

# North Belts Travel Plan

U.S.D.A, Forest Service - Helena National Forest  
Broadwater / Lewis & Clark/ Meagher Counties, Montana

## FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

JANUARY 2005

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This analysis considers the effects of six travel planning alternative options for this area of the Helena National Forest. Design features and mitigation have been incorporated into the alternatives to reduce impacts on the area's resources. The alternatives were analyzed for effectiveness in resolving the agency, public and cooperators' planning issues, for avoidance of unnecessary impacts to resources and the human environment, for responsiveness to public concerns and for compliance with the Forest Plan, statutes and regulations.



The purpose of this travel planning analysis is to determine the future motorized road and trail system, the nonmotorized trail system, and snowmobile use areas in the North Belts and Dry Range areas, including potential new routes. It will also determine the closure methods that would be applied for routes closed year long, the trailheads that would be needed, and road or trail related watershed improvement projects.

The deciding officer for this project is Jane Kollmeyer, Acting Forest Supervisor of the Helena National Forest. For more information, please contact Beth Ihle of the Townsend Ranger District at 406-266-3425.

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# CHAPTER 1 – PURPOSE AND NEED

## Introduction

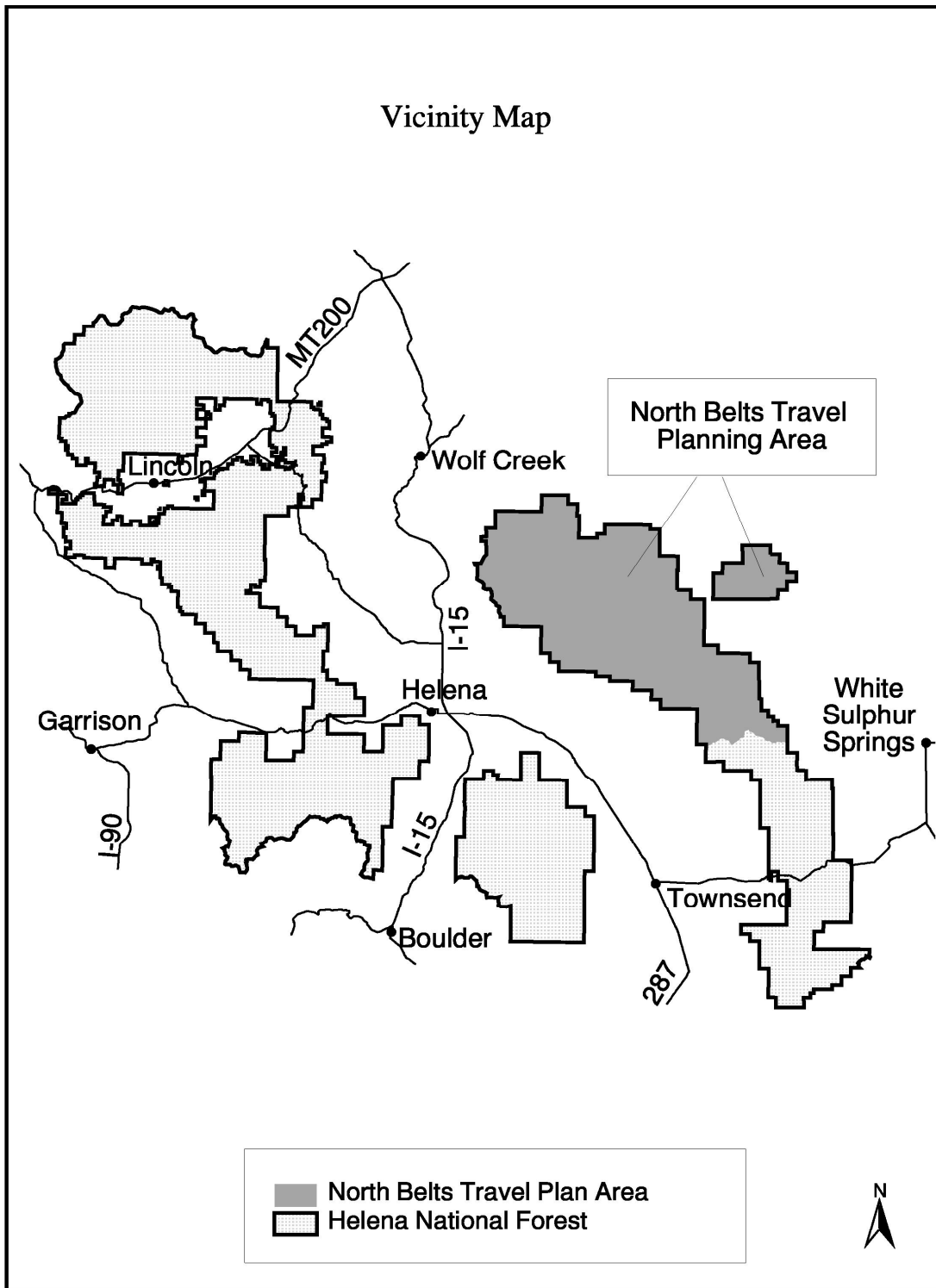
The North Belts and Dry Range Travel Plan project considers the effects of six travel planning alternative options for this area of the Helena National Forest. The planning area lies within Broadwater, Lewis and Clark, and Meagher Counties, Montana and is approximately 250,000 acres in size. The purpose of this travel planning analysis is to determine the future motorized road and trail system, the nonmotorized trail system, and snowmobile use areas in the North Belts and Dry Range areas, including potential new routes. It will also determine the closure methods that would be applied for routes closed year long, the trailheads that would be needed, and road or trail related watershed improvement projects. The project area includes National Forest System lands (NFS) in the northern Big Belt Mountain Range from the north end of the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness south to the Boulder Creek tributary of Confederate Gulch. The analysis area also includes the NFS lands in the Dry Range which lies east of the Big Belts bordering the Smith River (Figure 1-1).

This analysis is organized into four chapters. Chapter 1 identifies the reasons that the project is being conducted, legal requirements, issues, public involvement and analysis parameters. Chapter 2 describes the alternatives – including those not analyzed in detail. Chapter 3 presents the resource components of the existing environment, the environmental effects of implementing the alternatives and the cumulative effects of the actions proposed in the alternatives. The Appendices incorporate reference material needed to more fully understand the analyses and alternatives.

## Background

The effort to revise travel management in the North Belts and Dry Range was initiated in 1996. At that time, the project also included vegetation management and noxious weed control alternatives. Travel planning on Bureau of Land Management lands in the vicinity of the North Belts and Spokane Hills was also included in that analysis. A series of public meetings regarding that combined proposal was held in 1997 and a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) called the North Belts Travel Plan/Magpie-Confederate Vegetation Restoration Project was issued in March 1999. The DEIS included five travel alternatives, including the existing or no action, the proposed action, and three additional action alternatives submitted by the Frontier Four-Wheelers, Capital Trail Vehicle Riders Association, and the Wild Divide Chapter of the Montana Wilderness Association. Nearly 300 public comments were received in response to the DEIS.

Work on the DEIS was halted by the severe wildfire season of 2000. Wildfires burned about 29,000 acres in the greater Cave, Magpie, and Hellgate Gulch areas within the North Belts. The effects of the Cave Gulch fire necessitated that travel, vegetation, and noxious weed planning be reconsidered and evaluated under separate analyses. The vegetation and noxious weeds efforts are ongoing. Efforts to continue with travel planning for the North Belts were delayed during post-fire area restoration activities and burned timber salvage analysis.



In February 2003, the Helena National Forest restarted travel planning for this area and mailed a new proposed action to the public and user groups. The new proposed action and analysis area did not include Bureau of Land Management areas in the North Belts. It also did not include the vegetation and noxious weed treatment alternatives that were included in the 1999 DEIS. Following receipt of public comments, the DEIS was released in July 2003 and public comments were received. This document includes the information obtained and alternative analysis conducted since issuance of the DEIS.

# Purpose and Need

## *Purpose*

The initial reason that the Forest started travel planning in the North Belts/Dry Range is still valid today: to provide for a variety of motorized and nonmotorized recreation opportunities while allowing access for administrative uses, permitted uses, and for private landowners within the Forest Boundary. These opportunities and uses are to be provided while simultaneously meeting Forest Plan standards for fish and wildlife habitats, soil and watershed health, and prevention and control of noxious weed spread. This project responds to the goals and objectives outlined in the Forest Plan and helps move the Forest toward the desired conditions described in the Plan (pgs. II-1, 2-10, 11). This project also responds to the Big Belts Integrated Resource Analysis (11/94) and the update (6/98). In addition, the Forest utilized information (values and concerns) that was developed in the 2002 - 2004 Roads Analysis – as it pertains to individual classified roads in the project area.

## *Needs*

The Helena Forest Plan was completed in 1986. Since that time, several conditions related to the Forest road and trail transportation system in the North Big Belts and Dry Range have changed:

**1. Use of Forest Roads and Trails:** Urban growth in the greater Helena area and the increasing popularity of ATV-type vehicles and snowmobiles have resulted in an increase in use and more requests for expanded ATV trail and snowmobiling options in the North Belts area. Since the adoption of the Forest Plan, the local Helena snowmobile club has successfully competed for State funds to groom trails and prepare user maps in the analysis area. There is a need to identify a planned system of safe roads, trails, and trailheads for this travel area for the future. There is also a need to provide a safe system of non-motorized trails that allows access for many nonmotorized recreation activities and to provide reasonable and well-defined parking at trailheads to reduce resource damage.

**2. Proliferation of Unclassified/User Created Routes:** For the purposes of this Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), the term ‘user-created routes’ refers to the development of two-track routes created from repeated cross country travel. These routes have not been planned for, but have appeared, for the most part, in recent years. We use this term because it is familiar to the public. ‘Unclassified’ is the term used by the Forest Service when mapping these routes.

Field review of the North Belts travel area in 2003 resulted in the identification of almost 49 miles of unclassified routes. While some of these are believed to have been in existence for quite some time, others have been created on the landscape in recent years. Combined, they have not been accounted for in road inventories. Conversely, the field review identified that nearly 20 miles of inventoried (classified) roads did not exist and have been removed from the road inventory. Thus, the field review resulted in a net increase of about 30 miles of new routes used by the public in the North Belts travel area. Therefore, there is a need to identify the routes and trail systems that are to be used as the baseline layer of information for the classified road and trail systems.

In addition, This project is also validating which existing routes, as defined in the 2001 OHV decision, will be part of the long term transportation system and which will not.

**3. Difficult Maps and Signs:** The current Helena National Forest visitor map displays 23 different types of travel restrictions. This makes understanding, implementing, and enforcing the travel plan complex both for the users and the Forest Service. There is a need for a less complex travel plan that is easier to understand and enforce, as well as clearer signing and more obvious identification of road and trail access portals.

**4. Maintenance and Resource Management:** There is a need to reduce the classified road system to meet expected future maintenance funding levels, while retaining sufficient access for resource management and public use and enjoyment. There is also the need to address the transportation systems related resource concerns such as watershed health and noxious weeds.

