

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](http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/helena/projects/winter_travel)

“Caring for the land and
serving people.”



Right: Copper
Bowls in late May
2004, snowmobile
and skier tracks.



Left: Continental
Divide trail in
February 2004.

Join Us!

An **open house** will be held in **Lincoln** to visit about the proposed action for Winter Travel Planning from 4-7 p.m., Thursday, September 14th at the Lincoln Community Hall, Main Street, Lincoln, Montana. An **open house** will be held in **Helena** from 4-6 p.m., Tuesday, September 26 at the Lewis & Clark County Library large conference room in downtown Helena. Forest Service and representatives from the Winter Use Agreement groups will be available at the open houses to answer questions about the proposed action and the efforts of the collaboration group.

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September 2006
Official Comment Period
Newsletter

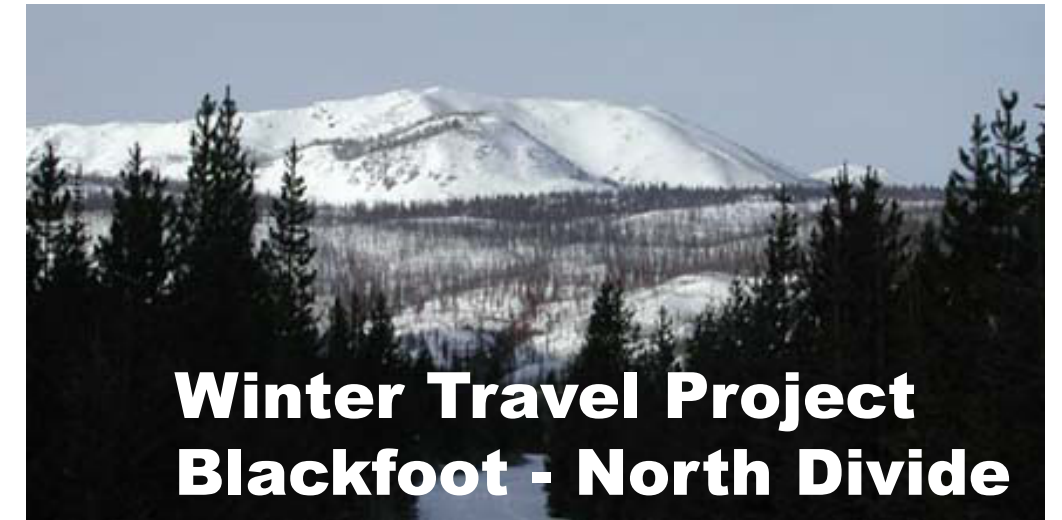
How to Get Involved

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

The comment period ends 30 days following the date of publication of this legal notice in the Helena Independent Record. This publication date is the exclusive means for calculating the time to submit comments on the proposed action. Those wishing to comment on this proposal should not rely upon dates or timeframes provided by any other source. Only those who provide comment or otherwise express interest in the proposed action by the close of the comment period will be accepted as appellants. Comments must meet the requirements of 36 CFR 215.6. It is expected the legal notice will be published on September 9, 2006.

Comments must be submitted 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 stated address.

To be eligible for appeal, each individual or representative from each organization submitting comments must either sign the comments or verify identity upon request.



Why Winter Travel Planning?

There has recently been a successful collaboration to address motorized and non-motorized winter recreation between the Montana Snowmobile Association, Ponderosa Snow Warriors (snowmobile club in Lincoln, MT), Helena Snow Drifters, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP), and the Montana Wilderness Association for approximately 360,000 acres of National Forest lands within the Blackfoot River drainage and along the Continental Divide.

Collaboration took place over the course of about 10 months and in May of 2005 an agreement was reached. Together with the entities mentioned above, signatories to the agreement also included the Forest Supervisor of the Helena National Forest, Forest Supervisor of the Lewis and Clark National Forest, Director of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, & Parks, President of the Montana Snowmobile Association, President of Montana Wilderness Association, President of the Helena

Snowdrifters, President of the Ponderosa Snow Warriors, and President of the two local Montana Wilderness Association Chapters.

