

# CHAPTER II. ALTERNATIVES

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes and compares four alternatives considered for management of summer wheeled vehicle travel, and three alternatives for management of winter over-snow travel. It defines the differences between each alternative and provides a basis for comparison among options by the public and decision maker.

The public expressed a desire to see alternatives that reflected their points of view. As a result, two alternatives for management of wheeled vehicles were specifically developed by groups that use the Forest. One action alternative for winter management was developed by a working group of special interests, and the no-action winter alternative was preferred by a local contingent of snowmobilers.

## ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

Travel management alternatives are displayed on separate maps, with an accompanying table listing type of travel and any restrictions proposed for each road and trail. The text description of each alternative below serves primarily as a summary of the rationale and general features of each alternative.

### Actions Common to All Alternatives

Under all alternatives, exemptions to off road travel as described in 36 CFR 212.51(a) would be allowed. Exemptions include administrative activities such as law enforcement, fire, emergencies, military operations, noxious weed control, certain special use permit provisions, and other official business purposes. All such use would require specific authorization from the appropriate Line Officer, detailing when, where, who, and under what circumstances motorized travel would be allowed.

Under all alternatives, wheeled motorized travel would continue to be allowed for at least part of the year on existing main access roads to trailheads, developed campgrounds, recreational cabins, and other facilities.

Under all alternatives, implementation of a new travel plan would occur under the new Federal regulations (36 CFR Part 212) that were issued in December 2005.

Under all alternatives, motorized wheeled vehicle travel off designated system roads and trails for parking or dispersed camping would be allowed within one vehicle (and attached trailer) length as described in the glossary for “off –road / off-trail travel exceptions”. Motorized over-snow travel would be allowed through restricted areas on designated routes as described in the glossary for “off –road / off-trail travel exceptions”.

Mitigation measures developed by the IDT would be carried out under all alternatives. These measures are listed in Appendix D to the FEIS. The Best Management Practices listed in Appendix G to the FEIS would be applied under all alternatives, and would help mitigate potential impacts of any alternative chosen.

## **No Action Alternative**

### ***SUMMER - ALTERNATIVE 1***

***Rationale:*** The No Action alternative provides a baseline for estimating the effects of other alternatives and therefore must be considered in detail (FSH 1909.15, part 14.1; 40 CFR 1502.14(d)). In cases such as this, where ongoing programs or management described within an existing plan continue as new plans are being developed, the No Action alternative means no change from current management direction (FSH 1909.15, part 14.1; CEQ's 40 Most Asked Questions, section 65.12, question 3). The 1988 Travel Plan and the 2001 Three-State OHV Decision define travel management that is currently enforced on the ground. This is the existing condition, and it would be carried forward if there were no decision made to change travel management. Therefore it is appropriately considered the No Action alternative. Analysis of current travel management also fulfills a 1989 directive by the Regional Forester to complete additional analysis of the 1988 Travel Plan.

***Features:*** Under this alternative the season and type of use currently allowed on existing roads, trails, and areas in the Little Belt, Castle, and north half Crazy Mountains would not change. Opportunities for motorized wheeled vehicle travel are widely dispersed throughout the three mountain ranges and vary in type and season.

### ***WINTER - ALTERNATIVE 1.***

***Rationale:*** The 1988 Travel Plan defines over-snow travel management that is currently enforced on the ground. This is the existing condition that most people are familiar with, and establishes a basis to compare the effects of other alternatives.

***Features:*** Under this alternative the season and type of use currently allowed during the winter months in the Little Belt, Castle, and north half Crazy Mountains would not change. Opportunities for motorized over-snow travel are widely dispersed throughout the three mountain ranges and vary in type and season.

## **Action Alternatives**

We deliberately skipped Summer – Alternative 2, because it will not be analyzed in detail. Summer – Alt. 2 was the “proposed action” released in September 2005 for public comment. Refer to the section on “alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed study” for more discussion as to why Alternative 2 was dropped from detailed analysis.

### ***SUMMER - ALTERNATIVE 3***

***Rationale:*** This alternative was developed by a coalition of organizations representing motorized travel including aircraft.

