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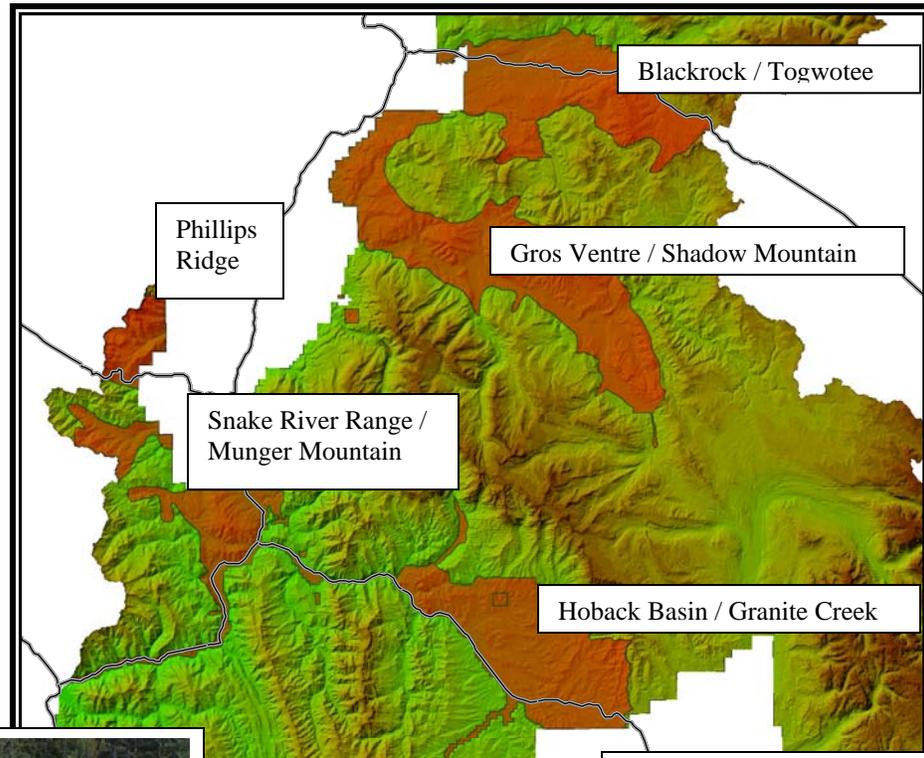
January 2009



Final Environmental Impact Statement

Off-Highway Vehicle Route Designation Project

Bridger-Teton National Forest
Buffalo, Jackson, and Big Piney Ranger Districts
Teton, Lincoln, and Sublette Counties, Wyoming



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**OHV Route Designation Project
Final Environmental Impact Statement
Bridger-Teton National Forest
Buffalo, Jackson, and Big Piney Ranger Districts**

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Cooperating Agencies: Wyoming Game and Fish Dept.
Wyoming State Trails Program

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(North Zone Travel Plan Revision)

Abstract:

The purpose of this project is to improve management of public summer motorized use (May 1 – November 30) by designating roads and motorized trails in areas of the Bridger-Teton National Forest where motorized use is currently not restricted. Winter snowmobile use is not addressed in this project. Currently, summer motorized use within the unrestricted portions of the Forest is not being managed in a manner consistent with current travel management regulations and Forest Plan direction or in manner consistent with resource protection, public safety, and enjoyment by all Forest users. Specific project objectives are to (1) Designate roads and motorized trails to meet identified public needs, improve the quality of the system, and reduce conflicts, (2) Reduce resource impacts, and (3) Improve the ability to maintain routes and enforce travel regulations. All routes proposed for designation exist on the ground although not all are currently part of the Forest transportation system; no construction of new routes is proposed. This project will result in a summer motor vehicle use map by spring 2009. Once the motor vehicle use map is published, summer motorized will be allowed only on designated routes.

This Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) serves to disclose and compare the effects of implementing alternative designated OHV route systems. Five alternatives are evaluated including the No Action alternative which would allow unrestricted motorized travel to continue. This alternative serves as a baseline for comparing the effects of other alternatives. The four action

alternatives vary in terms of the mileage of designated motorized routes, the number of routes with seasonal restrictions, and the classification of vehicle routes (e.g. full-size vehicle road, 50” or less trail, or motorcycle trail). The mileage of designated motorized routes varies from 388 miles of road and 33 miles of motorized trail in Alternative B to 445 miles of road and 102 miles of motorized trail in Alternative E. Alternatives C and D have the most miles of designated routes affected by seasonal restrictions with Alternative C having the most miles of routes that would only be available for motorized use during the summer (July 1st until September 9th). Alternative D is the initial preferred alternative. All alternatives meet the project objectives and address the seven significant issues to varying degrees.

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Date Appeals must be received:

45 days after publication of the decision in the Casper Star Tribune (refer to Record of Decision for more information)

SUMMARY

The Bridger-Teton National Forest is proposing to improve management of public summer motorized use (May 1 – November 30) by designating roads and motorized trails in certain areas of the Bridger-Teton National Forest where motorized use is currently not restricted. Winter snowmobile use is not addressed in this project. On the Bridger-Teton National Forest, there are 255,830 acres that currently allow unrestricted motorized travel by wheeled vehicles. These areas are located on the Buffalo, Jackson, and Big Piney Ranger Districts and include five geographic areas: Blackrock/Togwotee, Gros Ventre/Shadow Mountain, Phillips Ridge, Snake River Range/Munger Mountain, and Hoback Basin/Granite Creek. All routes proposed for designation exist on the ground although not all are currently part of the Forest transportation system; no construction of new routes is proposed. This project will result in publication of a summer motor vehicle use map by spring 2009. Once the motor vehicle use map is published, summer motorized use will be allowed only on designated routes.

Off-highway vehicle (OHV) use within portions of the Bridger-Teton National Forest is not being managed in a manner consistent with the 1990 Forest Plan direction and the 2005 National Forest Travel Management Rule or in a manner consistent with resource protection, public safety and enjoyment by all Forest users. The current travel plan for the north zone of the Bridger-Teton National Forest was developed in the late 1970s and 1980s prior to the technological advances that transformed truck, ATV and motorcycle use on public lands. Motorized use has a long history on the Forest and is a legitimate and appropriate way for people to enjoy the National Forest, in the right places and with proper management. Since the 1980s, motor vehicle use has changed from primarily jeep travel to a mix of passenger car, truck, ATV, and motorcycle use and the desire for motorized trail access has increased. The current system of roads and motorized trails evolved from historical use and forest management activities, thus the system was never designed with an eye towards current recreation and access needs. As a result, the current system is often confusing in terms of what is and is not allowed and does not always serve visitors well. Unrestricted motorized use has also caused resource damage, wildlife disturbance, and conflicts between motorized and non-motorized visitors, particularly during the fall hunting season. Thus, the specific project purpose is to (1) Designate roads and motorized trails to meet identified public needs, improve the quality of the system, and reduce conflicts, (2) Reduce resource impacts, and (3) Improve the ability to maintain routes and enforce travel regulations.

To help develop a proposed OHV route designation system, a series of workshops were held in May 2006 to hear from citizens. Input was received about how participants use the areas being analyzed in this project, specific concerns, desirable attributes of a designated road and motorized trail system, and ideas for balancing public use and resource values. This input was combined with resource information to develop an initial proposal. This proposal was then posted on the Forest Service website for public comment and two open houses were held. A proposed action was then developed to begin the formal environmental analysis process. The Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare a Draft EIS was published in the Federal Register on January 5, 2007. Public events in 2007 included an educational seminar, a workshop to gather input for alternative development, and three field tours. In May 2008, a public open house was held to introduce the five alternatives, provide an opportunity for citizens to meet with resource specialists, and explain how to comment on the Draft EIS. The Draft EIS was released on June 16, 2008 with the notice of availability published in the Federal Register on June 20, 2008. Throughout this process,

numerous informal meetings have occurred with agencies, non-governmental organizations, tribes, and individual citizens and information has been available on the project website. Two Wyoming State departments – Wyoming Game and Fish Department and Wyoming State Trails Program – are cooperating agencies for this project and have provided assistance. In addition to the input received during public workshops and events, a total of 1300 comments were received in response to the scoping document and 216 comments were received on the Draft EIS.

