

USDA Forest Service Northern Region
Kootenai National Forest Recreation Niche

4/24/07 Niche Statement (for coming decade)

Vast by Nature, Uncrowded by Design

Emphasis: Bordering Canada and nestled in the mountainous terrain of NW Montana, the Kootenai National Forest holds impressive forests, wildlife and landscapes, including striking cliffs, spires, river canyons, and the magnificent peaks of the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness and Whitefish Range. This vast uncrowded landscape has been the lifeblood for many peoples for thousands of years and continues to foster a pioneer spirit passed down through generations. These ties to the land and history are the foundation for interpretation and education for new and traditional visitors. Water, in all forms, has played a significant role in shaping recreation with reservoirs, rivers, waterfalls, glacial lakes, and snow providing a variety of year round day-use activities.

Forest-wide Settings, Special Places, and Values: The forest is comprised of five mountain ranges, four major rivers and three major reservoirs that dominate the landscape. This diverse landscape ranging from high elevation pristine wilderness to eligible wild and scenic rivers is home to many threatened and endangered plant and animal species. The Forest is known as home to large wildlife, whose habitat connects to the larger landscape of ID, MT and Canada. Unique geologic features created by glacial and volcanic activity are scattered across the landscape, while unique vegetation like ancient cedar groves amaze visitors. Fall colors of western Larch provide spectacular viewing.

Water/Travelways -- With the Cabinet Mountains, Whitefish Range and NW Peaks as a backdrop, primary roads and waterways traverse the forest, link communities and provide outstanding views of wildlife and scenery year round. The Clark Fork, Kootenai, Yaak and Bull Rivers parallel primary roads. The Kooconusa Scenic Byway runs on each side of Lake Kooconusa. Ross Creek Cedar Grove, 100 acres of cathedral-like western red cedar is a popular attraction along a key travelway. Other attractions include Kootenai Falls, Libby Dam, Yaak and Eureka areas.

Rock and Ice -- Areas of unique landforms, geology and topography formed by glacial carving. Much of this setting includes special interest areas that have been congressionally or administratively designated due to their outstanding natural and scenic values. This includes Cabinet Mountains Wilderness, Ten Lakes Scenic and Wilderness Study Area, and NW Peaks. Glacial lakes scattered across these landscapes are outstanding fisheries habitat.

Forested Landscape – Vast forested landscapes cover much of the area. These are managed for a variety of uses including timber, minerals, wildlife habitat and watershed protection. Although an extensive road system accesses the area, only key travel routes are open to vehicles to maintain important wildlife habitat and uncrowded recreation opportunities. Visitors encounter newly treated timber stands, as well as majestic forests of old growth. Past fires and other forces of nature— insect epidemics along with management—have shaped the forested landscape to create a mosaic of patterns.

Forest-wide Activities/Opportunities/Experiences: Easy access for viewing scenery & wildlife, water and winter based play, and relaxation. Snowmobiling is a regional draw and an uncrowded experience is maintained. Routes through the forest with ridgeline views and some play areas are provided. Hunting, gathering forest products and fishing are traditions on the Forest. I&E focuses on the rich history of discovery, from the wonders of geology to the marvels of forest ecology. These programs instill the current day wonder of discovery in children. Recreation rentals provide an historic link and quality overnight lodging. Designated OHV routes are provided with adjoining Forests on existing roads, providing a quality, well-managed system.

Water/Travelways – Driving and bicycle touring routes for viewing scenery & wildlife with water based camping and day use. Fishing, boating and tournaments are big on the reservoirs & lakes, with motorized watercraft on major water bodies. Floating the rivers for fly fishing or thrill seeking is also popular.

Rock and Ice – Stunning scenery created by the geologic formations and glacial remnants offer viewing with a remote feel. Visitors backpack in Cabinet Mountains Wilderness, day use at Ten Lakes, and hike and horse back ride throughout.

Forested Landscape – Traditional gathering, hunting, and winter activities occur throughout. Turner Mt. Ski Area, constructed and operated by volunteers, offers an affordable family oriented opportunity on a diverse mountain with great snow.

Primary Visitors

Local	Communities contiguous to the Forest – emphasis on families and retirees with traditional ties.
Regional	Spokane, Coeur d'Alene, Missoula, Kalispell, Canadians with a specific destination
National	Visitors from across the country for hunting, fishing, overnight at recreation rentals, and bicycle touring

Kootenai NF Niche Bridge for Recreation Sites

Niche Emphasis: Uncrowded water-based day use, winter activities, viewing scenery & wildlife, hunting, history & geologic I&E

Question #1

SETTING NAMES:		Water Travelways		Rock & Ice		Forested Landscape			
SITE FUNCTION/THEME: How sites are designed & managed to best meet the Niche <i>Question #2</i>		Facilitates easy access to rest of forest, and water associated activities within corridor		Facilitates access to more remote areas and viewing spectacular scenery		Facilitates general forest access and traditional uses either summer or winter			
KEY ACTIVITIES: In support of the Niche for the coming decade <i>Question #3</i>		Driving and bicycle touring routes for viewing scenery & wildlife with water based camping and day use.		Viewing scenery, backpacking, hiking, equestrian, water based day use, winter play, OHV use on designated routes.		Traditional gathering, hunting, fishing, and winter activities occur throughout; OHV use on designated routes			
INFRASTRUCTURE	SITE TYPE/ DEVELOPMENT SCALE Needed to provide key activities <i>Question #4</i> & <i>Question #5</i> (Sites will be the lowest dev scale possible to maintain visitor experience & protect the resource)	Site Type	Dev Scale	Site Type	Dev Scale	Site Type	Dev Scale		
		Campgrounds	2-4	Camping Areas	1	Camping Areas	1		
		TH	3	TH	2-3	Campgrounds	2		
		I and E	3	I & E	2-3	TH	2-3		
		Rec. Rentals	3-4	Rec. Rentals	3	I and E	2-3		
		Picnic Sites	3			Rec. Rentals	3		
		Boating Sites	3-4			Boating Sites	2		
	Swimming Sites	3-4							
SITE CAPACITY Low <50, Medium 50-100, High >100 <i>Question #5</i>	Med-High		Low-Med		Low-Med				

Programmatic Strategies:

Develop a comprehensive I and E strategy for the forest that focuses on new visitors. Design snowmobile system of routes to retain quality uncrowded opportunities. Provide a focused, well managed system of routes utilizing other forest providers that appeals to weekend family visitors and allows for localized jamborees. Leverage available \$ to operate & maintain system.