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FINAL Environmental Impact Statement Little Belt, Castle, and North Half Crazy Mountains Travel Management Plan

Belt Creek, Judith, Musselshell, and White Sulphur Springs Ranger Districts,
Lewis and Clark National Forest
Cascade, Judith Basin, Meagher, Wheatland, Sweetgrass, and Park Counties, Montana



DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FEIS AND DEIS

A “Draft” Environmental Impact Statement was prepared by the Lewis and Clark National Forest and released for public comment on July 7, 2006. Over 1,700 public comments were received on the DEIS. Based on public comments, the Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) of resource specialists developed additional analysis to better answer public concerns, or clarify discussion of effects. As a result, this “Final” Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) was prepared.

Highlighted bold text in this FEIS denotes additional text or changes in text between the “draft” and “final” EIS.

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Little Belt, Castle, and North Half Crazy Mountains Travel Management Plan

Final Environmental Impact Statement

Cascade, Judith Basin, Meagher, Wheatland, Sweetgrass, and Park Counties, Montana

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Abstract:

The Lewis and Clark National Forest proposes to change the management of motorized and non-motorized travel on the roads, trails, and areas within the Little Belt, Castle, and north half Crazy Mountains. Changing travel management affects the recreational opportunities (mileage and acreage) for use of motorized wheeled vehicles, snowmobiles, bicycles, stock, hiking, and other modes of travel on roads, trails, and cross-country. Three action alternatives were developed and compared with a no-action (no change) alternative for summer wheeled vehicle management. Two action alternatives were developed and compared with a no-action alternative for winter over-snow management. The effects on 21 issues were analyzed and displayed for all 7 alternatives in a final environmental impact statement. Selecting any combination of the summer and winter alternatives would result in a system of designated roads, trails, and areas for travel in the three mountain ranges.

Comments on this FEIS.

Public review and comment was solicited on the “draft” environmental impact statement (DEIS), and utilized in the preparation of this final environmental impact statement (FEIS). No further public review nor public comment is being sought on this “final” EIS.

Appeal of Decisions.

Reviewers whom disagree with information presented in this FEIS may appeal any decision based upon it. Decisions based upon this FEIS are described in separate documents. It is the reviewer’s responsibility to obtain those decision documents and follow procedures described in them to appeal the decision(s).

**LITTLE BELT, CASTLE, CRAZY MOUNTAINS
TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLAN**

FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

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SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Lewis and Clark National Forest proposes to revise and update the current travel management plan for the Little Belt, Castle, and north half Crazy Mountains. In doing so, the Lewis and Clark National Forest would designate those roads, trails, and airfields that would be recognized as system routes for management as part of the Forest transportation system.

Motorized and non-motorized travel in these three mountain ranges has been managed for the past 17 years under regulations described on the 1988 Lewis and Clark Forest Travel Plan map for the Jefferson Division. The 1988 Travel Plan may no longer provide the types of recreation opportunity desired by the public and may not be compatible with other resources. It is timely to address these concerns before problems cause resource damage or confuse visitors.

The project area includes all National Forest System lands within the Little Belt Mountains (900,310 acres), Castle Mountains (79,820 acres), and north half of the Crazy Mountains (69,980 acres) on the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Four ranger districts are involved with management. The 1,050,110 acres encompassed by the analysis comprise about 86% of the lands within the Jefferson Division of the Lewis and Clark National Forest, or 53% of the entire area managed by the Lewis and Clark National Forest.

PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose of travel management is to provide the public with opportunities to use both non-motorized and motorized modes of transportation to access public lands and travel on National Forest System (NFS) lands, roads, and trails. This environmental analysis is needed to evaluate the year-round impacts of both non-motorized and motorized travel on existing roads, trails, and areas managed by the Belt Creek, Judith, Musselshell, and White Sulphur Springs Ranger Districts within three mountain ranges.

PROPOSED ACTION

In 2000, the Lewis and Clark National Forest asked the public about the need to update and revise travel management restrictions across the entire Forest. Based on comments from the public, the agency came to the conclusion that most people had a good understanding of the 1988 Travel Plan that had been in place for many years, and that the 1988 Travel Plan made a logical starting point to determine “need for change”.

In 2005, an interdisciplinary team (IDT) of resource specialists developed a proposed action for the Little Belt, Castle, and north half Crazy Mountains based on “need for change” from the existing methods of travel allowed. To ensure long-term protection of various natural resources and also provide for recreational enjoyment of the area, the IDT considered seven evaluation criteria for wildlife and fish habitat protection, erosion control, safety, user conflict, and protection of other resources. The “proposed action” developed by the IDT consisted of one map for management of motorized wheeled vehicles and a data table containing information on how each road, trail, and area would be managed for motorized and non-motorized travel. For management of winter travel, the IDT selected the “winter

resolution” agreed to by a coalition of special interest groups for the Little Belt Mountains. The IDT then developed and included restrictions for winter travel in the Castle and north half Crazy Mountains. Color coded maps of the summer and winter travel proposals were sent to the public in September 2005.

DECISION FRAMEWORK

Given the purpose and need, the deciding official would review the existing condition, modified proposed action, the other alternatives, and the environmental consequences in order to make the following decision(s):

Restrictions on types of travel and/or seasons of travel.

Identify areas, roads and trails that are appropriate for various motorized modes of travel, and identify areas, roads, and trails that are appropriate for various non-motorized modes of travel. Impose seasonal or yearlong restrictions on any particular mode of travel based on considerations of safety, administration, public access, handicap access, recreational use, conflicts between uses, water quality, soil erosion, noxious weeds, wildlife and fisheries habitat, cultural resources and law enforcement.

Roads, trails, and airfields to be part of the designated transportation system.

Designate roads, trails, and airfields that would be recognized as system routes for management as part of the Forest transportation system.

RELATIONSHIP TO FOREST PLAN

The 1986 Lewis and Clark National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan for short) directs management of all Federal lands within the project area. The Forest Plan establishes goals and objectives for the multiple uses of renewable resources, and standards and guidelines to assure sustained productivity of the land and protection of the environment. In short, the Forest Plan goals and objectives identify the types of goods and services to be provided, while the standards and guidelines set the environmental sideboards within which activities are to be carried out.

TRAVEL MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES FOR PROJECT AREA

Based on Forest Plan direction, the 3-State OHV Decision summarized above, and Forest Service recreation policy (FSM-2350), the following objectives and goals were used to guide project design.