## Proposed Action

The following travel management features summarize the proposed action:

- There would be only 2 dates for seasonal route restrictions. Other designated routes would be either open or closed to motorized vehicles yearlong. The restriction dates include:
  - October 15 – December 1 (big game security during hunting season)
  - December 2 – May 15 (winter range protection)
- For the most part, big game winter range areas would not be open to snowmobile use. However, designated snowmobile routes through certain winter ranges would be identified. Areas that are open to snowmobiles would be from December 2 - May 15.
- New motorized trail construction, new non-motorized trail construction, new road construction, and development of trailheads and information kiosks would occur. A full suite of possible watershed improvement tools such as culvert replacements/removals, drainage corrections, etc. were also identified. Decommissioning methods would be applied on some routes closed year long and include erosion controls, seeding, ripping, and recontouring.
- Four route types were identified:
  - Roads: open to vehicles that meet the requirements of state laws.
  - Motorized trails: open to vehicles 50 inches wide or less
  - Non-motorized trails: open to all types of nonmotorized uses (note – mountain bikes and other mechanized uses are prohibited in wilderness).
  - Snowmobile Routes
- Vehicle access within 300 feet of an open, designated road would be allowed primarily to access dispersed camping sites, but also for other uses as long as it does not result in resource damage such as rutting, fording of streams, crossing of wet meadows, new user-created routes/hill climbs, or noxious weed spread. To protect resources, the proposed action features the flexibility to restrict motorized use in the 300-foot zone in local situations.
- To guide decisions about access to private lands that are located within the National Forest Boundary, the proposed action includes *draft* guidelines that consider private landowner needs as well as protection of resources on the National Forest System lands.

To comply with the Canada lynx conservation strategy, the proposed action does not result in a net increase in designated and/or groomed over-the-snow routes and snowmobile play areas in lynx habitat (generally higher elevation spruce/fir forest).

In July 2003, a DEIS was issued which included five travel alternatives. The original Proposed Action was modified due to comments received and to correct map and table errors in the February 2003 scoping. The resulting alternative generated from the Proposed Action was Alternative 5 in the DEIS. Three alternatives similar to the 1999 DEIS were carried forward because they had been developed by user groups and were still applicable to the project. These were Alternatives 2, 3, and 4. Alternative 1 was the existing condition or No Action alternative.

Following issuance of the DEIS in July, 2003, the interdisciplinary team (ID Team) conducted additional team field trips, public field trips, and public/user group meetings to gain commentary on the DEIS. These field trips and meetings resulted in the development of a 6<sup>th</sup> alternative (Alternative 6) that is presented here in the FEIS. Alternative 6 is the preferred alternative.

## Project Scope

The geographic scope of the proposed action is limited to those portions of the Helena National Forest from the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness south to Boulder Baldy Mountain near Confederate Gulch. The scope also includes NFS lands in the Dry Range (see previous map). The project area includes lands in Broadwater, Lewis and Clark, and Meagher Counties. The project area does not include Bureau of Land Management lands or private lands.

Several projects that included transportation decisions have been reevaluated as part of this project, including the Wagner Atlanta Vegetation Treatment project decision (1997). This decision was made at a more localized scale while the North Belts Travel project scale includes areas directly adjacent and interconnected to this area. The North Belts Travel Plan analysis is a more comprehensive evaluation. Additionally, the Wagner-Atlanta project decision incorporates a bow-hunting seasonal closure on several routes that would start September 1, as well as general rifle season closures that start on October 15. Simplifying the closure dates and route restrictions across the forest was identified as a key public issue during initial development of the travel planning process and the October 15 date is more consistent across the forest. Thus, the areas that included the September 1 closure date are included for analysis in this project.

Previous travel decisions regarding the Whites Gulch Road, the Jimmy's Gulch area, and Trout Creek Canyon Trail-Figure 8 Road, will not be re-visited in this analysis. This plan will not include the long-term disposition for the road in Cave Gulch. That project will be pursued and analyzed at the initiative of the private landowner through the Special Use road process. This project decision will supercede any temporary, emergency closure orders for the Cave Gulch fire area that are currently in effect.

The administrative scope includes analysis of existing designated roads and trails, routes included as part of the Helena National Forest Roads Analysis that may have been previously closed but were not specifically excluded from the scope, former routes no longer maintained, and unclassified/user created routes. The administrative scope also includes new construction of roads and trails (including just portions of roads and trails), closure methods for roads closed year long, proposed trailheads, and watershed improvement projects. Specifics of the administrative scope of the proposed action are described below under "Decisions to be Made".

This travel plan analysis will serve as the site-specific analysis needed to supercede the Helena National Forest Roads Analysis.

The travel plan alternatives and maps include routes that are county jurisdiction as well as a few routes crossing private land. These routes have been included in the alternatives to show how the routes are connected to each other and, in the big picture, how the transportation system would work. Full implementation of a selected action alternative would not occur until proper right-of-ways are secured. Depending on the success of obtaining these right-of-ways, other options may need to be explored. Right-of-ways would be pursued following the Record of Decision (ROD).

Dual-use routes are included in the analysis, though not in all alternatives. Dual-use routes are those that are available for unlicensed vehicles and drivers. They are lower maintenance routes where slow speeds are intrinsic to them. Dual-use routes would not be officially available for dual-use until an individual route analysis and determination of safety has been completed, consistent with Forest Service Handbook 7709.59-99-1.

## Decisions to be Made

The Forest Supervisor of the Helena National Forest is the deciding officer for this project. Given the purpose and need for this action, the Forest Supervisor will review the proposed action, other alternatives, anticipated effects, and public input and determine whether or not to make the following decisions:

- Which areas, roads, and trails would be open or closed in the analysis area, and for what types of public - motorized and non-motorized travel?
- Which areas, roads, and trails would have seasonal restrictions to protect resource needs?
- What types of closure and/or rehabilitation methods should be used on yearlong restricted routes?
- What new travel routes or relocation of existing routes should be implemented?
- What new trailhead facilities should be implemented?
- Which road maintenance and repairs are needed to address watershed issues?
- What type of access is needed for lands held in private ownership and are located within the National Forest Boundary?
- Is a Forest Plan amendment necessary?

## Management Direction

### *Forest Plan*

Management Direction for the project area is found in the Helena Forest Plan (USFS, 1986). The Forest Plan divides the Forest into management areas - each with different goals, resource potentials, and limitations. Management areas are not single, contiguous units; they consist of many individual pieces, each classified with one of the specific management area prescriptions.

The decision for this project must strive to be consistent with the Forest Plan. Forest-wide goals, objectives, and standards are found in Chapter II of the Forest Plan (pp. II-1 to II-36). The Plan also provides goals for each of 25 Management Areas (MAs). These MAs are described in Chapter III of the Forest Plan. Each specialist report includes a section on Forest Plan Consistency.

The management areas from the Forest Plan included within the project area are: L1, L2, M1, P1, R1, T1, T3, T4, T5, W1, and W2.

## ***Landscape Analysis***

The Big Belts Integrated Resource Analysis (November 1994) and update (June 1998) identified an integrated desired condition for access and travel management which includes the following:

- The road and trail system should provide reasonable and appropriate access to NFS lands for recreation use, resources management, and access to private land. The transportation system should be diverse and provide both motorized and nonmotorized users with an enjoyable experience: it should ensure accessibility by maintaining key routes for passenger vehicles and other modes of travel.
- The transportation system is to be physically and economically maintainable. It should be safe, conform to laws and regulations, and adequately signed.
- Scenic values are to be maintained or enhanced for forest visitors experience. Travel should be consistent with the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS).
- Management of the transportation system should facilitate recovery of riparian areas.
- The transportation system should not reduce elk security during hunting season below existing levels and should increase security to desired conditions where feasible. Big game winter range effectiveness should not be reduced below existing levels. Habitat for threatened, endangered or sensitive species should meet desired conditions.
- The transportation system should minimize accelerated soil erosion, protect site productivity, minimize the spread of noxious weeds, and lower maintenance costs. Sediment delivery to streams should be minimized overall, and reduced in those streams that have fisheries habitat or that have water quality limited segments.

The interdisciplinary team was informed of this integrated desired condition during the development of the proposed action in the DEIS and Alternative 6 in the FEIS. The other travel plan alternatives also meet some of these desired conditions to some degree. However, their development along specific issues necessarily precludes their being able to be responsive to all the desired conditions.

## **Public Involvement**

Public involvement in this project has been ongoing since 1996. Public input from a series of meetings in 1997 and other scoping responses resulted in development of three user group alternatives for the North Belts Travel Plan. The Forest Service developed three alternatives with information from the Frontier Four-Wheelers, Capital Trail Vehicle Riders Association, and the Wild Divide Chapter of the Montana Wilderness Association.

A No Action alternative and an agency alternative were also included in the initial DEIS along with vegetation and weeds treatment projects. Approximately 600 copies (summary or DEIS) were sent out for public review, which resulted in 301 letters of response and comment. The comments on the Travel Plan portion of the 1999 DEIS have been carried forward into the new North Belts Travel Project that was restarted in February 2003.

To restart the project in 2003, a new Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS was published in the Federal Register on February 14, 2003. A scoping letter that presented the proposed action was distributed to 616 people on February 14, 2003. The letter also explained that the current project scope includes only the travel planning portion of the 1999 project. Copies

were made of people's previous comments on the 1999 DEIS and these were mailed back to them with the scoping document for their convenience. A press release was also issued on February 18, 2003 explaining the nature of the project. One hundred thirty-nine letters were received in response to the scoping.

Following initial mailing of the proposed action, thirteen newspaper articles/press releases/letters were published in the Helena Independent Record, Townsend Star, or Meagher County News regarding this travel planning effort. Five public meetings were also held in Helena, York, Townsend, and White Sulphur Springs. Coordination/information meetings were held with many stakeholders during this phase of the project - including livestock permittees, adjacent private landowners, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, American Wildlands, Montana Wilderness Association, Capital Trail Vehicle Association, Frontier Fourwheelers, and Helena Snowdrifters. Information received from these interactions was used to develop the five alternatives in the DEIS.

The DEIS was released in July 2003 and 129 written comments were received during the extended scoping period. In addition to more group/public meetings, a small multidisciplinary working group was formed and led by private citizens to identify areas of common ground in travel planning. This group met five times and provided a summary (October 23, 2003) of their efforts, which included a matrix that identified issues where there was potential for agreement between ideologically different users, as well as other information. Four public field tours were also hosted. Tours included various areas in the North Belts and a total of 41 public participants attended. As a result of the scoping/public involvement activities after the release of the DEIS, a 6<sup>th</sup> alternative was developed. For specific details regarding scoping activities since the inception of the project, refer to the project file.

## Issues

Section 102(2)(e) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) states that all Federal agencies shall "study, develop, and describe appropriate alternatives to recommended courses of action in any proposal which involves unresolved conflicts concerning alternative use of available resources." These unresolved conflicts, identified by the Forest Service and the public, are the environmental issues related to the Proposed Action.

Public comments on the original proposed action were read for content to identify issues and concerns. All issues from the letters were catalogued by subject and a determination made as to how the issues would be addressed. Public comments on the DEIS and from public meetings and field trips were also evaluated to determine whether there were any new issues. The responses to the substantive comments are found in Appendix F.

