



File Code: 1950/2350

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Dear Friend of the Caribou-Targhee:

The Caribou-Targhee National Forest is proposing to refine the existing trail network in the Caribou Mountains Subsection. The goal of this project is to provide and manage trail opportunities for ATVs, motorcycles, mountain bikes and non-motorized uses that are safe, environmentally sound, affordable to manage and maintain, and responsive to public needs. The Forest also proposes to close the Caribou Mountains Subsection to cross-country (off-trail) use by bicycles and other mechanized uses.

The project area is in Southeastern Idaho within Bonneville County. The area includes National Forest System lands between Idaho Falls, Idaho and Alpine, Wyoming - south of the South Fork of the Snake River and west of Palisades Reservoir. The Forest Plan identified the area as the Caribou Mountains Subsection (1997 Revised Forest Plan, page III-63).

This project will not reanalyze all aspects of travel management planning in the Caribou Mountains Subsection. Winter travel or road management will not be addressed. Only trail system management will be evaluated.

1.1 Background Information

The 1999 Motorized Road and Trail Travel Plan (Travel Plan) developed a road and trail system for the Targhee National Forest which complied with direction from the 1997 Revised Forest Plan (RFP). A major objective of the plan was to resolve conflict by finding integrated, compatible management methods and prescriptions that allow public use of roads and trails to occur in a way that can best meet the needs of the resources and the recreating public. In other words, the plan was developed so that it would be compatible with other resource objectives, such as protecting soils, water quality, riparian habitat, wildlife habitat, and other forest resources while providing a transportation system that was safe, environmentally sound, affordable to manage and maintain, and responsive to public needs.

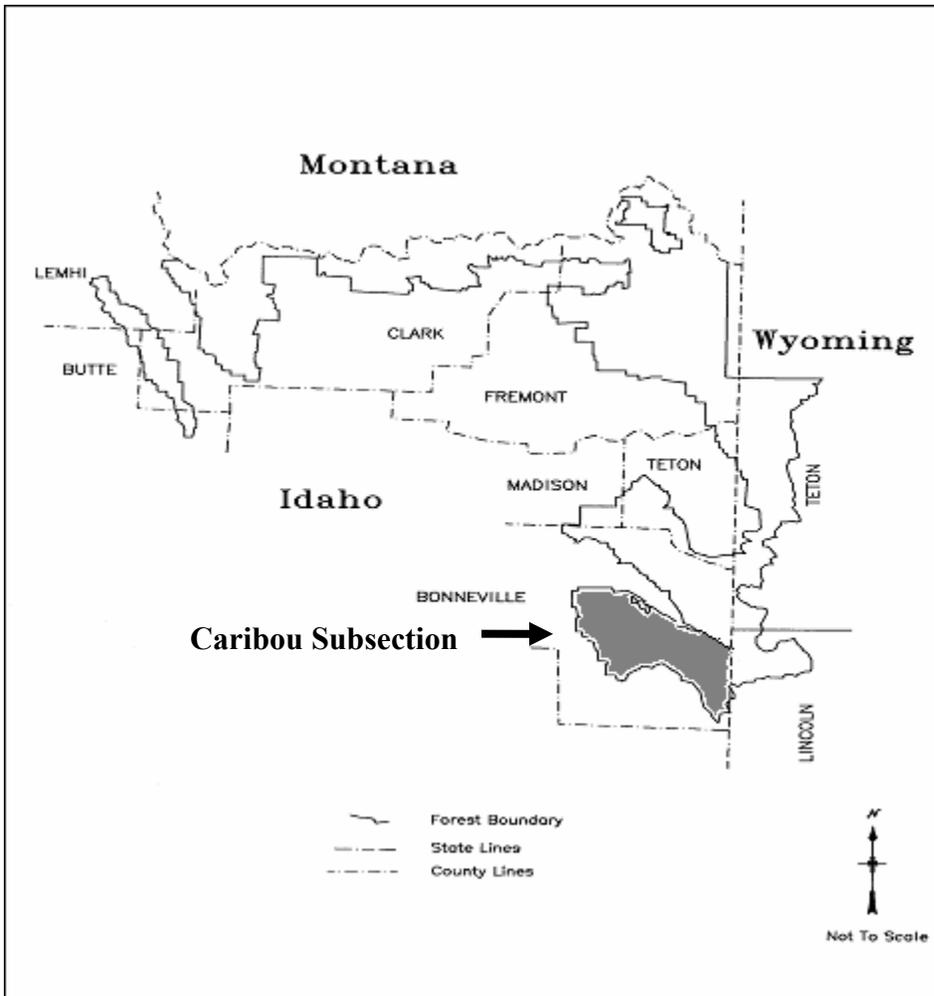
Existing Condition: When preparing the 1999 Travel Plan, the Forest did not have some of the site specific condition data on trails that is now available. Revised Forest Plan direction (page III-27) required an interdisciplinary review of 5-10 percent of the trails each year to determine rehabilitation needs. During the past five years, the Forest has completed much of the monitoring and now has a better inventory of the existing trail system.