***Features:*** This alternative features a network of single-track loop trails for motorcycles, and loop trails for ATVs in all three mountain ranges. Non-motorized foot and horse travel is accommodated in the upper Tenderfoot Creek, Hoover Creek, Sawmill-Wagner Gulch, Lost Fork Judith River, Steiner Creek, and Yogo Creek areas of the Little Belt Mountains. Four airstrips are also proposed in the Little Belt Mountains.

#### ***SUMMER - ALTERNATIVE 4.***

***Rationale:*** This alternative promotes non-motorized recreation in areas identified by the Montana Wilderness Association. It incorporates features of Summer – Alt. 2 for areas that would be open to motorized recreational travel during the spring, summer, and fall.

***Features:*** This alternative features large blocks of “quiet” non-motorized areas in the Middle Fork Judith Wilderness Study Area, Tenderfoot-Deep Creek, Eagle Creek, Pilgrim Creek, Hoover-Big Baldy, Daisy Dean-Nevada Creek, Haymaker Creek, and East Fork Spring Creek areas in the Little Belt Mountains. It also features large non-motorized blocks in the west half of the Castle Mountains, and north half of the Crazy Mountains. Single-track loop trails for motorcycles, and loop trails for ATVs are accommodated in the Calf Creek, Jumping Creek, Jefferson Creek, Smoky Mountain, Dry Wolf Creek, South Fork Judith River, Spring Creek, and eastern portion of the Little Belt Mountains. No airstrips are proposed.

#### ***SUMMER - ALTERNATIVE 5.***

***Rationale:*** This alternative attempts to blend public preferences with resource concerns for all three mountain ranges. It includes actions not directly considered in Alternatives 1, 3, or 4 to help display and compare the effects of options to address some specific issues.

***Features:*** This alternative features a network of single-track loop trails for motorcycles, and loop trails for ATVs in the Little Belt Mountains. The Castle Mountains accommodates one ATV loop trail in the west half, and a network of roads in the east half. One loop ATV trail in conjunction with the Gallatin National Forest is provided in the Crazy Mountains. Non-motorized foot and horse travel is promoted in large blocks of quiet areas along the Smith River, upper Tenderfoot Creek, Pilgrim Creek, Lost Fork Judith, and South Fork Judith river in the Little Belt Mountains. In the Castle Mountains there would be large quiet areas in the Beartrap Peak-Woodchuck Mountain area, and the Castle Mountain area; and the north half of the Crazy Mountains is predominantly a large area for non-motorized travel. Two airstrips are proposed in the Little Belt Mountains.

#### ***WINTER - ALTERNATIVE 2.***

***Rationale:*** This alternative depicts an agreement between the Montana Snowmobile Association, Montana Wilderness Association, and other organizations for management of winter recreation in the Little Belt Mountains. Forest Service managers developed the “proposed winter recreation action” for the Castle and north half Crazy Mountains. This alternative is the “proposed action” for winter over-snow travel management that was released in September 2005 for public comment.

***Features:*** This alternative features maintenance of the existing groomed and designated snowmobile trail system in the Little Belt Mountains, and provides for open snowmobiling in about half of the Little Belt Mountains. Similarly, about two-thirds of the Castle Mountains, and half of the Crazy Mountains would remain open to snowmobiling. Developed cross-country ski areas would be promoted in the Mizpah, Deadman, O’Brien Park, and Jefferson Creek areas. Big-game winter ranges currently closed to snowmobiling would continue to be restricted. Large blocks of non-motorized quiet areas would be provided in the Middle Fork Judith WSA, Tenderfoot-Deep Creek-Pilgrim Creek-Dry Wolf area, and northeast end of the Little Belt Mountains. The east one-third of the Castle Mountains, and the east half of the Crazy Mountains would also provide quiet areas.

### **WINTER - ALTERNATIVE 3.**

*Rationale:* This alternative was developed by Forest Service managers and specialists for all three mountain ranges to protect big-game winter ranges, wolverine denning habitat, and cross-country ski areas. It includes actions not directly considered in Winter Alternatives 1 or 2 to help display and compare the effects of options to address some specific issues.