Issues

Seven significant issues emerged from input provided by the public and resource specialists. These issues include:

1. Effects on opportunities for motorized recreation
2. Effects on opportunities for non-motorized recreation
3. Effects on route sustainability and potential for sedimentation into water sources
4. Effects on wildlife including threatened, endangered, and sensitive species and management indicator species
5. Effects on the character of inventoried roadless areas, Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and National Parks
6. Effects on cultural resources
7. Effects on the agency's ability to manage the OHV system

Other issues such as effects to fisheries, wetlands and riparian areas, sensitive plants, introduction and spread of noxious weeds, and some wildlife species such as wolves, lynx, and bald eagles were also identified and are briefly discussed in the Final EIS but the alternatives were not found to have effects that help differentiate among alternatives.

Alternatives

The seven significant issues led the agency to develop five alternatives to address the issues and meet the project purpose and need.

Alternative A is the No Action alternative. While this alternative does not meet the project purpose and need, it is required to be analyzed to serve as a baseline for comparing the effects of other alternatives. Under this alternative, OHV management would be guided by the current 2002 travel plan for the Jackson, Buffalo, and a portion of Big Piney Ranger Districts. Motorized use would not be restricted to designated trails within the grey areas displayed on the travel map. Only roads and trails currently included in the Forest transportation system would be eligible for maintenance funds. Motorized routes would not have vehicle class designations, thus there would be a tendency for routes to increase in width over time as ATVs rode single-track trails or full-size vehicles drove on motorized trails.

Alternative B would minimize the number of designated OHV routes. Under this alternative, unrestricted motorized use would be eliminated and replaced with a limited system of designated motorized routes. In general, Alternative B designates roads and trails that are currently on the Forest transportation system (except for Level 1 closed roads) and increases the miles of routes that have seasonal restrictions. It includes the least number of motorized routes compared with other action alternatives. Alternative B was developed to address environmental issues,

particularly issues regarding the potential effect of motorized routes on inventoried roadless areas and Wilderness Study Areas and issues regarding potential wildlife effects in key habitat areas.

Alternative C would use seasonal restrictions more than closures for the designated OHV system. This alternative was developed to address environmental issues, particularly issues regarding the potential effect of OHV routes on wildlife habitat security and soil or watershed concerns. This alternative is intended to provide more motorized access than Alternative B with a mix of opportunities for full-size vehicle travel, vehicles 50 inches or less wide, and motorcycle travel. Motorized trail opportunities would primarily be available during the summer months of July and August.

Alternative D is the initial preferred alternative. This alternative was developed with an emphasis on retaining primary existing uses, establishing seasonal restrictions to protect wildlife habitat security particularly during the calving period, and improving the manageability of the OHV system. Alternative D is similar to Alternative C in terms of the number of routes available however Alternative D would establish fewer seasonal restrictions on OHV routes during the fall. This alternative is intended to give the public and decision-makers an initial idea of how motorized opportunities and resource concerns might be balanced. It is important to recognize that this Draft EIS is the initial disclosure of anticipated effects from implementing the alternatives including this initial preferred alternative. It is likely that information gleaned from public comments and further review by the Forest Service will result in changes to the preferred alternative.

Alternative E would maximize the number of designated OHV routes. This alternative was developed to address issues raised during public scoping that the proposed action did not offer sufficient opportunities for motorized travel. The intent of this alternative is to maximize opportunities for motorized travel while still addressing resource concerns. In general, system roads and system trails are retained under this alternative and more miles of motorized trail are proposed to be added to the system compared with other alternatives. However, this does not mean that all roads and trails that currently exist on the ground would be included as part of the designated OHV system. Many non-system roads and trails have sustainability or manageability issues that preclude adding them to the system.

Comparison of Alternatives and Environmental Effects

Table S-1 displays how the five alternatives vary in terms of miles of routes, miles managed for each class of vehicle (e.g. vehicles 50” or less, motorcycles), and seasonal restrictions. Table S-2 displays a comparison of major findings regarding the effects of implementing each alternative based on the seven significant issues.

