

IV. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

In 2000, the Lewis and Clark National Forest asked the public about the need to update and revise travel management across the entire Forest. A total of 211 people attended 10 open house meetings, and 90 letters were received from the public. In 2002, an Interdisciplinary Team of Forest Service employees began developing a proposed action for travel management on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District. This proposed action was released to the public for comment beginning August 22, 2002. The 30-day comment period was extended to mid-December 2002. Meetings with the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council in October resulted in additional open house meetings being held in December, and the comment period was extended to late January 2003. Seven open house meetings were attended by 192 people during the scoping period. About 6,300 comments were received from the public as a result of this process.

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement was released for public comment beginning June 16, 2005. Eight open house meetings were attended by 357 people. About 35,500 comments were received as a result of this process. A content analysis of public comments is contained in the project file.

V. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

The Interdisciplinary Team developed five alternatives (including the No Action Alternative) that were studied in detail. The alternatives are site specific to road and trail location and vary primarily in the mode of travel restricted and season of travel restricted.

No Action Alternative

ALTERNATIVE 1

The No Action alternative provides a baseline for estimating the effects of other alternatives and therefore must be considered in detail (FSH 1909.15, part 14.1; 40 CFR 1502.14(d)). In cases such as this, where ongoing programs or management described within an existing plan continue as new plans are being developed, the No Action alternative means no change from current management direction (FSH 1909.15, part 14.1; CEQ's 40 Most Asked Questions, section 65.12, question 3). The 1988 Travel Plan and the 2001 Three-State OHV Decision define travel management that is currently enforced on the ground. This is the existing condition, and it would be carried forward if there were no decision made to change travel management. Therefore it is appropriately considered the No Action alternative. Analysis of current travel management also fulfills a 1989 directive by the Regional Forester to complete additional analysis of the 1988 Travel Plan.

Action Alternatives

ALTERNATIVE 2

In 2002, an interdisciplinary team (IDT) of resource specialists began developing a proposal for travel management on the RMRD, based on the need for change identified through an early scoping effort conducted in late 2000 and through detailed review of all roads and non-wilderness trails on the RMRD. The IDT considered seven criteria on which to assess the need for change on roads and trails throughout the non-wilderness portion of the RMRD: wildlife and fish habitat protection, conflict between uses, erosion control, safety, facility/resource protection, wilderness protection, and noxious weed spread. The IDT also identified and proposed corrections to travel management restrictions and ownership that were shown erroneously on the existing 1988 Travel Plan Map.

Based on field visits and knowledge of on-site conditions acquired during 2002/2003, the IDT determined that some modifications were needed to correct errors in and improve the Proposed Action. Because the majority of these modifications were minor corrections or changes that did not alter the basic characteristics of the Proposed Action, the decision was made to carry the new, modified alternative forward for detailed analysis in place of the Proposed Action. This modified alternative is now referred to only as Alternative 2, in accordance with my direction as described above. The original “Proposed Action” that was provided to the public for comment is retained in the Alternatives Not Considered in Detail section of the DEIS, along with the rationale for not carrying it forward for detailed analysis.

ALTERNATIVE 3

Alternative 3 is based largely on comments submitted by the public requesting that travel management on the RMRD emphasize traditional foot and horse travel and eliminate motorized travel on trails.

ALTERNATIVE 4

Alternative 4 is based both on comments submitted by the public requesting greater separation of motorized and non-motorized travel, and on efforts by the IDT to identify areas in which to focus motorized loop opportunities and other areas in which to emphasize enhancement of other resources. In identifying areas in which to restrict motorized travel, the IDT attempted to choose areas in which more than one resource (e.g. wildlife habitat, wilderness/roadless characteristics, traditional travel, etc.) might benefit. In identifying areas in which to focus motorized loop opportunities, the IDT looked for areas in which the existing infrastructure could support a specific type of motorized use, in which loops existed or trail mileages were sufficient to create a reasonable motorized recreational opportunity, and in which other resources could be appropriately protected or impacts of motorized travel mitigated. The IDT also attempted to provide a mix of recreational opportunities throughout various geographic areas of the RMRD.

ALTERNATIVE 5

Alternative 5 was developed by the IDT in response to consultation with the Blackfoot tribal government and to address cultural issues in the Badger-Two Medicine area. The National Forest and the Blackfoot Indian Reservation share a common boundary in this area, and the Blackfoot retain specific reserved rights in the area in accordance with the 1895-96 agreement with the U.S. Government. Much of the Badger-Two Medicine area has been determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a Traditional Cultural District.

VI. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY LAWS, REGULATIONS, AND POLICIES

A. Forest Plan Consistency

The Lewis and Clark National Forest Plan provides integrated guidance for all natural resource management activities as required by the National Forest Management Act of 1976. The Forest Plan established goals and management direction for the entire Forest and identified standards for resource protection. The actions selected in this ROD comply with Forest Plan goals and direction.

