

OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISABLED ACCESS

The Rocky Mountain Ranger District currently has no trails that are specifically designed to allow access for people with disabilities. Likewise, there are no roads specifically designated for disabled hunting motorized access only. There is a public demand for both of these opportunities. Some people believe there needs to be continued and improved opportunities for handicapped, elderly, and disabled people to have access to the backcountry. People with disabilities should be allowed the opportunity to use motorized vehicles on roads and trails that are otherwise closed to motorized travel.

1. EXISTING CONDITION

a. Natural Characteristics

This issue relates to the desirability of providing some trails that are designed and constructed to be accessible not just to the general public, but also to those with physical disabilities. It additionally addresses the need for motorized access for disabled hunters on roads normally closed during the hunting season to motorized use.

The state of Montana has a large population of individuals with one or more disabilities as shown in Table III-34. More than 145,000 people, or about 16% of the state’s approximately 900,000 residents have some kind of disability. **Montana’s population is also aging. Nationally, the average age is expected to increase by 10% by 2025 (See Table III-28).**

Table III-34.

Types of Disabilities for Non-Institutionalized Population of Montana

POPULATION BY AGE CLASS & TYPE OF DISABILITY	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
5 to 15 years:	75,141	70,710	145,851
With one type of disability:	4,705	2,214	6,919
Sensory Disability	421	320	741
Physical Disability	239	287	526
Mental Disability	3,988	1,612	5,600
Self-Care Disability	57	28	85
With two or more types of disability:	774	465	1,239
Includes self-care disability	510	242	752
Does not include self-care disability	264	223	487
No Disability	69,662	67,998	137,660
16 to 20 years:	34,118	32,648	66,766
With one type of disability	2,800	2,073	4,873
Sensory Disability	242	185	427
Physical Disability	156	218	374
Mental Disability	1,178	551	1,729
Self-Care Disability	15	9	24
Go-outside-home disability	293	249	542
Employment disability	916	861	1,777
With two or more types of disability:	1,082	965	2,047
Includes self-care disability	162	143	305
Does not include self-care disability	920	822	1,742
Go-outside home and employment only	260	275	535
Other combination	660	547	1,207
No Disability	30,286	29,610	59,896

POPULATION BY AGE CLASS & TYPE OF DISABILITY	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
21 to 64 years:	251,645	253,073	504,718
With one type of disability	25,164	21,056	46,220
Sensory Disability	5,118	2,603	7,721
Physical Disability	5,791	6,359	12,150
Mental Disability	2,401	2,424	4,825
Self-Care Disability	82	64	146
Go-outside-home disability	671	1,021	1,692
Employment disability	11,101	8,585	19,686
With two or more types of disability:	21,653	17,464	39,117
Includes self-care disability	3,913	4,038	7,951
Does not include self-care disability	17,740	13,426	31,166
Go-outside home and employment only	3,096	1,986	5,082
Other combination	14,644	11,440	26,084
No Disability	204,828	214,553	419,381
65 years and over:	51,101	63,258	114,359
With one type of disability	10,863	12,206	23,069
Sensory Disability	4,174	2,265	6,439
Physical Disability	4,425	6,781	11,206
Mental Disability	639	712	1,351
Self-Care Disability	25	103	128
Go-outside-home disability	1,600	2,345	3,945
With two or more types of disability:	9,440	12,775	22,215
Includes self-care disability	2,711	5,005	7,716
Does not include self-care disability	6,729	7,770	14,499
No Disability	30,798	38,277	69,075
TOTAL DISABLED POPULATION FOR MONTANA	76,481	69,218	145,699
TOTAL POPULATION (over age 5) FOR MONTANA	412,005	419,689	831,694

* Data from USDC – Census Bureau, Census 2000 (2003)

Presently, there is **only one** Forest system trail on the district that is accessible to the disabled as determined by *Forest Service Trails Accessibility Guidelines (FSTAG)*. **It is the trail to Wood Lake boat launch from the Wood Lake Campground. The FSTAG provides guidance for maximizing accessibility of trails in the National Forest System, while recognizing and protecting the unique characteristics of their natural setting. The FSTAG applies only to trails in the National Forest System that (1) are new or altered; (2) have a designed use of hiker/pedestrian under the Interagency Trail Data Standards (ITDS) and Forest Service Trail Planning and Management Fundamentals; and (3) connect directly to a currently accessible trail or a trailhead. In other words, new trail construction or trail alternation proposals must consider FSTAG standards if designed for hiker/pedestrians use and are directly connected to an accessible trail or a trailhead. Other existing trails, if not under consideration for alteration, do not fall under FSTAG standards. FSTAG also provides exceptions for new trail construction or alteration accessibility standards when such would unduly impact the attractiveness of the trail setting. FSTAG states, in this regard, “the uniqueness of each trail is preserved through the use of conditions for departure and exceptions from the guidelines, when application of a technical provision would cause a change in a trail’s setting or the purpose or function for which a trail was designed.”**

