

## **EFFECTS ON RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS AREAS.**

Some people are concerned about the effects of motorized recreation on areas recommended for Wilderness designation under the Forest Plan. They believe that allowing motorized recreation to continue will make it more politically difficult for the area's to eventually be designated as wilderness. The following analysis will compare the effects of current and proposed travel management under each alternative, and display the effects of motorized travel on the roadless and wilderness characteristics of each area.

### ***1. EXISTING CONDITION***

#### **a. Natural Characteristics**

Seven components will be used to evaluate effects on the wilderness characteristics of the four areas (MA-Q areas shown on Map 20) recommended for wilderness designation in the Forest Plan. They include: natural integrity, apparent natural integrity, opportunities for solitude, opportunities for a primitive recreation experience, remoteness, unique features, and manageability/boundaries. Detailed descriptions of these characteristics were discussed under the "Effects on Roadless Characteristics" issue and will only be summarized here.

##### Natural Integrity:

Impacts to natural integrity are measured by the presence and magnitude of human induced change to an area, including physical developments such as roads, fences, lookouts, and cabins, domestic livestock grazing, mineral developments, wildlife/fisheries management activities, vegetative manipulation, introduction of exotic species, and fire suppression activities.

Campgrounds, cabins, corrals, and trailhead developments on public lands in the Benchmark area, and developments on private property in the head of Gibson Reservoir affect the natural integrity of the adjacent Renshaw area.

##### Apparent Naturalness:

Apparent naturalness means that the environment looks natural to most people. If the landscape has been modified by human activity, the evidence is not obvious to the casual observer, or it is disappearing due to natural processes. Wheel tracks and wheel ruts left by motorcycles on trails within the Falls Creek area affect the natural appearance in some locations. Gibson Dam is situated outside the Renshaw area, but affects the apparent naturalness of the adjacent setting.

##### Opportunity for Solitude:

Solitude is defined as isolation from the sights, sound and presence of other humans and developments. Some trails in the Falls Creek area are open to motorcycle travel and affect the opportunity for solitude. Snowmobile travel during the winter also affects the opportunity for solitude in the West Fork North Fork Teton area, Renshaw area, and Falls Creek area.

##### Opportunity for a Primitive Recreation Experience:

Primitive recreation experiences correlate closely to opportunities for solitude, and are normally found in Primitive and Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized classes of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS). It includes the opportunity to experience solitude, a sense of remoteness, closeness to nature, serenity, and spirit of adventure in an environment that offers a high degree of challenge and risk. Motorcycle travel on some trails in the Falls Creek area affects the opportunity for a primitive recreation experience. Likewise, snowmobile travel affects opportunities for primitive recreation during the winter in three of the four areas.

### Remoteness:

Remoteness is a perceived condition of being secluded, inaccessible, and out of the way. Topography and vegetation can provide seclusion by screening the sights and sounds of others. Lack of perfected public easements can make some areas remote by increasing the distance people need to travel to reach the area. Falls Creek is a remote drainage due to the lack of a perfected public easement on the access trail. The landowner allows goodwill access for people on foot or horseback, but does not allow motorized access.

### Unique Features:

Uncommon fish and wildlife species, unique plants or plant communities, Research Natural Areas, outstanding landscape features such as rock formations, and significant cultural resource sites are some of the items that are considered when analyzing this element. Rock reefs are the most unique physical feature of the four areas.

### Manageability / Boundaries:

This element relates to the ability of the Forest Service to manage the area to meet size criteria and the six elements discussed above. All four areas would be difficult to define on the ground because their boundaries do not follow topographic features.

## **b. Past Events and Conditions**

The 1986 Forest Plan recommended four areas on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District for inclusion in the wilderness preservation system. These four areas, totaling 51,834 acres, are designated as Management Area Q in the Forest Plan. [Note: Geographic Information Systems mapping reports the total acreage in MA-Q as about 55,770 acres.]

## **c. Desired Condition**

Forest Plan direction is to protect the area's wilderness values. No new roads are to be constructed within the areas. Existing trails are to remain open to motorized use and cross-country snowmobile travel is to remain open. Restrictions on motorized travel should only be imposed as needed through Travel Planning. Any newly constructed trails should only allow non-motorized use, and trail reconstruction should encourage non-motorized use.

