allotments operating within the Cooney McKay Project Area.

# Analysis Area

## Spatial Bounds

The analysis area for determining direct, indirect, and cumulative effects for recreation, wilderness, and range resources are the lands within the Cooney McKay Project Area boundary. It is on these lands that all proposed activities would take place, and where effects to these resources, if any, would most likely occur.

## Temporal Bounds

The effects are limited to the operational period of the proposed action, including any post activity treatments.

## Affected Environment

# Recreation

The lands within the Cooney McKay Project boundary are perhaps best characterized making use of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS). The lands can be considered roaded, natural in appearance, and provide both motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities.

## **Developed Sites**

One developed recreation site is found within the project area, the Old Condon Ranger Station. The Old Condon Ranger Station is eligible for the National Historic Register and is currently being converted to a recreational cabin rental for overnight use by the general public.

## **Dispersed Use**

The project area contains several Forest Roads, which recreationists use for dispersed activities during the summer and winter such as camping, driving for pleasure, wildlife watching, hiking access, picnicking, huckleberry picking, firewood gathering, hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, cross country skiing, or just the opportunity to be outdoors.

## **Administrative Facilities**

The Condon Work Center is located on Highway 83, which houses Forest Service Field Crews during the summer. The Swan Ecosystem Center also has an office located in the Work Center. The Swan Ecosystem Center helps the Forest Service maintain an on-the-ground presence by generating funds and sharing operating costs to keep the Work Center open. The Swan Ecosystem center operates an office and visitor center in the facility. Staff and volunteers sell maps and firewood permits, and they provide information about area trails and recreation.

## **Access Management**

### **A. Trails**

The following table depicts the summer trails and their existing travel management within the project area.

**TABLE 3-50.  
TRAILS WITHIN THE COONEY MCKAY PROJECT AREA**

Trail Name - #	Mileage in Project Area	Access Management
Smith Creek Pass #29	5.0 miles	Non-motorized
East Foothill #192	6.0 miles	Non-motorized

The Smith Creek Pass Trailhead provides parking and stock handling facilities for trail access to the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Use of the trailhead is fairly light compared to nearby trailheads outside the project area and is primarily used by a permitted outfitter and guide operation. The lower portion of the trail located in Section 2 and is closed yearlong to ATVs and Motorcycles and open yearlong to bicycles, carts, wagons, pack animals, and hikers. The upper portion starting in Section 22 is located within a Swan Front Area Closure and is only open yearlong to pack animals and hikers.

The East Foothill Trail #192 provides a connector trail from the Cooney Lookout to the north side of Holland Lake. This trail is used primarily during the fall by hunters and winter by cross-country skiers. This trail is closed yearlong to ATVs and Motorcycles and open yearlong to bicycles, carts, wagons, pack animals, and hikers.

The system trails accessed by the existing open roads in the project area can be accomplished as a day hike by the average hiker.

### **B. Roads**

In general, driving for pleasure is one of the most popular recreation activities. Wheeled motorized access on forest roads also provides users access for hiking, firewood gathering, hunting, fishing, camping, huckleberry picking, ATV/motorcycle riding, wildlife viewing, stock use, and just appreciating their National Forests from a vehicle.

Within the project area, there are approximately 28 miles of either open yearlong or seasonally open road available to wheeled motorized use.

### **C. Winter Motorized Use**

The Flathead National Forest Winter Motorized Recreation Plan Record of Decision was signed November 17, 2006. This plan designates winter-motorized routes, play areas, and seasons for snowmobile recreation throughout the Flathead National Forest depicted on the Over the Snow Motor Vehicle Use Map, March 2007 (Project File Exhibit M-1). Snowmobiling in the project area is restricted to open roads with conditions permitting and road templates that are open December 1st to March 31st on NFS lands, which are designated on the Over the Snow Motor Vehicle Use Map.

## Wilderness

The Cooney McKay Project Area is adjacent to lands designated as proposed wilderness in the Draft Flathead National Forest Plan.

## Range

There are no active range allotments in the project area but one range allotment is located adjacent to the project area to the south. The Barber Creek Allotment currently supports the grazing of 25 cow/calf pairs.

# **Environmental Consequences**

The Cooney McKay Project consists of three action alternatives and a No Action Alternative. The alternatives are described in detail in Chapter 2 of this DEIS. The Cumulative Effects Worksheets, located in the Recreation, Wilderness, and Range Project Files (Project File Section M) consider and describe proposed activities in addition to the past, current, and reasonably foreseeable activities listed at the beginning of this chapter in Tables 3-1 and 3-2. Please refer to these worksheets for more detailed discussion on cumulative effects.

## **Alternative 1 – No Action Direct and Indirect Effects**

Under this alternative, no new management actions would occur. The project area is used for year round motorized and non-motorized recreation such as driving for pleasure, huckleberry picking, camping, hiking, and just enjoying the natural environment. In general, recreation would continue as it is now under current management direction. The Old Condon Ranger Station and dispersed recreation pursuits would be unaffected if Alternative 1 were implemented. There would be no changes to the existing access management to trailheads, wheeled motorized use, and snowmobile seasons. Harvest, fuel reduction treatments, and ecosystem burning would not take place thereby resulting in no affect to recreationists in the short term.

Alternative 1 would not affect the wilderness values in the adjacent Bob Marshall Wilderness.

No Range Allotments would be affected by Alternative 1.

### **Effects Common to All Action Alternatives Direct and Indirect Effects**

None of the alternatives would significantly affect recreation opportunities in the Cooney McKay Project Area. The general nature of effects to recreational opportunities can be characterized as short-term disturbance that is limited in scope. Logging or burning operations may displace recreationists, be they hunters, hikers, or recreational road users, during operational periods. There are no new system roads proposed in the action alternatives. The existing roads providing access to private land and to the general forest area would not change. Firewood and other forest products gathering opportunities would remain the same in all action alternatives. There would be a small amount of new temporary road constructed for timber removal; however, these would be immediately reclaimed and would not create a noticeable change in access. The indirect effects of increased traffic from timber management operations, including road maintenance such as BMPs on roads due to the proposed activities would be short-term.

The Old Condon Ranger Station would be unaffected by the action alternatives. There would be no changes to the existing access management to trailheads, wheeled motorized use, and snowmobile seasons.

Although short in duration and intensity, recreationists in the Bob Marshall Wilderness could be directly affected by having their visibility and air quality impaired by smoke produced by prescribed burning.

No range allotments or grazing authorizations would be affected by any of the action alternatives.

### **Cumulative Effects**

Cumulative effects could result from the local and visiting populations that are increasing in the project area. Their desire for recreation activities such as camping, hunting, fishing, huckleberry picking, firewood gathering, hiking, and biking is also increasing. The collective effect of these activities can result in overlapping the recreationists onto the same area, trails, and roads. The cumulative results are increased maintenance and repairs on facilities, roads, and trails, providing for health and safety issues, and overall people management.

## **Regulatory Framework and Consistency**

This analysis tiers to the Forest Plan, Forest Plan EIS, and ROD, as amended. Chapter 2 of the Forest Plan establishes forest-wide recreation, wilderness, and range goals and standards. This project is consistent with Forest Plan direction for management of recreation, wilderness, and range resources.