SMITH RIVER CORRIDOR RECREATION, MOTORIZED AND NON-MOTORIZED TRAIL ACCESS

The Smith River is a nationally recognized river famous for its fishing, outstanding scenery, and the opportunity it provides for a 60 mile, three to five day float through private, state, and National Forest System lands during the late spring and early summer months. The existing Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Smith River Management Plan emphasizes the need to maintain an opportunity to enjoy the natural scenic beauty and solitude of the river while seeking ways to enhance, protect, and improve the largely natural appearing scenic quality of the canyon's visual corridor. Ongoing private land development along the river corridor continues to threaten this setting. Also there are concerns that the Lewis and Clark National Forest, Jefferson Division Travel Plan will further impact this setting if more and continued motorized access to the Smith River corridor is allowed. Concerns have been expressed of impacts to water quality and fisheries from motorized use along tributaries of the Smith River. Trail 311 leading out of the Smith River canyon provides only private landowner access into the forest from the Smith River, and has members of the public at odds on whether it should be open to ATVs from the forest to access the river. Concerns have been expressed about private landowners who have motorized access to the Smith River that the general public does not posses. Other members of the public want more OHV access to the corridor and feel that only floaters, hikers, private landowners, and stock users presently have adequate access to the river corridor.

1. EXISTING CONDITION

a. Existing Characteristics

Approximately 23 miles of the Smith River is bounded on the east by National Forest System lands. Within this 23-mile segment there are 19 primitive style boat camps with latrines and metal fire rings on the Lewis and Clark National Forest. These camps provide overnight accommodations for permitted floaters through this segment of river. One of the primary opportunities to access the corridor is by applying for a Smith River floating permit through the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MT FWP), Region 4 Headquarters. On average 800 permits are awarded annually from a pool of 3500 to 4500 applicants. From the 800 permits awarded, the average number of floaters per trip is 6.12 thus providing the opportunity for approximately 4000 visitors into the corridor between April and October of each year. The peak season for floating is historically between May and mid-July of each year. Use of the Smith River by floaters drops off significantly after mid-July through the remainder of the year due to low water flows. This permit system continues to provide one of the main opportunities to visit the Smith River corridor.

Presently four trails provide access to the Smith River corridor from National Forest System lands. Of the trails providing access, three trails; #311, #310, and #331, are designated entirely as motorized trails, and approximately a one mile segment of trail 309 provides for non-motorized access with the remainder of 309 designated as motorized. The majority of lands on the west side of the Smith River is under private ownership and provides little public access to the corridor. Trail 311 provides ATV access exclusively to private landholders with residences or land along the Smith River. Presently there is no public access to the portion of trail 311 open to ATVs from National Forest System lands.

It may be important to reduce or limit the number of motorized access points to the corridor and boat camp sites in order to minimize user conflicts with permitted floaters and to help preserve the solitude of the corridor. The likelihood for horse and foot travelers to camp at Smith River boat camps may be higher than those approaching on motorized equipment since the travel time from a National Forest trailhead to the Smith River corridor and return to that trailhead may be more then can be reasonably accomplished in one day. This use may also add to the reduction of solitude along the river.

b. Human Influence

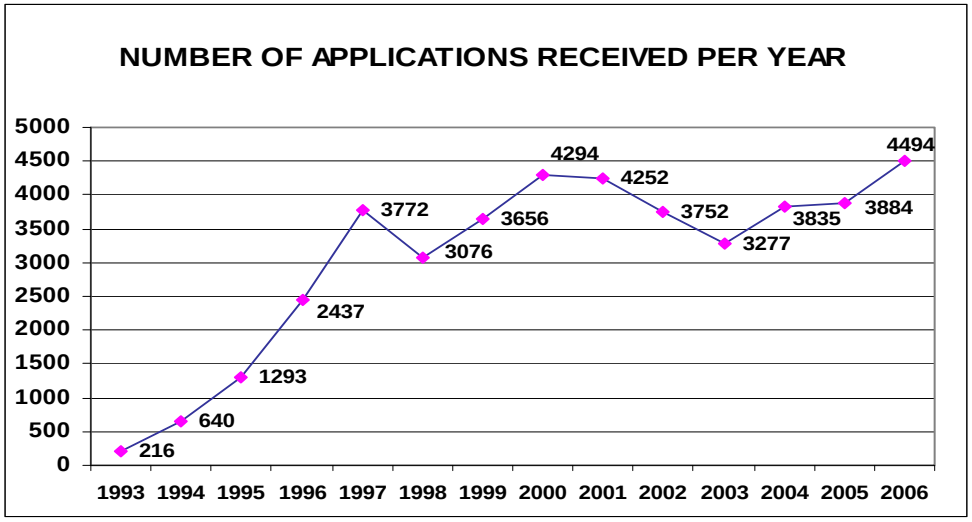
The Smith River corridor varies in degree of development along its passage through National Forest on the eastern and western banks. Several developments on private land adjacent to National Forest lands consist of summer homes, cabins, and numerous unimproved and improved access roads. Little to no human development is apparent on National Forest System lands. The greatest human influence to the Smith River from floating occurs during the peak floating season between May and mid-July of each year. During this time period use is at its highest level for the year. The shoulder season, which includes: April, August, September, and October, has little use by private floaters.

