

# Chapter 1

## Purpose and Need

### *Introduction*

This Environmental Assessment (EA) discloses the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the proposal to repair the washout on Indian Creek Road (Forest Development Road #036).

This chapter outlines the Proposed Action, Purpose and Need, and Decision Framework of this proposal. This chapter describes how the proposal implements the Salmon National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) (USDA Forest Service, 1988) and other laws and regulations, and also describes the environmental issues derived from public involvement and other scoping activities, including cumulative effects issues.

### *Background*

During the spring snowmelt of 1997 and associated runoff event, natural channel obstructions caused Indian Creek to drop its bedload and fill up a short reach of the existing channel. This obstruction caused the stream to change course and flow down the adjacent road that was located in the floodplain.

Approximately 700 feet of Indian Creek Road washed out during the spring 1997 snowmelt runoff. The washed out portion of the road is on National Forest System (NFS) land, but was not immediately replaced because access was in dispute where the road passed through private property. The upper boundary of the private property is about .3 miles downstream from the washed out area.

This washed out stream reach was evaluated in 2000 to determine if there were watershed and fisheries habitat benefits by restoring Indian Creek back to the channel it occupied prior to the 1997 flood event. After field reviews by the Forest Service, NOAA Fisheries and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, it was determined that there would only be minimal fisheries or watershed benefits in restoring Indian Creek to the previously occupied channel (USDA Forest Service, 2000)

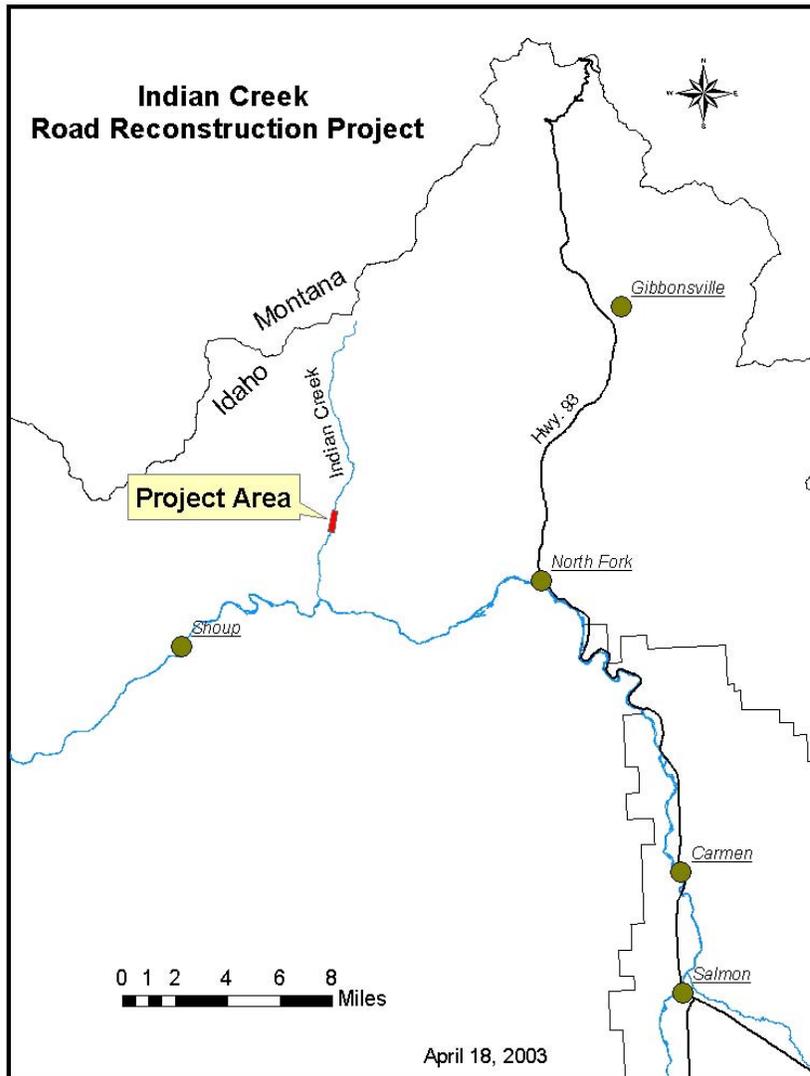
Indian Creek provides important habitat for spawning steelhead, bull trout, and salmon. Currently, because of the road washout, motorized vehicles cannot get through the area without driving up the creek and through the riparian habitat. To protect this important habitat, Acting Forest Supervisor Bob Russell signed a closure order prohibiting motor vehicles from traveling through the wash out area of the road where it crosses Indian Creek. The upper reaches of Indian Creek Road can still be accessed by motor vehicles by using either the Sage Creek Road or the Hull Creek Road and then driving down the East Fork of Indian Creek. However, these roads are snow packed later in the season than the Indian Creek Road.