**Forest Service Region 1 guidance is to prohibit motorized and mechanized use within recommended wilderness. In addition, some public comments on the DEIS proposed that mountain bicycles be prohibited on all non-Wilderness lands on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District as an interim step until Congress considers further legislation. The DEIS did not evaluate the effects of prohibiting bicycles within recommended wilderness areas, but the FEIS has been modified to include such an assessment.**

## ***2. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES***

### **a. Alternative 1 - No Action Alternative**

#### ***1. Direct and Indirect Effects***

Travel management has the potential to affect only a few characteristics of the four areas recommended for wilderness designation.

Natural Integrity: Natural integrity is not affected. There are no system roads, nor undetermined roads and trails within the areas recommended for wilderness.

Apparent Naturalness: Apparent naturalness may be affected by the visual appearance of ruts and wheel tracks along trails, and indiscriminate or new wheel tracks off existing trails in the Falls Creek area. Two motorcycle trails in the Falls Creek area are the only routes open to motorized use within recommended wilderness areas. The Forest Service does not have perfected public access on the Falls Creek access trail, and the landowner does not allow the public to cross his property with motorcycles. Consequently, there is no motorized travel on trails in the Falls Creek area.

Solitude: Opportunities for solitude may be affected by the sound of motorized vehicles, and by the number of other people camping or traveling in the area. Table III-58 indicates that opportunities for solitude could not be guaranteed along 8.7 miles of motorized wheeled-vehicle trails that exist in the Falls Creek area. However, the landowner does not allow motorcycles to access Falls Creek across his property and there are no other legal routes for motorcycles to access the Falls Creek trail system. Consequently, there are reasonable expectations for solitude (natural quiet) along these 8.7 miles of trail, as well as along 51.6 miles of non-motorized trails in all four areas. In the winter there are no designated snowmobile trails in any of the areas. Three of the areas are open to snowmobiling. Rugged terrain and dense timber precludes the use of snowmobiles on much of the terrain within these four areas. The South Fork Teton area, totaling about 4,250 acres, is closed to snowmobiles during the winter.

**Table III-58. Miles of Existing System Travel-ways  
within Management Area Q – Recommended Wilderness**

| FOREST PLAN<br>RECOMMENDED<br>WILDERNESS | DESIGNATED SYSTEM ROUTES* |              |                     |                     |               |
|--|---------------------------|--------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------|
|  | ROAD                      | ATV<br>TRAIL | MOTORCYCLE<br>TRAIL | HORSE/HIKE<br>TRAIL | SNOW<br>TRAIL |
| West Fork North Fork Teton               | 0.0                       | 0.0          | 0.0                 | 9.1                 | 0.0           |
| South Fork Teton                         | 0.0                       | 0.0          | 0.0                 | 7.9                 | 0.0           |
| Renshaw                                  | 0.0                       | 0.0          | 0.0                 | 31.2                | 0.0           |
| Falls Creek                              | 0.0                       | 0.0          | 8.7                 | 3.4                 | 0.0           |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                             | <b>0.0</b>                | <b>0.0</b>   | <b>8.7</b>          | <b>51.6</b>         | <b>0.0</b>    |

\*Data from December 2004 report.

Primitive Recreation: Opportunities for a primitive recreation experience are high during the spring, summer, and fall in the West Fork North Fork Teton, South Fork Teton, and Renshaw areas, and moderate during that same time period in the Falls Creek area. The South Fork Teton is the only area that has high primitive recreation opportunities during the winter because snowmobiling is prohibited within the MA-Q area.

**The use of mountain bicycles and other mechanized forms of transportation such as game carts is currently allowed within the four areas recommended for wilderness designation. There is no indication that people currently use bicycles as a form of recreational access within these areas. There were no public comments received on the DEIS that indicated people use mountain bicycles in these areas, or that they intend to or support the concept of using bicycles in these areas. The apparent absence of bicycle use retains the high value of the areas for providing a primitive recreation experience.**

Remoteness: Remoteness remains unchanged, except the remoteness of Falls Creek could increase substantially if the landowner stops all public access on Trail 229 into the area.

Manageability: Manageability concerns about indistinct boundaries would not change. There are no “undetermined trails”.

## 2. Cumulative Effects

Alternative 1 provides a description of the existing situation, and as such establishes a baseline for the public to compare the effects of other alternatives. There are no oil and gas drilling, pipeline, or other energy related projects proposed in or near the four areas recommended for wilderness in the Forest Plan. All proposed prescribed burns and fuel treatments are expected to have short-term effects on the apparent naturalness of the area, and have a positive long-term affect on natural integrity by restoring natural ecological processes. There are no known cumulative effects with other proposed or foreseeable activities as listed in Appendix M that may affect wilderness character.