Based on the external and internal comments, the Forest Service separated the issues into two groups: significant and other issues. Significant issues were defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action. Other issues are also important in the analysis of the area, but did not drive the development of alternatives. These are also analyzed by alternative. Other issues were identified as those:

- outside the scope of the proposed action;
- already decided by law;
- irrelevant to the decision being made; or
- conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence.

## ***Significant Issues***

The Forest Service identified the following significant issues during initial scoping and subsequent comments on the DEIS. These issues helped drive the development of the DEIS alternatives and led to the development of a new alternative in this FEIS:

### **Issue 1: The need to provide opportunities for motorized activities including recreation, resource management, and private land access.**

Indicators:

- Miles of road open to wheeled motorized vehicles yearlong or seasonally
- Miles of motorized trail open yearlong or seasonally
- Miles of designated motorcycle trail open yearlong or seasonally
- Miles of dual use routes open yearlong or seasonally
- Acres open to snowmobile use seasonally
- Availability of areas within 300 feet of a motorized route for dispersed uses

### **Issue 2: The need to provide opportunities for nonmotorized activities.**

Indicators:

- Miles of nonmotorized trail available yearlong
- Change in road miles in Inventoried Roadless Areas

## ***Other Issues***

The following issues are also addressed in the FEIS. The information gathered regarding these issues will be considered by the decision maker.

- The need to improve trailhead facilities and the condition of roads, motorized trails, and non-motorized trails so as to optimize recreational opportunities and safety.
- The complexity of each proposed travel plan alternative, consistency with the other geographic areas of the Helena Forest Travel Plan, and enforceability.
- The degree to which each alternative protects or improves watershed conditions and fisheries habitat quality.
- The manner in which the alternatives affect wildlife corridors and linkages, and elk and lynx habitat.
- The potential for open routes, new routes and road obliteration to impact heritage resources.
- The degree to which alternatives provide for visitor safety.
- The degree to which alternatives provide for access to timber, firewood, and other forest products.
- The potential for open routes to allow noxious weed spread and the ability to treat noxious weed infestations on closed routes.
- The potential for open routes to lead to increased wildfire starts and the ability to respond to wildfire starts on closed roads.
- The degree to which travel plan alternatives affect roadless areas.

- The economics of travel plan implementation, including new construction, reconstruction, decommissioning of roads, and future maintenance costs.
- Displacement/loss of motorized opportunity to date by previous decisions since the Forest Plan was adopted.
- Location and type of authorized off route travel.

## Tiered and Referenced Documents

This FEIS hereby incorporates by reference the Project Record (40 CFR 1502.21). The Project Record contains the record of public involvement, team and public meeting notes, correspondence, Specialist Reports, references, and other technical documentation used to support the analysis and conclusions in this FEIS. Relying on Specialist Reports and the Project Record helps implement the CEQ Regulations' provision that agencies should reduce NEPA paperwork (40CFR 1500.4), that EISs shall be analytic rather than encyclopedic, and that the EISs shall be kept concise and no longer than absolutely necessary (40 CFR 1502.2). The objective is to furnish enough site-specific information to demonstrate a reasoned consideration of the environmental impacts of the alternatives and how these impacts can be mitigated, without repeating detailed analysis and background information available elsewhere.

Other projects have been analyzed in the North Belts area. NEPA encourages agencies to tier their environmental impact statements to eliminate repetitive discussions of the same issues and to focus on the actual issues ripe for decision. Agencies are also directed to incorporate by reference material when the effect will be to cut down the bulk without impeding the agency and public review of the action. The following documents guide/informs this analysis:

- Forest Plan, Helena National Forest
- Forest Plan, Helena National Forest EIS
- Cave Gulch Post-Fire Salvage Sale EIS and ROD
- Roads Analysis (Helena National Forest 2002 - 2004)
- Big Belts Integrated Resources Analysis, Helena National Forest 1994 with June 1998 Update

Tiered and reference documents that are specific to a resource area are found in the references section of the Specialist Reports in the project file.

## Changed Condition

Along with the Cave Gulch fire of 2000, several other actions have resulted in a 'changed condition' for the North Belts/Dry Range areas since 1996. Effective July 1, 2001, new off-highway vehicle regulations went into effect on National Forest and BLM lands in Montana, North Dakota, and portions of South Dakota. This decision applies to all lands, including the Big Belts and Dry Range, where site-specific Forest Travel Plan decisions have not been made. It restricts wheeled motorized travel to routes that were in existence prior to the OHV decision. This policy does not apply to snowmobiles.

Another change that occurred is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listing of the Canada lynx as a threatened species. Lynx habitat extends across all the Northern Rocky Mountains including the North Belts project area. A conservation strategy has been developed for lynx. It includes guidance on travel management, primarily relating to winter travel routes.

The Jimtown Fire in 2003 resulted in the burning of 1000 acres adjacent to the Jimtown Road (County Road 4) on NFS and private land. In addition, the Sheep Camp fire in 2003 resulted in the burning of about 1,200 acres on NFS and private land adjacent to the Wagner Gulch road (Forest Road 259) on the east side of the Big Belts. Several other small fires in 2003 resulted in a minor amount of acreage burned.



# CHAPTER 2 – THE ALTERNATIVES

## Introduction

This chapter describes and compares the No-Action alternative and five other alternatives considered for the North Belts Travel Plan project in the North Big Belts and Dry Range. This chapter is presented in six sections: Alternative Development Process, Changes between the Draft and Final EIS, Alternatives Considered in Detail; Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from detailed study, Comparison of the Alternatives, and Selection of the Preferred Alternative.

## Alternative Development Process

The alternatives were originally developed for the July, 2003 DEIS based on public involvement, discussions with user group alternative proponents, identification of issues, and the Forests' purpose and need as discussed in Chapter 1. The needs for and issues with travel planning include responding to changes in use of forest roads and trails with increased popularity and capability of ATV's and snowmobiles, increases in unclassified routes, increasingly complex visitor maps, and declining maintenance funds. These issues are in the context of needing to continue to provide a balance of motorized and nonmotorized recreation opportunities, providing access for administrative and other permitted uses, and meeting Forest Plan standards and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MFWP) recommendations for fish and wildlife habitats, soil and watershed health, and preventing and controlling noxious weed spread.

While these issues are not the complete list of concerns identified during scoping, these are the significant ones that validated the range of alternatives from the DEIS and guided the development of Alternative 6 for this FEIS. Also, please refer to the alternative comparison tables at the end of this chapter and the alternative maps located in the map packet at the end of the document.

Five alternatives were included in the DEIS. Subsequent to the issuance of the DEIS, the Helena Forest conducted ID Team field reviews and public field trips in the fall of 2003 (see Public Involvement, Ch.1). Based on these field trips and comment letters that pointed out specific route errors, corrections were made to the forest roads database. Corrections included identification of new routes that were not already in the roads data layer (48.7 miles), removal of routes that were on the roads data layer that did not exist (about 18 miles) and correction of minor route location errors.

These route changes were made to Alternative 1 (Existing Condition) for the FEIS. The ID Team then determined how these routes would be managed in the other alternatives.

It is important to understand that in the development of travel alternatives for this project, Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 were originally developed by user groups, based on their travel philosophies and issues. They have been modified somewhat since their original development by the ID Team as well as the alternative proponents. Only Alternative 5, the proposed action in the DEIS was responsive to some extent to all of the user groups, as well as resource issues and the Forest Plan.

However, the need to develop an additional alternative after issuance of the DEIS arose for several reasons:

- Field reviews identified new routes and non-existent routes that needed to be analyzed for inclusion, closure, or removal from the database;
- The proposed action (Alt 5) was not responsive to the need for designated motorcycle routes;
- The proposed action did not provide for a Dual Use designation;
- The proposed action did not include motorized access during hunting season in several key areas for disabled and older hunters,
- The proposed action did not consider how the public used various short spurs and other upland areas for dispersed camping, and
- The winter use area boundary in the proposed action was not tied to easily distinguishable topographic features. There was a need to adjust the winter use boundary to make it more easily understood by users and more enforceable.

Alternative 6, the Preferred Alternative, was developed based on these reasons. Development of the Preferred Alternative is discussed in detail in the Alternatives Description section below. By including Alternative 5 in the FEIS, we are able to display the differences between the proposed action and preferred alternative as well as demonstrate responsiveness to public comments since issuing the DEIS.

## Changes between Draft and Final EIS

Several changes have been made between the DEIS and FEIS. These changes include items that affect each action alternative. Changes for individual resources are discussed in Chapter 3, Affected Environment by resource. Specific changes within an individual alternative are discussed in the section, “Alternatives Considered in Detail”. The changes between the DEIS and FEIS are as follows:

1. Unclassified routes were added to or removed from Alternative 1 due to field reviews and in public comment letters, as noted above. These routes were incorporated or closed variously in the other alternatives.
2. Alternative 6 was added.
3. Watershed improvement projects are included in all the action alternatives, instead of just Alternative 5.
4. Trailheads/kiosks are included in all of the alternatives, instead of just Alternative 5.
5. Some proposed new routes in the DEIS were discarded from consideration in the FEIS in Alternatives 2-5 following field reviews. See Recreation in Chapter 3 or the alternative maps for specific routes.

## Alternatives Considered in Detail

The following sections include Features Common to All Alternatives Including Mitigation; Mitigation for Alternatives That Allow for Motorized Use Within 300 Feet of an Open Route; Features Common to All *Action* Alternatives Including Mitigation; and Alternative Descriptions. As discussed above, there are six (6) alternatives, including Alternative 1-No Action. A summary Table for alternative comparison is included near the end of Chapter 2.

Design features and mitigation have been incorporated into the alternatives to reduce impacts on the area’s resources as follows.

## ***Features Common to All Alternatives, Including Mitigation***

The following management guidance will continue, regardless of which alternative is selected, and is common to all alternatives.

All alternatives have as a premise that wheeled motorized use is restricted to designated routes which are open either yearlong or seasonally—the balance of the area is closed to all wheeled motorized use. Routes and off route use would be closed unless designated open. The one exception is that Alternative 2 has an approximate 425-acre area that would be available for off-route wheeled vehicle use (OHV's). This is described and analyzed in Chapter 3.

Disabled access is provided per the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Under the Act, an individual with a disability will not, solely by reason of disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity conducted by the Forest Service. Motorized wheelchairs are not considered OHV's and therefore are not restricted by any of the alternatives.

Motorized use of roads closed to the general public will continue to occur and includes such uses as Forest Service permitted uses, resource management activities such as weed spraying, emergency response activities such as wildland fire response and search and rescue, etc., and access to private property.

Motorized, wheeled cross country travel will continue to occur on a limited basis for administrative activities such as noxious weed spraying, emergency response such as wildfire, and lessee or permitted activities such as livestock allotment administration. Such uses would be limited to the terms of the lease or permit, and may require specific authorization.

Motorized trails, dual use roads, and roads are also available to all non-motorized uses.

Areas designated for snowmobile use also include any routes, open or closed to wheeled vehicles, that occur within them.

Maintenance of roads and trails will occur to meet National Forest standards and management objectives. Resource effects that may occur, based on the type and amount of use, will be greatly minimized through professional trail design and routine maintenance.

