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## United States Department of the Interior



OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Office of Environmental Policy and Compliance  
Denver Federal Center, Building 56, Room 1003  
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Denver, Colorado 80225-0007

August 5, 2005

ER 05/0542

Lesley W. Thompson, Forest Supervisor  
Lewis and Clark National Forest  
1101 15<sup>th</sup> Street North  
Great Falls, Montana 59401

Dear Mr. Thompson:

The Department of the Interior (Department) has reviewed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Rocky Mountain Ranger District Travel Management Plan, Lewis and Clark National Forest, and provides the following comments.

### GENERAL COMMENTS

The DEIS analyzes the Lewis and Clark National Forest proposal to revise and update the current travel management plan for the Rocky Mountain Ranger District (RMRD). Since the Lewis and Clark National Forest has not yet chosen a preferred alternative for their Travel Management Plan, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would like to express their support for Alternative 3, which emphasizes traditional foot and horse travel and eliminates motorized travel on trails. As a secondary alternative, the Department would also support Alternative 5. Under this alternative, motorized wheeled vehicles would not be allowed on any roads in the Badger-Two Medicine area. This area has been determined to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a Traditional Cultural District.

### SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Page 250: Forest Plan Direction, Threatened and Endangered Species, Grizzly Bear:

The RMRD is part of the eastern portion of the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) Recovery Area for grizzly bears. Occupied grizzly bear range extends eastward to at least Highway 89. The referenced section states that most of the RMRD is designated as Management Situation (MS) 1 habitat for grizzly bears, defined in the Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines (Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee, 1986) as areas in which, "Grizzly habitat maintenance and improvement ... and grizzly human conflict minimization will receive the highest management priority. Management decisions will favor the needs of the grizzly bear when

grizzly habitat and other land use values compete. Land uses which can affect grizzlies and/or their habitat will be made compatible with grizzly needs or such uses will be disallowed or eliminated. Grizzly-human conflicts will be resolved in favor of grizzlies unless the bear involved is determined to be a nuisance."

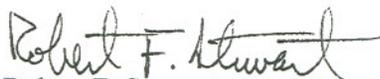
Given the MS 1 designation in the RMRD, Alternatives 3 and 5 would provide the greatest benefits to the threatened Grizzly Bear population in the NCDE. Alternative 3 would be the alternative that gives grizzly bears the highest overall management priority, followed closely by the stipulations outlined in Alternative 5.

Page 282: Effects of Travel on Westslope Cutthroat Trout, Alternatives 2-5, 1<sup>st</sup> Paragraph: The last line in the paragraph states "benefits to fish habitat would not be realized if other types of travel increased or maintenance programs fell behind." Alternatives 3 and 5 provide the greatest benefit to westslope cutthroat trout in terms of sediment reduction. Conservation of the species will be best realized with reduction of sediment input which leads to habitat degradation. Alternative means to reduce sedimentation need to be considered if unmaintained roads and trails result in increased sedimentation due to lack of funding. In addition, we request that the plan address ways to reduce ford sites that disrupt spawning gravels.

## CONCLUSION

The Department appreciates the opportunity to comment. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Office (USFWS) in Helena, Montana, is willing to work with you to further clarify their concerns and work towards solutions of problems addressed in these comments. If you have any questions or need further information, please contact Mark Wilson at 406-449-5225, extension 205.

Sincerely,



Robert F. Stewart  
Regional Environmental Officer

cc: Dick Schwecke, ID Team Leader

## REFERENCES

Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee. 1986. Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines. USDA Forest Service, USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, USDI National Park Service, USDI Bureau of Land Management, MT Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Idaho Fish and Game, and Washington Game Department. 99 p.