In May of 2006, the collaboration resumed after the addition of over 6700 acres of Nature Conservancy lands into the National Forest system northeast of Lincoln. The group amended their agreement to include these lands.

The Helena National Forest, as part of the Winter Use Agreement, committed to considering this agreement as an alternative in the upcoming travel planning analysis. After receiving funding from the Tri-County Resource Advisory Committee (Powell County) and the Lewis & Clark County Resource Advisory Committee, the Helena National Forest is bringing this collaborative work forward and initiating the required environmental analysis and public involvement in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Here's What Is Proposed

The collaboration group agreed to areas in the project area where motorized and non-motorized use would be allowed for winter travel. Please note, this agreement and proposed action is only for winter travel.

These areas were defined on maps using logical topographic boundaries and features so the areas would be easy to determine when people are out on the ground. Areas were delineated to address resource concerns such as roadless areas, big game winter range, research natural areas, proposed research natural areas, mountain goat habitat, and lynx/wolverine habitat.

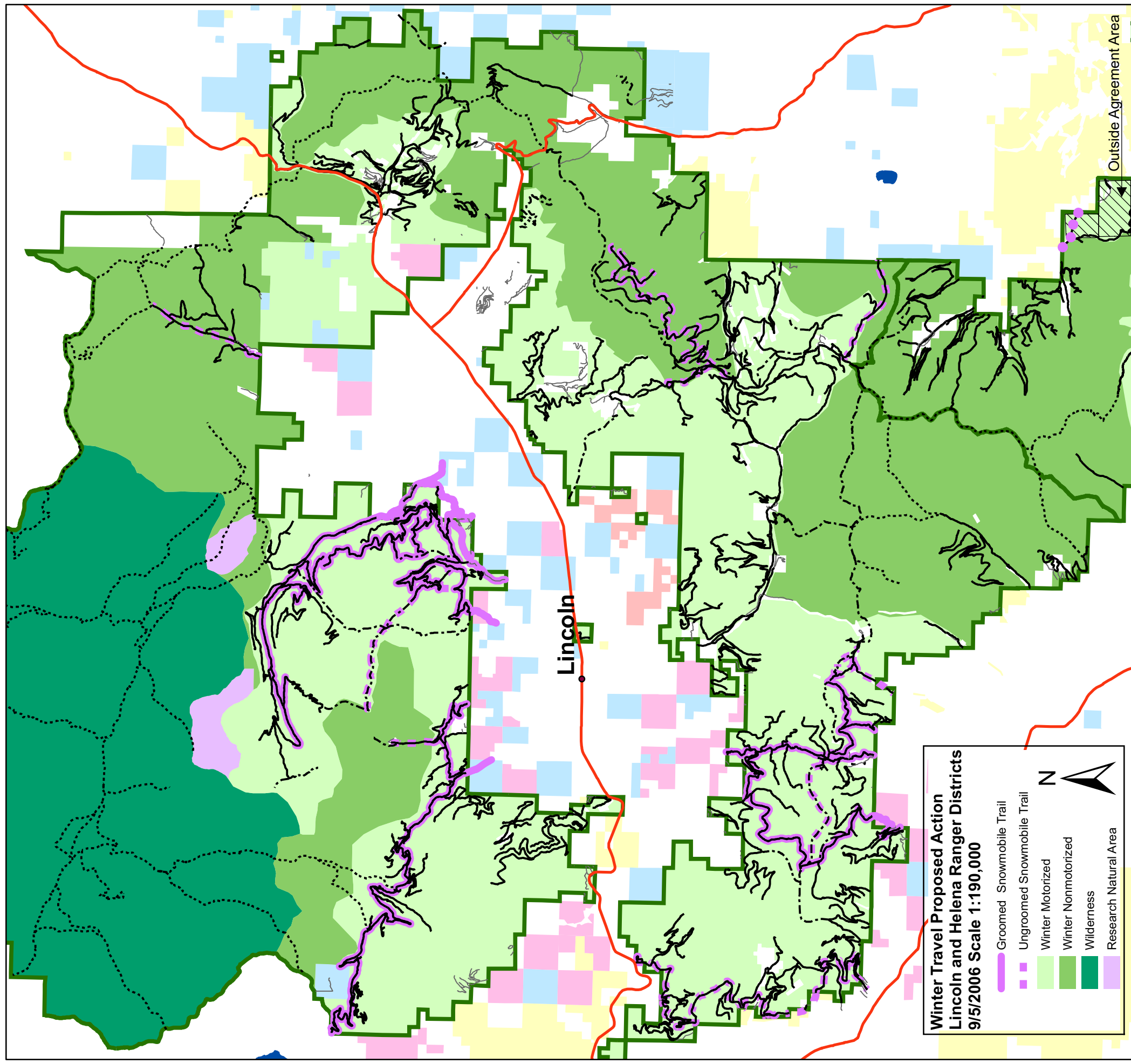
In addition to resource issues, other social issues such as backcountry, roadless, quiet areas, remoteness, and special features were also considered in the collaborative process.

