

SOCIAL CONFLICT BETWEEN MOTORIZED AND NON-MOTORIZED RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES.

There is a great disparity in opinions about the effects on a person's recreational experience when they encounter others on the trail. Some people using non-motorized modes of travel become upset when they encounter or hear motorized equipment. The reverse situation is not as frequently true...most people using motorized modes of travel do not seem to be disturbed when they encounter people on foot or horseback, or on bicycles. Often the situation is erroneously defined as "user conflict", but there generally is no physical or safety conflict associated with one party encountering another party on the trail. The situation is more accurately defined as a failure to fully meet the social expectation of the non-motorized visitor.

1. EXISTING CONDITION

a. Natural Characteristics

Strong preferences for specific recreation settings are leading to competition for the recreational resources of this country (English, et. al, 1999). Competition is especially evident between motorized and non-motorized users, on-foot versus riding participants, fast-moving versus slow-moving styles, highly specialized versus novice participants, commercial versus private users, and risk/adventure versus sensing/learning motivated users. Even within groups holding similar preferences there is conflict due to new technologies that are incongruous with individual perceptions of the experience. The most prevalent example is the use of GPS receivers, satellite telephones, and laptop computers to keep in touch with the outside world while deep in the wilderness (Douglass, 1999).

The issue of conflict between uses is an indicator of the narrow range of tolerance that humans have for others. Hikers complain their experiences are ruined by motorized OHVs, by horse manure, by speeding bicyclists, and by areas disturbed by horses or OHVs. Horsemen complain that their experiences are ruined by OHVs, by campers too close to the trail, by hikers and dogs that scare their horses, and by llamas. Skiers complain their experiences are ruined by dog tracks, by snowshoe tracks, and by snowmobiles. OHV riders complain land managers closing motorized travel routes ruin their experiences. Intolerance becomes most pronounced when it involves social and environmental views on opposite ends of the scale.

b. Past Events and Conditions

Fifty years ago there were relatively few complaints about other people encountered on the trail, because encounters were rare. There were fewer people traveling in the backcountry, and the concept of sharing the trail was acceptable to the general public. The majority of people were willing to embrace multiple forms of recreation because there were very few other people sharing the outdoors. But as the population of the United States grew, more and more people began using motorized OHVs to enjoy the outdoors. Non-motorized and motorized enthusiasts alike began encountering more and more people with differing mindsets as to what types of activity provided recreational enjoyment. And the concept of multiple-use on trails became less acceptable.

Multiple-use is still a byword of the U.S. Forest Service, but it does not mean multiple uses on every acre of ground, nor on every trail. It never did. Some uses are not compatible with other uses, and managers have the responsibility to determine what, if any, uses should be permitted, and where those activities should be permitted.

c. Human Influence

In 2004 the Forest Service requested all National Forests provide current information on OHV management problems. Information reported by Northern Region National Forests is shown in the following table. The table may indicate different interpretations of what information to report. For example, the Gallatin National Forest reported a very high mileage of new routes being created in just the past year. (It is possible the Gallatin NF reported all non-system routes that they have inventoried.) The Idaho Panhandle report of new routes may also warrant some questioning to determine their interpretation of information being reported. Consequently, the data probably are not directly comparable across all National Forests.

Table III-65. OHV Management Problems Reported in 2004 by R-1 National Forests

Region 1 National Forests	Type of OHV Mgmt. Problems	Magnitude of Problem	Estimated Miles of Roads/Trails Created by Users in Past Year
Montana			
Beaverhead-Deerlodge	Vegetation Social (use conflict) Soil	Low	10 miles
Bitterroot	Cultural Social (use conflict) Soil	High	1 mile
Custer	Vegetation Wildlife Soil	Medium	0 mile
Flathead	Soil Other (litter, more trails created)	Medium	2 miles
Gallatin	Vegetation Soil Other (invasive weeds)	Low	293 miles
Helena	Vegetation Wildlife Social (use conflict)	Medium	3 miles
Kootenai	Vegetation Cultural Social (use conflict)	Medium	2 miles
Lewis & Clark	Social (use conflict)	Medium	1 mile
Lolo	Vegetation Social (use conflict) Soil	Low	5 miles
North Idaho			
Clearwater	Water Quality Social (use conflict) Soil	Medium	6 miles
Idaho Panhandle	Water Quality Wildlife Social (use conflict)	Medium	50 miles
Nez Perce	Water Quality Social (use conflict) Soil	Medium	no report
North & South Dakota			
Dakota Prairie	Soil	Low	2 miles

Source: OHV questionnaire, June, 2004, at website <http://r4data01.r4.fs.fed.us/fsfiles/unit/e/atv.nsf>

d. Future Trends

Francis Pandolfi (1999) of the U.S. Forest Service Washington Office described this situation best when he stated “outdoor recreation is but one of the many multiple uses we have for our lands, public and private. Yet, its importance in Americans’ lives and the benefits it provides seem to be increasing faster than many other uses of our precious land. The rise in importance of outdoor recreation in Americans’ lives is one of the dramatic changes, as well as challenges, now occurring in the United States. There is no single constituency for the

outdoor recreation experience since activities vary so greatly and agendas of the various user groups range across a broad spectrum of interests.”