Since 1997 the status of the Indian Creek Road has been in litigation in the courts. On December 27, 2002 the Idaho Supreme Court determined Indian Creek Road to be a public road. With this ruling the Forest Service began the analysis process to determine if, how and where to repair the Indian Creek Road washout.

## *Description of the Area*

The project area is within the Lower Salmon River Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 7 Watershed, approximately 10 miles west of North Fork, Idaho. The proposed project activities are located about three miles north of the Salmon River Road, within T 24 N, R 20 E, section 6, Boise principal meridian on the North Fork Ranger District of the Salmon-Challis National Forest, Lemhi County, Idaho (Maps 1-3, pages 1-2 through 1-4).

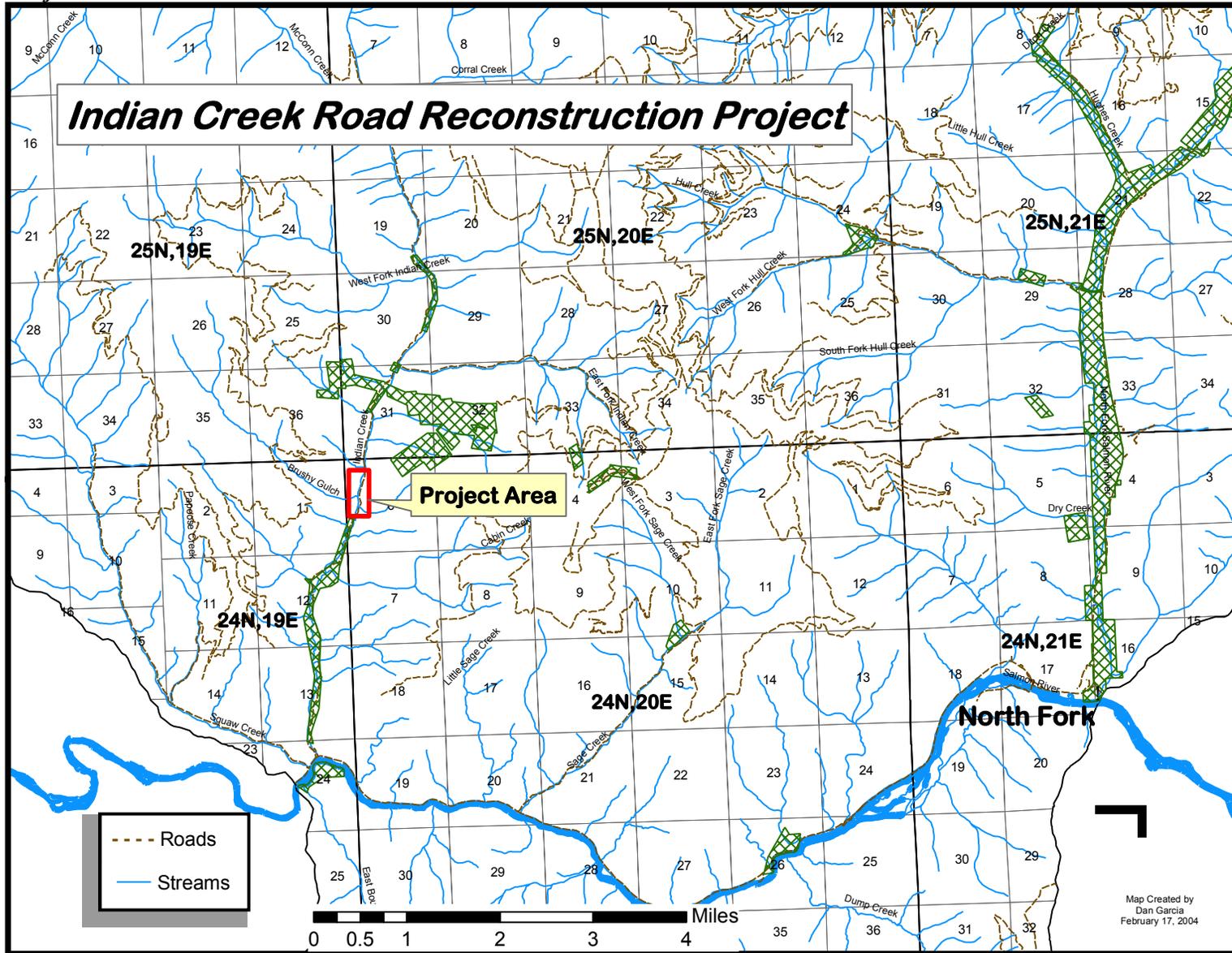
**Map 1. Vicinity Map**



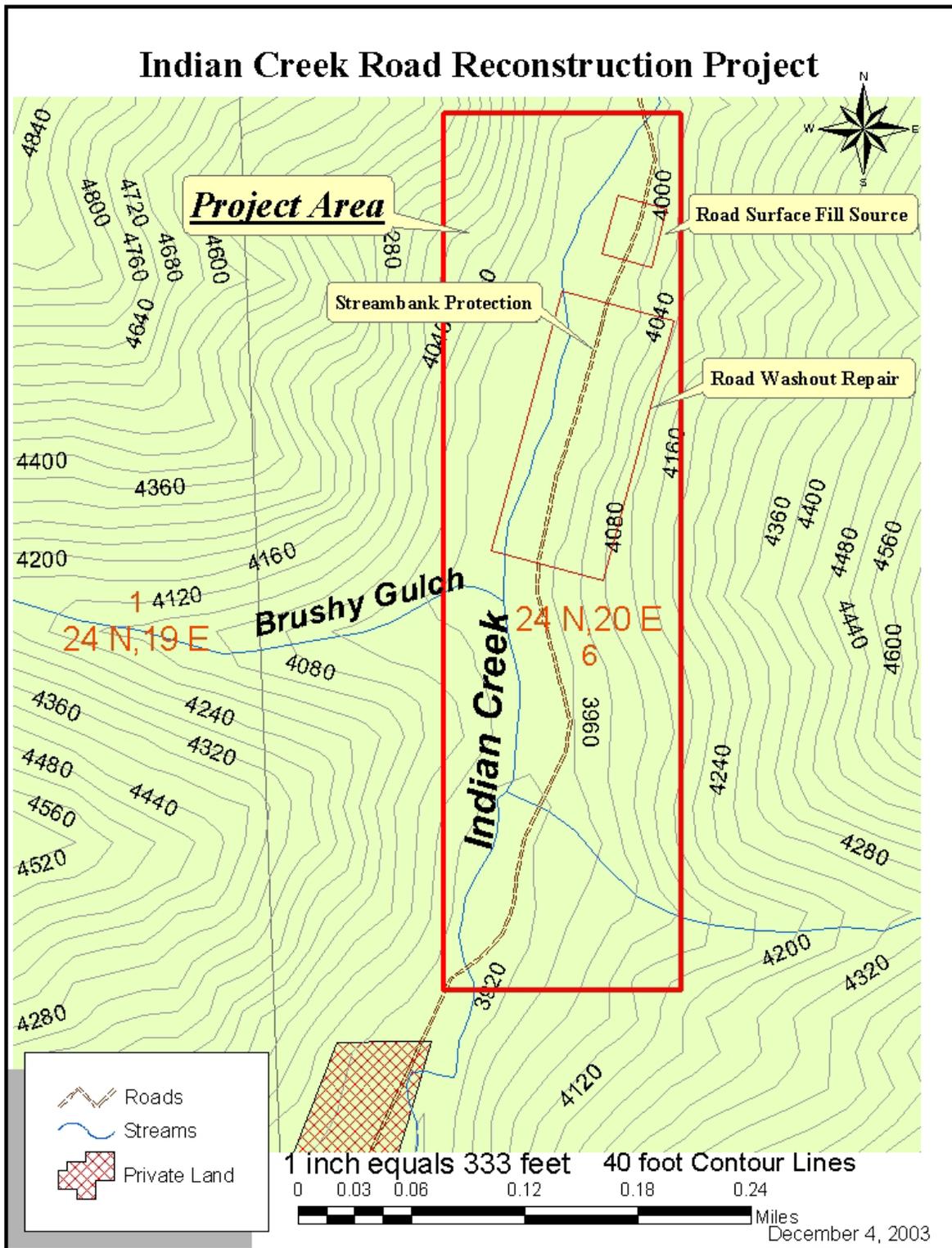
## *Proposed Action*

The Forest Service proposes to repair the Indian Creek road washout by constructing a new road prism adjacent to Indian Creek. This will involve removing a small area of trees, which will be used as log barriers between the road and the stream. There will also be streambank protection and the development of a small amount of borrow material in the area.

Map 2. Project Area



Map 3. Project Area



## ***Purpose and Need for This Action***

The purpose of this proposal is to restore motorized road access on the Indian Creek road to both public and private land within the drainage.

The following specific needs have been identified:

1. Meet the direction of the Idaho Supreme Court Ruling.
2. Provide public land access for recreation, hunting, fishing, and firewood gathering.