*Features:* This alternative features maintenance of the existing groomed and designated snowmobile trail system in the Little Belt Mountains, and provides for open snowmobiling in about two-thirds of the Little Belt Mountains. Similarly, about two-thirds of the Castle Mountains, and one-third of the Crazy Mountains would remain open to snowmobiling. Developed cross-country ski areas would be promoted in the Mizpah, Deadman, O'Brien Park, and Jefferson Creek areas. Large blocks of non-motorized quiet areas would be provided in the Smith River-Deep Creek area, Thunder Mountain, Barker Mountain, Peterson Mountain, Big Baldy Mountain, Kelly Mountain, Bluff Mountain, and northeast end of the Little Belt Mountains. The Four Mile Creek area and east one-third of the Castle Mountains; and the northwest corner and east half of the Crazy Mountains would also be quiet areas.

## **MITIGATION COMMON TO ALL ALTERNATIVES**

The Interdisciplinary Team developed the mitigation measures listed in Appendix D to be used as part of all the action alternatives. These mitigation measures would be applied to all alternatives to minimize, reduce, rectify, eliminate, avoid, and/or compensate for some of the impacts to resources discussed in Chapter III (40 CFR 1508.20). Also, the Best Management Practices listed in Appendix G will help mitigate potential impacts.

## **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED STUDY**

Federal agencies are required by NEPA to rigorously 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). Public comments received in response to the Proposed Action provided suggestions for alternative methods for achieving the purpose and need. Some of these alternatives may have been outside the scope of travel management, duplicative of the alternatives considered in detail, incorporated into alternatives considered in detail, or determined to be components that would cause unnecessary environmental harm. Therefore, a number of alternatives were considered, but dismissed from detailed consideration for reasons summarized below.

### **Summer – Alternative 2: (2005 “Proposed Action”)**

In September 2005 the Forest Service issued a proposal to change travel management in the project area. There was little support for this alternative from the public, and there appeared to be no benefit in modifying the alternative to make it more acceptable. Other alternatives incorporated many of the features of Alternative 2. For example, Alternative 4 retained Deep Creek as a non-motorized area. Alternative 4 also retained the motorized features for all areas outside of the Inventoried Roadless Areas. Alternative 5 keeps the Middle Fork Judith WSA the same as proposed in Alternative 2. A map of the “proposed action” is retained in the project file for informational purposes.

### **The 1988 Travel Plan is “illegal”, and should not be the basis for a proposed action.**

Some people believe that the 1988 Travel Plan is illegal because it was only to be implemented on an interim basis until a better analysis of effects was completed. In their definition, interim does not equate to 17+ years.

There is a long history to the existing 1988 Travel Management Plan for the Jefferson Division. These details are described in the project file as a non-significant issue not addressed in detail. The dispute as to the legality of the 1988 Travel Plan has not been litigated in a court of law, and probably will continue to be disputed in the arena of public opinion until a lawsuit is filed and settled, or until the 1988 Travel Plan is replaced. Since the public has 17+ years experience with travel management under the 1988 Travel Plan, they are familiar with the effects of that type of management. Consequently, the 1988 Travel Plan is an appropriate basis for describing the existing condition (no-action) alternative.

### **1984 Travel Plan.**

The 1984 Travel Plan was in effect for the project area prior to the advent of the current 1988 Travel Plan. There is a remote possibility that someone could litigate the 1988 Travel Plan, and there is a possibility that the plaintiffs could prevail. If a court voids the 1988 Travel Plan, then travel management would legally revert to the 1984 Travel Plan. There is no benefit to be gained by analyzing the effects of an alternative that is dependent upon a remote possibility for litigation to overturn the current 1988 Travel Plan. Also, it is unlikely that the plaintiffs in a civil suit, or the Forest Service, would desire a return to the 1984 Travel Plan.

