



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 June 16, 2005. Over 35,000 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 on DEIS:** This chapter provides a list of preparers and agencies consulted during the 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 on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District has been managed for the past 16 years under regulations described on the 1988 Lewis and Clark Forest Travel Plan map for the Rocky Mountain 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 covers the entire non-wilderness portion of the Rocky Mountain Division of the Lewis and Clark National Forest. It encompasses approximately 391,700 acres of the 777,600 total acres that comprise the Rocky Mountain Ranger District.

Approximately 385,900 acres of designated Wilderness in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex (BMWC), which includes the Scapegoat and Bob Marshall Wilderness areas, will not be addressed in this environmental impact statement. Travel management in these two wilderness areas will continue to occur in accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964 and Recreation Management Direction for the Bob Marshall Complex (USDA, 1987).

The vicinity map (Map 1) shows the location of the Rocky Mountain Ranger District in relation to other locations in Montana. [Note: all alternative maps also show the location of the project area in relation to major landmarks in Montana.]

Due to the complexity of travel management issues, some discussions in the analysis focus on general areas. Map 2 depicts the four non-wilderness areas on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District that are occasionally referenced or discussed in general terms.

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 Rocky Mountain Ranger District. Specifically, this planning effort is intended to address the following purposes and needs.

The 24 types of travel restrictions shown on the 1988 Travel Plan map for the Rocky Mountain 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 Helena, Flathead, 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 on trails and roads not designed for the level of use occurring. Also, conflicts can occur when visitors encounter other types of uses that they had not expected. The road and trail system on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District needs to be assessed to determine if types and levels 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.

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.

Non-system roads and trails exist on the landscape. The vast majority of these non-system routes have been inventoried and mapped by the Forest Service. 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, drill sites, cutting units, or recreational attractions. Other non-system

routes were more recently developed via repeated travel with motorcycles, ATVs, 4x4 vehicles, horses, or feet. All of 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 trails, and if adverse effects can be mitigated. Non-system routes that are determined unsuitable for management would be closed to motorized travel.

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 Rocky Mountain Ranger District was a high priority for completing a detailed site-specific travel management plan.

Average snowmobilers are limited by steep terrain and dense timber along the majority of the Rocky Mountain Division. Most snowmobiling opportunities exist along creek bottoms, ridgelines, and in open bowls. The majority of the high country is too steep and densely timbered except for very skilled snowmobilers. With the advent of more powerful snowmobiles there is an increasing risk of snowmobiles reaching designated Wilderness areas, disturbing sensitive habitats in the high country, or 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 handicapped 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. Approximately 1.1 miles of cross-country ski trail is marked along the entire Rocky Mountain Division. There is a need to assess the opportunities for providing and effects of marking more non-motorized winter recreation opportunities.

Many of the existing roads and trails evolved from early 1900's horse and wagon trails, or evolved from 1950's jeep two-track roads. Most were initially located for convenience, following the easiest routes up drainage bottoms or along ridgelines rather than undertaking more expensive and difficult construction work on stable, drained, erosion resistant sites such as side hills. Over the years, erosion has taken a heavy toll on some roads and trails. Likewise, heavy use during some seasons of the year results in increased erosion or damage. Various roads and trails within the National Forest are in need of heavy maintenance to reduce erosion impacts and eliminate safety hazards. There is a need to assess every road and trail to identify maintenance backlog, and to determine needs for seasonal restrictions to reduce or recover from seasonal impacts.

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.

The Forest Service issued revised regulations for motor vehicle use on all National Forest System lands on November 9, 2005. The new regulations require designation of roads, trails, and areas for motor vehicle use. The agency is striving to have these new rules implemented within four years on all National Forests and Grasslands. The new rules prohibit the use of motorized wheeled vehicles off of routes specifically designated for motorized travel (closed unless designated open). The new rules also apply to snowmobiles, but provide local land managers more flexibility in allowing cross-country travel by snowmobiles within areas appropriate for such use. The Lewis and Clark National Forest expects the results of this travel planning effort to be in full compliance with the new regulations.