To be considered accessible, trails must generally be 12% or less in grade (5% or less is ideal); be at least 36” in width; have a cross slope of not more than 5%; have no vertical obstacles greater than 2” in height; and provide a firm and stable surface for the user. **Less than 0.5 miles of accessible trail were constructed** at Wood Lake Campground and Picnic Area **during 2006**.

Although not considered trails, there are accessible roads within those campgrounds that have been reconstructed within approximately the last 15 years, which include South Fork Campground; Mortimer Campground; and Summit Campground. These roads provide an accessible experience but are very much limited to the area of the existing campgrounds, and do not provide separation between non-motorized and motorized users.

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks allows the taking of big game from a road vehicle when the hunter meets requirements to be considered disabled. Presently, the district encourages such hunting on Hannan Gulch Road 3305, which remains open to the general public as well.

b. Future Trends

As the nation’s population ages, there will be more of a demand for trails that meet the requirements of the disabled. There will be increased demand for hunting by the disabled on roads not open to other motorized use.

c. Desired Condition

The district would **provide** several trails in various locations that are accessible to the disabled and provide for their needs for trail-based recreation. These trails would be constructed as funds become available. Such trails would be accessible by wheelchair, which is considered the design vehicle. Accommodating wheelchairs provides access for a variety of disabilities. These accessible trails would also be available to hikers, but not to stock or motorized users (except motorized wheelchairs).

Accessible trails would be located in settings where trails do not need to be “forced” onto the landscape, **and would be constructed on existing trails. See Table III-35 for locations.** Trail excavation, switchbacks, and other impacts to the landscape would be **negligible**.

Disabled hunters would have settings available to them enabling them to bag big game. This would likely involve designation of one or more roads for motorized access only by the disabled and their support person during big game season.

There would be an adequate mix of motorized and non-motorized trails and roads on the district to accommodate needs of the public, including those with disabilities. **This would include an aging population that develop disabilities.** With the exception of disabled hunting described above, the disabled would not be allowed to use motorized means of transport on non-motorized roads and trails, but would use existing opportunities on existing motorized roads and trails. The disabled would also have the opportunity to use stock to access backcountry. Forest Travel Plan maps would clearly delineate where motorized and non-motorized trail opportunities are located.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

a. Alternative 1 - No Action Alternative

1. Direct and Indirect Effects

This alternative presently provides no accessible trails for the disabled, nor any specially designated roads available during big game season only for the disabled. An accessible trail connecting Wood Lake Campground with the lake across the road, and an accessible fishing platform, as well as a short accessible trail at Wood Lake Picnic Area, **were constructed in 2006** and are **less than 0.5 miles** in total length. With this exception this alternative fails to address **the need for trails designed for wheelchairs** almost entirely, other than providing roads within some reconstructed campgrounds, and hunting by disabled hunters on roads also open to the general public.

Table III-17 shows that this alternative provides more miles of ATV trail than other alternatives. These trails can accommodate some of those with disabilities.

Hannan Gulch Road 3305 and Green Gulch Road 3307 and 3308 would continue to remain open to all segments of the public year round.

2. Cumulative Effects

Roads on and off the forest would continue to be used by the disabled, as well as the general public. Roads on the district are quite limited, compared with the remainder of the forest. **A** slowly **growing** population would make these roads less productive for hunting as pressure from road hunters, whether or not disabled, slowly increases. An aging population would continue to increase the number of hunters with disabilities over time. A trend towards more and more closure of private lands to hunting would likely continue, although state block management programs may help counter this. The total available acres of private land for hunters of all kinds would decrease slowly. Disabled hunters may feel the pinch more than others because of inherent limitations on where they can physically hunt.