Table III-32. Smith River Use Statistics by Month For Years 2001-2005

MONTH →	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPT	OCT
# of Private Floaters 2005	387	1,283	1,013	483	0	16	15
# of Private Floaters 2004	298	1,182	1,387	320	0	Not available	Not available
# of Private Floaters 2003	216	1,232	1,547	69	0	1	0
# of Private Floaters 2002	110	889	1,335	454	8	2	0
# of Private Floaters 2001	195	1,048	402	33	0	0	0

c. Future Trends

Figure III-1. Smith River Float Applications Received Per Year, 1993 – 2006



Source: MT FWP Visitor Use Statistics

Demand to float the Smith River is expected to remain high as displayed in the above chart. Mandatory pre-registration and application process was established by MT FWP in 1993, although float permits could still be obtained without entering the drawing. Actual use by

floaters over the last 14 years has ranged from a low of 1,678 in 2001 to a high of 4,149 in 1997. The 14-year average is approximately 3,080 private floaters per year.

Displayed in Table III-33 below is the actual use of Lewis and Clark National Forest boat camps along the 62-mile float. Use of these boat camps over the last five years (2001-2005) has accounted for 35-35% of the total boat camp overnight use on the river for years (FWP Annual Smith River Report, Years 2001-2005).

Table III-33. 5 Year Boat Camp Use on Smith River Segment Through the Lewis and Clark National Forest

Boat Camp	Ownership	Number of Groups at Boat camp by Year 2005/ 04/ 03/ 02/ 01	% Of overall Use 2005 /04/ 03/ 02/ 01
Canyon Depth	Lewis Clark NF	75/ 78/ 69/ 65/ 36	3.79 / 4.13 / 4.01 / 3.79 / 3.19
Two Creek	Lewis Clark NF	25/ 30/ 27/ 27/ 14	1.26 / 1.59 / 1.57 / 1.57 / 1.24
Sheep Wagon	Lewis Clark NF	49/ 53/ 47/ 37/ 29	2.48 / 2.80 / 2.73 / 2.15 / 2.57
Upper Cow Coulee	Lewis Clark NF	64/ 54/ 53/ 38/ 26	3.24 / 2.86 / 3.08 / 2.21 / 2.30
Middle Cow Coulee	Lewis Clark NF	37/ 43/ 42/ 37/ 29	1.87 / 2.28 / 2.44 / 2.15 / 2.57
Lower Cow Coulee	Lewis Clark NF	10/ 7/ 9/ 20/ 6	0.51 / 0.37 / 0.52 / 1.16 / 0.53
*Upper Sunset Cliff	Lewis Clark NF	50 / 42 / 30 / 48 / 27	2.53 / 2.22 / 1.74 / 2.80 / 2.39
*Middle Sunset Cliff	Lewis Clark NF	68 / 66 / 54 / 65 / 34	3.44 / 3.49 / 3.14 / 3.79 / 3.01
*Lower Sunset Cliff	Lewis Clark NF	64 / 58 / 56 / 50 / 38	3.24 / 3.07 / 3.26 / 2.91 / 3.37
County Line	Lewis Clark NF	12 / 13 / 3 / 20 / 7	0.61 / 0.69 / 0.17 / 1.16 / 0.62
*Upper Bear Gulch	Lewis Clark NF	4 / 7 / 14 / 7 / 13	0.20 / 0.37 / 0.81 / 0.41 / 1.15
*Lower Bear Gulch	Lewis Clark NF	11 / 7 / 5 / 13 / 10	0.56 / 0.37 / 0.29 / 0.76 / 0.89
Upper Trout Creek	FWP	36 / /26 / 22 / 29 / 18	1.82 / 1.38 / 1.28 / 1.69 / 1.59
Middle Trout Creek	FWP	49 / 50 / 41 / 40 / 20	2.48 / 2.65 / 2.38 / 2.33 / 1.77
Lower Trout Creek	FWP	31 / 34 / 34 / 28 / 17	1.57 / 1.80 / 1.98 / 1.63 / 1.51
Crows foot	FWP	73 / 76 / 57 / 57 / 35	3.69 / 4.02 / 3.31 / 3.32 / 3.10
Upper Table Rock	Lewis Clark NF	60 / 55 / 47 / 33 / 31	3.03 / 2.91 / 2.73 / 1.92 / 2.75
Middle Table Rock	Lewis Clark NF	35 / 22 / 29 / 19 / 10	1.77 / 1.16 / 1.69 / 1.11 / 0.89
Lower Table Rock	Lewis Clark NF	10 / 4 / 9 / 9 / 8	0.51 / 0.21 / 0.52 / 0.52 / 0.71
*Upper Fraunhofer	Lewis Clark NF	42 / 66 / 59 / 50 / 44	2.12 / 3.49 / 3.43 / 2.91 / 3.90
*Middle Fraunhofer	Lewis Clark NF	7 / 11 / 10 / 20 / 5	0.35 / 0.58 / 0.58 / 1.16 / 0.44
*Lower Fraunhofer	Lewis Clark NF	28 / 14 / 15 / 15 / 11	1.42 / 0.74 / 0.87 / 0.87 / 0.97
Upper Parker Flat	Lewis Clark NF	61 / 50 / 43 / 33 / 27	3.09 / 2.65 / 2.50 / 1.92 / 2.39