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 2002, an interdisciplinary team (IDT) of resource specialists was assigned the task of developing a proposed action for the Rocky Mountain Ranger District 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 Rocky Mountain Ranger District 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 a set of maps and a data table containing information on how each road, trail, and area would be managed for motorized and non-motorized travel. Summary tables comparing the "proposed action" with the existing condition, along with color coded maps of the proposal were sent to the public in August 2002.

Based on field visits and better knowledge of on-site conditions acquired during 2002/2003, the Interdisciplinary Team modified the proposed action to carry forward into detailed analysis. A set of maps and data table containing information on the “modified proposed action” are described in detail in Chapter II, Alternatives.

Travel management proposals are quite complex due to the amount of detail involved with each road and trail. They are best displayed on a map, with an accompanying data table listing each road and trail. In general, the “modified proposed action” continues to allow seasonal use of ATVs on some trails in the Badger-Two Medicine area, as well as continues to allow seasonal motorcycle use on some trails in the Badger-Two Medicine area. The modified proposed action also continues to allow seasonal motorcycle use on some trails in the Birch-Teton and South Fork Sun River areas, but restricts motorized use on most trails in the Dearborn-Elk area. Snowmobile use is restricted more than in the past, but continues to be allowed seasonally in the Badger-Two Medicine, Birch-Teton, South Fork Sun, and Dearborn-Elk areas. [See Map 2 for location of areas.] Overall, motorized travel by wheeled vehicles is restricted more under the “modified proposed action” than the 1988 Travel Plan, but is not totally eliminated. Motorized travel by snowmobiles is also restricted more under the “modified proposed action” than the 1988 Travel Plan, but is not totally eliminated.

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.

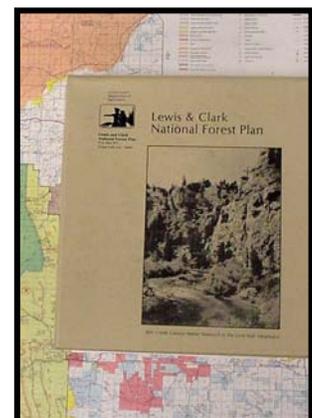
Identify areas, roads and trails that are appropriate for various motorized modes of travel, and identify areas, roads, and trails that are appropriate for various non-motorized modes of travel. Impose seasonal or yearlong restrictions on any particular mode of travel based on considerations of safety, 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.



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), Native American claims (Forest Plan, pg. 2-60), rights-of-way (Forest Plan, pg. 2-62), Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (Forest Plan, pg. 2-65), 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, 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 11 management areas on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District. Map 13 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 E, G, H, I, N, O and S, comprising about 71% of the non-wilderness lands in the Rocky Mountain Division, 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. Direction for MA-F (15% of the non-wilderness lands in the Rocky Mountain Division) states that all areas and trails are to be closed to OHVs, except on designated routes. Direction for MA-M (less than 1% of the area) states that no new roads or trails are to be constructed in Research Natural Areas. Direction for MA-Q (14% of the non-wilderness lands) states that no new roads are to be constructed, and that all areas and trails are open to trail vehicles and snow machines except where use is restricted by season, type of vehicle, or type of activity.

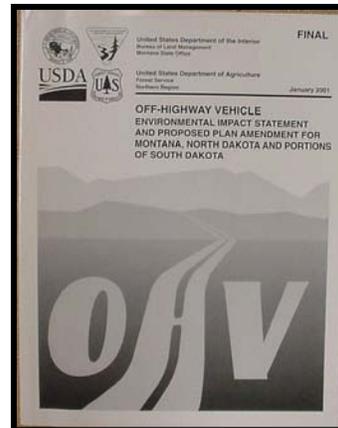
Table I-1. Forest Plan Management Direction Summary

Forest Plan Management Areas	Acreage*	Management Direction & Standards
E	76,680	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	58,260	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	103,340	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	11,230	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	19,230	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.
M	940	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.
N	42,740	Provide interim management as a Wilderness Study Area. 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.
O	22,650	Protect, maintain, and improve resource quality while providing timber at a low intensity level to meet local needs. Manage for livestock at moderate intensity level. 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.
P	385,900	Manage in accordance with Wilderness Act of 1964 to maintain an enduring system of high quality wilderness. Do not allow motorized use.
Q	55,770	Manage these areas to not preclude their inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. 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	860	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	777,600 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 Rocky Mountain Ranger District was 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 Rocky Mountain 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 C” on the 1988 Rocky Mountain Division Travel Plan restricts road vehicles and snowmobiles yearlong. Therefore, a full-sized 4x4 vehicle could not legally be driven on any unsigned “existing” road within the Area C boundary. Likewise, a snowmobile could not be used anywhere in the Area C boundary except on specifically signed routes. Many people have a difficult time understanding the regulations imposed by both the 1988 Travel Plan and Statewide OHV decision.

