

Helena National Forest
Lincoln Ranger District
1569 Highway 200
Lincoln, MT 59639

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For more information, visit the Helena National Forest website at www.fs.fed.us/r1/helena/projects/winter_travel

“Caring for the land and serving people.”



What Comes Next

We are sending you this information on the range of alternatives in order to get your feedback. Once we receive your comments, we will incorporate them into the project. We will analyze the environmental effects of the alternatives by the end of the spring (around June 2007).

The analysis, in the form of a biological assessment, is then sent to the US Fish and Wildlife Service for a consultation process on the effects to the threatened and endangered species in the project area.

Then, we will send out a final environmental document that includes a decision by the Helena National Forest on what management actions will be taken in the project area. There will be an appeal period following the project decision.

If you have specific questions about the process or on the alternatives, you can contact Mandy Alvino or Amber Kamps at the Lincoln Ranger District, 362-4265.

If you have specific questions about the collaboration group and how they came to the agreement, you can contact any of the board members of the Ponderosa Snow Warriors at 362-4140 or Gabriel Furshong of the Montana Wilderness Association at 466-2600.

What We Heard

During the official comment period on the proposed action late last year, we received a total of 58 comments from an assortment of individual citizens (47), organizations (10) and other agencies (1). Of those who commented, 54 live within a 90 mile radius of the project area.

The Forest Service presented information about the project at the meetings of several different organizations, we held two open houses about the project and had a number of individuals stop by or call the office for information and to talk about winter travel planning.

Some comments had concerns about specific areas, specific types of use and season of use while other comments requested the analysis look at issues like wildlife and economic impacts of the alternatives. Quite a number of the comments we received “voted” support for or against the proposed action.

The grey section on page one of this newsletter provides important information on how to comment now. Even though this is not an “official” comment period under 36 CFR 215, your comments will be used to shape the project and will be considered in the final decision.

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April 2007 Winter Travel Project Update Newsletter

How to Stay Involved

The Lincoln and Helena Ranger Districts of the Helena National Forest are preparing an Environmental Assessment for the Blackfoot - North Divide Winter Travel Plan.

The official comment period on the proposed action is complete, and the responsible officials have agreed on the range of alternatives to analyze. There were several parties who asked for another opportunity to provide feedback on the project, so this comment period will run from April 16 through May 4, 2007. There will not be any open houses at this stage unless a specific request is received.

The information presented here can also be obtained from the Lincoln Ranger District at 1569 Highway 200, Lincoln, MT 59639, the Helena Ranger District at 2001 Poplar Street, Helena, MT 59601 or on the Forest website at www.fs.fed.us/r1/helena/projects/winter_travel

Please be aware this is not an official comment period. Only those people who provided comments or otherwise expressed interest in the proposed action by the close of the original official comment period (September 9 through October 10, 2006) can be accepted as appellants, although all of the comments sent will be used to shape the project and be considered in the final decision.

Submit comments to:
Mandy Alvino
Resource Specialist
Lincoln Ranger District
1569 Highway 200
Lincoln, MT 59639
(406) 362-4265 phone
(406) 362-4253 fax

Comments may be submitted by email in word (.doc), rich text format (.rtf), text (.txt), and hypertext markup language (.html) to comments-northern-helena-lincoln@fs.fed.us

Comments may also be hand delivered weekdays 8:00 am - 4:30 pm at the above address.

Let’s work together and incorporate your ideas at this important stage.



Winter Travel Planning Update

This is the second newsletter in the process of completing an environmental analysis on a winter travel plan for the Blackfoot – North Divide area of the Helena National Forest. We had an official comment period on the proposed action which ended on October 10, 2006 and consisted of a mailing, several open house meetings and speaking engagements at the request of several recreation groups. The Lincoln District Ranger, Amber Kamps, committed to offering the public a chance to comment on the range of alternatives to be analyzed for this project.

After the official comment period closed, personnel from the Helena National Forest met to go over all of the comments we received, examined them, categorized them, and consolidated them. The District Rangers from the Lincoln and Helena districts reviewed this work and agreed on the issues to be considered in detail; that is, issues which can create alternatives to the proposed action, determine the scope of the analysis or advise mitigation or monitoring measures. All of the comments we received are being considered in the analysis.

There are three alternatives being analyzed in detail for the Blackfoot – North Divide Winter Travel Planning project: the existing condition (no change from current management), the proposed action and an action alternative with lands administered by the Helena Ranger District not included. There are also several alternatives which were eliminated from detailed study, these will be described in the final environmental analysis.

Proposed areas designated open to motorized use in the two action alternatives will be available for that use for a specific period of time. Keep in mind all grooming of snowmobile routes in Montana stops on April 1, none of the alternatives changes that. To display the effects of motorized use, the following dates will be analyzed for all of the alternatives except the existing condition: motorized use areas open from December 2 until April 1, except the Copper Bowls, open until May 31; motorized use areas open from December 2 until

April 15, except the Copper Bowls, open until May 31; motorized use areas open from December 2 until May 15, except the Copper Bowls, open until May 31.