Table S-1: Proposed System of OHV Routes – What would be available for Public Motorized Travel within Project Area (Grey Areas)

	Alternative A (I)	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D	Alternative E
Miles of system road available for public motorized use	482	386	399	407	445
Miles of system trail managed for vehicles less than 50” wide	28	33	79	64	102
Miles of system trail managed for motorcycles	7	0.5	22	35	37

Miles of route with seasonal restrictions (more restrictive than summer long use) (2)	38	67	126	132	40
Miles of route with seasonal restriction that allows use only from July 1 st until Sept 9 th (most restrictive season)	0	27	81	36	0
Miles of route available all summer long – May 1 st until November 30 th	378	244	253	253	419
Acres within project area potentially available for OHV use (3)	110,273	14,786	15,099	15,335	16,683

(1) Alternative A just includes miles of route on the current Forest transportation system. These mileages do not include miles associated with non-system roads and trails. However, these miles do include closed roads that are available to vehicles less than 50” wide and motorcycles within the unrestricted motorized areas.

(2) This includes season restrictions allowing use from June 1st until Nov 30th; July 1st until Nov 30th; July 1st until Sept 9th; and Sept 10th – November 30th (i.e. seasons that are more restrictive than summer long use between May 1st and November 30th)

(3) For Alternative A, motorized vehicles can travel off system roads and trails however not every acre of the unrestricted area can actually be used due to terrain and vegetation constraints. Thus an estimate of potentially available terrain was determined through GIS analysis (see appendix for explanation of methodology). For Alternatives B-E, a designated OHV route system would be established with no motorized vehicle travel beyond designated corridors. The acres available for OHV routes for these alternatives was estimated by buffering roads with a 600 foot corridor and determining usable terrain within these corridors, buffering 50” motorized trails with a 15 foot corridor, and buffering motorcycle trails with a 3 foot corridor.

Given the purpose and need, information from the environmental analysis, and public input, the District Rangers for the Buffalo, Jackson, and Big Piney Ranger Districts will make the following decisions about public motorized use on their respective district.

1. Which roads and trails should be added to the current transportation system for public motorized use, which roads and trails should be closed to public motorized use, and which roads should be converted to motorized trails?
2. What class of vehicle should each designated motorized route be managed for?
3. What seasonal restrictions are needed on motorized routes?
4. Which roads are not appropriate for travel by vehicles less than 50” wide or unlicensed motorcycles (i.e. public safety would be compromised if mixed vehicle use occurred)?

The decision on the designated road and motorized trail system will be made in accordance with the requirements of the National Forest Travel Management Rule and within the context of the Bridger-Teton Forest Plan. Wyoming State statute will continue to govern requirements for operating off-road vehicles. The decision for the designated road and motorized trail system will be displayed on a motor vehicle use map that conforms to a nationally consistent format and is updated annually.

Changes between the Draft EIS and the Final EIS

As noted in Appendix A “Response to Comments”, some edits were made in Chapter 1 of this FEIS to clarify points that could be misinterpreted or to correct errors. Examples of edits made include clarifying statements about the need for motorized recreation in the project area and clarifying the definition of off-highway vehicles (OHVs) used by the Forest Service versus the definition of off-road recreational vehicles (ORVs) used by the State of Wyoming. In Chapter 2, Table 4 (summary of project compliance with Forest Plan direction) in the DEIS was removed from the FEIS. Resource analysis relative to Forest Plan direction was a key component that informed modifications to the initial preferred alternative. The summary of compliance with Forest Plan direction is more appropriately documented in the Record of Decision, not the FEIS. Further information is provided in the project record. In Chapter 3, the analysis of effects on motorized recreation opportunities is updated to remove misleading ORV registration data and include updated information from a visitor survey conducted in 2008 in the relevant counties. Further explanation is provided to avoid potential misinterpretation for some of the indicators used for the effects analysis on non-motorized recreation opportunities and on special areas. In the analysis of effects on wildlife, information about habitat effectiveness for elk among the different alternatives has been updated. The analysis of effects on the management of the OHV system (issue #7) was also updated to provide additional information on projected implementation costs.

Since release of the Draft EIS, there have been a few changes relative to legal rulings that affect OHV travel planning.