- Provide trail-related recreation opportunities that serve public needs and meet land management and recreation policy objectives (FSM-2353.02)
- Provide OHV recreation opportunities that are in concert with the environmental setting, minimize effects on the land and resources, promote public safety, and control conflicts with other uses of NFS lands (FSM-2355.02).
- Provide a diversity of trail opportunities and modes of travel consistent with land capability (FSM-2353.03)
- Develop trails that are suited to a variety of modes of travel. (FSM-2353.2).

- Provide a balance of opportunities for people to access and enjoy the outdoors.
- Manage roads and trails to provide safe public access to a variety of recreational settings while minimizing environmental impacts and conflicts with other uses.
- Manage OHVs in accordance with Forest Plan direction to protect resources, minimize conflict between users, and provide for safety of all users of NFS lands.

CONFORMANCE WITH LAWS, POLICY, AND REGULATIONS

Laws, policies, directives, strategies, and agendas establish many of the parameters for the environmental analysis of travel management on the Belt Creek, Judith, Musselshell, and White Sulphur Springs Ranger Districts. The project file contains a list of the principal federal laws, executive orders, policies, national strategies, national agendas, treaties, and state laws used to guide the analysis. Other laws, regulations, and policy not specifically listed in the project file also were taken into account by the various resource specialists during analysis.

SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

In 2000, the Lewis and Clark National Forest asked the public about the need to update and revise travel management restrictions across the entire Forest. A total of 211 people attended the public meetings, and 90 letters were submitted.

A Notice of Intent (NOI) was published in the Federal Register on September 23, 2005, beginning the formal process of public scoping. A one-page letter and 2 maps displaying the proposed action were mailed to 678 people on September 20, 2005. Additional copies of the proposed action were mailed or handed to several hundred people requesting them. A letter was mailed in October 2005 to 1,010 people stating that the comment period was extended to November 25, 2005. Public meetings were held in 9 locations, and attended by over 650 people. To expedite communication with interested organizations, Forest Service employees met 15 times with various organizations to explain the proposed action and answer questions.

A large number of people responded to the proposed action by the November 25, 2005, due date. A few comments kept trickling in throughout the winter, and were added to the public comment file for content analysis. A total of about 2,255 comments were received.

Starting in December 2005, all letters and e-mails with substantive comments were read by at least two people. In January 2006, the ID Team reviewed a summary of public comments and developed issue statements to be addressed by this analysis.

Beginning in July 2006, a “draft” EIS was sent to 61 libraries, 28 organizations, and 15 individuals. Compact discs (CDs) of the DEIS were sent to another 1,936 people. Nine public meetings were held. Comment letters were received from 747 people and organizations, along with about 1,036 form letters. All letters were read for substantive comments.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES, CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

Using the comments from the public, organizations, and other agencies, the interdisciplinary team developed a list of issues to address. Significant issues were defined as those directly or

indirectly caused by implementing any of the alternatives. Issues were deemed significant because of the extent of their geographic distribution, the duration of their effects, or the intensity of interest or resource conflict.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

Actions Common to All Alternatives

Under all alternatives, certain types of travel may be authorized for specific purposes. Motorized travel on roads, trails or areas closed to motorized use may be allowed for administrative purposes such as law enforcement, fire, emergencies, military operations, noxious weed control and other official business purposes. Motorized travel on roads, trails or areas closed to motorized use may also be authorized for carrying out the provisions of certain special use permits or other activities such as administration of grazing allotments. 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 that were issued in December 2005.

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.

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.

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 “alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed study” for rationale/discussion.

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 resource 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 Alt. 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.

IDENTIFICATION OF PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

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



CHAPTER I. PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FEIS AND DEIS

A “Draft” Environmental Impact Statement was prepared by the Lewis and Clark National Forest and released for public comment on July 7, 2006. Over 1,783 public comments were received on the DEIS. Based on public comments, the Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) of resource specialists developed additional analysis to better answer public concerns, or clarify discussion of effects. As a result, this “Final” Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) was prepared. Highlighted bold text in this FEIS denotes additional text or changes in text between the “draft” and “final” EIS.

DOCUMENT STRUCTURE

The Lewis and Clark National Forest has prepared this Environmental Impact Statement in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations. This Environmental Impact Statement discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action and alternatives. The document is organized into four chapters:

- **Chapter 1. Purpose and Need for Action:** The chapter includes information on the history of the project proposal, the purpose of and need for the project, and the agency’s proposal for achieving that purpose and need. This section also details how the Forest Service informed the public of the proposal and how the public responded.
- **Chapter 2. Alternatives:** This chapter provides a more detailed description of the agency’s “modified” proposed action as well as alternative methods for achieving the stated purpose. These alternatives were developed based on significant issues raised by the public and other agencies. This discussion also includes mitigation measures. Finally, this section provides a summary table of the environmental consequences associated with each alternative.
- **Chapter 3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences:** This chapter describes the environmental effects of implementing the proposed action and

other alternatives. This analysis discusses significant issues for major resources listed in alphabetical order.

- **Chapter 4. Consultation / Coordination / Response to Comments:** This chapter provides a list of preparers and agencies consulted during development of the environmental impact statement, and provides a summary of public comments on the DEIS and the Forest Service response to them.
- **Chapter 5. Appendices:** The appendices provide more detailed information to support the analyses presented in the environmental impact statement.

Additional documentation, including more detailed analyses of project-area resources, may be found in the project planning record located at the Forest Supervisor's Office, Lewis and Clark National Forest, Great Falls, Montana.