(* Boat Camps with designated system trail leading into or near boat camp.)

This use trend is expected to continue at established Forest Service boat camps and may create resource impacts at those sites given the current floater use. The Lewis and Clark National Forest and MT FWP, through cooperative work agreements are identifying resources

problems and developing plans to rehabilitate, improve, and take corrective actions to address resource concerns at some sites.

Other recreationists desire to visit the Smith River corridor by means of motorized or horse and foot travel is expected to increase proportionate to the population growth and popularity of those opportunities and areas on the National Forest.

Trends that may be expected to continue into the future are the subdivision and sale of private lands along the Smith River creating the potential for more recreational homes, more development, and more people along the corridor. Private land development and continued increase of private access points may have the greatest affect to the solitude of the area with the potential to create user conflicts between recreationists and private landowners.

d. Desired Condition

The Smith River is located in Management Area F with a goal to emphasize semi-primitive recreation opportunities, while maintaining and protecting other Forest resources. The Forest Plan trail management direction for this area may: open all areas and trails to OHVs except where use is restricted by season, type of vehicle, or type of activity. Closures or restrictions may be used to: resolve user conflicts; promote user safety or protect resources (Lewis and Clark Forest Plan, 1986). Amendment II Wild and Scenic River Study of the Lewis and Clark National Forest Plan recommended potential classification of 11.8 miles of the Smith River as "scenic". Guidance in Amendment II of the Lewis and Clark Forest Plan for classified scenic rivers is that "motorized travel on land or water may be permitted, prohibited or restricted to protect river values". In 1993 the Montana, Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the USDA Forest Service, Lewis and Clark National Forest signed an agreement to cooperatively maintain and manage the lands within the Smith River Corridor. In 1996 the MT FWP developed the Smith River Management Plan which provided direction and guidance to identify ways to provide continued public recreation use and enjoyment of the Smith River waterway consistent with the rivers capacity to maintain this use; to seek ways to minimize conflicts between river users and private landowners, and to protect the integrity of the rivers water and canyon resources for future generations. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks have also identified the Smith River as important for "maintaining the opportunity to enjoy the natural beauty and solitude of the river and to conserve fish and wildlife and scientific and recreational values".

Increasing the number of public motorized access points from National Forest System lands into the Smith River corridor beyond the current level will diminish the unique recreational experience, and reduce the solitude and semi primitive character that the Smith River corridor provides. Recreation along the Smith River should be a combination of motorized and non-motorized opportunities. Motorized access to the river will be limited to private land and those National Forest System trails where the access does not create new or additional conflicts with floaters, boat camps, or further threaten the solitude of the river corridor; this is critical during the high use floating periods between **May** 1st and mid-July of each year. Otherwise, little conflict with floaters would be expected **during the** shoulder **seasons from mid-July through September and between March and the end of April of each year. Eliminating motorized conflicts and the potential of other user occupancy at all Forest Service boat camps during the peak floating season will achieve the desired condition.**

2. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

a. Alternative 1 - No Action Alternative

Under Alternative 1, there are four trails (#309, #310, #311 and #331) entirely or partially on National Forest System lands, which provide public access to the Smith River Corridor. Three trails provide motorized access and one trail is partially non-motorized:

- Parker Ridge Trail 309 provides only one mile of non-motorized use down to the Smith River Canyon due to its limiting natural features, slope and terrain constraints, which limit motorized use in this section. The upper end of trail 309 is motorized from the Deep Creek Park area to this non-motorized junction. The trail joins the canyon near Middle Fraunhofer boat camp.
- Strawberry Ridge Trail 311 will provide motorized single-track access (2004 decision memo to complete construction of trail 311) from the Monument Peak area down to the Smith River. Trail 311 will be a combination of single track motorized and ATV trail. A three-mile segment of trail 311 from the Smith River to the Deep Creek Park area is open for ATV use but is presently only accessible to private landowners and there associates from this private land along the Smith River. The remainder of trail 311 is not authorized for ATV use. Private landowners control all other motorized access from the west to trail 311/Smith River junction, which limits public access to this trail from the west.
- Bear Gulch Trail 310 provides motorized single-track access to the Smith River.
- Cow Coulee Trail 331 in its present location provides motorized access through private land to the Smith River into the Sunset Cliff boat camp. Upstream from the Sunset Boat camp is a river ford which is occasionally used by adjacent landowners west of the river to gain access to National Forest lands on the east side of the river. This undetermined route was not constructed by the Forest Service, although it is being used to gain access onto National Forest System lands and travel through the Sunset boat camps. Continued use of this route increases the potential for conflict occurrence between floaters, private landowners and other users.

Tenderfoot trail 342, due to private land, does not provide public access to the Smith River.

Under the existing situation all trails from National Forest System lands, which provide access into the Smith River corridor will remain motorized with the exception of a portion of Parker Ridge Trail 309. Parker Ridge Trail 309 provides a one-mile segment of trail for non-motorized use. Non-motorized users will continue to have shared access into the corridor with motorized users but this will not provide for the experience which some of this user group desires. In this alternative there are no other non-motorized trail opportunities to the Smith River. ATV access from the forest to the Smith River will not be provided for. Private landowners along the Smith River will continue to have sole access to the existing ATV trail segment on trail 311.

1. Direct and Indirect Effects

The direct and indirect effects will be the continued use of all trails leading into established boat camp sites creating the potential for user conflicts at these sites during the peak floating season between May and July. Also there may be potential for degradation of a semi primitive recreational experience and solitude of the Smith River corridor. The probability that use by

non-motorized enthusiasts will increase due to establishment of non-motorized areas and trails is high. The result may be increased overnight use along the corridor and at established boat camps. Through the Smith River floating permit system floaters are required to pre register for assigned boat camp sites and must reserve these sites. This continued use of motorized access directly into or near established boat camps may cause the potential for conflicts between floaters and deter from the solitude of the corridor. The goal of MT FWP is to maintain the opportunity to enjoy the natural scenic beauty and solitude of the Smith River corridor. The alternative offers a variety of routes to access the river corridor and adds to those already established private land access points along the river. This may create the potential to increase the motorized use within the corridor, degrade the solitude, primitive setting, and character of the corridor, in addition to increasing unwanted river fording and degradation of stream banks.

2. Cumulative Effects

Continued and increased motorized use of the three existing public trail access routes into the Smith River corridor will develop recreational user conflicts at established permitted boat camp sites and could diminish the unique recreational experience and solitude that the river corridor provides during the peak floating season. Revisions to the travel plan may increase hiker and horse use on these trails into the corridor and at established boat camp sites.

b. Action Alternatives 3-5

1. Direct and Indirect Effects

The action alternatives vary in degree by the amount of opportunities offered to motorized and non-motorized recreations for access into the Smith River corridor.

Alternative 3 provides four motorized seasonally accessible trails into the Smith River corridor. ATV opportunities would be increased over current conditions when compared to all other alternatives. While providing for more ATV opportunities and increased motorized access points into the corridor this alternative lessons the opportunity for solitude and increases motorized use into established boat camps sites. Alternative 3 may have the potential to reduce the opportunity for solitude and the primitive character of the corridor.

Alternative 4 eliminates all motorized use to the Smith River corridor. This alternative will reduce motorized user conflicts at all boat camps and ultimately reduces all recreational opportunities for motorized enthusiasts to access the Smith River from public lands. This alternative may go too far in trying to reduce user conflicts and attempting to preserve the solitude of the corridor because it entirely eliminates a significant user group from accessing the river corridor. Given that the predominance of the western border of the corridor has uncontrolled motorized use by private landowners this alternative does not provide for motorized recreation from National Forest System lands to the Smith River corridor. This alternative ultimately removes all public motorized access and recreational opportunities from the area. A potential affect to the corridor from this alternative may be the increased use from non-motorized enthusiasts (horses, hikers, and backpackers) visiting the corridor for extended periods and potentially competing for camp areas at boat camp locations. As a result of this projected increased use, the potential to affect the solitude of the area and increase user conflicts at boat camp sites where trails enter the corridor is similar for all alternatives.