3. Provide access to 500 acres of private land using the Indian Creek Road. The alternative road access is longer, more limiting to certain types of vehicular traffic, and has a shorter access season. It does not allow for the delivery of needed supplies to private landowners and severely impairs private landowner's emergency medical and law enforcement services.
4. Provide Forest Service motorized road access. This is needed through the washout area for administrative purposes, including for wildfire suppression, to National Forest System Lands above the washout.

## ***Relationship to the Forest Plan***

This EA tiers to the Forest Plan. The Forest Plan provides overall forest management direction, under Forest Management Goals, Forest-Wide Direction, Desired Future Condition, and Management Area Direction:

**Forest Management Goals** describe how the Forest will be administered to assure long-term protection and utilization of resources for the people of the United States. The proposed action would fulfill Forest Plan goals to:

- Be responsive to public and private needs for use of National Forest land (Forest Plan, page IV-3).
- Develop and maintain a Forest Transportation system that provides safe, economical, functional, and environmentally sound access for managing and protecting the Forest resources (Forest Plan, page IV-4).

**Forest-Wide Direction** provides management requirements that set the baseline conditions that must be maintained throughout the Forest in carrying out the Forest Plan. The proposed action would fulfill the Management Activities, General Direction Statements, and Standard and Guidelines displayed in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1 Management Requirements**

Management Activities	General Direction	Standards & Guidelines