### **b. Action Alternatives 2-5**

#### *1. Direct and Indirect Effects*

*Natural Integrity:* Natural integrity is not affected under any of the action alternatives. There are no system roads, nor undetermined roads and trails within the areas recommended for wilderness. Road construction is not proposed under any alternative.

*Apparent Naturalness:* All action alternatives restrict all types of motorized wheeled vehicle travel within the areas recommended for wilderness. Consequently, there would be no motorized travel on trails within the areas recommended for wilderness, and no potential for wheel tracks from motorized OHVs to affect the visual appearance of the trail surface.

*Solitude:* Opportunities for solitude could be assured during the spring, summer, and fall in all four areas recommended for wilderness, because motorized wheeled vehicles would be restricted yearlong on all trails under all action alternatives. Likewise, Alternatives 3, 4 and 5 restrict snowmobiling yearlong in all four areas recommended for wilderness, providing opportunities for solitude during the winter months.

Alternative 2 is the only action alternative that allows snowmobiling to continue on about 12,500 acres (22% of the acreage recommended for wilderness). Expectations for solitude (natural quiet) could not be assured in the winter in the Falls Creek area, and in a portion of the West Fork North Fork Teton area under Alternative 2.

*Primitive Recreation:* Opportunities for a primitive recreation experience would be high during the spring, summer, and fall in all four areas under all action alternatives. Likewise, opportunities for primitive recreation would be high in the winter in the South Fork Teton and Renshaw areas under all action alternatives. Under Alternative 2, the West Fork North Fork Teton would also have high opportunities in the western two-thirds of the area, and Falls Creek would have high opportunities in the western one-half of the area.

**The FEIS modified Alternative 4 to include restriction of mountain bicycles on all trails within the four areas recommended for wilderness. This action would protect the existing high value of the areas for providing primitive recreation experiences, and would prevent incompatible uses such as bicycle travel from becoming established. It complies with Forest Service Region 1 guidance to manage recommended wilderness areas to fully preserve there inherent wilderness characteristics.**

**Information presented in the following table provides a comparison of mileages available to enjoy mountain bicycling in a non-motorized setting between alternatives including**

**the option to modify Alternative 4 by prohibiting mountain bicycles within the recommended wilderness areas. As shown in the table, modifying Alternative 4 would increase the opportunities for hikers and horses to enjoy a more primitive experience along an additional 69 miles of trails. Bicycle enthusiasts would still have the opportunity to ride on about 295 miles of trails in a primitive non-motorized setting.**

**Table III-58A. Miles of Hiking, Horseback Riding, and Biking Trails Outside Wilderness by Alternative**

| HIKING,<br>HORSEBACK RIDING,<br>AND BICYCLE<br>TRAILS | Map*<br>Zone | ALT.<br>1           | ALT.<br>2           | ALT.<br>3           | ALT.<br>4           | Modified<br>ALT. 4** | ALT.<br>5           |
|---|--------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Hiking Only Trails                                    | BTM          | 0 mi. tr.            | 0 mi. tr.           |
|   | BCS          | <u>5</u> mi. tr.    | <u>6</u> mi. tr.    | <u>7</u> mi. tr.    | <u>7</u> mi. tr.    | <u>7</u> mi. tr.     | <u>7</u> mi. tr.    |
|   |              | <b>5 mi. total</b>  | <b>6 mi. total</b>  | <b>7 mi. total</b>  | <b>7 mi. total</b>  | <b>7 mi. total</b>   | <b>7 mi. total</b>  |
| Hiking & Stock<br>Trails (no bicycles)                | BTM          | 0 mi. tr.            | 0 mi. tr.           |
|   | BCS          | <u>0</u> mi. tr.    | <u>18</u> mi. tr.   | <u>16</u> mi. tr.   | <u>16</u> mi. tr.   | <u>93</u> mi. tr.    | <u>16</u> mi. tr.   |
|   |              | <b>0 mi. total</b>  | <b>18 mi. total</b> | <b>16 mi. total</b> | <b>16 mi. total</b> | <b>93 mi. total</b>  | <b>16 mi. total</b> |
| Hiking, Stock, and<br>Bicycle Trails                  | BTM          | 17 mi. tr.          | 48 mi. tr.          | 186 mi. tr.         | 125 mi. tr.         | 125 mi. tr.          | 192 mi. tr.         |
|   | BCS          | <u>133</u> mi. tr.  | <u>158</u> mi. tr.  | <u>317</u> mi. tr.  | <u>233</u> mi. tr.  | <u>167</u> mi. tr.   | <u>233</u> mi. tr.  |
|   |              | <b>150 mi total</b> | <b>206 mi total</b> | <b>503 mi total</b> | <b>358 mi total</b> | <b>292 mi total</b>  | <b>425 mi total</b> |
| <b>Total: non-motorized</b>                           | BTM          | 17 mi.              | 48 mi.              | 186 mi.             | 125 mi.             | 125 mi.              | 192 mi.             |
|   | BCS          | <u>138</u> mi.      | <u>182</u> mi.      | <u>340</u> mi.      | <u>256</u> mi.      | <u>260</u> mi.       | <u>256</u> mi.      |
|   |              | <b>155 mi.</b>      | <b>230 mi.</b>      | <b>526 mi.</b>      | <b>381 mi.</b>      | <b>385 mi.</b>       | <b>448 mi.</b>      |