### **Develop an alternative that restricts motorized use in all Inventoried Roadless Areas and Wilderness Study Areas.**

Some people suggested that motorized travel be restricted on all roads and trails within Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA), and within the Middle Fork Judith Wilderness Study Area (WSA). This option was discussed by the IDT and discarded as an alternative. There is no compelling direction in the 1977 Wilderness Study Act to prohibit all motorized use within the WSA. In fact, there is direction in the Act to maintain motorized uses that existed in 1977. Similarly, there is no compelling direction to manage Inventoried Roadless Areas for non-motorized uses only. The effects of motorized travel on the wilderness characteristics of the WSA, and the roadless characteristics of the IRAs will be addressed for all alternatives.

### **Develop an alternative that alternates use periods between non-motorized and motorized travel.**

Some people suggested alternating use periods, by days of the week, weeks, months or seasons for motorized and non-motorized activities. This concept does have some merit, but it also has disadvantages. After some discussion by the IDT, a specific alternative was not developed and analyzed in detail. There are problems with enforcement of this type of management. One day its open to motorized travel, and the next day its not open. Visitors would get confused. Travel plan maps would become more difficult to interpret by all of the various people visiting the area. The IDT felt this option did not need to be analyzed in a separate alternative, but could be considered by the decision maker on a case-by-case basis. A coalition of recreation groups could provide the necessary level of detail to make this concept feasible.

## COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES

This section provides a summary of the effects of implementing each alternative in the Little Belt, Castle and north half Crazy Mountains. Information in the table is focused on activities and effects where different levels of effects or outputs can be distinguished quantitatively or qualitatively among alternatives.

**Table II-1.  
Comparison of Summer Alternatives**

FEATURE	SUMMER ALT. 1	SUMMER ALT. 3	SUMMER ALT. 4	SUMMER ALT. 5
<b>HERITAGE RESOURCES:</b>				
Potential adverse effects to properties (2) <i>listed</i> on the National Registers of Historic Places/Lookouts.	0	1 site (Monument Lookout)	1 site (Monument Lookout)	1 site (Judith Station)
Potential adverse effects to historic or prehistoric properties: number of NRHP- eligible or unevaluated sites that may require consultation or mitigation beyond scope of Programmatic Agreements.	0	20 sites	12 sites	17 sites
Potential beneficial effects to historic or prehistoric resources: miles of recorded road or trail where levels of use are reduced; number of sites where type of access will be reduced.	N/A	0 mi. 15 sites	30 mi. 31 sites	8.5 mi. 20 sites
Effects to potentially undiscovered cultural properties: linear miles of field survey required for Section 106 review. (Includes estimates for proposed construction/reroutes).	N/A	+/- 242.5 mi.	+/- 52.5 mi.	+/- 109.5 mi.
<b>Historic routes closed: number and miles to be recorded, closure based on SHPO consultation.</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>15 routes 21.5 mi.</b>	<b>19 routes 35.5 mi.</b>	<b>21 routes 38.0 mi.</b>
<b>LAW ENFORCEMENT:</b>				
Law enforcement activities and concerns about the potential effectiveness remains the same under all alternatives.				
<b>RECREATION:</b>				
Summer – Motorized ROS in acres and percent of analysis area.	817,313 (88%)	<b>802,154</b> (87%)	637,781 (69%)	722,292 (78%)
Summer – Non-Motorized ROS in acres and percent of analysis area.	106,251 (12%)	121,410 (13%)	285,783 (31%)	<b>200,913</b> (22%)

