

United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ECOLOGICAL SERVICES
MONTANA FIELD OFFICE
585 SHEPARD WAY
HELENA, MONTANA 59601
PHONE (406) 449-5225, FAX (406) 449-5339

File: M19 Lewis and Clark National Forest (I)

September 18, 2006

Lesley W. Thompson, Forest Supervisor
Lewis and Clark National Forest
1101 15th Street North
P.O. Box 869
Great Falls, Montana 59403-0869

Dear Mr. Thompson:

This is in response to your August 4, 2006 request for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) review of the biological assessment for federally listed threatened and endangered species regarding the effects of the proposed Rocky Mountain Ranger District Travel Management Plan (Travel Plan). Your request was received August 7, 2006 and a supplement to the biological assessment was received September 5, 2006.

The Travel Plan would be implemented on the non-wilderness portion of the Rocky Mountain Ranger District south of the North Fork of Birch Creek. The proposed Travel Plan would decrease the amount of roads open to motorized travel as well as trails open to ATV and motorcycle travel. The proposed plan would also incorporate provisions of the 2001 three-state OHV decision signed by the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management that prohibits motorized cross-country on all National Forest System and BLM public lands.

The Service has reviewed the biological assessment and supplement to the biological assessment and concurs with the determination that the proposed action is not likely to adversely affect the threatened grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*), the threatened Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) and the endangered gray wolf (*Canis lupus*). The Service acknowledges the no effect determination for the threatened bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*). Therefore, pursuant to 50 CFR 402.13 (a), formal consultation on the species referenced above is not required.

The Service bases its concurrence on the information and analysis in the biological assessment and the supplement to the biological assessment prepared by Wendy Maples, District Biologist. Eight grizzly bear subunits occur within the analysis area. Forest Service ownership is less than 75 percent in six of these subunits. Open and total motorized access route densities would be reduced and core area would be increased on Forest lands in all grizzly bear subunits. Several lynx analysis units occur within the analysis area. The overall acreage available for dispersed snowmobiling would be greatly reduced and concentrated within two main areas. All aspects of the proposed Travel Plan are compatible with applicable standards in the LCAS. One wolf pack is known to

occur on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District. The Red Shale pack is established roughly seven miles west of the Travel Plan boundary, in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. The Travel Plan is a long-term plan, expected to be in place for a minimum of 10 to 15 years. During this timeframe, the potential for disturbance to grizzly bears, Canada lynx and gray wolves does exist, however impacts would be insignificant.

If the final project design is changed so as to have effects on threatened or endangered species other than those described in the biological assessment, a revised biological assessment will be necessary. The Service will then issue a letter of concurrence/non-concurrence on the revised biological assessment.

We appreciate your efforts to ensure the conservation of threatened and endangered species as part of your responsibilities under the Endangered Species Act, as amended. If you have questions or comments related to this issue, please contact Katrina Dixon or me at 406-449-5225.

Sincerely,



R. Mark Wilson
Field Supervisor