INTRODUCTION

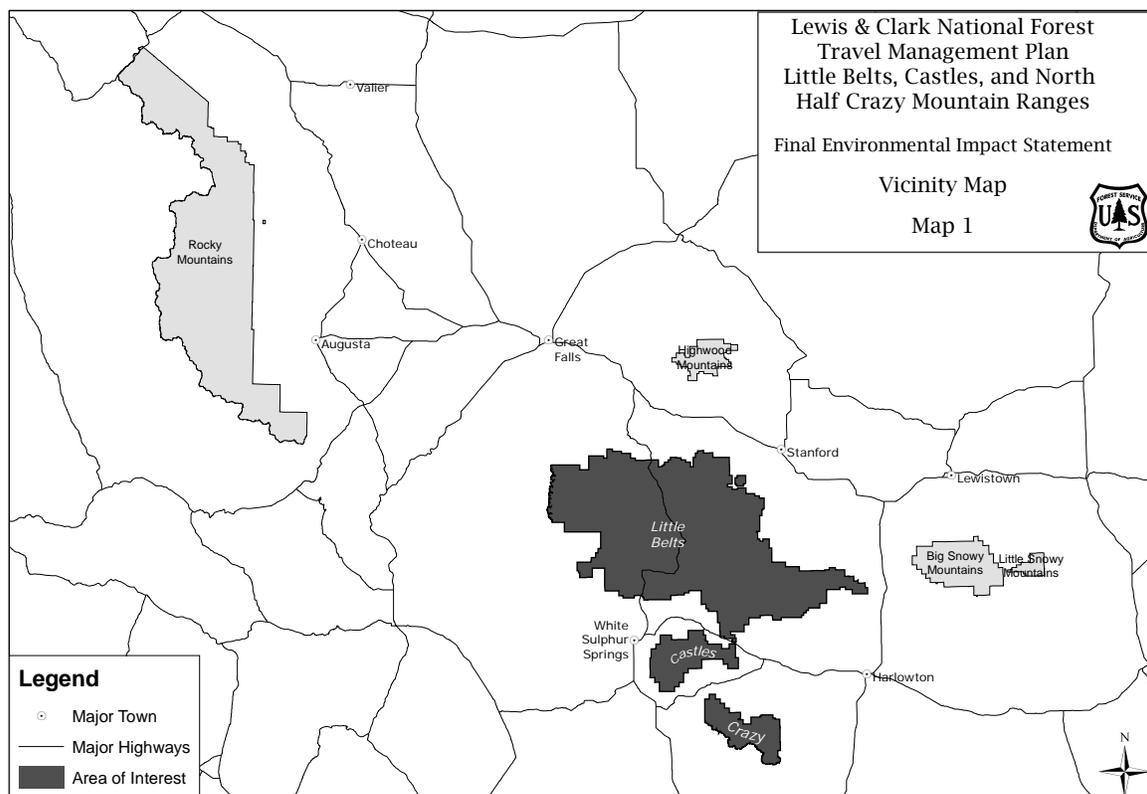
Motorized and non-motorized travel in the Little Belt, Castle, and north half Crazy Mountains has been managed for the past 19 years under regulations described on the 1988 Lewis and Clark Forest Travel Plan map for the Jefferson Division. In the past few years several concerns regarding the Travel Plan have been identified and need resolution. For example, types of use, levels of use, resource and safety concerns, and associated regulations have changed. The 1988 Travel Plan may no longer provide the types of recreation opportunity desired by the public and may not be compatible with other resources. It is timely to address these concerns before problems cause resource damage or further confuse visitors.



PROJECT AREA

The project area includes all National Forest System lands within the Little Belt Mountains (900,310 acres), Castle Mountains (79,820 acres), and north half of the Crazy Mountains (69,980 acres) on the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Four ranger districts are involved with management. The 1,050,110 acres encompassed by the analysis comprise about 86% of the lands within the Jefferson Division of the Lewis and Clark National Forest, or 53% of the entire area managed by the Lewis and Clark National Forest.

The vicinity map (Map 1) shows the location of the Little Belt, Castle, and north half Crazy Mountain ranges in relation to other landmarks in Montana.



PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose of travel management is to provide the public with opportunities to use both non-motorized and motorized modes of transportation to access public lands and travel on National Forest System (NFS) lands, roads, and trails. This environmental analysis is needed to evaluate the year-round impacts of both non-motorized and motorized travel on existing roads, trails, and areas managed by the Belt Creek, Judith, Musselshell, and White Sulphur Springs Ranger Districts within three mountain ranges. Specifically, this planning effort is intended to address the following purposes and needs.

In December 2005, a new travel management rule took effect for all National Forest System lands. The new Federal regulation directs National Forests to restrict motorized travel to designated roads, trails, and areas only. All National Forests are expected to complete a planning process by the end of 2009 to determine what roads, trails, and areas would be designated for motorized travel. This analysis is part of the planning process to select routes for designation as motor vehicle roads, trails and areas under the new regulation.

Non-system roads and trails exist on the landscape. On the Lewis and Clark National Forest the vast majority of these non-system routes have been mapped as to location. Because they are not “system” routes the Forest Service does not invest time or money in their maintenance, yet the routes are used for recreational travel. Some non-system routes are old roads and trails that accessed mines, timber harvest units, or recreational attractions. Other non-system routes were more recently developed via repeated travel with motorcycles, ATVs, 4x4 vehicles, horses, or feet. These non-system routes need to be assessed to determine if they provide a desirable recreational opportunity, if they can be managed as system roads or system trails, and if adverse effects can be mitigated. Non-system routes deemed suitable for management would be added to the Forest Service inventory of system roads and trails. Unauthorized (non-system) routes that are determined unsuitable for management would be closed to motorized travel in accordance with the December 2005 Federal regulation.

In April 2004, a resolution for management of winter recreation in the Little Belt Mountains was agreed to by the Montana Snowmobile Association, Montana Wilderness Association, and other interested groups. The Lewis and Clark National Forest agreed to consider the resolution as one alternative for management of snowmobiles. This analysis is part of the planning process to determine whether or not the resolution is selected for implementation.

All-terrain-vehicles (ATVs) were just becoming a common mode of transportation when the 1988 Travel Plan was implemented. The 1988 Travel Plan designated some old roads as ATV trails, and also left some areas open to cross-country motorized travel. Due to the increased popularity and use of ATVs since 1988, there is a need to address the effects of this type of vehicle on various resources and the suitability of trails to accommodate them.

The 20 types of travel restrictions shown on the 1988 Travel Plan map for the Jefferson Division are confusing. Many visitors are unable to correctly interpret the map, which results in angry visitors, or inadvertent violations, or both. The 1988 map has errors, and does not show many of the roads and trails that exist on the ground. There is a need to develop a simpler travel plan with fewer categories of restrictions. Likewise, there is a need to design a simpler map, which complies with recently developed National standards and is consistent between National Forests.

Visitors are sometimes confused when they encounter different travel restrictions as they cross from one National Forest to another. Travel restrictions are not consistent across common boundaries between the Gallatin and Lewis and Clark National Forests. Improving the coordination of travel management along boundaries between Forests could eliminate or reduce confusion for visitors.

Conflicts between different uses generally occur on trails and roads that are not designed to accommodate the types of uses allowed, or when visitors encounter other types of uses that they had not expected. The road and trail system in the Jefferson Division needs to be assessed to determine if types of use on each route accommodate safe travel for all. Likewise, signs, maps, and other types of public information need to be evaluated to determine if they adequately inform all users of other modes of travel they may encounter.

In January 2001, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management issued a joint decision to prohibit motorized cross-country travel on all National Forest System and BLM public lands in a three state area. This decision did not address winter travel. It also directed all National Forests to set up a schedule for completing site-specific planning that would designate appropriate uses on all system and non-system roads and trails. The Lewis and Clark National Forest determined that the Little Belt, Castle, and Crazy Mountain ranges have a high priority for completing a detailed site-specific travel management plan.