TRAVEL MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES FOR PROJECT AREA

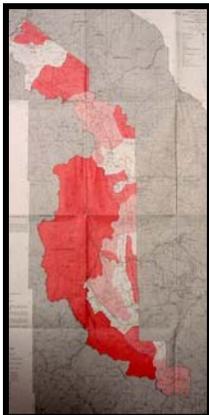
Based on Forest Plan direction, the 3-State OHV Decision summarized above, and Forest Service recreation policy (FSM-2350), the following objectives and goals were used to guide project design.

- 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 Lewis and Clark National Forest issued a “preliminary” Travel Plan for the Rocky Mountain Division in 1976. A similar 1976 Travel Plan was signed into effect on the Jefferson Division on February 15, 1977. Unfortunately, we have been unable to locate signed 1976/77 Travel Plan maps for the Rocky Mountain Division, but it seems likely that the “preliminary” plan was signed into effect about the same time as the plan for the Jefferson Division. This 1976/1977 Travel Plan was the first effort to manage motorized travel.

1984 Travel Plan. On August 1, 1984, new travel management regulations were issued for the Rocky Mountain Division, thereby replacing the 1976/77 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 16 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 Rocky Mountain Ranger District. 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.



Treaties with the Blackfeet Nation, and government to government relationship with the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council were considered in the 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 March 7, 2002, a Project Initiation Letter (PIL) directed an Interdisciplinary Team of resource specialists to begin development of a “proposed action” for travel management on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District. 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 August 23, 2002, beginning the formal process of public scoping. The NOI asked for public comment on the proposal by October 25, 2002. Beginning August 22, the proposed action was posted on the Lewis and Clark Forest website. News releases were sent to all local news services, and articles appeared in 5 newspapers. A one-page letter, 14-page summary, and 5 maps outlining the proposed action were mailed to 464 people on August 22, 2002. Additional copies of the proposed action were mailed or handed to approximately 200 people requesting them. On October 1 the comment period was extended to December 13, 2002. Several follow-up articles on the comment period extension were printed, and citizens wrote 5 letters-to-the-editor. A separate meeting was arranged with the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council and Cultural Committee. As a result of the October 10 meeting with Tribal representatives, 3 open house meetings were scheduled on the Blackfeet Reservation. Overall, public meetings were held in 7 locations as follows:

Open House Meetings to Discuss the Proposed Action

DATE	LOCATION	TIME	ATTENDANCE
9/30/02	Great Falls, MT	2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.	55
10/1/02	Cut Bank, MT	4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.	32
10/2/02	Choteau, MT	4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.	23
10/3/02	Augusta, MT	4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.	9
12/9/02	Browning, MT	3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.	33
12/10/02	East Glacier, MT	3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.	22
12/11/02	Heart Butte, MT	3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.	18

A large number of people responded to the proposed action by the December 13, 2002, due date. Since the public meetings on the Blackfeet Reservation were held late in the comment period, the comment period was verbally extended to late January 2003. A few comments kept trickling in throughout the month of February, and were added to the public comment file for content analysis.

Number of Comments Received on Proposed Action

COMMENT PERIOD	ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES	HOUSEHOLDS AND BUSINESSES	UNKNOWN PERSON	FORM POSTCARD OR FLYER	e-MAIL FORM LETTER
12/13/2002	41	1,464	15	15	about 5,250
1/31/2003	4	55	1	3	about 1,041
TOTAL	45	1,519	16	18	about 6,291

All e-mails with unique individual comments were printed and added to the public comment file. All e-mail form letters were printed and reviewed by two people for any additional substantive comments. Additional substantive comments within form letters were added to a separate list and analyzed as part of the process. Starting in January 2003, all letters and e-mails with substantive comments were read by at least two people. All hard copy form letters were read for any additional comments. Only one copy of each of the two types of e-mail form letters was read for content analysis, along with the list of additional substantive comments contained on the form letters. Comments were coded according to categories listed in Appendix B. Individual names, addresses, and comments were put into a database program. On May 5, 2003, the database program was used to print a 470-page report of all coded public comments for review by agency line officers and resource specialists. Over the next several months the ID Team reviewed these public comments and developed issue statements to be analyzed.