Since the details of the Winter Use Agreement will directly address the outcomes of the project and meet current Forest Plan direction, the agreement

areas will be used as the proposed action. So, with this mailing, the Forest Service is beginning the environmental analysis for winter travel and we would like your participation.

The purpose and need for this project is to provide for and implement a plan that has support from the motorized and non-motorized communities which is a benefit for public lands. This support will make implementation easier particularly with education, information exchange, and enforcement. Implementing winter travel planning will also provide better and more enforceable area delineations between motorized and non-motorized use. The establishment of non-motorized use will benefit various natural resources including wildlife habitat/populations as well as ensure quality winter quiet areas and protection of pristine areas. Implementation of motorized areas will benefit users with lands that provide a high quality experience of both a trail system and play areas.

Winter Travel Plan - Proposed Action



How to Get Involved

We are sending you this proposed action in order to get your thoughts, concerns and alternative suggestions to the proposed action. Once we receive your comments, we will incorporate them into the proposal where possible, then alternatives to the proposal will be developed. We will analyze the environmental effects of the alternatives by the end of the winter (around March 2007).

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, with specific rules to appeal a project.

Please visit the Forest website for more information on how this process works. Let's work together and incorporate your ideas at this very important stage. If you have specific questions about the collaboration group and how they came to the agreement, you can contact Jim Paris of the Montana Snowmobile Association at 362-4140 or Bob Bushnell of the Ponderosa Snow Warriors at 362-4629 or Brad Borst of the Montana Wilderness Association at 443-7350 ext. 102.

Motorized and Non Motorized Winter Use Areas

The map above shows areas proposed to allow for motorized winter use (light green) and areas to allow for non motorized winter use (darker green). By law, the Research Natural Areas (purple) and designated Wilderness (darkest green) areas are for non motorized use only. Groomed snowmobile routes are shown as solid purple lines, and snowmobile routes not groomed are shown as dashed purple lines. Larger, more detailed maps are available for viewing on our website or at the office locations listed on page one of this document.

Proposed Action Motorized Use Dates

Areas designated as open to snowmobile use will be available for a specific period of time. We are asking for your feedback on two date scenarios. The Winter Use collaboration group did not recommend motorized use dates in their final agreement.

First scenario - Motorized use areas open 12/2 - 4/15 except for the Copper Bowl area which would be open 12/2 - 5/1.

Second scenario - Motorized use areas open 12/2 - 4/15 except for the Copper Bowl area which would be open 12/2 - 6/1.

Keep in mind that all grooming of snowmobile routes in Montana stops on April 1.

Initial Acreage Comparison

Winter Use	Existing
Motorized	189,200
Non Motorized	49,500
RNA and Wilderness	85,500
Total	324,200

Winter Use	Proposed
Motorized	134,400
Non Motorized	111,000
RNA and Wilderness	85,500
Total	330,900*

*includes acres recently acquired from the Nature Conservancy.