Snowmobiling is a popular activity during the winter months. With the advent of more powerful snowmobiles there is an increasing risk of snowmobiles disturbing sensitive habitats in the high country. Similarly, with more people engaged in snowmobiling there is a greater risk of disrupting winter ranges at the lower elevations. There is a need to assess the effects of snowmobiling and identify suitable opportunities for this activity.

Demand for disabled access during all seasons of the year appears to be increasing. There may be opportunities to accommodate access for disabled individuals in accordance with the Forest Service Strategic Plan (USDA, 2000) to “ensure that NFS lands, programs, and facilities are accessible to all Americans”. There is a need to assess the opportunities for and effects of providing more disabled access opportunities.

Demand for non-motorized recreation opportunities during the winter appears to be increasing. The Silvercrest Winter Sports area offers a limited area to engage in cross-country skiing in a quiet setting. There is a need to assess the opportunities for providing and effects of marking more non-motorized winter recreation opportunities.

Ever since the 1988 Travel Plan replaced the 1984 Travel Plan on June 1, 1988, issues have been raised about its legality. The 1988 Travel Plan was developed by debate and consensus between various user groups, with concurrence from resource specialists from Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) and the Forest Service. Although a great deal of time and work was spent developing consensus, not everyone agreed with every part of the 1988 plan. Some organizations chose not to participate at all. When the final decision was made, four organizations appealed the decision to implement the 1988 Travel Plan. Upon review of their concerns, the Deputy Regional Forester determined that the environmental analysis (EA) of the 1988 Travel Plan was not adequate and instructed the Lewis and Clark National Forest to complete a new analysis and decision within a timeframe negotiated with the appellants. The Deputy Regional Forester also rejected the appellant's primary point of relief to remand the 1988 Travel Plan. The Deputy Regional Forester directed the 1988 Travel Plan to be implemented in its entirety because all parties, including the appellants, agreed it was a better plan than the previous 1984 Travel Plan. (Note: the project file contains more details on the 1988 Travel Plan appeal and status). There is a need to complete an analysis of the effects of current travel management to comply with direction issued following appeal of the 1988 Travel Plan.

PROPOSED ACTION

Development of proposed action

In 2000, the Lewis and Clark National Forest asked the public about the need to update and revise travel management restrictions across the entire Forest. Based on comments from the public, the agency came to the conclusion that most people had a good understanding of the 1988 Travel Plan that had been in place for many years. Also based on comments from the

public and resource specialists, the Lewis and Clark National Forest felt that the 1988 Travel Plan made a logical starting point to determine “need for change”.

In 2005, an interdisciplinary team (IDT) of resource specialists was assigned the task of developing a proposed action for the Little Belt, Castle, and north half Crazy Mountains based on “need for change” from the existing methods of travel allowed for specific areas, roads and trails. To ensure long-term protection of various natural resources and also provide for recreational enjoyment of the area, the IDT considered seven evaluation criteria described in Appendix C for wildlife and fish habitat protection, erosion control, safety, user conflict, and protection of other resources. The 1988 Travel Management Plan for the Jefferson Division and the 2001 Off Highway Vehicle cross-country travel decision served as the basis for development of a proposed action. The IDT also identified and proposed corrections of travel management restrictions and ownership that were erroneously shown on the existing 1988 Travel Plan.

The “proposed action” developed by the IDT consisted of one map for management of motorized wheeled vehicles and a data table containing information on how each road, trail, and area would be managed for motorized and non-motorized travel. For management of winter travel, the IDT selected the “winter resolution” agreed to by the special interest groups for the Little Belt Mountains. The IDT then developed and included restrictions for winter travel in the Castle and north half Crazy Mountains. Color coded maps of the summer and winter travel proposals were sent to the public in September 2005.

DECISION FRAMEWORK

Given the purpose and need, the deciding official would review the existing condition, all action alternatives analyzed in detail, and the environmental consequences in order to make the following decision(s):

Restrictions on types of travel and/or seasons of travel.

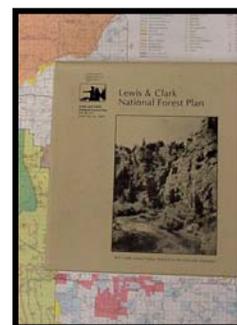
Identify areas, roads and trails that are appropriate for various motorized modes of travel, and identify areas, roads, and trails that are appropriate for various non-motorized modes of travel. Impose seasonal or yearlong restrictions on any particular mode of travel based on considerations of safety, administration, public access, disabled access, recreational use, conflicts between uses, water quality, soil erosion, noxious weeds, wildlife and fisheries habitat, cultural resources and law enforcement.

Roads, trails, and airfields to be part of the designated transportation system.

Designate roads, trails, and airfields that would be recognized as system routes for management as part of the Forest transportation system.

RELATIONSHIP TO FOREST PLAN

The 1986 Lewis and Clark National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan for short) directs management of all Federal lands within the project area. The Forest Plan establishes goals and objectives for the multiple uses of renewable resources,



and standards and guidelines to assure sustained productivity of the land and protection of the environment. In short, the Forest Plan goals and objectives identify the types of goods and services to be provided, while the standards and guidelines set the environmental sideboards within which activities are to be carried out.

Forest Plan direction is established at two scales. Forest-wide direction is applicable throughout the Forest, while management area direction ties specific goals, objectives, and standards to the unique capabilities of given parcels of land.

Forest-wide Direction

Chapter 2 of the Forest Plan describes the goals, objectives, and standards that apply to the entire Forest. Page 2-64 (Forest Plan) describes the management standard to facilitate travel planning, and lists criteria to be used in determining travel restrictions on areas, roads and trails. The criteria for determining the need for travel management restrictions include: 1) safety of forest visitors; 2) resource protection; 3) user conflicts; 4) facility protection; and 5) public support.

One of the guidelines on page 2-64 states, "...the Lewis and Clark NF will generally be open to vehicles except for roads, trails, or areas which may be restricted." This Forest Plan guideline is reflected in the existing 1988 Travel Management Plan. Discussions may lead to an alternative that has a basis of "closed to motorized vehicles unless posted open".

Some of the other Forest-wide goals, objectives, standards and guidelines that apply to this project include the following. Goal 9 (cooperate with agencies, groups, Tribes, etc.) and goal 10 (public education) are part of this project, but are not driving goals. Objectives for winter trails (Forest Plan, pg. 2-4), cultural resources (Forest Plan, pg. 2-5), roadless areas (Forest Plan, pg. 2-5), and noxious weeds (Forest Plan, pg. 2-6) are considerations of this project, but are not driving objectives. Likewise, standards for travel shelters (Forest Plan, pg. 2-26), winter snow trails (Forest Plan, pg. 2-26), cultural resources (Forest Plan, pgs. 2-26,27), rights-of-way (Forest Plan, pg. 2-62), and maintenance--construction standards for roads and trails (Forest Plan, pgs. 2-65 through 2-71) are important considerations of travel management. These Forest-wide standards, as well as all other Forest-wide standards not mentioned above, provide guidance for the project.