\* BTM is the Badger-Two Medicine area. BCS is the remainder of the Ranger District (south of Birch Creek).

\*\* Alternative 4 modified from DEIS. This FEIS table displays effects of restricting bicycles under Alt. 4.

*Remoteness:* There are no effects on remoteness under any of the action alternatives, except the remoteness of Falls Creek could increase if the landowner stops all public access on Trail 229 into the area.

*Manageability:* Manageability concerns about indistinct boundaries would not change under any of the action alternatives.

## 2. Cumulative Effects

There are no oil and gas drilling, pipeline, or other energy related projects proposed in or near the four areas recommended for wilderness in the Forest Plan. All proposed prescribed burns and fuel treatments are expected to have short-term effects on the apparent naturalness of the area, and have a positive long-term affect on natural integrity by restoring natural ecological processes. There are no known cumulative effects with other proposed or foreseeable activities as listed in Appendix M that may affect wilderness character.

### c. Effects Common To All Alternatives

#### 1. Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects

Several roadless characteristics remain the same under all alternatives, because proposed changes in travel management on existing roads and trails do not affect some characteristics.

Features of natural integrity that remain the same under all alternatives include the affects of livestock grazing and fences because those activities are not addressed by this project. The effects of development on public lands in the Benchmark area and on all private property in-holdings at the head of Gibson reservoir will not be altered by any alternative.

Apparent naturalness will continue to be affected under all alternatives by the affects of Gibson Dam because that feature is not addressed by this project. Transmission lines may have added effects if Gibson Dam is retrofitted to produce electricity.

Remoteness for the West Fork North Fork Teton, South Fork Teton, and Renshaw areas will remain the same under all alternatives. This project does not propose changes to major access points along the roads and associated trailheads that access those three areas.

The unique rock reefs of the Front will not be affected by any alternative.

Manageability problems associated with boundary lines remain the same under all alternatives. None of the alternatives propose to modify the boundaries of areas recommended for wilderness designation.

**d. Effects Common To All Action Alternatives**

***1. Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects***

There are no known direct, indirect, or cumulative effects common to all action alternatives.

**e. Comparison Of Alternatives.**

The following tables display information described above by alternative. Appendix F also provides tabular information on roads and trails within the recommended wilderness areas.