Best Management Practices (BMP's) addressing soil, water, and noxious weeds will be applied to all reconstruction or maintenance of roads and trails.

In regards to heritage resources, the impacts of road and trail obliteration would be mitigated through project redesign. Rather than ripping up the roadbed where heritage sites are now exposed, the Forest Service could place filter fabric atop them, then cover and contour the road prism with gravel and soil. Likewise, new trails and watershed improvements could be re-routed around significant heritage sites. Alternatively, data recovery could precede road obliteration whereby archaeological materials in harm's way would be systematically collected through conventional archaeological methods. These mitigation measures would require review by the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and Tribal historic preservation officers, and would have an attached cost, with mitigation through data recovery being the most expensive.

An inventory of all ground-disturbing projects in the selected alternative would be completed according to the Helena Forest Site Identification Strategy. Affected sites would be

evaluated to determine their archaeological or historic value, and National Register of Historic Places-significance. Based on this assessment, site-specific mitigation plans could be developed in consultation with the State and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers.

## Trailheads

Trailhead improvement projects are identified for all of the alternatives, instead of just Alternative 5, as was proposed in the DEIS. Improvements can include one or more of the following: kiosk signs, fences, parking area, toilets, and other signs. None of the parking areas exceed 1/2 acre in size, except Neversweat – which may be about one acre. Most are existing sites currently serving as unimproved parking areas. The parking improvements would consist of some leveling of the sites and surfacing to harden the sites, as well as sign installation.

A graveled parking area (about one acre) for 6 vehicles, a post/pole perimeter fence, picnic tables, and a toilet facility would be established at Neversweat Gulch (Trail 241). A graveled parking area for 4-6 vehicles and a post/pole perimeter fence would be established at the Cave Ridge trailhead (Trail 243).

One to two-panel interpretive kiosk-style signs describing local features of interest would be installed at the following main forest portal/entrances:

- Confederate Gulch;
- Whites Gulch;
- Benton Gulch; Avalanche Gulch;
- Hellgate Gulch;
- Magpie Gulch; and
- Beaver Creek.

Graveled parking areas for 4 vehicles would also be developed at these locations.

The following table displays the specific trailhead improvements by alternative. Not all trailhead improvements apply to all alternatives because of differences in the proposed routes available by alternative.

Again, mapping and additional specificity regarding proposed trailhead and watershed improvements is available in the project record.

### Portal/Trailhead Improvements by Alternative

Trailhead Name	Est. Cost	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4	Alt. 5	Alt. 6
Blacktail trailhead #142	\$5,000	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Spring Gulch trailhead	\$5,000	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Kentucky Gulch	\$5,000	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Wagner Gulch	\$5,000	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Timber/Doolittle Gulches	\$5,000	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Thompson/Nary Time Gulches	\$5,000	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Magpie Meadows	\$5,000	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Hellgate Gulch/Argo mine	\$5,000	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Camas Ridge	\$5,000	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Trailhead Name	Est. Cost	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4	Alt. 5	Alt. 6
Browns' Gulch*	\$5,000	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N
Jimmy's Gulch	\$7,500	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
White's Gulch portal	\$7,500	N	N	N	N	Y	N
Benton Gulch portal	\$7,500	N	N	N	N	Y	N
Avalanche Gulch portal	\$7,500	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Hellgate Gulch portal	\$7,500	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Magpie Gulch portal	\$7,500	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Beaver Creek portal	\$7,500	N	N	N	N	Y	N
Neversweat trailhead	\$25,000	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Cave Gulch*	\$12,000	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Beartrap Gulch	\$5,000	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Kelly Ridge*	\$5,000	N	N	N	N	N	Y
Holiday Gulch*	\$5,000	N	N	N	N	N	Y
Indian Flats*	\$5,000	N	N	N	N	N	Y
Ridge/Rocker Cr*	\$5,000	N	N	N	N	N	Y
Boulder Lakes #118	\$5,000	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y

\* Site currently not serving as a trailhead

## ***Mitigation for Alternatives Which Allow for Motorized Use Within 300 Foot Buffers***

The 2001 OHV decision provided for some motorized uses within 300 feet of a road or trail in recognition that forest users want some allowance to get away from the dust and noise generated on open routes. The expectation with this permissive use was that agency specialists' expected relatively few new sites to be exploited within the 300 foot area, as most good camping/parking areas already have a road to them. Indeed this expectation is believed to be mostly accurate in the North Belts Travel Plan area as this area has a legacy of dispersed use. Many areas within 300 feet of an open route are already unsuitable for use due to terrain or vegetation limitations.

The ID Team was also concerned that closure of traditionally popular dispersed sites and areas would lead to concentration of use in the remaining available areas - leading to potential adverse impacts. However, the agency currently has several authorities to temporarily or permanently remove a site or area from use should unacceptable resource impacts be identified.

Alternatives 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 allow for limited motorized use within 300 feet of a designated open road (see Alternative Descriptions, below). In addition, Alternatives 1, 2, 3, and 6 allow for limited motorized use within 300 feet of motorized trails. Limitations in motorized use within 300 feet of roads or trails for these alternatives are based on identification of agency resource concerns such as rutting, fording of streams, crossing of wet meadows, new unclassified routes extending from sites or connecting sites, noxious weed spread, or similar problems.

# ***Features Common to All Action Alternatives, Including Mitigation***

## **Types of Routes**

There are six categories of roads and trails in the North Belts and Dry Range areas. Not all of these types of routes are in every alternative.

**Roads** are defined as routes that are available to motorized vehicles consistent with state laws.

**Dual use** routes are identified in Alternatives 2, 3 and 6. Dual use routes are those that are open for motorized vehicles and no State vehicle license is required for either the driver or vehicle. Operators and vehicles must comply with state law when on these routes. Route and terrain conditions do not facilitate use by passenger vehicles. If included in the Record of Decision, roads designated for Dual Use must be analyzed and approved according to Forest Service Handbook 7709.59-99-1. These routes would not be open to Dual Use until the handbook direction for a written evaluation has been completed and approved by the Forest Supervisor. They would be available for licensed vehicles until the dual use evaluation is completed.

**Motorized trails** are routes that are available for vehicles 50 inches or less in width as well as non-motorized users.

**Motorcycle trails** are available for motorcycles and nonmotorized users.

**Non-motorized trails** are available for hikers, bicyclers (except in wilderness and proposed wilderness) and horseback riders.

**Snowmobile trails** are roads or other trails that also allow snowmobile use.

The words “system” and “nonsystem” (or “user created”) have been used in the past (informally by the agency and the public) to describe roads and trails. However, the official nomenclature is “classified” and “unclassified”. As we transition to the official nomenclature, the words may be used interchangeably within this document (classified/system and unclassified/nonsystem/user created).

Designated trails would not be designed or maintained to provide a sustained high level of challenge. Motorized and non-motorized trails would be managed to provide opportunities that could be classified as easy to moderate.

Designated areas would be available for off-route travel for snowmobiles. Areas designated as open to snowmobile use would be available 12/2-5/15. Groomed snowmobile routes are closed to wheeled vehicles over 50 inches wide.

Unclassified routes would be closed with the decision on this project, if they are not identified as part of any alternative.

All seasonal road restrictions would include some type of sign and/or barrier to help enforce the closure.

Road and trail standards would be variable, depending on intended use. They would allow for a range of route conditions from primitive to high standard. Much of the improvement associated with bringing individual roads or trails up to standard falls within the category of

light reconstruction/routine maintenance and would proceed as funding is secured. However, portions of some roads and trails would require relocation in order to meet standards. Authorization of some of the actual road or trail relocation work may be beyond the scope of this decision and would require a subsequent NEPA decision.

New road and trail construction would be considered with this decision and varies by alternative. Most of the new construction would consist of “connector” segments, which would tie existing roads or trails together. Construction specifications associated with the road and trail categories are detailed in Appendix D of this EIS.

The Gates of the Mountains Wilderness Area would remain closed to all forms of mechanized vehicles, including non-motorized vehicles (bicycles, carts).

## **Road Closure/Decommissioning**

Closure methods and/or decommissioning of yearlong restricted routes is considered with this decision and varies by alternative. Some of the types of closure would continue to provide motorized access by permit or other authorization such as emergency response. There are 6 types of decommissioning and closure methods for yearlong restricted routes. These also vary by alternative and include:

- erosion control measures,
- ripping all of the road prism and seeding,
- ripping a portion of the prism and seeding,
- restoring prism to natural contour,
- gates or barriers.
- and converting road prisms to trails.

Combinations of closure and decommissioning options would also be used. The closure and decommissioning methods are described by alternative below. Decommissioning methods are included in Appendix A by route and by alternative.

## **Wildlife Mitigation**

The following items would apply:

- Any new roads would have appropriate seasonal closures
- Firewood retrieval would be addressed via the permit process, and
- Road closure effectiveness would be monitored as described in the Record of Decision (ROD) monitoring plan
- Construction of new trailheads would be designed to avoid removal of lynx habitat
- Construction of new roads and trails would not reduce suitable lynx habitat in LAU’s bb-02 and bb-03 that now have more than 30% habitat currently in an unsuitable condition

## **Watershed Improvement Projects**

Watershed improvement projects were originally included in only Alternative 5 in the DEIS. Based on public and agency comments, the ID Team decided to include watershed improvement projects, as applicable, to all of the action alternatives. The table below provides a brief description of the improvement project, its estimated cost, and the applicable alternatives. Note that some watershed improvements apply to both motorized

and nonmotorized routes but would be modified based on which route type is in the alternative.

### **North of Trout Creek**

Replace the existing culvert on un-named tributary to Indian Cr. on Road No. 138 in Section 17, T12N R1E with a culvert that will pass the 100-year flood in order to protect watershed and fishery values.

Replace two existing culverts on Hidden Valley Road No. 4119 in Sections 7 and 18, T12N R1E with culverts that will pass the 100-year flood in order to protect watershed and fishery values.

Install a culvert on Beaver Creek Road No. 138 that will pass the 100-year flood where Pikes Gulch enters Beaver Creek in section 27, T13N R1E.

Re-route a total of one-half a mile of the Yellowstone Pipeline maintenance road in Beaver Creek section 32, T13N R1E to eliminate six existing fords.

### **Trout Creek to Avalanche Watershed Improvement Projects**

There are three sediment delivery sites on the Magpie Road No. 425 that would be reconstructed to minimize sediment washing from the road into the creek. In section 31, T11N, R1E, the road drainage would be modified to focus run-off into vegetation filter strips. In Section 34, T12N, R1E, the road template would be reshaped and drainage modified as above.

The Harris Gulch Road is an unclassified road that provides access to a private land inholding. This route was rebuilt by the landowner under a special use permit in 2004. Additional stabilization work would need to be completed before making the route available for public motorized use. All work is located in section 23 & 27, T11N, R1E.

Hellgate Trail No. 264 - Relocate the trail to the east side of the creek from the parking area to Carpenter Gulch, this is a total distance of one mile. About half of this mile will be new trail and the other half will be on the existing trail location and this will eliminate two existing fords. Construct two trail bridges in this section at the two remaining stream crossings. Above Carpenter Gulch in section 14, T11N, R1E an existing ford will be hardened and two 150-foot sections of the trail would be relocated in the places where it is too close to the stream.