Forest Plan Amendment #23, approved in January 2001, restricts motorized wheeled cross-country travel yearlong on all National Forest System lands where it was not already restricted. This amendment resulted from a 3-State OHV decision by the Regional Forester.

Management Area Direction

Table I-1 summarizes the Forest Plan direction for 14 management areas in the Little Belt, Castle, and Crazy Mountains. Map 6 shows the location of all management areas. [Refer to Chapter 3 of the Forest Plan for a complete description of goals and standards for these management areas.]

In general, Management Areas A, B, D, E, G, H, I, L, and S, comprising about 68% of the three mountain ranges, have standards permitting motorized use on existing roads and travelways, and allowing OHVs to use all areas and trails except where restricted by season, type of vehicle, or type of activity. Management Area C (7% of the project area) has similar standards permitting motorized use on roads and trails so long as elk habitat effectiveness is maintained. Direction for MA-F (22% of the three mountain ranges) states that all areas and

trails are to be closed to OHVs, except on designated routes. Direction for MA-J (1% of the project area) states that no new roads are to be constructed within the municipal watersheds, and that OHVs are to be restricted to designated routes. Standards for MA-K (1% of the project area) permits public motorized travel on existing roads, and allows OHVs on designated routes so long as research values are protected. Direction for MA-M (1% of the area) states that no new roads or trails are to be constructed in Research Natural Areas.

Table I-1. Forest Plan Management Direction Summary

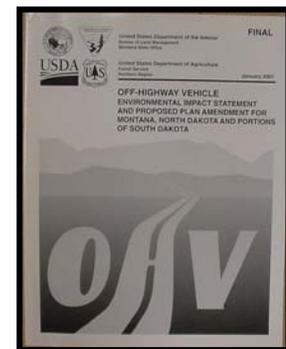
Forest Plan Management Areas	Acreage*	Management Direction & Standards
A (4%)	42,560 Lt. Belts 0 Castles 0 Crazies 42,560 ac. Total	Protect scenic values near Highway 89 and Dry Fork Belt Crk (Rd. 120). Permit motorized use on all arterial and most collector roads. Open all areas and trails to OHVs except where use is restricted by season, type of vehicle, or type of activity.
B (26%)	249,400 Lt. Belts 0 Castles 26,890 Crazies 276,290 ac. total	Emphasize timber management, and moderate level of livestock forage. Permit motorized use on all arterial and most collector roads. Open all areas and trails to OHVs except where use is restricted by season, type of vehicle, or type of activity.
C (7%)	46,550 Lt. Belts 18,750 Castles 8,800 Crazies 74,100 ac. total	Maximize elk habitat effectiveness, and emphasize habitat diversity. Permit motorized use on all arterial and most collector roads. Open all areas and trails to OHVs except where use is restricted by season, type of vehicle, or type of activity, but maintain elk habitat effectiveness.
D (2%)	0 Lt. Belts 19,870 Castles 0 Crazies 19,870 ac. total	Provide sustained high level of forage for livestock and big-game animals. Permit motorized use on all arterial and most collector roads. Open all areas and trails to OHVs except for those areas and trails that cannot be protected against erosion or provide for user safety.
E (9%)	77,980 Lt. Belts 15,750 Castles 0 Crazies 93,730 ac. total	Provide sustained high level of forage for livestock and big-game animals. Permit motorized use on all arterial and most collector roads. Open all areas and trails to OHVs except where use is restricted by season, type of vehicle, or type of activity.
F (22%)	235,750 Lt. Belts 0 Castles 0 Crazies 235,750 ac. total	Emphasize semi-primitive recreation opportunities, while maintaining and protecting other forest resources. Limit motorized use to existing roads. Close all roads and trails to OHVs, except designated routes.
G (19%)	150,420 Lt. Belts 15,070 Castles 34,290 Crazies 199,780 ac. total	Maintain and protect forest resources with minimal investment. Limit motorized use to existing roads. Open all areas and trails to OHVs except where use is restricted by season, type of vehicle, or type of activity.
H (5%)	48,680 Lt. Belts 1,980 Castles 0 Crazies 50,660 ac. total	Provide recreation opportunities supported by other public and private developments while maintaining other resource values. Permit motorized use on all arterial and collector roads. Open all areas and trails to OHVs except where use is restricted by season, type of vehicle, or type of activity.
I (1%)	12,820 Lt. Belts 0 Castles 0 Crazies 12,820 ac. total	Maintain or enhance important big-game habitat. Emphasize the management of Threatened and Endangered species habitat. Permit motorized use on all arterial and most collector roads. Open all areas and trails to OHVs except where use is restricted by season, type of vehicle, or type of activity.
J (1%)	3,350 Lt. Belts 4,810 Castles 0 Crazies 8,160 ac. total	Maintain high-quality water for municipal use. Do not build roads. Limit OHVs to designated routes.
K (1%)	7,870 Lt. Belts 0 Castles 0 Crazies 7,870 ac. total	Manage the Tenderfoot Experiment Forest to meet research objectives. Permit motorized use only on existing roads. Open all areas and trails to OHVs except where use is restricted by season, type of vehicle, or type of activity, but research values will be protected.
L (2%)	18,340 Lt. Belts 3,590 Castles 0 Crazies 21,930 ac. total	Emphasize mineral exploration, development, and production. Permit motorized use on all arterial and collector roads. Open all areas and trails to OHVs except for those areas and trails that cannot be protected against erosion or provide for user safety.

Forest Plan Management Areas	Acreage*	Management Direction & Standards
M (1%)	5,900 Lt. Belts 0 Castles 0 Crazyes 5,900 ac. total	Maintain natural conditions for Research Natural Area purposes. Do not build roads. Open all areas and trails to OHVs except where use is restricted by season, type of vehicle, or type of activity.
R	No acreage specified.	Manage to protect or enhance unique ecosystem values associated with riparian zones. Manage roads and trails to be compatible with adjacent route management.
S (0%)	690 Lt. Belts 0 Castles 0 Crazyes 690 ac. total	Provide winter recreation opportunities supported by public and private developments while maintaining other resource values. Permit motorized use on all arterial and collector roads. Open all areas and trails to OHVs except where use is restricted by season, type of vehicle, or type of activity.
TOTAL	1,050,110 acres	

* Acreage from GIS data may not be the same as listed in Forest Plan.