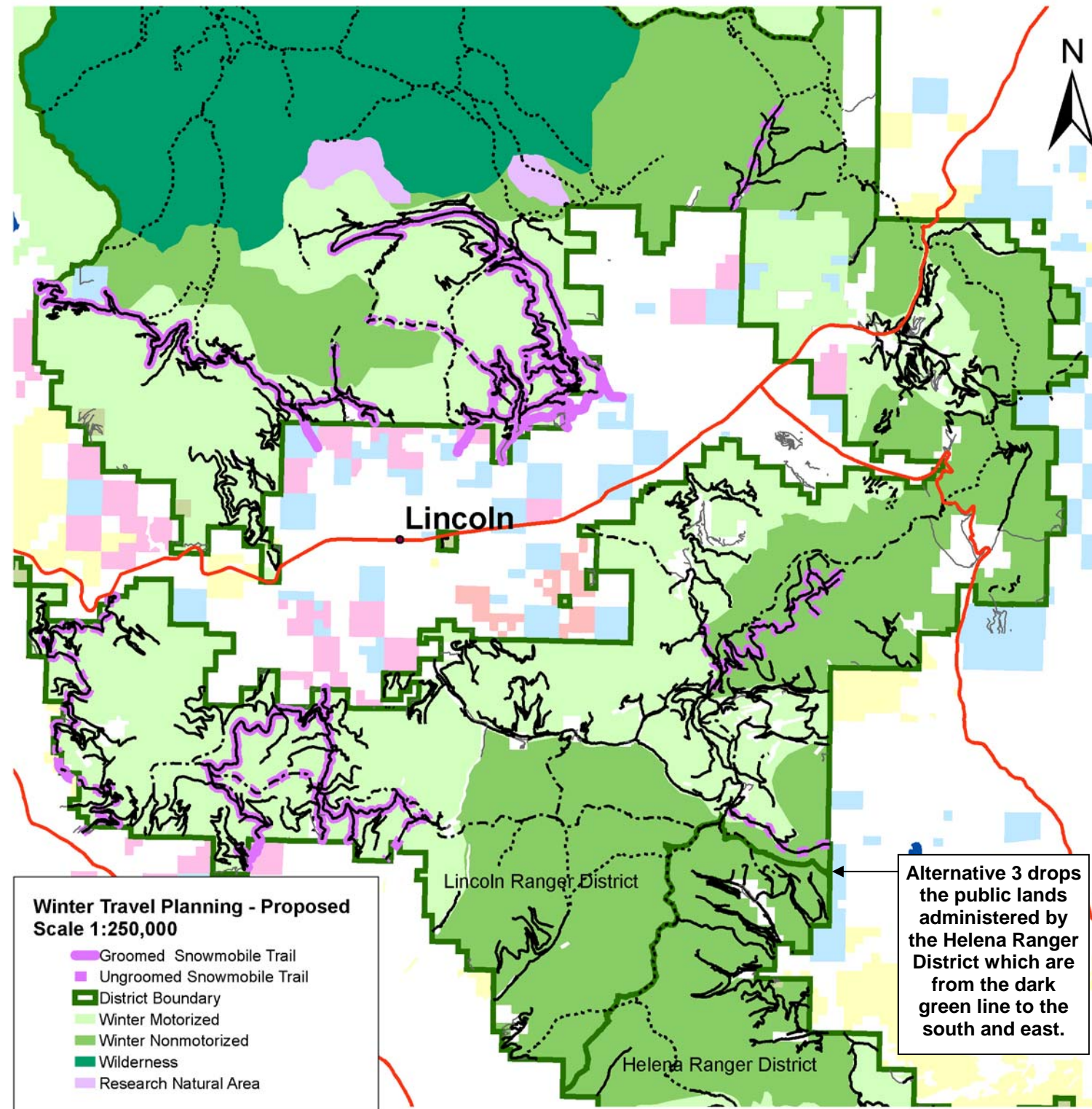
Proposed Action (Alternative 2) Description:
This administrative decision for only National Forest system lands about whether a route or area is designated for over the snow travel as motorized or non motorized would be implemented through new maps, installation of signs and gates, and an information campaign. No new ground disturbing activities are included and no new construction of routes is proposed. Specifically:

- Winter recreation use defined, using topographic boundaries and features, in large areas of either motorized use (light green on the map), or non motorized use (darker green).
- All existing routes within motorized areas would be open to over the snow vehicles and all existing routes within non motorized area unless designated would be closed to over the snow vehicles.
- There would be no change to the existing groomed trail system (purple solid line).
- The existing ungroomed trail up Stonewall Creek would stop at the private land boundary, reducing it by one mile; otherwise there would be no change to the existing ungroomed system (purple dashed line).
- Change to the original proposed action: Baldy Mountain area would be designated as non motorized as would the small areas designated as non motorized for over the snow in a 1996 Forest Plan amendment.
- Motorized winter use areas: 134,200 acres
- Non motorized winter areas: 111,200 acres
- Research Natural Area (RNA) and designated Wilderness: 85,500 acres