<b>FEATURE</b>	<b>SUMMER ALT. 1</b>	<b>SUMMER ALT. 3</b>	<b>SUMMER ALT. 4</b>	<b>SUMMER ALT. 5</b>
Summer Recreation & Access Opportunities in miles:				
Highway vehicle roads (open to passenger cars)	1,523	1,033	955	928
High-clearance roads (open to 4x4)	514	437	397	378
ATV trails and roads.	226 / 34	309 / 90	170 / 92	208 / 79
Motorcycle trails and roads.	658 / 81	651 / 95	242 / 95	443 / 79
Horse/Hike/Bicycle trails (“quiet” trails)	76	93	480	242
Undetermined Roads & Trails:				
Miles adopted as system road or trails.	0 / 0	46 / 54	45 / 38	54 / 89
Miles of roads / trails closed to motorized use (decommissioned).	0 / 0	280 / 80	281 / 96	272 / 45
Miles of Mixed traffic (dual-use) roads proposed	0	414	31	440
Number of Non-Motorized Blocks greater than 15,000 acres in size	0	0	6	3
Consistency with adjacent Nat’l. Forests Summer -- (Yes/No)	No	No	No	No
<b>ROADLESS / WILDERNESS:</b>				
Middle Fork Judith WSA (and adjoining Inventoried Roadless Area):				
Highway vehicle roads.	54	46	14	31
OHV trails and roads.	58	78	5	43
Horse/Hike/Bicycle trails and roads.	38	77	113	56
Inventoried Roadless Areas:				
Highway vehicle roads.	216	130	98	121
OHV trails and roads.	418	407	88	265
Horse/Hike/Bicycle trails and roads.	33	54	328	141
<b>SOCIAL / ECONOMICS:</b>				
Potential for conflict between uses. (1=lowest, 5 = highest)	5	4	5	2
<b>SOILS:</b>				
Soils: Miles of roads and trails crossing landtypes with sensitive soils, calculated as if effective restoration of closed roads & trails had occurred.	839.9	839.8	674.1	841.7
<b>VEGETATION:</b>				
Miles of Road and Trail by Risk for spread of Noxious Weeds:				
Low Risk	69	167	238	220
Moderate Risk	132	125	64	108
High Risk	415	324	314	288
Number of roads and trails with potential to positively and negatively affect known sensitive plant populations.	N/A	+11 / -2	+11 / -2	+17 / -2

<b>FEATURE</b>	<b>SUMMER ALT. 1</b>	<b>SUMMER ALT. 3</b>	<b>SUMMER ALT. 4</b>	<b>SUMMER ALT. 5</b>
<b>WATER:</b>				
Water: Miles of roads and trails within 100 feet of perennial streams following decommissioning and eventual recovery of hydrologic and soil function.	315	282	279	253
Water: Number of GIS indicated stream crossings following effective decommissioning.	2,122	1,832	1,807	1,571
<b>WILDLIFE / FISH:</b>				
Open USFS road and motorized road density (miles per square mile):				
Roads only	1.07	0.74	0.69	0.66
All motorized routes	1.56	1.27	0.92	1.03
Percentage of elk security habitat provided during hunting season:				
Bow Season (Sept. 1 to Oct. 14)	19%	23%	39%	33%
Rifle Season (Oct. 15 to Dec. 1)	26%	30%	41%	42%
Open route density in elk calving habitat.	2.15	1.56	1.04	0.86

**Table II-2.  
Comparison of Winter Alternatives**

<b>FEATURE</b>	<b>WINTER ALT. 1</b>	<b>WINTER ALT. 2</b>	<b>WINTER ALT. 3</b>
<b>HERITAGE RESOURCES:</b>			
There are no concerns about effects on heritage resources under any of the winter alternatives.	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>LAW ENFORCEMENT:</b>			
Law enforcement activities and concerns about the potential effectiveness remains the same under all alternatives.			
<b>RECREATION:</b>			
Winter – Motorized Area in acres and percent of analysis area.	876,460 (95%)	454,438 (51%)	593,067 (64%)
Winter – Non-Motorized Area in acres and percent of analysis area.	47,130 ( 5%)	469,152 (49%)	330,523 (36%)
Recreation & Access Opportunities:			
Groomed / marked snowmobile trails.	290	290	310
Groomed / marked x-country ski trails.	8	8	8
Consistency with adjacent Gallatin National Forest			
Winter -- (Yes/No)	No	No	No