RELATIONSHIP TO FOREST SERVICE / BLM 3-STATE OHV DECISION, 2001

In January 2001, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management issued a joint decision to prohibit motorized cross-country wheeled-vehicle travel on all National Forest System and BLM public lands in a three state area. Over-snow winter travel was not restricted. The decision amended nine Forest Plans, including the Lewis and Clark Forest Plan. The decision also directed all National Forests to set up a schedule for completing site-specific planning that would designate appropriate uses on all system and non-system roads and trails. The Lewis and Clark National Forest determined that the Little Belt, Castle and Crazy Mountains were a high priority for completing a detailed site-specific travel management plan.



Until a National Forest makes site-specific decisions about designated roads and trails, the 3-State OHV decision restricts motorized wheeled vehicles to “existing” roads and trails. Vehicles must fit within the width of the track. In other words, a full-sized four-wheel-drive vehicle can only be used on a road that has at least two wheel-tracks spanning the width of a standard 4x4 vehicle. A 4x4 vehicle cannot be driven on a set of wheel tracks that are 50-inches or less in width. A 50-inch wide ATV can only be used on an existing trail that has two distinct wheel tracks spanning at least 50-inches; it cannot be used on an existing 18-inch wide single track trail. Motorcycles can be used on “existing” continuous single-track trails, but cannot be used on livestock or game trails that have intermittent breaks in the tread. These rules of thumb leave some decisions up to individual operators, but are reasonable interim guidelines until site-specific planning can be completed and posted on the ground.

Established Travel Management Plans were supplemented by the Statewide OHV decision. The 1988 Travel Plan for the Jefferson Division remains in force, and continues to regulate motorized travel on designated routes. The 1988 Travel Plan also continues to regulate over-snow travel, and regulate travel on unsigned “existing” roads and trails within “Area Restrictions”. For example, “Area R” on the 1988 Jefferson Division Travel Plan restricts road vehicles and ATVs yearlong, and restricts motorcycles and snowmobiles from October 15 through August 30. Therefore, a 4x4 vehicle or ATV could not legally be driven on any unsigned “existing” road within the Area R boundary. Likewise, a motorcycle or snowmobile could not be ridden on any unsigned “existing” trail anywhere in the Area R

boundary except for a six week period from September 1 through October 14. Many people have a difficult time understanding the regulations imposed by both the 1988 Travel Plan and Statewide OHV decision.

RELATIONSHIP TO FOREST SERVICE OHV RULE - 2005

In December 2005, the Forest Service revised regulations pertaining to the management of motorized vehicle use on National Forest System lands. The new OHV rule requires the designation of roads, trails, and areas that are open to motorized travel. Current travel plans and regulations remain in place until a National Forest goes through a process to identify and designate routes for motor vehicle use. The agency expects all National Forests to complete the designation process within 4 years. Minimum size for implementation of the regulation is by Ranger District.

The Lewis and Clark National Forest anticipates that the public involvement and analysis process involved with this project will result in the identification and selection of roads, trails and areas that would be designated for motor vehicle use. Consequently, the Lewis and Clark National Forest expects all four ranger districts involved in this project would be ready for implementation of a designated route system under the new regulations by December 2008.

TRAVEL MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES FOR PROJECT AREA

Based on Forest Plan direction, the 3-State OHV Decision summarized above, and Forest Service recreation policy (FSM-2350), the following objectives and goals were used to guide project design.

- Provide trail-related recreation opportunities that serve public needs and meet land management and recreation policy objectives (FSM-2353.02)
- Provide OHV recreation opportunities that are in concert with the environmental setting, minimize effects on the land and resources, promote public safety, and control conflicts with other uses of NFS lands (FSM-2355.02).
- Provide a diversity of trail opportunities and modes of travel consistent with land capability (FSM-2353.03)
- Develop trails that are suited to a variety of modes of travel. (FSM-2353.2).
- Provide a balance of opportunities for people to access and enjoy the outdoors.
- Manage roads and trails to provide safe public access to a variety of recreational settings while minimizing environmental impacts and conflicts with other uses.
- Manage OHVs in accordance with Forest Plan direction to protect resources, minimize conflict between users, and provide for safety of all users of NFS lands.

RELATIONSHIP TO PREVIOUS TRAVEL PLANS

Executive Order 11644 signed by President Nixon on February 8, 1972, directed land management agencies to designate areas where off-road-vehicles may or may not be permitted. Executive Order 11989 signed by President Carter on May 24, 1977, clarified direction to land management agencies in regard to regulating use of off-road-vehicles on

areas where such use may cause or is causing adverse effects. These two executive orders initiated the development of travel management plans on National Forest System lands.

1976/77 Travel Plan. The first effort to manage motorized travel on the Lewis and Clark National Forest came on February 15, 1977, when a travel management plan for the Jefferson Division was issued. On March 1, 1978, an updated travel plan was issued that remained in effect until 1984.



1984 Travel Plan. On August 1, 1984, new travel management regulations were issued for the Jefferson Division, thereby replacing the 1978 Travel Plan.

1988 Travel Plan. The 1988 Travel Plan replaced the 1984 Travel Plan on June 1, 1988. The 1988 Travel Plan recognized the advent of ATV trail vehicles, and allowed for use of trail vehicles <50-inches wide on designated trails and within areas open to cross-country travel. Some people believe that their appeal of the 1988 Travel Plan is still unresolved. Detailed information on the appeal and legality of the 1988 Travel Plan is presented in the project file as a non-significant issue. It is important to note here that the 1988 Travel Plan has been in effect for over 18 years, the 1988 Travel Plan has not been litigated, and that this analysis should resolve any remaining issues concerning the appeal.

CONFORMANCE WITH LAWS, POLICY, AND REGULATIONS

Laws, policies, directives, strategies, and agendas establish many of the parameters for the environmental analysis of travel management on the Belt Creek, Judith, Musselshell, and White Sulphur Springs Ranger Districts. The project file contains a list of the principal federal laws, executive orders, policies, national strategies, national agendas, treaties, and state laws used to guide the analysis. References to applicable laws and policy, as well as disclosures and findings required by them, can be found throughout this document and in the project file. Some of the laws are summarized in the project file, and some are referenced to the appropriate source. Other laws, regulations, and policy not specifically listed in the project file also were taken into account by the various resource specialists during analysis.

SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT SUMMARY

In 2000, the Lewis and Clark National Forest asked the public about the need to update and revise travel management restrictions across the entire Forest. Letters were mailed to 611 people on a Forest-wide mailing list, and 10 open house meetings were held. A total of 211 people attended the public meetings, and 90 letters were submitted. Based on comments from the public, the Lewis and Clark Forest came to the conclusion that most people had a good understanding of the 1988 Travel Plan that had been in place for many years. Also

based on comments from the public and resource specialists, the Forest Supervisor felt that the 1988 Travel Plan made a logical starting point to determine “need for change”.