The 1999 Travel Plan designated roads and trails open to motorized use on the Targhee National Forest. On trails, it made the distinction between vehicles over 50 inches in width and those less than 50 inches in width. The travel plan designated trails that were "Open for Motorized Use less than 50 inches wide *but not recommended for ATVs*" and trails that were "Open for



Motorized Use less than 50 inches wide *and suitable for ATVs*". The travel plan also closed the Caribou Mountain Subsection to cross-country motorized use but allowed cross-country travel by mountain bikes/mechanized vehicles throughout the Caribou Mountain Subsection.

Figure 1 - Vicinity Map: Caribou Mountains Subsection



1.2 Purpose of and Need for Action

The **purpose** of this analysis is to refine the existing trail network in the Caribou Mountains Subsection to provide and manage trail opportunities for all recreation user groups, reduce user-conflicts and create a balanced network of trails that are safe, environmentally sound, affordable to manage and maintain, and responsive to public needs.

The **need** for this analysis is to clarify ambiguity discovered during the implementation of the existing Travel Plan Map that allows ATV use on single-track trails that are shown as “not recommended for ATV use” on the current Travel Plan Map (2001). A considerable increase in ATV use has occurred in the area during the last several years. Some trails are sustaining use by ATVs but in need of minor modification to support the anticipated increase in ATV use. However, ATV use on single track trails *that were not designed for ATV use* has posed safety risks for visitors and damage to vegetation, soils and in some cases, the trails capability to support other uses.

Since the 1999 Travel Plan was adopted, there has been an increase in the recreation use levels of all types of trail use which has increased user conflicts on the trails. Some motorcycle riders have expressed concern that the Forest would widen existing single-track trails and reduce grades to accommodate ATV use on trails used traditionally by motorcycle riders. The combination of increased recreation use, user conflicts and trail use beyond the capability of the trail design has resulted in damage to the existing trail system and a proliferation of user-created trails.

1.3 Proposed Action

Please note: For visual comparison, see the maps and additional tables posted at our website: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/caribou-targhee/caribou-targhee/palisades/>. The attached “Table 2.2” provides detailed information regarding the management of each trail that will have a change from the existing situation.

The actions proposed by the Caribou-Targhee National Forest to meet the purpose and need are:

1. **Develop a clearly defined plan for a mix of trails** designed and managed specifically for all terrain vehicles (ATVs), motorcycles, mountain bikes and non-motorized uses that are safe, environmentally sound, affordable to manage and maintain, and responsive to public need.
2. **Close all or portions of the Caribou Mountain Subsection to cross-country use (off-trail) by mountain bicycles.**
3. **Analyze the effects of relocating specific sections of trails** that may be necessary to accommodate the designated use in a safe and sustainable manner and comply with Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines.

The following summarizes what would be provided by the Forest Proposed Action:

- 208.1 total miles of trails for motorized and non-motorized uses. (All miles would be open for horse, hiking, and mountain bikes).
- 57.8 miles open to ATVs less than 50 inches wide. These trails would also be open to single track vehicles (motorcycles) and non-motorized uses.
- 103.2 miles open to Single Track motorized vehicles (motorcycles) and non-motorized uses.
- Increases total motorized trails by 9.1 miles.
- 47.1 miles open to non-motorized and mechanized uses (includes mountain bikes).
- Increases total non-motorized trails by 9.6 miles.
- Reconstruction of 4.5 miles of trails to meet ATV standards.
- Construction of 8.5 miles of new ATV trails.
- Re-routes 10.95 miles of trails (not show in Table 2.2 estimated only).
- Construction of 5.2 miles of new non-motorized trails.
- Converts 1.5 miles of non-motorized trails to motorized trails.
- Converts 4.2 miles of motorized trails to non-motorized trails
- Decommissions 1.8 miles of existing trails.
- Converts 3.9 miles of system road to ATV Trails
- Perform normal yearly trail maintenance as needed.
- Converts 5.2 miles of existing non-motorized non-system trails to non-motorized system trails
- Converts 13.2 miles of existing motorized non-system trails to motorized system trails

When these recommendations are completed on the ground, this action would provide the following loop trail opportunities:

- Approximately 41.04 miles of loop trails for ATVs, (This is very difficult to determine because of the numerous possibilities. Road travel was not considered in loop travel).
- Numerous loop trail possibilities for two-wheel motorized vehicles (motorcycles) and non-motorized uses.

1.4 No Action Alternative

The no action alternative will be analyzed and be based on the existing situation. This action would leave the summer trail system and plan in place for the Caribou Mountain Subsection. This action is displayed on the current Travel Map for the Palisades Ranger Districts – dated 2001.

The following summarizes what currently exists:

- Approximately 187 total miles of motorized and non-motorized trails
- Approximately 128.2 miles of trails open to two wheel motorized use less than 50 inches wide but not recommended for ATVs.

- Approximately 23.2 miles of trails open to motorized use less than 50 inches wide and suitable for ATVs.
- Approximately 35.6 miles of trails open to non-motorized use, including bicycles.