It is important to note that wilderness is compatible with multiple-use management. Many multiple uses are enhanced by wilderness protection, for example, water quality, wildlife, fisheries, and primitive recreation. Few, if any, wildlands are managed for a single use, even though some areas are managed with a narrower set of uses and values than others.

e. Desired Condition

The National Forest trail system is not large enough, and the Forest Service does not have the financial resources to provide a separate trail system for each type of use. One of the missions of the Forest Service is to provide a balance of opportunities for people to experience the outdoors. Multiple-use trails accommodating motorized and non-motorized uses (including hiking, stock, and bicycles) will continue to accommodate the needs of a great number of people, especially where use levels are low. In addition, some multiple-use trails may only accommodate a variety of non-motorized travel, and some trails may only accommodate single modes of travel such as hiking. Travel planning is the process used to evaluate social and resource concerns to determine the relative amounts and locations of various types of trail.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

a. Alternative 1 - No Action Alternative

1. Direct and Indirect Effects

Of the 11 public access routes and 2 Blackfoot Nation access routes to National Forest System lands in the Rocky Mountain Division, 8 routes provide direct access to non-motorized “quiet” trails during the summer. About 23% of the non-Wilderness transportation system (153 miles of trail and 2 miles of closed roads) provide opportunities for a non-motorized recreation experience during the summer. About 20% of the non-wilderness NFS lands in the Division would provide opportunities for non-motorized recreation during the winter months. (Mileages from tables in discussion of Recreation –Opportunity for Solitude.)

2. Cumulative Effects

The proposed oil and gas drilling in the Badger-Two Medicine area would utilize some existing roads and also develop some additional road. Management of travel on existing roads and trails would not make the drilling project more or less viable. Motorized access to the drill site would not have an effect on conflicts between motorized and non-motorized recreation, because the proposed drilling is in a location already influenced by motorized traffic during the summer and winter. Any proposed prescribed burns and fuel treatments are expected to have short-term effects on motorized/non-motorized recreation in the area during burning and patrol operations. Alternative 1 does not have any known cumulative effects with other proposed or foreseeable activities as listed in Appendix M that could affect conflicts between motorized and non-motorized recreation.

b. Action Alternatives 2-5

1. Direct and Indirect Effects

All action alternatives reduce the conflict between motorized and non-motorized visitors by increasing the opportunity for a non-motorized experience during the summer and winter months. Alternative 3 eliminates all motorized travel on trails, and may go too far in trying to minimize conflicts between two types of uses by totally eliminating the motorized users. If there are no opportunities for people to travel on motorized trails, it is possible that there will be more conflicts around campgrounds, cabins, trailheads, dispersed campsites and existing roads. Without some opportunities for people with motorized OHVs to disperse along a designated trail system, they will have no choice but to concentrate along the access roads. Alternative 3 also eliminates all cross-country motorized travel by snowmobiles during the winter months, concentrating snowmobilers on the unplowed access roads. This may result in more conflicts on the unplowed roads that are the main access routes for people to reach their recreation residences and to reach the backcountry.

Alternatives 2, 4 and 5 retain from 5 to 7 trailheads where there are opportunities to choose either a non-motorized or motorized trail. Alternative 2 eliminates access to the trail system from Summit Campground, but retains the other access points from Highway 2. Overall, Alternative 2 maintains 10 access points with immediate access to non-motorized “quiet” trails. About 37% of the road and trail system provides opportunities for non-motorized recreation during the summer, and about 47% of the area provides for non-motorized recreation during the winter under Alternative 2.

Alternative 4 provides about 62% of the road and trail system for non-motorized summer recreation, and 67% of the area for non-motorized winter recreation. All major access roads would provide opportunities for motorized and non-motorized recreationists to disperse on trails suitable for their type of recreation, with minimal conflicts between types of uses. All 13 access routes to NFS lands would provide direct access to non-motorized trails, which should meet the expectations of visitors not wanting to encounter anyone on motorized OHVs.

Alternative 5 provides about 72% of the road and trail system for non-motorized summer recreation, and 75% of the area for non-motorized winter recreation. This alternative eliminates all motorized trails in the Badger-Two Medicine area, and may go too far in trying to minimize conflict between motorized and non-motorized enthusiasts. We do not know what effects, if any, displacing all motorized recreation from the Badger-Two Medicine would have on the social conflict between motorized and non-motorized modes of recreation. [Refer to Recreation – Diverse Winter Recreation for more discussion of this issue.]

2. Cumulative Effects

The proposed oil and gas drilling in the Badger-Two Medicine area would utilize some existing roads and also develop some additional road. Management of travel on existing roads and trails would not make the drilling project more or less viable under any of the action alternatives.

Under Alternatives 2 and 4, motorized access to the drill site would not have an effect on conflicts between motorized and non-motorized recreation, because the proposed drilling is in a location already influenced by motorized traffic during the summer and winter.

Under Alternatives 3 and 5, the proposed oil and gas drilling in the Badger-Two Medicine area would utilize some existing roads that would be closed to motorized travel. It is unlikely

that motorized access by the drilling permittee would exacerbate the conflict between motorized and non-motorized recreation in the area, because the access would be on a relatively small proportion of the transportation system, and be for a limited period of time. Management of travel on existing roads and trails would not make the drilling project more or less viable. Any proposed prescribed burns and fuel treatments are expected to have short-term effects on motorized/non-motorized recreation in the area during burning and patrol operations.

None of the action alternatives have any known cumulative effects with other proposed or foreseeable activities as listed in Appendix M that could affect conflicts between motorized and non-motorized recreation.

c. Effects Common To All Alternatives

1. Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects

Under all alternatives it is important to direct visitors to the type of experience they are seeking, and to forewarn visitors as to other types of people they may encounter along the trail. Most, if not all, of the conflict between motorized and non-motorized recreation could be eliminated by informing people at the trailhead what they may encounter on the trail. Information goes a long way in meeting people's expectations, and preventing surprises. Potential conflicts could be reduced under all of the alternatives by applying the following mitigation measures:

Mitigation (all alternatives):

- Trailhead signing about other types of uses that one may encounter on multiple-use trails.
- Recreational maps and information emphasizing areas for non-motorized activities, and motorized activities.
- Website providing the above information on a trail-by-trail basis.

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.