On April 7, 2005, a Project Initiation Letter (PIL) directed an Interdisciplinary Team of resource specialists to begin development of a “proposed action” for travel management on the Little Belt, Castle, and Crazy Mountain ranges. The PIL identified a list of preliminary issues for the ID Team to consider and refine in developing a proposed action. A Notice of Intent (NOI) was published in the Federal Register on September 23, 2005, beginning the formal process of public scoping. The NOI asked for public comment on the proposal by October 24, 2005. Beginning September 19, the proposed action was posted on the Lewis and Clark Forest website. News releases were sent to all local news services, and a series of articles appeared in the local Great Falls newspaper. A one-page letter and 2 maps displaying the proposed action were mailed to 678 people on September 20, 2005. Additional copies of the proposed action were mailed or handed to several hundred people requesting them. In October a letter was mailed to 1,010 people notifying them the comment period was extended to November 25, 2005. Several follow-up articles on the comment period extension were printed by the Great Falls Tribune, and citizens wrote a few letters-to-the-editor. Public meetings were held in 9 locations as follows:

Open House Public Meetings to Discuss the Proposed Action

DATE	LOCATION	TIME	ATTENDANCE
9/19/2005	Monarch/Neihart	3-8 pm	49
9/20/2005	Roundup	3-8 pm	12
9/22/2005	Great Falls	4-8 pm	413
9/26/2005	Harlowton	3-9 pm	3
9/28/2005	Billings	3-9 pm	no record
10/3/2005	Lewistown	3-9 pm	67
10/4/2005	Harlowton	3-9 pm	9
10/6/2005	Stanford	3-9 pm	54
10/13/2005	White Sulphur Springs	7-9 pm	44
TOTAL OF 9 meetings			651+ people

To expedite communication with interested organizations, Forest Service employees met with various organizations to explain the proposed action and answer questions.

Organizational Meetings to Discuss the Proposed Action

DATE	LOCATION	ORGANIZATION
10/05/2005	Great Falls	Great Falls Snowmobile Club
10/07/2005	Great Falls	Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Association
10/14/2005	Great Falls	Montana Wilderness Association
10/27/2005	Great Falls	CMR Backcountry Horsemen
10/28/2005	Great Falls	Montana Wilderness Association
11/10/2005	Belt Creek R.S.	Neihart/Forest Green residents
11/10/2005	Great Falls	Conservation Council
11/15/2005	Great Falls	Horsemen / Outfitters
11/16/2005	Great Falls	Flyfishers of the Missouri
11/25/2005	Great Falls	CMR Backcountry Horsemen
undated	W.S.S.	Meagher County Littlebelters (Snowmobile club)
01/27/2006	Stanford	Montana Wilderness Association

DATE	LOCATION	ORGANIZATION
02/14/2006	Great Falls	Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks
02/14/2006	Great Falls	American Wildlands
03/02/2006	Billings	Treasure State ATV

A large number of people responded to the proposed action by the November 25, 2005, due date. A few comments kept trickling in throughout the winter, and were added to the public comment file for content analysis. Since the Judith Watershed Assessment project in 2004 involved travel management in the Middle Fork Judith WSA, those comment letters were re-evaluated for this project.

Number of Comments Received on Proposed Action

Source of Comments	Number of Comments
Groups / Organizations / Agencies	48
Individuals / Businesses	1,131
Comments on Judith Assessment (2004)	97
Deficient Letters (no legible name or address)	195
Form Letter 1	400
Form Letter 2	6
Form Letter 3	6
Form Letter 4	63
Form Letter 5	156
Petition 1	9 signatures
Petition 2	89 signatures
Late Letters (after comment period)	55
TOTAL	2,255

All e-mails with unique individual or organization comments were printed and added to the public comment file. All e-mail form letters, deficient letters, and late letters were printed and reviewed by two people for any additional substantive comments. Starting in December 2005, all letters and e-mails with substantive comments were read by at least two people. All form letters were scanned for any additional comments. Only one copy of each of the four types of form letters was read for content analysis. All deficient letters were read, and all late letters were read and included as received. Comments were coded according to categories listed in Appendix B. Individual names, addresses, and comments were put into a database program. In January 2006, the ID Team reviewed these public comments and developed issue statements to be addressed by this analysis.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ON DEIS:

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Little Belt, Castle, and Crazy Mountains Travel Management Plan was distributed beginning July 7, 2006 as follows:

385 page DEIS, 8 alternative maps, & 19 resource maps mailed to: 61 libraries
385 page DEIS, 8 alternative maps, & 19 maps mailed to: 28 orgs/ind
385 page DEIS, 8 alternative maps, & 19 maps mailed to: 10 orgs/ind
385 page DEIS, 8 alternative maps, & 19 maps hand delivered to: 5 ind.
Total full-text DEIS distributed: 104

Beginning July 10, 2006, the DEIS was distributed as follows:

CD (compact disc) of DEIS & 1 hardcopy cover letter mailed to: **1,848 people**
 CD (compact disc) of DEIS & 1 hardcopy cover letter handed out to: **88 people**
Total CDs distributed: 1,936

Notice of Availability published in Federal Register on September 23, 2005

Posted maps of 8 alternatives on website effective May 8, 2006

Full text of Draft EIS posted on website effective July 11, 2006

Legal ad published in Great Falls Tribune on July 15, 2006

Open house public meetings:

DATE	LOCATION	ATTENDANCE
July 13, 2006	White Sulphur Springs	24
July 20, 2006	Lewistown	48
July 25, 2006	Billings	21
July 27, 2006	Harlowton	12
July 27, 2006	Stanford	22
Aug. 1, 2006	Great Falls	274
Aug. 17, 2006	Townsend	12
Aug. 19, 2006	Neihart (Belt Creek)	49
Sept. 7, 2006	White Sulphur Springs	21
TOTAL ATTENDANCE		483 people

Letters received on the Draft EIS:

Organizations/Agencies = 44
 Individuals = 582 (households)
SUB-TOTAL = 626 (35% of total)

Form Letters #1-#4 = 1,036 (58% of total)
 Deficient Letters = 91 (5% of total) (no name &/or no postal address)
 Late Letters = 30 (2% of total) (after comment period ended)

TOTALS: 1,783 total comments received

- **626 original substantive letters (35% of total) were submitted to the LCNF.**
 - **83% of substantive letters came from Montana**
- **1,036 form letters (58% of total) were submitted to the LCNF.**
 - **82% of form letters came from Montana**
- **79% of Montanan's submitting letters supported Summer Alts. 1 or 3, and/or Winter Alt. 1.**

MAILING LIST:

When public scoping was first started in September 2005, the project mailing list consisted of 678 contacts. The project mailing list now consists of 1,912 contacts, with an additional electronic mailing list of 728 e-mail addresses. Most of the e-mail addresses are for the same people already in the database program contact list.