Comments from the public continued to trickle in throughout the analysis process. Starting March 10, 2003, late comments were filed separately and reviewed periodically. A total of 44 late letters and e-mails were read for any new issues (21 were read in December 2003, 10 were read in April 2004, and 13 were read on April 5, 2005).

MAILING LIST:

When public scoping was first started in August 2002, the project mailing list consisted of 464 contacts. The project mailing list now consists of 2,036 contacts, with an additional electronic mailing list of 6,899 e-mail addresses. Many 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 December 2004. 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.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT ON DEIS:

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Rocky Mountain Ranger District Travel Management Plan was distributed beginning June 16, 2005, as follows.

21 page Summary, 5 alternative maps, & 1 cover letter mailed to: 1,848 people
21 page Summary, 5 alternative maps, & cover letter handed out to: 250 people
Total Summaries distributed: 2,098

375 page DEIS, 5 alternative maps, & 26 resource maps mailed to: 46 libraries
375 page DEIS and 31 maps mailed to: 23 orgs/ind
375 page DEIS and 31 maps hand delivered to: 52 ind.
Total full-text DEIS distributed: 121

Posted maps of 5 alternatives on website effective December 13, 2004
Posted full text of Draft EIS on website effective June 16, 2005
Notice of Availability published in Federal Register on June 17, 2005
Legal ad published in Great Falls Tribune on June 18, 2005
Copied and handed out approximately 12 compact discs of DEIS

Open house public meetings:

DATE	LOCATION	ATTENDANCE
June 21, 2005	Browning	9
June 22, 2005	Choteau	60
June 23, 2005	Great Falls	76
June 27, 2005	East Glacier	17
June 28, 2005	Heart Butte	6
June 29, 2005	Cut Bank	55
June 29, 2005	Augusta	46
July 6, 2005	Helena	88
TOTAL ATTENDANCE		357 people

Letters received on DEIS:

Organizations/Agencies: = 39
Individuals: = 1,620 (households)
SUB-TOTAL = 1,659 (5%)

Hard Copy Form Letters: = 413 (1%)
Electronic Form Letters: = 33,048 (93%)
Deficient Letters: = 388 (1%)

TOTALS: 35,508 total comments received

- 1,659 original substantive letters (5% of total) were submitted.
67% of substantive letters came from Montana
80% of Montanan's submitting substantive letters supported Alt. 3.
- 33,048 electronic form letters (93% of total) were submitted.
20,624 electronic form letters (58% of total) came from one computer.

A content analysis process was used to categorize and examine public comments more thoroughly. A separate document describing the process and the agency’s response to comments is contained in the project file. In addition, Chapter IV provides a summary of the agencies “response to public comments”.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES, CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

