



NEWS RELEASE

United States
Department of Agriculture

Forest Service
Helena National Forest
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FOREST SERVICE OPEN HOUSES TO DISCUSS WINTER TRAVEL PLANNING

HELENA, MONT., September 8, 2006— Officials with the Helena National Forest will be hosting two open house meetings to kick-off planning efforts for motorized and nonmotorized winter recreation. Specifically the planning effort will only analyze winter travel in the Blackfoot and North Divide landscape areas. The first meeting will be held at the Lincoln Community Center from 4-7 p.m. on Thursday September 14th. The Helena meeting will be held the following week on September 26th from 4-6 p.m. at the Lewis and Clark County Library conference room.

The Lincoln and Helena Ranger Districts are preparing a Blackfoot and North Divide Winter Travel Plan Environmental Assessment. The purpose of this planning effort is to implement a plan that has support from both the motorized and non-motorized users which can be successfully implemented, easily understood by recreationists, and more enforceable with delineations between motorized and non-motorized use. The establishment of non-motorized use will benefit various natural resources including wildlife habitat, wildlife populations as well as ensure quality winter quiet areas and protection of pristine areas. Implementation of motorized areas will benefit users with lands that provide a high quality experience of both a trail system and “play” areas.

A great deal of discussion has occurred between the Forest Service and user groups. In May 2005, the Montana Snowmobile Association, Ponderosa Snow Warriors, Helena Snow Drifters, Montana Fish, Wildlife

& Parks and the Montana Wilderness Association developed a Winter Use Agreement where the groups agreed to areas in the project area where motorized and non-motorized use would be allowed for winter travel in the Blackfoot, Continental Divide landscapes. The Helena National Forest committed to considering the Winter Use Agreement, as the proposed action in the travel planning analysis which will use a collaborative framework throughout the required environmental analysis in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act. A majority of the funding for this effort has been contributed through the Tri-County (Powell County) and the Lewis & Clark County Resource Advisory Committees.

The Winter Travel Plan proposed action can be obtained from the Lincoln Ranger District at 1569 Highway 200, Lincoln, MT 59639, the Helena Ranger District at 2001 Poplar Street, Helena, MT 59601 or on the Forest website at www.fs.fed.us/r1/helena/projects/winter_travel. The comment period ends 30 days following the date of publication of the legal notice in the Helena Independent Record.

For more information about these open houses or the planning effort, please contact Amber Kamps or Mandy Alvino at 362-4265.

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