Avalanche Road No. 239 – Raise the roadbed 3 feet in elevation for a distance of 300 feet in the area in section 11, T11N, R1E where beaver activity has caused the creek to flow onto the road.

Thompson Gulch Trail No. 264 - The lower one-quarter of a mile of this trail would be relocated out of the creek bottom where possible. The upper portion of the trail would have drainage dips and other drainage structures added where necessary.

Avalanche Gulch Road No. 359 – the road crosses the main creek 17 times and many of these crossings are sediment delivery sites and/or fish passage barriers. Problems at seven of the crossings have been effectively addressed. The remaining ten crossings need improvements to reduce sedimentation and to provide fish passage. There are also ten places where side drainages cross the road and at each of these sites improvements will be done to reduce sedimentation or the risk of culvert failure in a flood event.

## South of Avalanche Watershed Improvement Projects

Springs Gulch Road No. 1020 - Reduce the sediment delivery from this road by reducing the road width, installing culverts and drive through dips, out sloping, and re-vegetating the cut and fill slopes.

Harden the ford in section 15, T10N, R2E across Whites Gulch Creek to the camping area in Millers' Gulch.

On the Whites Gulch Road No. 587 improve the road surface drainage in seven locations to prevent material from the road surface getting into the stream. This would be accomplished by reshaping the road to inslope it and by constructing a ditch, as well as installation of drain dips. Also replace four culverts that carry the streams on the north side of the drainage under the road. This would include Number Sixteen, No. 2, Upper No. 2, and Horse Gulches.

## East of the Divide Watershed Improvement Projects

Improve the surface drainage on five 500-foot sections of the Ridge Road, No. 4161. Conveyor belt water bars would be installed every 100' to keep water from running down the steep sections of the road during the wet weather.

### Watershed Improvement Projects by Alternative

Watershed Improvement Project	Cost	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4	Alt. 5	Alt. 6
Beaver Creek road #138 - Indian Creek tributary culvert	\$5,000	Applies	Applies	Does not apply, road would be decommissioned	Applies	Applies
Road #4119 Hidden Valley culverts	\$5,000	Applies	Applies	Does not apply, road would be decommissioned	Applies	Applies
Beaver Creek road #138 - Pikes Gulch culvert	\$5,000	Applies	Applies	Applies	Applies	Applies
Yellowstone pipeline road reroute	\$5,000	Applies	Applies	Applies	Applies	Applies
Magpie road #425 sediment control work	\$3,000	Applies	Applies	Applies	Applies	Applies
Harris Gulch road reconstruction	\$35,000	Applies	Applies	Private landowner would do it	Applies	Applies
Harris Gulch swale drainage correction/erosion abatement	\$3,000	Applies	Applies	Applies	Applies	Applies
Hellgate trail #264 reconstruction/relocation	\$10,000	Applies – motorized trail	Applies-motorized trail	Applies-nonmotorized trail	Applies – part motorized, part nonmotorized trail	Applies – part motorized trail, part non-motorized trail
Avalanche road #239 – roadbed work for drainage	\$5,000	Applies	Applies	Applies	Applies	Applies
Thompson Gulch trail #264 relocations and drainage	\$5,000	Applies – motorized trail	Applies-motorized trail	Applies – nonmotorized trail	Applies-motorized trail	Applies – motorized trail
Avalanche Gulch road #359 – sedimentation reduction, culvert work, fish passage	\$120,000	Applies	Applies	Applies	Applies	Applies

Watershed Improvement Project	Cost	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4	Alt. 5	Alt. 6
Spring Gulch road #1020 – reduce sediment delivery	\$10,000	Applies	Applies	Does not apply, road would be decommissioned	Applies	Applies
Whites Gulch to Miller Gulch ford	\$5,000	Applies	Applies	Applies	Applies	Applies
Whites Gulch road 587 – improve surface, replace culverts	\$10,000	Applies	Applies	Applies	Applies	Applies
Ridge Road #4161 – drainage improvement, erosion control	\$5,000	Applies – motorized route	Applies – motorized route	Applies – nonmotorized route	Applies – motorized route	Applies – motorized route

## Alternative Descriptions

This section describes the No Action Alternative (Alternative 1) and five other alternatives for travel planning in the North Belts and Dry Range area. All alternatives are subject to compliance with all valid statutes on NFS lands. Impacts of all resources are considered through utilization of the processes identified in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969.

A description of each route and its status by alternative is included in Appendix A. This appendix also identifies the decommissioning method, if any, for routes closed yearlong and a description of decommissioning methods.

The alternative descriptions in Chapter 2 summarize the road and trail mileages by category of access and use. *It is important to note that road and trail mileages listed in each of the resource sections in Chapter 3 may be summarized in different ways for the purpose of addressing or analyzing various resource effects.* Therefore, the reader may observe seeming differences in road or trail mileages between these Chapter 2 alternative descriptions and the various Chapter 3 resource analyses of environmental consequences. Nonetheless, the same GIS database was queried to derive all road and trail mileages in the different sections of this EIS.

For example, in the watershed analysis, the road and trail mileages summarized for Chapter 2 alternative descriptions do not include some of the miles of routes on private land because the Helena National Forest does not necessarily have authority for allowing public access on these routes. However, the Chapter 3 section for watershed resources does include and evaluate miles of roads and trails on private lands. These private roads are included in the watershed analysis of environmental consequences because the physical presence of these routes can affect watershed function. Therefore, there are apparent differences in total miles of roads and trails when comparing the Chapter 2 alternative descriptions and the Chapter 3 Watershed section. However, the road and trail mileages were derived from the same GIS database, and are consistent between these different sections.

### Alternative 1 – No Action

Under this alternative, no new actions stated in the Proposed Action would take place other than items identified as common to all alternatives, including mitigation. This alternative is responsive to comments received stating support for leaving current road and trail management more or less static, including the unclassified routes identified in 2003. This

alternative is developed as a basis for comparing other alternatives and is required by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations.

Roads and trails available for public use would remain with current use designations as shown on the current Helena National Forest Travel Plan map (2001), subsequent decisions, and Forest Service roads and trails inventories. Additional closure methods such as new gates could be installed to help fully implement the current travel plan as well as installation of new trailhead facilities. The current level of snowmobiling opportunity would also remain unchanged. This alternative includes all previous open/closed/new route decisions made within the North Belts area. It does not include any remaining temporary emergency orders placed on the Cave Gulch Fire area.

The existing condition includes the July 1, 2001 Statewide Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) decision which restricted wheeled motorized vehicles to existing roads and trails. The OHV decision also provides for motorized travel up to 300 feet off designated routes to reach dispersed campsites.

### **Route Miles and Snowmobile Use Summary, includes unclassified routes**

- Road open yearlong or seasonally for licensed vehicles – 370 miles
- Road closed yearlong – 101 miles
- Unclassified route miles open 45.9 of 47.8 miles
- Motorized trail open yearlong or seasonally – 40 miles
- Motorcycle trail open yearlong – 1.9 miles
- Nonmotorized trail – 90 miles
- Snowmobile only (no other motorized use) trail – 3.3 miles
- Area available for snowmobile use – 113, 550 acres

### **Seasonal Restrictions**

Current seasonal restrictions on roads and motorized trails with this alternative include a bow season big game hunting restriction (9/1-12/1), a combined hunting and winter restriction (10/15 – 5/15), a springtime restriction (4/15-5/31), and a winter range restriction (12/2-5/15).

### **300 feet use**

Motorized wheeled cross-country travel to a campsite is permissible within 300 feet of roads and trails. Site selection must be completed by non-motorized means and accessed by the most direct route causing the least damage.

### **Unclassified routes**

Alternative 1 has 47.8 miles of unclassified routes that were identified during 2003. These routes include about 27 miles open yearlong, 19 miles open seasonally, and about 2 miles closed yearlong. See the table in the Transportation section of Chapter 3 for tabular display of how unclassified routes are dealt with by alternative. Also, see Appendix G.

### **Decommissioning**

There would be no decommissioning of any routes, including unclassified routes, in Alternative 1.

## **Alternative 2**

This alternative was developed to address issues provided by OHV and motorcycle enthusiasts and includes specific routes provided by local motorized user organizations. The overriding strategy of this alternative is designated routes for specific vehicle types based on terrain and other factors, and, connectedness of routes so that a comprehensive trail riding system is available, primarily between Trout Creek and Avalanche Creeks.

Alternative 2 includes an emphasis on ATV and motorcycle routes while slightly increasing the number of miles of nonmotorized routes, loops, dual use, and some game retrieval, as well as a 425 acre off route use area. The snowmobile areas and designated snowmobile routes are the same as the proposed action, Alternative 5.

### **Route Miles and Snowmobile Use Summary, includes unclassified routes**

- Road open yearlong or seasonally for licensed vehicles – 122.7 miles
- Road closed yearlong – 119.9 miles
- Unclassified routes becoming classified routes open for motorized use, see Appendix G (includes any motorized route open yearlong or seasonally) – 41.2 miles
- Dual use route open yearlong or seasonally – 232.8 miles
- Motorized trail open yearlong or seasonally – 92.5 miles
- Motorcycle trail open yearlong or seasonally – 13.3 miles
- Nonmotorized trail – 97.3 miles
- New routes - 0.9 miles of dual use road, 22 miles of motorized trail, 5.2 miles of nonmotorized trail
- Snowmobile only (no other motorized use) trail – 3.3 miles
- Area available for snowmobile use – 63,519 acres

### **Seasonal Restrictions and Retrieval**

Seasonal restrictions on roads and motorized trails would also be adopted with this alternative, including a 10/15 – 12/1 big game security restriction and a 12/2 – 5/15 big game winter range restriction.

Approximately 59 miles of game retrieval and disabled hunter access routes are also identified. Some retrieval routes would only be in place during the 10/15 to 12/1 big game rifle season. Other roads would allow retrieval from 10/15 to 5/15, which would accommodate big game rifle hunters and winter-time lion hunters.

### **300 feet use**

Travel up to 300 feet off of a designated route, both roads and trails, would be allowed for retrieval, woodcutting, and to reach dispersed campsites as long as it does not result in resource damage such as rutting, fording of streams, crossing of wet meadows, new unclassified routes, noxious weed spread or similar resource concerns.

### **Unclassified routes**

Alternative 1 has 47.8 miles of unclassified routes that were identified during 2003. Under Alternative 2, these routes would become 1.2 miles open for licensed vehicles, 16.5 miles open for dual use either yearlong or seasonally, 6.6 miles closed yearlong, about 17 miles

motorized trail open yearlong or seasonally, and about 7 miles of motorcycle trail open seasonally. See the table in the Transportation section of Chapter 3 for tabular display of how unclassified routes are dealt with by alternative. Also, see Appendix G.

### **Decommissioning**

The decommissioning methods incorporated in Alternative 2 focus on making the closed routes unavailable for motorized use. This would ensure compliance with the travel plan, while still providing the prism of the closed route for future activity. Therefore, the closure method utilized most extensively would be ripping a portion (first 100 feet or so) of the closed route and applying seed and slash. There would be about 68.2 miles closed by this ripping method. There would be about 1.5 miles closed with a new gate. The remaining miles of closed road are already closed by another method. Some of these closed routes would become part of the motorized trail system and would be converted to a trail width. Decommissioning methods for specific routes are found in Appendix A.