Using the comments from the public, organizations, other agencies, and the Blackfeet Tribe, 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:
AIR QUALITY / WATER QUALITY / SOILS:	
Effects on air quality due to motorized OHV travel.	Even though recreational use levels are not well known, the mileage of motorized roads and trails provide insight into impacts on air quality.
Effects on water quality from existing road and trail system under current levels of maintenance.	Risks of stream and water quality impacts are greater at stream crossings and when roads and trails are within 100-feet of perennial streams. Maintenance level, use levels, and kinds of use also influence impacts to water quality and stream function.
Effects on water quality if human use levels or road/trail mileages increase.	Risk of stream and water quality impacts are greater at stream crossings and when roads and trails are within 100 feet of streams. Maintenance level, use levels, and kinds of use also influence impacts to water quality and stream function.
Effects on soil quality due to motorized OHV travel.	Sensitive soils have physical characteristics that may affect travel or be affected by travel routes. Mileage of roads and trails crossing landtypes with sensitive soils are used to evaluate this issue.
HERITAGE RESOURCES:	
Potential effects on the Blackfeet Traditional Cultural District.	Narrative: assessment of potential effects based on the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 criteria regarding traditional cultural properties. Mileage and acres of motorized / non-motorized within the TCD.
Potential for effects on other identified and unidentified archaeological and historical sites.	Narrative: assessment of potential effects to classes of sites and site types, and an estimate of the potential for undiscovered sites, based on the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 criteria, standard professional practices, and programmatic agreements. Miles with changed levels of use, miles of newly accepted system trails, and numbers of sites requiring mitigation.
RECREATION:	
Opportunities for solitude/quiet trails.	Acreage of summer motorized/non-motorized ROS. Acreage of winter open/closed snowmobile area. Mileage of motorized/non-motorized roads/trails. Number of trailheads accessing motorized / non-motorized trails.
Current and potential use levels by activity.	Estimate potential changes in use levels for various recreation activities between 1995 and 2025 based on population and participation trends. Subjective evaluation of physical capacity to meet demand, potential for conflicts, travel time to reach

ISSUE	HOW THE ISSUE IS EVALUATED:
	desired setting, access for elderly and disabled, and technology threats.
Opportunities for diverse winter recreation.	Mileage of motorized /non-motorized winter recreation trails within 5 miles of plowed trailhead.
Opportunities for disabled access.	Mileage of disabled hunter motorized access. Mileage of potential wheelchair-accessible trails.
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%.
Opportunities for hiker-only trails.	Mileage of hiker-only trails.
ROADLESS/WILDERNESS:	
Effects on roadless characteristics.	Objective evaluation of effects on six characteristics of roadless/unroaded areas.
Consistency with adjacent BLM management of Outstanding Natural Areas.	Objective evaluation of consistency with travel management on ONAs.
Consistency with adjacent National Forest management.	Objective evaluation of consistency with travel management on adjacent Forests.
Effects on Wilderness Study Areas.	Objective evaluation of effects on six characteristics of wilderness study areas.
Effects on Recommended Wilderness Areas.	Objective evaluation of effects on six characteristics of wilderness study areas.
SOCIAL-ECONOMICS:	
Effect on the “western heritage” social value of the Rocky Mountain Division.	Number of trailheads and number of non-motorized trails providing access to Wilderness trail system. Mileage of non-motorized trails outside Wilderness.
Social conflict between motorized and non-motorized activities.	Mileage of motorized/non-motorized roads/trails. Number of trailheads accessing motorized / non-motorized trails.
Effects on grazing and Special Use permits.	Objective evaluation of effects on special-use and grazing permits.
Benefits to the local and State economy.	Objective evaluation of effects on local economic diversity.
Effects on Blackfeet Reserved Rights – the Ceded Strip.	Objective evaluation of effects on Blackfeet reserved rights. A narrative based on government policy and direction. Mileages and acres of motorized / non-motorized within the 1896 ceded land (RM-1 Unit)
TRANSPORTATION:	
Effect on management of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail.	Mileage of motorized / non-motorized portions of CDNST outside Wilderness.

ISSUE	HOW THE ISSUE IS EVALUATED:
VEGETATION:	
Potential for spread of noxious weeds.	Objective evaluation of potential for new infestations of noxious weeds and increases in size of existing infestations.
Effects on sensitive plant species.	Objective evaluation of potential for effects on sensitive plant species.
WILDLIFE / FISH:	
Potential for displacement of wildlife.	Acreage and percent of seasonal habitats outside 500-meter buffer around open wheeled motorized routes. Acreage and percent of seasonal habitats open to snowmobiles. Acreage and percent of grizzly bear BMU Subunits outside 500m buffer around open wheeled motorized routes.
Effects on seasonally important ranges for wildlife.	Mileage of open wheeled motorized routes in seasonal habitats. Acreage and percent of seasonal habitats outside 500m buffer around open wheeled motorized routes. Acreage and percent of seasonal habitats open to snowmobiles.
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.
Effects on habitat connectivity.	Number and size of areas (patches) outside 500m buffer around open motorized routes.
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. Potential motorized use effects are considered.
Effects on westslope cutthroat trout.	Subjective 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. Potential motorized use effects are considered.