Normal yearly trail maintenance would continue to occur. No trails would be re-routed, no segments would be closed or rehabilitated, no reconstruction of existing trails to better accommodate ATVs (i.e., widening) would occur, and no new construction would take place in order to create viable loop trails. Trail or trail segments would not be re-designated for a different type of motorized vehicle use beyond what currently exists. Mountain bikes would continue to be allowed to travel cross-country.

1.5 Preliminary Issues

The Forest Service separates the substantive comments into two groups: significant and non-significant issues. Significant issues will be defined as those that may directly or indirectly be affected by implementing the proposed action. Non-significant issues will be identified as those: 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan or other higher level decision; 3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations require this delineation in Sec. 1501.7, "...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)..."

Preliminary Issues to be considered in this Analysis

Based on previous comments the following potential issues have been identified:

- **Fisheries, Water Quality, and Soil Erosion:** Designated trail use (non-motorized versus motorized), trail location, trail design and trail maintenance have the potential to affect soil erosion and mass instability, negatively or positively which could directly affect water quality and aquatic habitats by increasing or reducing sediment into streams.
 - Potential Indicators:**
 1. Miles of trails within the Aquatic Influence Zone (AIZ).
 2. Acres of disturbance in the Aquatic Influence Zone.
 3. Acres and or miles of trails returned to productivity.
- **Wildlife and Riparian Habitat:** Trail reconstruction, improvements and relocation could directly affect plant and wildlife habitat and result in measurable disturbance to wildlife species (including Threatened, Endangered, Candidate, Sensitive and Management Indicator Species).
 - Potential Indicators:**
 1. Acres of wildlife habitat removed.
 2. Relative disturbance to wildlife species
 3. Acres of forest removed (by age class).
 4. Acres of habitat affected.

- **Recreational Use:** Public use satisfaction and law enforcement needs may be affected negatively or positively by several factors such as having trails start and end where users want to travel, providing loop trail opportunities for the various user groups, performing proper trail design for the intended use, and providing a mix of trails designated for specific user groups or mode of travel.

Potential Indicators:

1. Miles of ATV trails.
2. Miles of Single Track Motorized trails.
3. Miles of non-motorized trails.
4. Miles of trails to be reconstructed to meet ATV standards.
5. Miles of new trails to be constructed for ATV use.
6. Miles of new trails to be constructed for Single Track Motorized use.
7. Miles of new trails to be constructed for Non-Motorized use.
8. Miles of trails to be obliterated.
9. Miles of trails to be re-routed.
10. Miles of loop trails for ATV and Single Track Motorized vehicles.
11. Miles of existing road segments needed to create viable trail loops for ATVs and Single Track Motorized vehicles.

An Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) will analyze and disclose the environmental effects of this proposal. Comments received in response to this Scoping Document will be considered. In general, the effects of the closure of the Caribou Subsection to cross-country motorized uses and the designation of motorized trails have been analyzed in the Revised Forest Plan EIS, the 1997 Travel Plan EIS, and the 1999 Travel Plan EIS. To eliminate repetitive discussions of the same issues and to focus on the actual issues for decision, the IDT will tier to and incorporate by reference these documents, where appropriate. Additional alternatives will be approved by the District Rangers and analyzed by the IDT. There will be an additional opportunity for review and comment regarding the proposed action which will be sent out when the analysis is completed – probably in the spring of 2009.

1.6 Decision to be Made

The District Ranger will be the Deciding Officer. After reviewing the environmental analysis and comments from the public, the District Ranger will decide:

1. Which motorized trails will be managed and maintained for ATV use in the Caribou Subsection?
2. Which motorized trails will be closed to ATV use in the Caribou Subsection?
3. Whether or not to close all or portions of the Caribou Subsection to cross-country (off-trail) bicycle use.
4. Whether or not to add more non-motorized trails to the system of Forest Trails.
5. Whether or not an Amendment to the Forest Plan or Travel Plan would be required.

1.7 Opportunity for Comment

How to Comment and Timeframe

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments will be accepted for 30 calendar days following publication of this notice in the **Idaho Falls Post Register**. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this proposal. You should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Written comments must be submitted to: **Ron D. Dickemore, District Ranger, Palisades Ranger District, 3659 East Ririe Highway, Idaho Falls, ID 83401**. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours via telephone 208-523-1412 or in person; or at an official agency function (i.e. public meeting) that is designed to elicit public comments. Electronic comments must be submitted in rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to: comments-intermtn-caribou-targhee-palisades@fs.fed.us. Comments may also be faxed to 208-523-1418. Comments must meet the information requirements of 36 CFR 215.6. Only those who submit timely and substantive comments will be eligible to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR 215. Each individual or representative from each organization submitting substantive comments must either sign the comments or otherwise verify identity in order to attain appeal eligibility.

For additional information on the project, please phone Brent Porter at (208) 523-1412 or e-mail to: bporter@fs.fed.us.

Mass printing of the maps is cost prohibitive. Therefore, I am requesting that you view the maps at the following website:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/caribou-targhee/caribou-targhee/palisades>

Maps will also be available for review at the Palisades Ranger District offices, Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection under the Freedom of Information Act.

Sincerely,

/s/ Ron D. Dickemore

RON D. DICKEMORE
District Ranger

Enclosure: Table 2.2