- ESA protection for the northern Rocky Mountain gray wolf population was reinstated on July 18, 2008. The change in status for the gray wolf does not alter the effects analysis for this project, however it does require that the gray wolf now be discussed in the Biological Assessment. A determination as to the effects of this OHV project on the gray wolf was made in the Biological Assessment prepared to inform the decision.
- The North Fork of Spread Creek is no longer listed as an impaired or threatened stream in the 2008 Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality 305(b) report. A watershed improvement project sponsored by the Bridger-Teton National Forest has rehabilitated the stream channel and improved the ability of the stream to support aquatic life. Thus, the stream has been de-listed. This change has been noted in the Chapter 3 water quality effects analysis but the change in status does not alter the effects analysis for this project
- The status of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule continues to be in flux. On December 2, 2008, a court ruling in California appeared to limit reinstatement of the 2001 Roadless Rule to the Ninth Circuit and New Mexico, thus the rest of the country would be covered by the court ruling in Wyoming which enjoined the Roadless Rule. Current Forest Service direction is to “pause” on projects that could be inconsistent with either court ruling. Relative to travel planning, these court rulings are relevant if the Forest Service is proposing to construct or add a non-system road to the Forest Transportation system. Motorized trails for vehicles 50” or less in width or for motorcycles are not affected by these rulings.
- On January 8, 2009, the Forest Service revised the National Travel Management Rule to make it consistent with Forest Service travel management and planning national policy and

handbook direction which were finalized the same day. The change in the National Travel Management Rule allows for limited motor vehicle use for dispersed camping and for big game retrieval on National Forest System lands adjacent to roads or trails under the jurisdiction of public road authorities (e.g. county roads, State highways). The new national policy direction for travel management contains the following objectives:

1. To provide sustainable access in a fiscally responsible manner to NFS lands for administration, protection, utilization, and enjoyment of NFS lands and resources consistent with the applicable land management plan.
2. To manage the forest transportation system, including motor vehicle use on NFS roads, trails and areas, within the environmental capabilities of the land.
3. To provide an appropriate range of recreation opportunities on NFS lands and to minimize conflicts among uses of NFS lands.
4. To manage the forest transportation system to address user safety and convenience and efficiency of operations in an environmentally responsible manner and, where needed, to restore ecosystems along NFS roads and NFS trails designated for motor vehicle use within the limits of current and anticipated funding levels.
5. To coordinate travel planning and analysis on NFS lands with federal, state, county, and other local governmental entities and tribal governments and to allow the public to participate in the designation of NFS roads, NFS trails, and areas on NFS lands for motor vehicle use.
6. To designate those roads, trails, and areas on NFS lands open to motor vehicle use.

This OHV project is consistent with the new national travel management and planning policy and handbook direction.

Table S-2: Comparison of the Effects of Implementing Alternatives for a Designated OHV route System

This section provides a summary of the effects of implementing each alternative. Information in the table is focused on those effects that help distinguish the differences among alternatives.

	Alternative A No Action	Alternative B Minimize the number of designated OHV routes	Alternative C Use seasonal restrictions more than closures for designated OHV routes	Alternative D Initial Preferred Alternative	Alternative E Maximize the number of designated OHV routes
Motorized Recreation: Effects on opportunities for motorized recreation including dispersed camping, OHV riding, and hunting access					
Miles of designated and managed motorized trail (spring season)	34 miles	17 miles	29 miles	30 miles	130 miles
Miles of designated and managed motorized trail (summer season)	34 miles	33 miles	100 miles	98 miles	140 miles
Miles of designated and managed motorized trail (fall season)	34 miles	20 miles	34 miles	65 miles	140 miles
Miles of designated and managed motorized trails and primitive roads open during the fall season	225 miles	163 miles	191 miles	239 miles	355 miles
% of project area accessed within 1 mile from open motorized routes during the fall season (other geographic areas do not vary more than 10% among alternatives)	* See Table Footnote	Blackrock – 82% Gros Ventre – 67% Snake/Munger 81%	Blackrock – 81% Gros Ventre – 60% Snake/Munger 84%	Blackrock – 88% Gros Ventre – 84% Snake/Munger 84%	Blackrock – 94% Gros Ventre – 93% Snake/Munger 96%
Miles of designated and managed motorized trail associated with a loop system	15	0.5	49.5	66	76.5
Non-motorized Recreation: Effects on opportunities for non-motorized recreation					
Number of acres at least ½ mile from motorized routes	* See Table Footnote	100,860 acres	85,255 acres	85,289 acres	74,137 acres
Miles of non-motorized trail		95 miles	70 miles	57 miles	35 miles
% of project area that meets primitive or semi-primitive non-motorized recreation setting criteria		39%	33%	33%	29%