Oil and gas drilling proposals, timber sales, Wood Lake Campground and Picnic Area reconstruction, prescribed fire, and use of undetermined roads and trails are not expected to change or reduce existing opportunities for disabled road and trail access.

b. Action Alternatives 2-5

1. Direct and Indirect Effects

Alternative 2 would have the same direct and indirect effects on **the disabled using wheelchairs** and **on disabled hunters** as Alternative One. **It provides fewer miles of ATV trails than Alternative 1, but more than any other alternative.**

Alternative 3 would have the same direct and indirect effects on disabled **wheelchair** users and **on disabled hunters** as Alternative One, except that Hannan Gulch Road 3305 and Green Gulch Roads 3307 and 3308 would be closed to all of the public, eliminating their availability for motorized access by the disabled who may presently use them. This eliminates the one

road at Hannan Gulch to which many disabled hunters are presently encouraged to go. **This alternative also has no ATV trails, which can accommodate some of the needs of the disabled and older populations.**

Alternatives 4 and 5 propose construction over time of a number of trails accessible for the disabled **wheelchair user**. Trail locations are described in Table III-35. **Alternative 4 has more miles of ATV trail available than Alternatives 3 and 5, but less than Alternatives 1 and 2. Alternative 5 has the second lowest miles of ATV trail available of any of the alternatives (see Table III-17).**

Table III-35.

Opportunities for Trails Accessible to the Disabled under Alternatives 4 and 5.

Proposed Accessible Trail	Description and approximate length
Mill Fall Campground	Connects CG to waterfall. Would need to make existing trail a Forest system trail. About 1/8 mile.
Elk Creek Trailhead	Connects trailhead to Cataract Falls. About ¼ mile length.
West Fork Campground	Trail from rental cabin to junction with Tr. 106 near wilderness boundary. East side of N. Fk. Teton. About 1.1 miles length.
Wagner Basin Trail/Road	Opportunity to view mountain sheep in Wagner Basin. Existing trail is on old road bed and would go from undeveloped trailhead on N. Side of Hannan Bridge downstream about 1 mile to Wagner Basin.
Hannan Gulch Bridge Pictographs	North side of Sun River between Hannan Bridge upstream to bridge for Sun Canyon Road. About 1 mile length.

Alternatives 4 and 5 provide disabled-only motorized hunting opportunities in the spring and fall from three roads totaling approximately 11 miles. They are Hannan Gulch Road 3305 (Road vehicles and ATVs) and Green Gulch Roads 3307 (Road vehicles and ATV's,) and 3308 (ATV's only). Alternatives 4 and 5 provide the only road hunting opportunities for the disabled only.

2. Cumulative Effects

Alternative 2 will have the same cumulative effects on disabled trail users and disabled hunters as Alternative 1.

Alternative 3 will have the same cumulative effects on disabled trail users and disabled hunters as Alternative 1, except that closure of Hannan Gulch Road and Green Gulch Roads would speed up the trend towards fewer places for the disabled to hunt in the future.

For Alternatives 4 and 5, roads on and off the forest would continue to be used by the disabled, as well as the general public, but with motorized disabled hunting only on the three roads described. Roads on the district are quite limited, compared with the remainder of the forest. Slowly increasing population will make these roads less productive for hunting as pressure from road hunters, whether or not disabled, slowly increases. An aging population will continue to increase the number of hunters with disabilities over time. A trend towards

more and more closure of private lands to hunting will likely continue, although state block management programs may help counter this. The total available acres of land for hunters of all kinds will decrease slowly. Disabled hunters will feel the pinch in those areas shared with the general motorized public, making the three roads designated for disabled hunter motorized access, only, increasingly important to the disabled hunting community.

The next issue analysis is on “Cumulative Effects of Past Closures on Opportunities for Motorized Recreation” and describes effects of past closures of trails and roads (see Table III-39).

c. Effects Common To All Alternatives

1. Direct and Indirect Effects

All alternatives would include the already ongoing design and planned construction for an accessible trail connecting Wood Lake with Wood Lake Campground. Each alternative would allow the use of open roads for hunting from road vehicles by disabled hunters who meet Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks standards for being able to shoot from a vehicle.

2. Cumulative Effects

Oil and gas drilling proposals, timber sales, Wood Lake Campground and Picnic Area reconstruction, prescribed fire, and undetermined roads and trails are not expected to change or reduce existing opportunities for disabled road and trail access.

d. Effects Common To All Action Alternatives

1. Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects

None.