Elimination of all motorized use into the Smith River corridor and Deep Creek area in Alternative 4 would greatly affect the quality of motorized opportunities available to the public in this area. An indirect effect of Alternative 4 is the potential for increased non-motorized use on the trails leading to the corridor and boat camp sites due to eliminating motorized use on all trails entering the Smith River from National Forest System lands. An increase in use and length of stay in the river corridor and at boat camps from non-motorized users could result in an impact to the river corridor's solitude and competition at permitted floater boat camps.

Action Alternative 5 reduces the overall number of motorized trails providing access from National Forest System lands into the Smith River corridor and associated boat camps from three trails to one trail. Alternative 5 provides for two options for one seasonally restricted motorized (ATV and motorcycle) access trail route into the Smith River corridor from the Monument Peak area (the best location will be determined and a separate analysis done to establish the location). These routes provide the least disruption of solitude to floaters and direct motorized use to one of the least used Forest Service boat camp sites along the river. This alternative does not provide for additional ATV access trails into the Smith River corridor when compared to Alternative 3, but it does provide one motorized (ATV/motorcycle) access route (Table III-34) from National Forest System Lands into the corridor. The routes proposed for ATV access will utilize an existing road easement on road #263 as part of the trail system to access the corridor and will allow for public usage of road #263 down to the Smith River and Bear Gulch boat camp site. ATV users who have not had access to the Smith River corridor would benefit from this alternative. Motorcyclists desiring single-track routes will have significantly reduced opportunities to the river. The alternative provides for public access to the river corridor for motorized recreationists but concentrates that use to one route leading to the river. This concentrated use of one motorized trail will likely increase the potential for user conflicts at its outlet to the Smith River and the Bear Gulch boat camp site. As a result of this concentrated use, user conflicts at the Sunset Cliff and Fraunhofer boats camps will be reduced and the overall preservation of solitude will increase when compared to Alternative 3 for those areas. **During the peak float season, identified as between May 1 and July 10, all boat camps located on National Forest System Lands would be available only to floaters registered through the Smith River Permit system. This alternative will prohibit use of boat camps by non-floaters, including motorized trail users, during the peak float season (May 1 through July 10th) of each year and give floaters priority use at all boat camp sites located on National Forest Lands.** Following the float season all FS boat camps would be open for use to the general public. Selection and implementation of any action alternative will not change the Recreation Opportunity Setting (ROS) for this area.

Table III-34. Motorized / Non-motorized Trail Access to the Smith River Corridor

Smith River Summer Season Travel*	ALT. 1	ALT. 3	ALT. 4	ALT. 5
Number of Motorized Trails w/ Access into the Smith River corridor	3*	4**	0	1***
Number of Non-motorized Trails w/ Access into the Smith River corridor	1	0	4	4

* 2 motor cycle trails and 1 ATV/motorcycle trail
** 2 ATV/motorcycle trails and 2 Motorcycle trails
*** 1 Motorized ATV/motorcycle trail.
All trails provide for non-motorized use yearlong.
******1Motorized single track motorcycle trail**

2. Cumulative Effects

c. Effects Common To All Alternatives

Under all alternatives floating under the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks permit system and reservations for Forest Service permitted boat camp sites is expected to continue into the future. Based on results of the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks 2005 Smith River Annual Report the yearly river use trend statistics for number of floaters for years 1993-2005 has averaged 3,732 users per year into the Smith River corridor. It is expected that this trend will continue into the future. All alternatives allow some form of access into the corridor with potential to affect solitude, create user conflicts at designated boat camp sites and potentially affect the setting, fishers, stream bank vegetation and water quality.

d. Effects Common To All Action Alternatives

Under all action alternatives the number of floaters entering the Smith River corridor is expected to remain at the 13-year average of 3,732 users per year (MT FWP 2005 Smith River Annual Report). Common also to all action alternatives is that all users, whether motorized or non-motorized that utilize National Forest System Trails leading into the corridor will come into established boat camp locations and the river corridor. This may result in competition for boat camp sites and affect the solitude of the river corridor.

There are no known effects common to all alternatives from the winter travel plan alternatives.