Soils, Water Quality: Effects on route sustainability and potential for sedimentation into water bodies					
Miles of motorized routes within areas of unstable or marginally unstable land type	166 miles ** See Table Footnote	70 miles	102 miles	102 miles	122 miles
Wildlife: Effects on Wildlife including Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive species and Management Indicator species					
Elk habitat security (% of management areas with more than 30% minimum threshold value)***	* See Table Footnote	18%	18%	18%	9%
Density of motorized routes within elk calving areas		0.59 miles/sq mile	0.44 miles/sq mile	0.37 miles/sq mile	1.50 miles/sq mile
Miles of motorized routes within Gros Ventre pronghorn migratory corridor		28 miles	30 miles	29 miles	36 miles
% of secure grizzly bear habitat outside primary conservation area relative to 2003 baseline ****		78%	76%	76%	76%
Miles of motorized routes within 5km of sage grouse lek complex)		39 miles	45 miles	40 miles	47 miles
Density of motorized routes within peregrine falcon nest management zone		0.64 miles/sq mile	0.87 miles/sq mile	0.96 mile/sq mile	1.55 miles/sq mile
Special Areas: Effects on the character of inventoried roadless areas, Wilderness Study Areas, Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and National Parks					
Miles of motorized routes within ¼ mile of Parks, Wilderness, and WSAs	* See Table Footnote	46 miles	50 miles	46 miles	53 miles
Acres of non-motorized setting within inventoried roadless areas		69,878 acres	56,837 acres	55,787 acres	50,972 acres
Cultural Resources: Effects on cultural resources					
Number of eligible sites or potentially eligible sites along motorized routes	75 sites	9 sites	11 sites	16 sites	17 sites
Number of sites with potential adverse effects	75 sites	0 sites	2 sites	2 sites	3 sites
Management of Motorized System: Effects on the complexity of the system (affects cost and ability to enforce regulations)					
Number of dead-end trails not associated with a loop system	4 system trails	9 trails	13 trails	12 trails	24 trails

Number of routes with seasonal restrictions	21 routes	26 routes	46 routes	42 routes	28 routes
Number of gates and barriers necessary to provide field management of the system	92	191	206	209	211

* Indicator uses miles of open motorized routes to evaluate effects. Unlike the action alternatives, OHVs are not restricted to designated routes under Alternative A. It is not possible to determine a linear unit such as miles of OHV routes (system and non-system) due to the dynamic nature of user created routes within the unrestricted areas.

** The number of miles of motorized route located in marginally unstable or unstable land types for the No Action alternative is based only on the miles of system roads and trails within the project area combined with the miles of known non-system trails. The actual mileage of motorized routes for Alternative A is likely higher. This mileage is provided only to give some estimate of how Alternative A compares with the other alternatives.

*** If no roads were present in the Management Areas, 64% of the MAs would provide more than 30% secure habitat. Minimum 30% threshold value is recommended by Hillis et al. (1991) to limit elk vulnerability during hunting season.

**** All action alternatives are consistent with current management direction and standards inside the primary conservation area because they all either maintain or improve secure habitat. Outside the primary conservation areas, secure habitat is improved for the Gros Ventre and Snake Bear Analysis Units under all of the action alternatives but declines for the Hoback Bear Analysis Unit. The percent of secure habitat improves at least 10% for the action alternatives compared to the No Action alternative. The percents displayed in this table represent the Snake Bear Analysis Unit. Other units do not vary among alternatives. All analysis units have greater than 70% secure habitat under the action alternatives indicative of a low level of human influence on bears and their habitat.