Transportation System Management (L01 & 20) Forest Plan (IV-62 thru 63)	<p>4. Keep existing roads open to public motorized use unless: (LMP, page IV-64)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Financing is not available to maintain the facility or manage the associated use of adjacent lands;</li> <li>B. Use causes unacceptable damage to soil and water resources;</li> <li>C. Use conflicts with other resource objectives for the area;</li> <li>D. They are located in areas closed to motorized use and are not “designated routes” in the Forest Travel Management Direction.</li> <li>E. Use results in unsafe conditions unrelated to weather conditions; or,</li> <li>F. There is little or no public need for them.</li> </ul>	<p>a. Use the “R4 Technical Guide to Erosion Control on Timber Sales” as a guide for transportation systems, erosion prevention and control measures.</p>
Local Road Construction and Reconstruction (L11 thru L13) Forest Plan (IV-65)	<p>4. Construct and reconstruct local roads to provide access for specific resource activities such as campgrounds, trailheads, timber sales, range allotments, mineral leases, etc., with the minimum amount of earthwork.</p>	<p>a. Construction and reconstruction standards for local roads are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travel Speed – Average Less Than 20 MPH</li> <li>• Lanes – Usually single lane except for developed recreation sites</li> <li>• Surface – Varies from asphalt to native surface; majority native surface</li> <li>• Width – Typically 10 thru 14 feet. Turnouts optional depending upon traffic management</li> <li>• Drainage – Dips and culverts</li> </ul>
Road Maintenance (L19) Forest Plan (IV-66)	<p>1. Maintain all roads to the following minimum requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. All arterial and open collectors – Level 3</li> <li>B. All open local roads – Level 2</li> <li>C. All closed roads – Level 1</li> </ul>	<p>a. Level 1 maintenance includes upkeep of drainage structures and vegetation cover necessary to prevent erosion</p>