Maps of the alternatives were posted on the Forest website in May 2006. The intent was to allow the public an opportunity to review the maps and better prepare themselves to make substantive comments once the analysis was completed.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES, CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

Using the comments from the public, organizations, and other agencies, the interdisciplinary team developed a list of issues to address. The Forest Service separated the issues into two groups: significant and non-significant issues as per guidance from the Council on Environmental Quality regulations:

- “NEPA documents must concentrate on the issues that are truly significant to the action in question, rather than amassing needless detail.” (40 CFR 1500.1(b)).
- “Using the scoping process, not only to identify significant environmental issues deserving of study, but also to deemphasize insignificant issues, narrowing the scope of the EIS process accordingly.” (40 CFR 1500.4(g)).
- “Discussing only briefly issues other than significant ones.” (40 CFR 1500.4(c)). “As in a finding of no significant impact, there should be only enough discussion to show why more study is not warranted.” (40 CFR 1502.2(b)).

Significant issues were defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing any of the alternatives. Issues were deemed significant because of the extent of their geographic distribution, the duration of their effects, or the intensity of interest or resource conflict. A detailed description of each significant issue, how the issue would be analyzed, and any applicable mitigation measures were developed and approved by a line officer. Detailed “Issue Statements” are contained in the project file, and summarized in Table I-2. Each significant issue will be analyzed in detail in Chapter III.

Public comments on the DEIS did not raise any additional significant issues to address.

NON-SIGNIFICANT ISSUES, NOT CONSIDERED FURTHER

Non-significant issues were identified as those: 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan, or other higher level decision; 3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations explain this delineation. “Identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review, narrowing the discussion of these issues in the statement to a brief presentation of why they will not have a significant effect on the human environment or providing a reference to their coverage elsewhere.” (40 CFR 1501.7(a)3). Non-significant issues and reasons regarding their categorization as non-significant may be found in the project file.

No additional non-significant issues were identified as a result of evaluating public comments on the “Draft” EIS.

Table I-2. Significant Issues Addressed in Detail

ISSUE	HOW THE ISSUE IS EVALUATED:
HERITAGE RESOURCES:	
Potential for effects on identified and unidentified archaeological and historical sites.	Assessment of potential effects to classes of sites and site types, and an estimate of the potential for undiscovered sites. Miles with changed levels of use, miles of newly adopted roads and trails, and numbers of sites requiring mitigation.
LAW ENFORCEMENT:	
Effectiveness of law enforcement.	Subjective evaluation of law enforcement role and capabilities.
RECREATION:	
Opportunities for a full spectrum of summer recreational activities and settings.	Acreage of summer motorized/non-motorized ROS. Mileage of motorized/non-motorized roads/trails by activity, including disabled access. # of large non-motorized blocks.
Opportunities for airfields.	Number, location, and description of airfields, including ROS settings.
Cumulative effects of past closures on opportunities for motorized recreation.	Current mileage of motorized / non-motorized roads / trails on 6 eastside-Montana National Forests. Projected mileage of motorized roads/trails on 6 eastside NFs assuming reductions of 25% and 75%.
Effects to outfitter-guide permittees.	Changes in motorized trail and road access. Changes in ROS settings.
Current and potential use levels by activity.	Estimate potential changes in use levels for various recreation activities between now and 2025 based on population and participation trends. Evaluation of capacity to meet demand, potential for conflicts, and technology threats.
Opportunities for diverse winter recreation activities.	Acreage of winter open/closed snowmobile area. Mileage of motorized /non-motorized winter recreation trails.
Potential for effects on the Smith River corridor.	Changes in number and type of access points. Protection of boat camps.
Consistency with adjacent National Forest management.	Comparison of travel management on routes that cross administrative boundaries, and identification of any inconsistencies.
ROADLESS/WILDERNESS:	
Potential effects on Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) and Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs).	Qualitative evaluation of effects on characteristics of WSAs and IRAs such as opportunity for solitude, sense of remoteness, and natural integrity.
SOCIAL and ECONOMICS:	
Social conflict between motorized and non-motorized activities at local and political levels, and potential economic effects due to changes in travel management.	Subjective evaluation of social conflict between motorized and non-motorized uses. Objective valuation of local economy and potential for effects.

ISSUE	HOW THE ISSUE IS EVALUATED:
SOILS:	
Effect on soil quality when the design and location of roads and trails are inadequate, when routes cross sensitive soils, and when maintenance is inadequate.	Miles of roads and trails with an engineering design for the proposed use. Miles of roads and trails with a gradient exceeding a threshold that make mitigation expensive and technically difficult. Miles or percent of roads and trails crossing sensitive soils. Miles of roads and trails with regular, effective maintenance.
VEGETATION:	
Potential for spread of noxious weeds.	Evaluation of potential for new infestations of noxious weeds and increases in size of existing infestations.
Potential for effects on sensitive plant species.	Evaluation of designated roads and trails on sensitive plant species.
WATER:	
Effects on water quality from a designated road and trail system on a watershed basis, if there are inadequate buffers to trap sediment.	Miles or percent of roads and trails with an engineering design. Miles of roads and trails within a watershed. Number of road and trail stream crossings. Miles of roads and trails within 100 feet of a stream. Miles or percent of roads and trails with regular, effective maintenance.
WILDLIFE / FISH:	
Potential for displacement of wildlife.	Evaluation of route density, season of use, and elk habitat effectiveness.
Effects on seasonally important ranges for wildlife.	Evaluation of route density in winter ranges, calving areas, and wolverine denning habitat, and evaluation of secure elk habitat by hunting district.
Potential effects of snow compaction.	Acres open to snowmobiles in lynx habitat, by Lynx Analysis Unit. Miles of designated over-the-snow route in lynx habitat, by Lynx Analysis Unit. Route density near wolverine denning habitat.
Potential for sedimentation of fish habitat from existing roads and trails.	Mileage of roads and trails within 100-feet of perennial streams, and number of stream crossings in drainages supporting resident fish populations.
Effects on westslope cutthroat trout.	Evaluation based on potential for sedimentation and disruption of spawning gravel in streams with westslope cutthroat trout populations, as indicated by miles of roads and trails within 100-feet of streams and number of stream crossings.