

# Recreation, Wilderness, and Range

## Introduction

The Hemlock Elk Project Area is characterized by the checkerboard ownership of the Swan Valley. This ownership pattern has led to a dispersed pattern of recreational activities within the project area and in the Mission Mountain Wilderness. There are no range allotments operating within the Hemlock Elk 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 Hemlock Elk 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 Hemlock Elk Project Area 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:** There are no developed recreation sites found within the project area.
- **Dispersed Use:** The project area contains several 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. Kraft Creek Road #561 along the southern boundary of the project area is a popular route for access to three major trailheads.
- **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 provide information about area trails and recreation.

▪ **Access Management**

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

**TABLE 3-60.  
 TRAILS WITHIN THE HEMLOCK ELK PROJECT AREA**

Trail Name - #	Mileage in Project Area	Access Management
Mollman Lakes Trail # 301	~ 11 Miles	wilderness non-motorized/non-mechanized
Hemlock Peak # 515	4.6 miles	wilderness non-motorized/non-mechanized
Hemlock Lake Trail # 607	4.6 miles	wilderness non-motorized/non-mechanized
Hemlock Feeder Trail # 695	0.3 miles	wilderness non-motorized/non-mechanized

The Mollman Lakes Trail is little used due to its long length and difficult access. The trailhead is located on a road now closed yearlong to motor vehicles making access difficult. Mileage from the closest open roads to the pass and wilderness boundary is approximately 11 miles. Use of the trail is very light, with a few stock parties and backpacking parties per year. One outfitter currently makes one trip per summer to Mollman Lakes with approximately four guests for four days. The trail is open to foot and horse traffic only, closed to motorized and mechanized (bicycles) uses.

The Hemlock Peak and Lakes trail system is found off the Kraft Creek Road and is characterized by the passing through the burn area from the 2003 Crazy Horse Fire. Due to their relatively short length and the presence of scenic lakes, the trails see moderate levels of visitor use. These trails are also open to foot and horse traffic only, and are closed to motorized and mechanized uses.

**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 72 miles of either open yearlong or seasonally open road (FDRs and private roads) available to wheeled motorized use.

**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-3). As designated on the 2008 Over the Snow Motor Vehicle Use Map, the project area (with the exception of the Mission Mountains Wilderness) is open to snowmobiling, conditions permitting, from December 1 to March 31 on NFS lands.

**Wilderness**

The Hemlock Elk Project Area includes lands in the Mission Mountains Wilderness, though no treatments or actions are planned within the wilderness.

**Range**

There are no grazing allotments within the project boundary. Actively stocked grazing allotments exist to the north and south of the project boundary.

## Environmental Consequences

The Hemlock Elk Proposal has three action alternatives and a No Action Alternative. The alternatives are described in detail in Chapter 2 of this EA. The Cumulative Effects Worksheet (Project File Exhibit M-2) considers and describes proposed activities in addition to the past, current, and reasonably foreseeable activities listed at the beginning of this chapter. Please refer to these worksheets for more detailed discussion on cumulative effects.

### **Alternative A – 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 developed and dispersed recreation pursuits would be unaffected if Alternative A were implemented. There would be no changes to the existing access management to trailheads, wheeled motorized use, and snowmobile seasons. Harvest and fuel reduction treatments would not take place, thereby resulting in no affect to recreationists in the short term.

Alternative A would not affect the wilderness values in the nearby Mission Mountains Wilderness. No range allotments would be affected by Alternative A.

### **Alternatives B, C, and D Direct and Indirect Effects**

None of the alternatives would significantly affect recreation opportunities in the Hemlock Elk 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 promptly 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 BMP work on roads due to the proposed activities would be short-term.

There would be no changes to the existing access management to trailheads, wheeled motorized use, and snowmobile seasons.

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.