**Table III-59.  
Miles of Roads and Trails by Alternative Within  
Forest Plan Recommended Wilderness Areas**

| <b>ROADS &amp; TRAILS<br/>BY FOREST PLAN<br/>MANAGEMENT AREA "Q"</b> | <b>ALT.<br/>1</b> | <b>ALT.<br/>2</b> | <b>ALT.<br/>3</b> | <b>ALT.<br/>4</b> | <b>ALT.<br/>5</b> |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Motorized Roads  | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 |
| Motorized Trails   | 8.7               | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 |
| <b>Subtotal -- motorized</b>   | <b>8.7</b>        | <b>0</b>          | <b>0</b>          | <b>0</b>          | <b>0</b>          |
| Non-Motorized Roads  | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 |
| Non-Motorized Trails   | 51.6              | 60.3              | 60.3              | 60.3              | 60.3              |
| <b>Subtotal -- non-motorized</b>                                     | <b>51.6</b>       | <b>60.3</b>       | <b>60.3</b>       | <b>60.3</b>       | <b>60.3</b>       |
| <b>Subtotal – motorized and non-motorized</b>                        | <b>60.3</b>       | <b>60.3</b>       | <b>60.3</b>       | <b>60.3</b>       | <b>60.3</b>       |
| Decommissioned Roads & Trails  | n/a               | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 |
| Assigned as Special Use Trails                                       | n/a               | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 |
| <b>Grand Total</b>   | <b>60.3</b>       | <b>60.3</b>       | <b>60.3</b>       | <b>60.3</b>       | <b>60.3</b>       |

**Table III-60.**  
**Winter Travel Restrictions by Alternative Within**  
**Forest Plan Recommended Wilderness Areas**

| <b>WINTER TRAVEL<br/>WITHIN MANAGEMENT AREA "Q"</b> | <b>ALT.<br/>1</b> | <b>ALT.<br/>2</b> | <b>ALT.<br/>3</b> | <b>ALT.<br/>4</b> | <b>ALT.<br/>5</b> |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Acres open seasonally to snowmobiling.              | 49,180            | 12,500            | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 |
| Acres restricted yearlong to snowmobiling.          | 6,590             | 43,270            | 55,770            | 55,770            | 55,770            |
| Total acreage                                       | 55,770            | 55,770            | 55,770            | 55,770            | 55,770            |
| Miles of designated snowmobile trail.               | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 | 0                 |

**Table III-61.**  
**Comparison of Effects on Roadless Characteristics by Alternative**  
**within Forest Plan Recommended Wilderness Areas**

| <b>RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS AREA<br/>CHARACTERISTICS AND ACTIVITY</b>            | <b>ALT.<br/>1</b> | <b>ALT.<br/>2</b> | <b>ALT.<br/>3</b> | <b>ALT.<br/>4</b> | <b>ALT.<br/>5</b> |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| <b>NATURAL INTEGRITY:</b>  |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |
| Livestock grazing and fences.  | Unchanged.        | Unchanged.        | Unchanged.        | Unchanged.        | Unchanged.        |
| <b>APPARENT NATURALNESS:</b>   |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |
| Wheel ruts, wheel tracks, disturbed soil.                                      | Unchanged.        | No motorized use. | No motorized use. | No motorized use. | No motorized use. |
| <b>OPPORTUNITY FOR SOLITUDE:</b>   |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |
| Miles road open to motorized travel.   | 0 mi.             |
| Miles trail open to motorized travel.  | 8 mi.             | 0 mi.             | 0 mi.             | 0 mi.             | 0 mi.             |
| Miles non-motorized roads and trails.  | 52 mi.            | 60 mi.            | 60 mi.            | 60 mi.            | 60 mi.            |
| Acres open to snowmobile travel.   | 49,180 ac.        | 12,500 ac.        | 0 ac.             | 0 ac.             | 0 ac.             |
| <b>OPPORTUNITY FOR PRIMITIVE RECREATION EXPERIENCE:</b>                        |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |
| West Fork North Fork Teton.  | Spr/Sum/Fall      | Spr/Sum/Fall      | Yearlong          | Yearlong          | Yearlong          |
| South Fork Teton.  | Yearlong          | Yearlong          | Yearlong          | Yearlong          | Yearlong          |
| Renshaw.   | Spr/Sum/Fall      | Yearlong          | Yearlong          | Yearlong          | Yearlong          |
| Falls Creek.   | Fall              | Fall              | Yearlong          | Yearlong          | Yearlong          |
| <b>REMOTENESS:</b>   |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |
| Main trailheads (W.Fk & S.Fk.Teton, Sun Canyon, Benchmark, Elk Crk, Dearborn). | Unchanged.        | Unchanged.        | Unchanged.        | Unchanged.        | Unchanged.        |
| <b>UNIQUE FEATURES:</b>  |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |
| Rock reefs.  | Unchanged.        | Unchanged.        | Unchanged.        | Unchanged.        | Unchanged.        |
| <b>MANAGEABILITY / BOUNDARIES:</b>   |                   |                   |                   |                   |                   |
| Indistinct boundaries.   | Unchanged.        | Unchanged.        | Unchanged.        | Unchanged.        | Unchanged.        |