- A. National Forest Management Act
- B. National Environmental Policy Act
- C. Endangered Species Act
- D. National Historic Preservation Act
- E. Additional Laws and Regulations

VII. ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Council on Environmental Quality regulations direct the decision-maker to identify the environmentally preferable alternative. The environmentally preferred alternative is not necessarily the alternative that will be implemented and it does not have to meet the underlying need of the project. It does, however, have to cause the least damage to the biological, and physical environment and best protect, preserve, and enhance historical cultural, and natural resources (Section 101 NEPA: 40 CFR 1505.2(b)).

The Forest Service did not identify an environmentally preferred alternative in either the “Draft” or “Final” Environmental Impact Statement. On environmental issues like water quality and air quality the analysis does not indicate great differences between the alternatives. Based on the assumptions used in the analysis Alternative 3 would have slightly less negative impact on water and air quality. The analysis for effects on wildlife is more insightful. In reviewing ROD Tables 18, 19, 20, and 21 Alternative 3 has the least negative effects on wildlife habitat, and is the environmentally preferred alternative. My decision has almost identical impacts to the environmentally preferred alternative.

VIII. APPEAL PROVISIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. A written appeal must be submitted within 45 days following the publication date of the legal notice of this decision in the *Great Falls Tribune*, the newspaper of record. It is the responsibility of the appellant to ensure their appeal is received in a timely manner. The publication date of the legal notice of the decision in the newspaper of record is the *exclusive* means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Appellants should not rely on date or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Paper appeals must be submitted to:

USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
ATTN: Appeal Deciding Officer
P.O. Box 7669
Missoula, MT 59807

Or

USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
ATTN: Appeal Deciding Officer
200 East Broadway
Missoula, MT 59802

Office hours: 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Electronic appeals must be submitted to: appeals-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us

In electronic appeals, the subject line should contain the name of the project being appealed. An automated response will confirm your electronic appeal has been received. Electronic appeals must be submitted in MS Word, Word Perfect, or Rich Text Format (RTF).

It is the appellant's responsibility to provide sufficient project- or activity-specific evidence and rationale, focusing on the decision, to show why my decision should be reversed. The appeal must be filed with the Appeal Deciding Officer in writing. At a minimum, the appeal must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14, and include the following information:

- The appellant's name and address, with a telephone number, if available;
- A signature, or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for electronic mail may be filed with the appeal);
- When multiple names are listed on an appeal, identification of the lead appellant and verification of the identity of the lead appellant upon request;
- The name of the project or activity for which the decision was made, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the date of the decision;
- The regulation under which the appeal is being filed, when there is an option to appeal under either 36 CFR 215 or 36 CFR 251, subpart C;
- Any specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks and rationale for those changes;
- Any portion(s) of the decision with which the appellant disagrees, and explanation for the disagreement;
- Why the appellant believes the Responsible Official's decision failed to consider the substantive comments; and
- How the appellant believes the decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy

The decisions identified in this ROD shall be implemented as soon as practicable following opportunity for review and appeal.

IX. PLANNING RECORDS/CONTACT PERSON

The planning records contain detailed information and data used in preparation of the Rocky Mountain Ranger District Travel Management Plan EIS and in selecting Alternative 4 with modifications for implementation.

Documents are available at:

Lewis and Clark National Forest
1101 15th Street North, Box 869
Great Falls, MT 59403
(406) 791-7700

For additional information concerning this decision please contact Dick Schwecke, ID Team Leader, Lewis and Clark National Forest, Great Falls, Montana, (406) 791-7700.

LESLEY W. THOMPSON
Forest Supervisor

Date

Mitigation Measures

Mitigation measures as described in the FEIS for this project will be implemented to minimize, reduce, rectify, avoid, eliminate, and/or compensate the potential impacts to resources identified in Chapter III (40 CFR 1508.20).

Appendices

- Appendix A** Trails for Hiking Travel Only
- Appendix B** Trails for Hiking and Stock Travel
- Appendix C** Trails and Roads for Hiking, Stock, and Bicycle Travel
- Appendix D** Trails and Roads for Motorcycle (single-track) Travel
- Appendix E** Trails and Roads for ATV (double-track) Travel
- Appendix F** Roads for Seasonal Travel with Passenger Vehicles
- Appendix G** Roads for Yearlong Travel with Passenger Vehicles
- Appendix H** Yearlong Access Roads Not Changed or Included in ROD
- Appendix I** Disposition of “Undetermined” Routes
- Appendix J** Decommissioned Trails and Roads
- Appendix K** Biological Assessment**

**Appendix K includes a copy of the Biological Assessment (BA) submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and subsequent correspondence.

A Biological Evaluation (BE) was completed as part of the analysis of alternatives, and is documented and displayed in both the FEIS and Rationale for the Decision.