**Desired Future Conditions (DFC)** are a description of the Forest, which is expected to result from implementation of the Forest Plan. The following DFCs will be met through the proposed action:

- A safe, functional, and environmentally sound transportation system will be developed (Forest Plan, page IV-93).

**Management Area Description** contains the specific management area prescriptions for the Forest.

There is one management area (MA) within the project area:

- MA-4A: Emphasis is on providing required forage and cover on big game winter ranges. Winter habitat for elk, deer, big horn sheep, mountain goats, and/or pronghorn antelope is emphasized. Motorized use of new and/or existing roads and trails is managed to prevent unacceptable stress on big game animals during the primary use period (Forest Plan, page IV-95 and 110).

### ***Decision Framework***

Using this EA, the North Fork District Ranger will decide the following in accordance with Forest Plan goals, direction and desired future conditions:

- Whether or not to repair the Indian Creek road washout.
- If the decision is made to repair the road washout, then the location and type of road reconstruction work.
- What mitigation and/or monitoring, if any, will be included in the decision.

### ***Scoping and Public Involvement***

Numerous methods were used to involve the public and agencies in the analysis:

- A legal notice describing the proposal and seeking public comment was published in the *Salmon Recorder Herald* on April 3, 2003.
- A scoping letter dated May 8, 2003 was mailed to approximately 150 individuals, organizations and federal, State and local agencies, describing the proposed project and alternatives and requesting input on issues.
- A joint Forest Service and Lemhi County Commissioners Public meeting/open house was held in Salmon on May 22, 2003.
- Appropriate governments and government agencies were contacted, including the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NOAA Fisheries, and Idaho Department of Fish and Game. Field trips with representatives of NOAA Fisheries and the US Fish and Wildlife Service were conducted over the past year.
- The proposal was described in the Salmon-Challis National Forest quarterly *Schedule of Proposed Actions*, which is mailed to approximately 125 individuals and organizations. The proposal was also posted on the Internet.

- The District Ranger met with the Lemhi County Commissioners at their May 12, 2003 public meeting and again along with two interdisciplinary team members at their December 22, 2003 meeting.
- A legal notice describing the new project proposal seeking public comment was published in the *Salmon Recorder Herald* on January 29, 2004.
- A scoping letter dated January 27, 2004 was mailed to 74 individuals, organizations and federal, State and local agencies, describing the new proposed project and alternatives and requesting input on issues. This letter also stated the EA is being completed under revised 36 CFR 215 appeal regulations, which became effective June 4, 2003.

During the extended scoping period 62 written responses were received. Comments in the letters centered on access and impacts. During the County Commissioner meetings, Lemhi County asserted the continuing need to restore the public road use of the Indian Creek road.

All comments received were reviewed and used to determine the issues analyzed in this EA. Copies of all the letters and responses are located in the project analysis file at the North Fork Ranger District.

### ***Issues***

An issue is a point of discussion, debate or dispute (about environmental effects) regarding the proposed action. Issues were identified through scoping and by the Forest Service interdisciplinary team. Based on this, the following four Issues were used to formulate alternatives, prescribe mitigation measures and analyze environmental effects.

### **Water Quality**

The proposed action has the potential to adversely affect water quality by increasing sediment delivery to Indian Creek.

#### **Indicators:**

- Sediment Yield
- Effects on Water Quality and Beneficial Uses
- Watershed Risk Rating

### **Public Access & Safety**

The proposed action will affect access and emergency services to private and public lands

#### **Indicators:**

- Road access condition, distance and seasonality

### **Noxious Weeds**

The proposed action could increase the spread of established noxious weed populations and promote the introduction of new, exotic invaders.