### **Alternative 3**

This alternative was developed to address issues identified by four-wheel-drive enthusiasts and to provide opportunities for their use. The overriding strategy of this alternative is designated routes with an emphasis on maximizing roads for four-wheel driving, retaining closed road prisms for future use, and providing for game retrieval. Vehicle-specific routes, such as ATV only, motorcycle only, and mixed use on roads and trails are also included with the four-by-four routes. Many of the existing roads and trails available for motorized use would also allow for dual use. Allowance of dual use on existing roads would not entail any changes to the road beds.

### **Route Miles and Snowmobile Use Summary, includes unclassified routes**

- Road open yearlong or seasonally for licensed vehicles – 118 miles
- Road closed yearlong – 85.7 miles
- Dual use route open yearlong or seasonally – 290.3 miles
- Unclassified routes becoming classified routes open for motorized use, see Appendix G (includes any motorized route open yearlong or seasonally) – 44.6 miles
- Motorized trail open yearlong or seasonally – 68.9 miles
- Motorcycle trail open yearlong or seasonally – 9.2 miles
- Nonmotorized trail – 90 miles
- New routes – 3.4 miles of dual use road and 11.2 miles of motorized trail
- Snowmobile only (no other motorized use) trail – 3.3 miles
- Area available for snowmobile use – Same as Alternative 2

### **Seasonal Restrictions and Retrieval**

Seasonal restrictions on roads and motorized trails would occur with this alternative, including a 9/1 – 12/1 big game restriction, a 10/15 – 12/1 big game security restriction, and a 12/2 – 5/15 big game winter range restriction. A number of additional game retrieval opportunities would be provided during various seasons. The 9/1 to 12/1 retrieval date accommodates the entire big game hunting season, including bow season. Some retrieval routes would only be in place during the 10/15 to 12/1 rifle season. Other roads would allow retrieval from 10/15 to 5/15 which would accommodate big game rifle hunters and winter-time lion hunters. The final retrieval date would be from 12/2 to 5/15, again for lion hunting.

### **300 feet use**

Same as Alternative 2

### **Unclassified routes**

Alternative 1 has 47.8 miles of unclassified routes that were identified during 2003. Under Alternative 3, these routes would become 1.2 miles open for licensed vehicles, 20.4 miles open for dual use either yearlong or seasonally, 3.2 miles closed yearlong, about 18.5 miles motorized trail open yearlong or seasonally and about 4.5 miles of motorcycle trail open seasonally. Also, see Appendix G.

### **Decommissioning**

The decommissioning methods incorporated in Alternative 3 focus on making the closed routes unavailable for motorized use. At the same time, the prism of the closed route would be left intact for future activity. Thus, the closure method proposed most extensively is gates – approximately 27.5 miles. Some would have signs only - about 5.3 miles. The remaining routes are either currently closed by another method or no closure method would be used. Decommissioning methods for specific routes are found in Appendix A. See the table in the Transportation section of Chapter 3 for tabular display of how unclassified routes are dealt with by alternative.

### **Alternative 4**

This alternative was developed to address issues identified by quiet trails enthusiasts and emphasizes non-motorized uses. The overriding philosophy of this alternative is that classified roads should be for motorized vehicles. All other routes are trails for non-motorized users. Licensed vehicle and driver for all motorized routes is a requirement with this alternative. The emphasis of this alternative is to provide access to non-motorized trails via major forest roads. This alternative includes snowmobile routes which access two areas for off-route snowmobile use. No game retrieval routes are proposed.

### **Route Miles and Snowmobile Use Summary, includes unclassified routes**

- Road open yearlong or seasonally for licensed vehicles – 142.7 miles
- Road closed yearlong – 330.1 miles
- Unclassified routes becoming classified routes open for motorized use, see Appendix G - 0.4 miles
- Dual use route open yearlong or seasonally – 0 miles
- Motorized trail open yearlong or seasonally – 0 miles
- Motorcycle trail open yearlong or seasonally – 0 miles
- Nonmotorized trail – 198.6 miles
- New routes – 20.8 miles of nonmotorized trail
- Snowmobile only trail – 0 miles
- Area available for snowmobile use – 8,538 acres

## **Seasonal Restrictions**

Seasonal restrictions on roads occur with this alternative and include a bow season, big game hunting through winter range restriction (9/1 to 5/15), a winter range restriction (12/2 – 5/15), and a spring restriction (4/15 to 5/31).

## **300 feet use**

Vehicle use off of designated roads and trails is prohibited.

## **Unclassified routes**

Alternative 1 has 47.8 miles of unclassified routes that were identified during 2003. Under Alternative 4, these routes would become 0.4 miles open for licensed vehicles, 41.2 miles closed yearlong and 6.2 miles converted to nonmotorized trail. See the table in the Transportation section of Chapter 3 for tabular display of how unclassified routes are dealt with by alternative. Also, see Appendix G.

## **Decommissioning**

Decommissioning methods on roads closed yearlong in Alternative 4 focus on making closed routes unavailable for motorized use and restoring long-term watershed function. Thus, the closure method proposed most extensively is ripping or recontouring the entire closed route. About 195.8 miles would be ripped and about 70 miles would be recontoured. Both methods would include slash and seed. Some closed routes would have gates and/or signs where permitted or private land access is needed. About 5 miles of road would be converted to nonmotorized trail. These are specified by route in Appendix A.

## **Alternative 5 – Proposed Action**

This alternative was developed by the Forest Service in response to public comment on the 1999 DEIS, the findings of the Roads Analysis Report Helena National Forest (2002 – 2004), and the purpose and need as described in Chapter 1. Alternative 5 was modified between initial scoping in February 2003 and issuance of the DEIS in July 2003. It has been modified from the DEIS to the FEIS only to the extent of responding to the unclassified routes added in Alternative 1, which are described below.

Generally, big game winter ranges (based primarily on elevation) are not open to snowmobiles, though limited designated routes through winter range are provided in some instances. Other closure periods have either been grafted into these dates or the Forest is proposing to address them as unique situations and utilize special orders or other methods to respond to them. These situations include, but are not limited to spring thaw, groomed ski trails, game retrieval routes, and disabled access.

### **Route Miles and Snowmobile Use Summary, includes unclassified routes**

- Road open yearlong or seasonally for licensed vehicles – 241.4 miles
- Road closed yearlong – 240.2 miles
- Dual use route open yearlong or seasonally – 0 miles
- Unclassified routes becoming classified routes open for motorized use, see Appendix G – 14.1 miles
- Motorized trail open yearlong or seasonally – 57.4 miles
- Motorcycle trail open yearlong or seasonally – 0 miles

- Nonmotorized trail – 124.9 miles
- New routes – 0.9 miles of road, 4.5 miles of motorized trail, 9.7 miles of nonmotorized trail
- Snowmobile only (no other motorized use) trail – 3.3 miles
- Area available for snowmobile use – Same as Alternative 2

### **Seasonal Restrictions**

Seasonal restrictions on roads and motorized trails are part of this alternative, including a 10/15 – 12/1 big game security restriction and a 12/2 – 5/15 big game winter range restriction. Other designated routes are either open or closed to motorized vehicles yearlong.

### **300 feet use**

Motorized vehicle use within 300 feet of an open designated road is permitted, primarily to access dispersed campsites. It is also permitted for other uses as long as they do not result in resource damage (i.e. rutting, fording of streams, crossing of wet meadows, new unclassified routes, noxious weed spread, or similar resource concerns). Such use within 300 feet of an open designated trail would not be permitted under Alternative 5.

Several areas would be subject to special restrictions within the 300-foot buffer for designated roads. One such area is the meadowland south of the Beaver Creek road for 1.7 miles above the mouth of Beaver Creek. In Magpie Creek, the sensitive reach is located from Coxey Gulch upstream to Sheriff Gulch with about 5.3 miles of road affected by the special restriction. In Avalanche Creek, the sensitive reach is located between Doolittle Gulch and Cooney Gulch with about 7.5 miles of road affected by the special restriction. The special restriction would limit motorized use on the streamside of the 300-foot zone to already established roads and dispersed campsites. Again, fording of streams would only be allowed if the ford is part of a designated route.

### **Unclassified routes**

Alternative 1 has 47.8 miles of unclassified routes that were identified during 2003. Under Alternative 5, these routes would become 4.0 miles open for licensed vehicles, 0.0 miles open for dual use, 32.2 miles closed yearlong, 10.1 miles motorized trail open yearlong or seasonally, and about 1.4 miles of nonmotorized trail. See the table in the Transportation section of Chapter 3 for tabular display of how unclassified routes are dealt with by alternative. Also, see Appendix G.

### **Decommissioning**

There is not a specific emphasis on the type of decommissioning methods used in Alternative 5. Closure methods were developed to respond to administrative access needs, private land access needs, making routes unavailable for motorized use while still providing the prism of the closed route for future actions, and decommissioning roads in drainages or on soil types where watershed issues occur.

Thus, Alternative 5 has a mix of closure methods proposed. These closure methods include gates (24 new) and barriers other than a gate such as boulders (9 new) where the prism of the road would be available for motorized use, 5.7 miles of route with erosion controls and drainage improvements, as well as seed and slash, 76 miles of route that would be ripped, seeded and slashed along the entire length, 8.3 miles of route that would be recontoured,

and 3.1 miles that would be converted to nonmotorized trail. Decommissioning methods for specific routes are found in Appendix A.

## **Alternative 6**

Alternative 6 was developed between the draft and final EIS because the Proposed Action did not include; designated motorcycle routes, dual use designation for routes to make connections between roads and motorized trails, camping off of a motorized trail, access to areas of interest to disabled and older hunters, and moving irregular winter use boundaries to make identification on the ground easier. Alternative 6 also responds to resource concerns - including the potential for increased recreation impacts on resources due to the closure of other routes that have up to now helped to disperse users, the need for additional wildlife security in the Devils' Tower area, and the need for long term administrative access on closed road prisms.

In addition, Alternative 6 proposes some new motorized and non-motorized route segments that would result in better connected routes, increased safety for ATV users, and complete loops.

### **Route Miles and Snowmobile Use Summary, includes unclassified routes**

- Road open yearlong or seasonally for licensed vehicles – 164.9 miles
- Road closed yearlong – 202.7 miles
- Dual use route open yearlong or seasonally – 119.1 miles
- Unclassified routes becoming classified routes open for motorized use, see Appendix G – 18.4 miles
- Motorized trail open yearlong or seasonally – 45.9 miles
- Motorcycle trail open yearlong or seasonally – 13.6 miles
- Nonmotorized trail – 111.0 miles
- New routes – 2.2 miles of road, 4.0 miles of motorized trail, 1.6 miles of nonmotorized trail. Note, all new route miles are also included in the miles above.
- Snowmobile only (no other motorized use) trail – 3.3 miles
- Area available for snowmobile use – 63,686 acres

### **Seasonal Restrictions**

Seasonal restrictions on roads and motorized trails are part of this alternative and include a 10/15-12/1 big game security restriction and a 12/2-5/15 winter range restriction. Some routes include both restrictions. Several routes/areas have been identified to have routes *open* 10/15-12/1 to provide for hunting opportunity for disabled and older people. These areas were identified through public involvement and include a route in the Cochran Gulch area, routes open in the Hidden Valley area and a route open between Vermont Gulch and Lambing Camp gulches. These routes are closed the remainder of the year.

