

Recreation, Wilderness, and Range

Introduction

The Mid Swan 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 and Bob Marshall Wilderness Areas. There is one range allotment operating within the Mid Swan 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 Mid Swan 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 Mid Swan 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. The boat launch area at Piper Creek Bridge, within Unit 24 is also a relatively popular dispersed site which has been affected by the blowdown.
- Lion Creek Road #9769 is a popular route for access to the Lion Creek Palisade Trailhead #25, which originates in the project area. The Piper Creek Road #966 is used for access to the Piper Creek Trailhead #119, which originates outside the project area.
- **Administrative Facilities:** There are no Administrative Facilities located within the project area.

Access Management

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

TABLE 3-62
 TRAILS WITHIN THE MID SWAN PROJECT AREA

Trail Name - #	Mileage in Project Area	Access Management
Lion Creek Palisade Trail #25	~ 0.75 Miles	Wilderness Non-motorized/Non-mechanized

The Lion Creek Trail is primarily used by an outfitter for hunting access into the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Light use also occurs with backpacking parties. The trailhead is on Lion Creek Road #9769, which is open yearlong to motor vehicles. Mileage from the trailhead to the pass and wilderness boundary is approximately 10 miles with one additional mile to Palisade Lake. This is a dead end trail as it is not passable beyond Palisade Lake. The trail is open yearlong to foot, bicycle, and horse traffic only, and closed yearlong to motorized 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 11.9 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-20). As designated on the 2008 Over the Snow Motor Vehicle Use Map, the project area is open to snowmobiling, conditions permitting, from December 1 to March 31 on NFS lands.

Wilderness

The Mid Swan Project Area does not include any lands within the Bob Marshall or Mission Mountain Wilderness Areas.

Range

A portion of the Piper Creek Allotment lies within the boundary of the Mid Swan Salvage Project Area. The allotment permit allows 5 cow/calf pairs on NFS lands from June 1 through September 30. This allotment is described in detail in the South Swan Grazing Allotments EA (Project File Exhibit R-11). Existing conditions have not changed substantially since that 2004 Analysis.

Environmental Consequences

The Mid Swan 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 largely unaffected if Alternative A were implemented. The exceptions being that use of the dispersed launching and camping site near the Piper Creek Bridge in Unit 24 would remain affected by blowdown trees, with some disruption of use of the site. Additionally there may be some localized changes in dispersed activities such as hunting and berry picking as recreationists encounter localized heavy concentrations of blowdown. There would be no changes to the existing access management to trailheads, wheeled motorized use, and snowmobile seasons. Harvest treatments would not take place, thereby resulting largely only in the specific affects described above to recreationists in the short term.

Alternative A would not affect the wilderness values in the nearby Bob Marshall and Mission Mountains Wilderness Areas.

The management of the Piper Creek Allotment would continue as authorized in the South Swan Grazing Allotments Environmental Assessment and Decision Notice of 2004 (Project File Exhibit R-11). No timber harvest would occur with this alternative so existing cattle access would be unaffected except for some localized impact to the grazing and travel paths of cattle to the extent concentrations of blowdown impede travel. Forage production would not be improved through vegetation management activities. The exclusion of fire would increase the risk of stand-replacement fire within the project area. A major fire within the allotment could, in the short term, affect the availability of the allotment to be used by cattle. However, in the long term, a major fire would improve the availability of transitory range.

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

None of the alternatives would significantly affect recreation opportunities in the Mid Swan Project Area, with the possible exception that Alternatives B and C could improve the usability of the dispersed site at the Piper Creek Bridge within Unit 24 by removing the trees which have fallen on or adjacent to the site. Beyond this localized impact, 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 salvage 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.

The Piper Creek Allotment or grazing authorizations would not be affected by any of the action alternatives.

***Alternatives B, C, and D
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.