<b>FEATURE</b>	<b>WINTER ALT. 1</b>	<b>WINTER ALT. 2</b>	<b>WINTER ALT. 3</b>
<b>ROADLESS / WILDERNESS:</b>			
Middle Fork Judith WSA (and adjoining Inventoried Roadless Area): Groomed / marked snowmobile trails. Snowmobile open area. Ski / Snowshoe only area.	1.5 90,486 0	1.5 11,822 78,664	1.5 71,259 19,227
Inventoried Roadless Areas: Groomed / marked snowmobile trails. Snowmobile open area. Ski / Snowshoe only area.	0 413,140 4,326	0 121,599 295,867	0 236,512 180,954
<b>SOCIAL / ECONOMICS:</b>			
Potential for conflict between uses. (1=lowest, 5 = highest)	5	1	2
<b>SOILS:</b>			
There are no concerns about effects on soils under any of the winter alternatives.	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>VEGETATION:</b>			
There are no concerns about spread of weeds under any of the winter alternatives.	N/A	N/A	N/A
There are no concerns about potential effects on sensitive plants under any of the winter alternatives.	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>WATER:</b>			
There are no concerns about effects on water under any of the winter alternatives.	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>WILDLIFE / FISH:</b>			
Percent of seasonal habitat open to snowmobiles:			
Elk winter range	74%	28%	6%
Mule Deer winter range	81%	26%	7%
Wolverine natal denning	98%	38%	42%
Percent of lynx habitat open to snowmobiles	98%	53%	69%
Miles of designated over-the-snow routes in lynx habitat	269	343	387

## **BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES**

The Lewis and Clark National Forest Plan (page 2-50, F-1) states that the Forest will “utilize adequate soil and water conservation practices to protect soil productivity and to control non-point water pollution from project activities, using as a minimum, practices specified in any State developed “Best Management Practices”. A project which causes excessive water pollution, undesirable water yield, soil erosion, or site deterioration will be corrected where feasible, or the project will be reevaluated or terminated. Montana State Water Quality Standards require the use of reasonable land, soil, and water conservation practices as the controlling mechanism for non-point pollution. Use of BMPs is also required in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Forest Service and the State of Montana as part of our responsibility as the Designated Water Quality Management Agency on National Forest System lands.

The practices described in Appendix G are tiered to the practices in FSH 2509.22 (Soil and Water Conservation Practices Handbook) and would be incorporated into all project activities. The practices were developed as part of the NEPA process, with interdisciplinary involvement, and meet Forest and State water quality objectives.

## **MONITORING**

Monitoring and evaluation could be used to determine if the physical, biological, social, and economic effects of implementing any alternative occur as predicted. Monitoring may be conducted by sampling a range of projects from the entire Lewis and Clark National Forest as outlined in the Forest Plan on pages 5-6 through 5-17. If the Little Belt, Castle, and north half Crazy Mountain Travel Management project is selected for monitoring on the Forest, the items listed in Appendix E would be appropriate criteria for evaluating the effects of implementation.

## **FOREST SERVICE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE**

In both the DEIS and FEIS, the Forest Service has not identified a preferred alternative. All alternatives are viable options for management of motorized and non-motorized travel in the project area. Any combination of Summer and Winter alternatives could be selected.

The Responsible Official (the Lewis and Clark Forest Supervisor) may select any combination of travel management actions as presented and analyzed within this document. Summer - Alternatives 1, 3, 4, and 5 and Winter Alternative 1, 2, and 3 involve a number of independent actions that are feasible to implement. It is possible that public comment may point out a need to modify, add, or delete a particular action from the selected Summer and selected Winter alternative. The Responsible Official could select an alternative and also delete or modify some of the particular actions analyzed in that alternative. Independent actions analyzed in any of the alternatives could also be added to the selected alternative.

It is also possible that the Responsible Official could select some other combination of actions described in this document as the best course of management.

**In the FEIS, the Forest Service preferred alternative for wheeled vehicle management is a combination of Summer Alternatives 5, 4, 3, and 1. Likewise, the Forest Service preferred alternative for over-snow vehicle management is a combination of Winter Alternatives 2, 3, and 1. Each of the summer and winter alternatives has features that are preferable for social and environmental reasons. No single alternative has more good features than all the others, and no single alternative stands out as the best or “preferred” alternative. During deliberations between the Interdisciplinary Team and Line Officer, it became clear that no one alternative provided the mix of recreational opportunities and resource protection preferred by the agency, and that the public would be best served by the Line Officer selecting specific parts from all of the alternatives.**