### **300 feet use**

In an area where developed parking sites are not provided, and not otherwise prohibited, direct access to suitable parking within 300 feet of a road or trail designated for motorized use is authorized. Travel under this exception must not cause resource damage. Examples of resource damage associated with the exception include any fording of streams, rutting, travel on wet meadows, or hill-climbs. Authorization for travel within 300 feet off routes for

firewood cutting would be addressed in the firewood cutting permit. It may be allowed in some cases and not in others, depending upon resource concerns.

### **Unclassified routes**

Alternative 1 has 47.8 miles of unclassified routes that were identified during 2003. Under Alternative 6, these routes would become 1.0 mile open for licensed vehicles, 8.6 miles open for dual use, 24.9 miles closed yearlong, 8.8 miles motorized trail open yearlong or seasonally and about 1.4 miles of nonmotorized trail. See the table in the Transportation section of Chapter 3 for tabular display of how unclassified routes are dealt with by alternative. Also, see Appendix G.

### **Decommissioning**

The types of decommissioning methods used in Alternative 6 are in response to the following; administrative access needs, private land access needs, making routes unavailable for motorized use while still providing the prism of the closed route for future actions, reducing costs, and decommissioning roads in drainages or on soil types where watershed issues occur. To reduce costs, some routes that would otherwise have a standard Forest Service gate are being proposed for a less expensive, removable barrier type closure method. These types of closures were recommended particularly in areas where frequent lightning and wildfire response occurs, such as the Devils' Tower area.

Thus, Alternative 6 has a mix of closure methods proposed. These closure methods include gates (14 new) and barriers other than a gate (12 new) where the prism of the road would be available for motorized use, 33.9 miles of route with erosion controls and drainage improvements, as well as seed and possibly slash, 60.1 miles of route that would be ripped, seeded and slashed along the entire length, 13.0 miles of route that would be recontoured, and 1.5 miles that would be converted to nonmotorized trail. Decommissioning methods for specific routes are found in Appendix A.

## ***Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study***

Several alternative options were identified by the ID Team or provided by the public during the course of this project. Federal agencies are required by NEPA to explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives and to briefly discuss the reasons for eliminating any alternatives that were not developed in detail (40 CFR 1502.14(a)). These alternatives and the reasons they are not included for detailed analysis are discussed below.

### **Watershed Health Emphasis**

This alternative was identified by the ID Team during development of the DEIS. It entails relocating all roads in valley bottoms that are causing excessive sedimentation and altering floodplain action. This alternative is responsive to public comments regarding watershed impairments that are the result of poor road locations or roads located in shale-type bedrock, such as the Big Belts. Roads or portions of roads that would be considered for relocating in this alternative include Hellgate, Whites, Avalanche, portions of Magpie, Beaver Creek, Confederate-Benton, Trout Creek, and others.

This alternative is not being considered in detail for the following reasons:

- It would entail relocating many of the primary forest access roads. The specifics and complexity of relocating these routes is outside of the scope of this project, including design specifics, acquisition of easements, etc. Note that portions of this issue are

addressed in the alternatives with watershed improvement projects and the watershed impacts are addressed in the analysis.

- Relocating these roads could result in loss of access to dispersed camp areas and changes to the connections between trails.
- Segments of many of these roads cross private property for which there is no recorded public easement. Moving these routes could not be completely facilitated without first conducting land exchanges or other agreements which are outside the scope of this project.

## **Wildlife Alternative**

This alternative was identified by the ID Team during development of the DEIS. It would entail closing most of the major and secondary forest routes to fully restore maximum habitat for various species of wildlife.

This alternative is not being considered in detail for the following reasons:

- It is not responsive to the purpose and need for the project to provide for motorized and non-motorized opportunities in the analysis area.
- Alternative 4 addresses these concepts.

## **1986 Level of Open Forest Roads Alternative**

This alternative was identified during a public meeting and subsequent public comment and includes identification and analysis of an alternative that includes all of the motorized and non-motorized routes that existed at the time the Forest Plan was adopted, 1986.

Given the information contained in the Forest Roads Analysis planning process, reduced trail and road maintenance budget, and the need to provide a motorized travel system that meets standards while protecting resources, it is not reasonable to fully address this alternative. Also, the previous decisions that have closed roads and trails are considered in the cumulative effects section(s) where applicable. Even though this alternative is not being considered in detail, the changes in availability of motorized routes since 1986 are presented in the Recreation section of Chapter 3, Cumulative Effects.

## **Montanans for Multiple Use Alternative**

The Helena Forest received a map of an alternative to be considered from a consortium of groups including the Jawbone Chapter of the Montanan's For Multiple Use, Citizens' Against Road Closures (Broadwater County) and Elaine Mann, Broadwater County Commissioner during the comment period on the DEIS. This alternative included the current road and trail classified routes and identified that they would be open yearlong to all motorized use, with the exception of routes that cross private property where no public access exists.

This alternative is not considered in detail for the following reasons:

- It is not responsive to the Purpose and Need for providing a reasonable amount of motorized and nonmotorized use.
- The alternative includes motorized trails in wilderness areas and proposed wilderness areas which are prohibited by law.
- The alternative includes motorized use of roads during the winter period on big game winter ranges which is in conflict with Forest Plan standards.

- The alternative includes motorized use of routes that were identified as outside the scope of this project.

## Comparison of Alternatives

This section provides a comparative summary of how the alternatives respond to the purpose and need for action and how they respond to the significant issues. It also displays the projected outputs and other environmental effects that may influence alternative selection. Based on this information and the analysis provided in Chapter 3, the deciding officer and the public should be able to see why some alternatives affect resources/issues differently than others, and what the trade-offs are between alternatives; that is, provide "a clear basis for choice among options by the decision maker and the public".

The tables on the following pages compare design features by alternative, roads, trails, and off-route uses by alternative, and compare the effects by alternative to the issues in a summary form. Chapter 3 provides considerable detail of the effects of alternative implementation; Appendix A provides considerable more detail as to route by route information.

### Summary Comparison of Roads, Trails, Off-route Use by Alternative

FEATURE	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4	Alt. 5	Alt. 6
Miles of classified roads (including new construction) open yearlong and seasonally for licensed vehicles <sup>1</sup>	370.4	122.7	118.0	142.7	241.4	164.9
Unclassified routes open year long, seasonally, or closed	47.8	0	0	0	0	0
Miles of dual use <sup>2</sup> roads open yearlong or seasonally (miles)	0	232.8	290.3	0	0	119.1
Miles of road closed yearlong	100.8	119.9	85.7	330.1	240.2	202.7
Miles of motorized trail open yearlong and seasonally to OHVs. <sup>3</sup>	40	92.5	68.9	0	57.4	45.9
Miles of motorcycle trail open yearlong or seasonally	1.9	13.3	9.2	0	0	13.6
Miles of motorized routes on NFS lands in Roadless Areas (yearlong or seasonally)	129.8	141.5	140.3	13.7	61.8	75.8
Miles of nonmotorized classified trails <sup>4</sup>	90	97.3	90	198.6	124.9	111.0
Acres of snowmobile areas	113,548	63,519	63,519	8,538	63,519	63,686

<sup>1</sup> - Roads open to full size vehicles and OHVs meeting State licensing requirements. Includes proposed new routes.

<sup>2</sup> - Dual Use roads include those available for full size and off-highway vehicles. Not necessary to meet State licensing requirements.

<sup>3</sup> - Vehicles/riders not necessary to meet state licensing. Motorcycle miles are totaled and include yearlong and with seasonal restrictions

<sup>4</sup> - Includes new construction and/or conversion from other route types. Nonmotorized trails open to all forms of nonmotorized use, including bicycles (except in wilderness).

## Summary Comparison of Features of the Alternatives

FEATURE	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4	Alt. 5	Alt. 6
Area Closure with designated routes	Yes	Yes, with 425 acre exception	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of different seasonal closure dates. Includes open date in Alt 6 of 10/15-12/1	10 (4/15-5/31) (10/15-5/15) (9/1-12/1) (12/1-5/15) (12/2-5/15) (2/1-8/30) (5/16-12/1) (10/15-6/30) (10/15-12/1) (10/15-12/31)	3 (12/2-5/15) (10/15- 5/15) (10/15-12/1)	4 (12/2-5/15) (10/15-5/15) (10/15-12/1) (9/1-12/1)	3 (4/15-5/31) (9/1-5/15) (12/2-5/15)	2 (10/15-12/1) (12/2-5/15)	2 (10/15-12/1) (12/2-5/15)
Types of vehicle/route designations	Licensed vehicles Vehicles less than 50 inches wide Motorcycles Snowmobiles	Licensed vehicles All Vehicles Vehicles less than 50 inches wide Motorcycles Snowmobiles	Licensed vehicles All Vehicles Vehicles less than 50 inches wide Motorcycles Snowmobiles	Licensed vehicles Snowmobiles	Licensed vehicles Vehicles less than 50 inches wide Snowmobiles	Licensed vehicles All Vehicles Vehicles less than 50 inches wide Motorcycles Snowmobiles
Provides roads (dual use) for unlicensed OHV vehicles and riders	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Designated motorcycle routes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Designated snowmobile period	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
300 feet – Off route use next to open classified route	Yes – For roads and trails, for camping only	Yes, for roads and trails, camping, woodcutting, and retrieval	Yes-Same as Alt 2	No	Yes for roads to access dispersed rec opportunities	Yes, for roads and trails to park
Watershed improvement projects/Trailhead Projects	No/Yes	Yes/Yes	Yes/Yes	Yes/Yes	Yes/Yes	Yes/Yes
Game Retrieval	No	Yes, 53.2 miles	Yes, 114.2 miles	No	No	No. However 3 roads open for hunting season
Year long road closure miles and closure/decommission method emphasis	100.8 miles; gate emphasis	119.9 miles; partial rip emphasis to prevent unauthorized use	85.7 miles; gate only emphasis	330.1 miles; rip all of prism and recontour emphasis	240.2 miles; mixture of gates, rip all of prism and some recontour	202.7 miles; mixture of gates, other barriers, erosion control methods, rip all of prism, and recontour
Dry Range routes and winter use	All open yearlong	Same as Alt.1	Same as Alt.1	Designated routes only, no snowmobile areas	Routes same as Alt.4, snowmobile use restricted on mapped winter range 12/2-5/15	Routes same as Alt 4, winter motorized use restricted on most winter range 12/2-5/15