Action alternative without Helena RD administered lands (Alternative 3) Description:
This administrative decision for only National Forest system lands about whether a route or area is designated for over the snow travel as motorized

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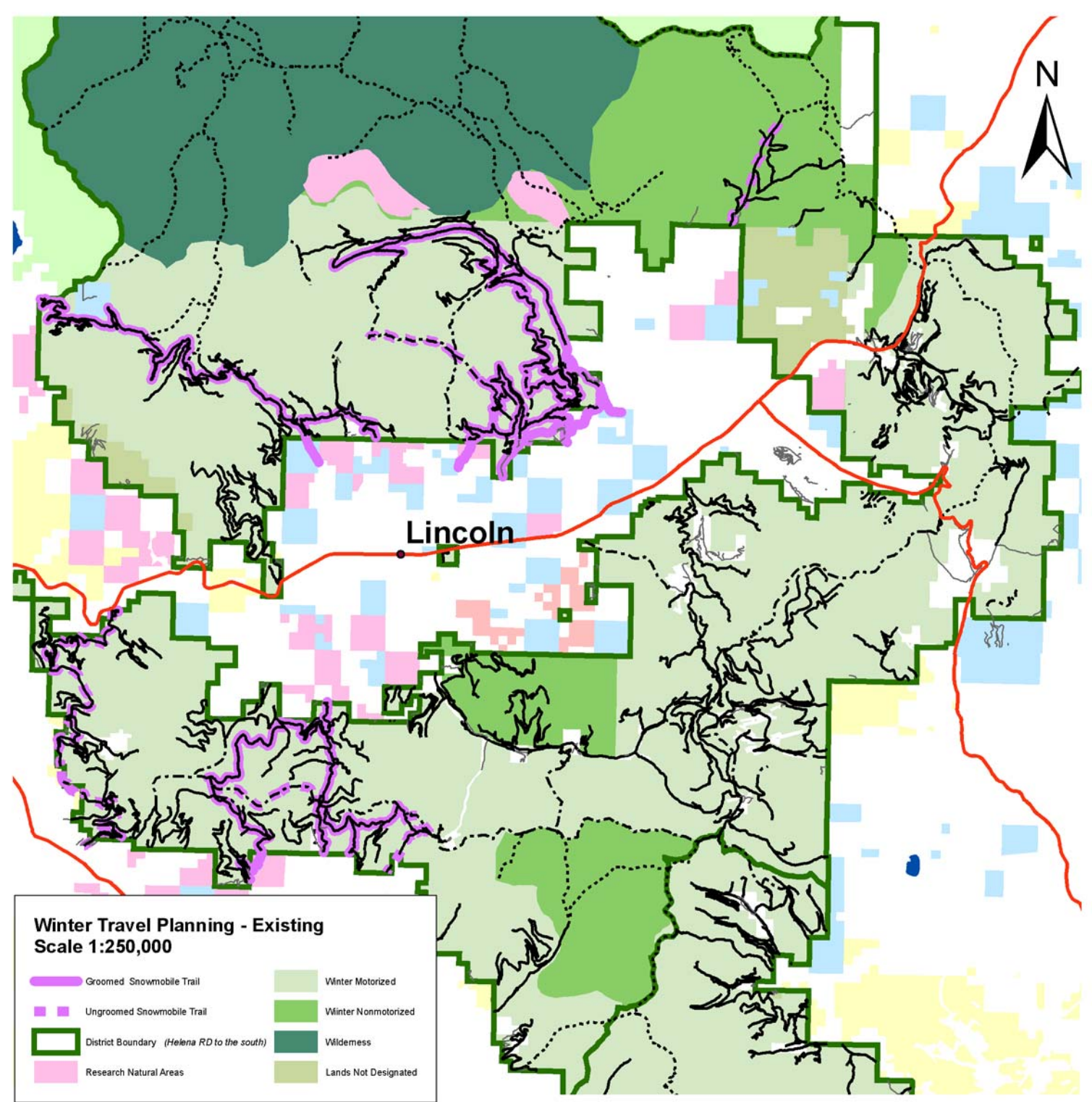
Map of Alternatives 2 and 3



Alternatives, continued from page 1

- or non motorized would be implemented through new maps, installation of signs and gates, and an information campaign. No new ground disturbing activities are included and no new construction of routes is proposed. Specifically:
- This alternative has the same description as the proposed action alternative but does not include the public lands administered by the Helena Ranger District, approximately 32,000 acres at the southeast end of the project area.
 - Motorized winter use areas: 134,200 acres
 - Non motorized winter areas: 79,200 acres
 - Research Natural Area (RNA) and designated Wilderness: 85,500 acres

Map of Alternative 1



Alternatives, continued from left

Existing Condition (Alternative 1) Description:

There would be no change from the current management. The 6,700 acres of new public land acquired in 2006 would undergo a separate analysis to determine appropriate travel management.

- Motorized winter use areas: 189,200 acres
- Non motorized winter areas: 49,500 acres
- Research Natural Area (RNA) and designated Wilderness: 85,500 acres