#### **Indicators:**

- Acres infested by noxious weeds

### **Other Resource Concerns Covered by Law**

#### **Fish and Wildlife**

The proposed action could affect important fish, other riparian habitats and wildlife species and/or their habitats.

#### **Indicators:**

**Wildlife:** Measurement indices used to predict effects on management indicator species, R4 sensitive species, federally listed species and/or their habitats include: winter range, coniferous habitats with snags, riparian zones.

**Fisheries:** Measurement indices used to predict effects on management indicator species, R4 sensitive species, federally listed species and/or their habitats include: stream habitat, fish species and population trends, stream sediment, and stream temperature.

### ***Cumulative Effects Issues***

Cumulative effects consist of the direct and indirect effects resulting from the incremental impact of the proposed action or alternatives, when added to other past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of who carries out the action (40 CFR 1508.7). All of the environmental issues carried forward for analysis in this EA have the potential for cumulative effects.

For the purposes of this EA, the general temporal boundaries of analysis are from 1975 to 2015 for most cumulative effects. This 40-year period encompasses a range within which data is reasonably available and forecasts are reasonably foreseeable. The geographic boundaries of analysis vary depending on the specific resource and potential effects. Cumulative effects are shown in Table 1.2 and described in Chapter 3.

**Table 1.2 Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Actions Analyzed**

Cumulative Action	Past	Present	Future
Proposed Action (Road Construction)			X
Fires, both wildfire and management ignited	X	X	X
Timber Sales	X		
Mining Operations	X		
Livestock Grazing	X	X	X
Personal use firewood harvesting	X	X	X
Motorized recreation, both summer and winter		X	X
Noxious Weeds (approx. 100 acres)		X	X
Private Land Development and Activities	X	X	X
Private Land Road Development, ingress and egress (approx. 0.15 miles)	X		X
Public Hunting and Travel	X	X	X
Special Use Permits (hunting, trail rides, water transmission line, irrigation ditch)	X	X	X
Fish Habitat Restoration (approximately 0.5 miles)	X		X
Fish Propagation (2 steelhead egg hatch boxes)	X		
Indianola Helibase (FS Administrative Site)	X	X	X
Fuels Reduction Project (approximately 1000 acres)			X

***Topics Not Specifically Analyzed In This EA***

The public raised some of the concerns or topics listed below during the scoping process. Others are required to be addressed by other laws or regulations but are not analyzed in detail in this EA. These topics are outside the scope of the analysis for the reasons shown, or are controlled by law or regulation, or are addressed in reports or other NEPA documents, which are in the project file. None of these topics drive specific alternatives and none have been determined to be significant under 40 CFR 1501.7.

**Heritage**

Completed cultural resource surveys can be found in the project file. Indian Creek road is one of the earliest roads in the Forest. While the road itself is identified as a heritage resource, it has been determined ineligible to the National Historic Preservation Act (amended 1980) based on its lack of historic integrity. During intensive inventories in the area, no significant historic properties or adverse affects were identified.

**Wild and Scenic Rivers**

There are no existing, proposed or eligible wild and scenic rivers within the project area. The project area is approximately 2.5 miles north of the Recreational segment of the designated Wild and Scenic Salmon River.

**Recreation**

Recreational uses are primarily related to driving for pleasure, hiking, hunting, fishing and firewood gathering. These needs are identified and analyzed through the access issue.

**Old Growth**

As part of the Forest Plan planning process, old growth stands have been selected to be retained as old growth habitat. They represent a diverse cross section of forested sites and forest habitat types. Old growth stands include those stands, which qualify as old growth at the present time, as well as those stands that will be retained and managed as future old growth areas. Designated old growth retention stands are identified and mapped on overlays keyed to 7.5-minute USGS topographic maps (North Fork Ranger District files).

One designated old growth stand of approximately 69 acres is within the vicinity of the proposed project area. A small portion (approximately ten percent, or 7 acres) of this designated stand is contained within the boundaries of the project area and located approximately 0.1 miles from the proposed construction activities. The portion of the designated old growth stand located within the proposed project area will not be impacted by the construction activities because these activities will occur outside the designated stand.