### Comparison of Effects Table

ISSUES	ALT. 1	ALT. 2	ALT. 3	ALT. 4	ALT. 5	ALT. 6
<b>TRANSPORTATION/ECONOMICS</b>						
Road Closures and Decommissioning	\$0	\$11,700	\$28,150	\$1,828,500	\$414,000	\$492,150
New Road Construction	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$22,500	\$0
New Dual-Use Road Construction	\$0	\$20,000	\$100,000	\$0	\$0	\$44,000
Convert Mot. Trail to Dual-Use Road	\$0	\$0	\$4,800	\$0	\$0	\$6,000
Motorized Trail New Construction (1)	\$0	\$396,000	\$198,000	\$0	\$81,000	\$72,000
Non-motorized Trail New Construction (1)	\$0	\$90,000	\$0	\$378,000	\$174,600	\$28,800
Motorized Trail Reconstruction(2)	\$252,000	\$504,000	\$402,000	\$0	\$318,000	\$336,000
Non-motorized Trail Reconstruction (2)	\$540,000	\$552,000	\$540,000	\$1,068,000	\$690,000	\$660,000
Signs	\$0	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$20,000	\$40,000	\$40,000
Trailheads/Portals	\$102,000	\$127,000	\$122,000	\$117,000	\$149,500	\$142,000
Watershed Improvement Projects	NA	\$231,000	\$231,000	\$176,000	\$231,000	\$231,000
<b>Total Costs for Implementation</b>	<b>\$894,000</b>	<b>\$2,006,700</b>	<b>\$1,700,950</b>	<b>\$3,587,500</b>	<b>\$2,120,600</b>	<b>\$2,051,950</b>
(1) New trail construction costs are estimated at \$18,000 per mile (2) Reconstruction costs are estimated at \$12,000 per mile. Includes costs to improve all designated trails to Forest Service standards. Also includes the cost of converting unclassified routes to trails.						
<b>RECREATION</b>						
Snowmobile Opportunity	113,548 acres	63,519 acres	63,519 acres	8,538 acres	63,519 acres	63,686 acres
<b>Trails Opportunity:</b>						
Nonmotorized	90 miles	97.3 miles	90 mi. – same as Alt.1	198.6 miles	124.9 miles	111 miles
Motorized, (including motorcycle in parenthesis)	41.9 miles (1.9 miles)	105.8 miles (13.3 miles)	78.1 miles (9.2 miles)	0 miles (0 miles)	57.4 miles (0 miles)	59.5 miles (13.6 miles)
<b>Dual Use Opportunity</b>	0	232.8 miles	290.3 miles	0	0	119.1 miles
<b>Open OHV Area – acres</b>	0	425 ac available	0	0	0	0
<b>Opportunity for Off Route Travel within 300 feet of an open designated route</b>	300 ft off rds/trails, for camping only	300 ft off rds/trails, for camping, firewood and retrieval	300 ft off rds/trails, for camping, firewood and retrieval	No off route travel adjacent to open routes	300 ft. off roads for all recreational activities	300 ft. off roads and trails to park
<b>Displacement of recreationists</b>						
Motorized	No	No	No	Yes, all OHV's	Yes, dual use	No

<b>ISSUES</b>	<b>ALT. 1</b>	<b>ALT. 2</b>	<b>ALT. 3</b>	<b>ALT. 4</b>	<b>ALT. 5</b>	<b>ALT. 6</b>
Nonmotorized	No	Minor	Minor	No	Minor	Minor
<b>Plan Complexity</b> – based on closures and vehicle types	Most Complex	Complex	Most Complex	Least Complex	Moderately Complex	Moderately Complex
<b>ROADLESS AREAS</b>						
<b>Miles of road and motorized trail in roadless areas</b>	129.8 miles	141.5 miles	140.3 miles	13.7 miles	61.8 miles	75.8 miles
<b>LANDS/SPECIAL USES</b>						
<b>Miles of rd. on FS land available to special use permit holders and not to public</b>	31.9	32.4	32.4	35.1	26.5	18.8
<b>FIRE MANAGEMENT</b>						
<b>% Change (from existing condition) in Access for Fire and Fuels Mgt.</b>	No Change	14% decrease	7% increase	63% decrease	16% decrease	13% decrease
<b>% Change (from existing condition) in Public Access and Associated Risk of Fire Starts</b>	No Change	4% decrease	11% increase	61% decrease	35% decrease	23% decrease
<b>FOREST RESOURCES</b>						
<b>% and acres of suitable timber lands accessible by motorized vehicle for mgt.</b>	50-55% 26,500 ac	50-55% 26,500 ac	50-55% 26,500 ac	30-35% 16,200 ac	45-50% 24,300 ac	45-50% 24,300 ac
<b>Miles of motorized route open and opportunity for firewood/forest products</b>	416– includes unclassified routes – no motorized use within 300 ft for firewood	355 – motorized use within 300 feet of road/trail permitted	408– motorized use within 300 feet of road/trail permitted	143 – no motorized use within 300 feet	241 – motorized use within 300 feet of road permitted	284 - motorized use within 300 feet of road/trail for firewood handled in firewood permit
<b>SOIL &amp; WATERSHED</b>						
<b>Road sediment reduction resulting from rd. decomm. (long-term) in tons per year</b>	Some reduction due to BMP's applied during maintenance	20-40 tons/yr	Same as Alt 1 as well as bringing routes to standard	260-340 tons/yr	80-110 tons/yr	80-120 tons/yr
<b>Road/stream interactions reclaimed – includes sedimentation, rd. proximity, &amp; stream crossing factors (see Ch.3 for more detail)</b>	0	31	0	190	65	72
<b>Miles of road or trail reclaimed in sensitive soils and RHCA's</b>	0	11	0	61	21	27
<b>Overall watershed improvement rating (further defined in Ch. 3)</b>	Low	Moderate	Low	Very High	High	High

ISSUES	ALT. 1	ALT. 2	ALT. 3	ALT. 4	ALT. 5	ALT. 6
<b>FISHERIES</b>						
Miles of high/moderate risk roads in fish bearing watersheds	115	120	118.1	74	99	100.2
Number of stream/route interactions in fish bearing watersheds - includes sedimentation, rd. proximity, & stream crossing factors (see Ch.3 for more detail)	610	562	579	300	437	504
Trend of condition of fish bearing streams (further defined in Ch. 3)	Downward	Downward	Downward	Upward	Upward	Upward
<b>RANGE</b>						
Permittee and FS access by motorized vehicle for Allotment Administration, % change from existing condition	No Change	No Change	16% Increase	58% Decrease	4% Increase	5% Increase
Road & motorized trail open year long or seasonally to the public, % change in potential for vandalism from existing condition	No Change	No Change	6% Increase	69% Decrease	35% Decrease	25% Decrease
<b>NOXIOUS WEEDS</b>						
% change from existing condition in miles available to FS for weed mgt. (See Ch 3 for more detail)	No Change	1% Increase	14% Increase	64% Decrease	4% Increase	4% Increase
% change from existing condition in miles of motorized route open year long or seasonally to the public (potential for weed spread)	No Change	No Change	6% Increase	68% Decrease	35% Decrease	23% Increase
Acres of New Disturbance	0	650	35	825	303	373
<b>WILDLIFE HABITAT</b>						
# of elk analysis areas that meet elk security method (see Ch.3) of assessing elk vulnerability	6 out of 11	4 out of 11	3 out of 11	9 out of 11	8 out of 11	7 out of 11
# of elk analysis areas meeting Forest Plan hiding cover standard	6 out of 11	7 out of 11	7 out of 11	9 out of 11	8 out of 11	7 out of 11
% of Lynx habitat open to snowmobile use –	63%	52%	52%	10%	52%	51%

ISSUES	ALT. 1	ALT. 2	ALT. 3	ALT. 4	ALT. 5	ALT. 6
doesn't reflect mi. of groomed/designated						
<b>Miles of groomed and/or designated routes in lynx habitat and total miles open to use in habitat</b>	6.8 mi groomed 56.9 miles open in lynx habitat	6.8 mi groomed 58.6 miles open in lynx habitat	6.8 mi groomed 53.7 miles open in lynx habitat	6.8 mi groomed 8.9 miles open in lynx habitat	6.8 mi groomed 33.4 miles open in lynx habitat	6.8 mi groomed 31.4 miles open in lynx habitat
<b>% of wolverine natal denning habitat protected</b>	70	74	74	95	74	76
<b>Travel corridors*, # of patches, and size of patch sizes</b> (see Ch.3 for more detail - ac means acres)	12<100 ac 1 at 100-250 ac 11> 250 ac	15< 100 ac 4 at 100-250 ac 12 > 250 ac	11< 100 ac 3 at 100-250 ac 12> 250 ac	5< 100 ac 0 at 100-250 ac 6> 250 ac	9< 100 ac 4 at 100-250 ac 10>250 ac	11< 100 ac 3 at 100-250 ac 10>250 ac

\*evaluated by number and size of patches – by size category

## Identification of the Preferred Alternative

The alternatives were analyzed for effectiveness in resolving the agency, public and cooperators' planning issues, for avoidance of unnecessary impacts to resources and the human environment, for responsiveness to public concerns and for compliance with the Forest Plan, statutes and regulations. Based on the analyses, Alternative 6 is identified as the Preferred Alternative.

Alternative 6 was identified because it provides for a planned system of motorized and non-motorized routes that are most responsive to the purpose and need as identified in Chapter 1. A variety of opportunities is met in Alternative 6 by inclusion of motorized route types, including ATV, dual use, motorcycle, and passenger vehicle, as well as a large number of nonmotorized trails. Variety is also provided in the availability of motorized trails for nonmotorized uses and the availability of non-motorized trails outside of the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness to mountain bikes. Alternative 6 provides a variety and an appropriate amount of non-motorized trails in areas that have been traditionally non-motorized. Alternative 6 considers new trail construction that provides for connectedness and is responsive while considering construction feasibility, costs, and impacts.

Alternative 6 is responsive to the Roads Analysis Plan emphasis of reducing the overall transportation system route miles and maintenance costs by identifying routes needed through an integrated resource methodology, closing yearlong routes not needed, and removing unclassified routes that are not part of a planned route system.

Alternative 6 meets or moves toward Forest Plan standards for fish and wildlife habitats, soil and watershed health, and prevention and control of noxious weed spread. Alternative 6 does not result in degradation of Inventories Roadless Areas. Alternative 6 would provide for designated classified routes and removal of unclassified routes.

Alternative 6 would allow for dispersed use within 300 feet of a road or trail to allow people to move away from the dust and noise generated along roads. Helena Forest recreation specialists do not anticipate widespread creation of additional new routes as most good dispersed sites already have a road accessing them.

Alternative 6 is highly responsive to the need for a travel plan to be less confusing with route types and closure dates. This alternative reduces the amount of possible seasonal restriction dates, removes off route travel periods, and defines the snowmobile use period.

Alternative 6 provides for a planned system of ATV and designated motorcycle trails without introducing motorized uses into currently non-motorized areas.

Alternative 6 is responsive to the needs of disabled and elderly by providing for several roads to be opened only during hunting season, as well as retaining open routes in areas that they have identified as having gentler terrain such as the area between Hellgate and Magpie Creeks. It also provides motorized access for disabled individuals to dispersed recreation sites.

Alternative 6 is responsive to the agency need for administrative access on some closed roads for fire suppression, weed control, or future timber management, as well as decommissioning routes that would no longer be needed for anticipated future management.

Alternative 6 provides snowmobile use areas that do not compromise winter ranges, while also having boundaries that are more easily understood on the ground.