

DECISION NOTICE

WILLETT CREEK, FOREST SERVICE ROAD 226 REROUTE PROJECT

USDA Forest Service
Bighorn National Forest
Medicine Wheel Ranger District
Big Horn County, Wyoming

DECISION

Based on my review of the Willett Creek Forest Service Road 226 Reroute Project Environmental Assessment (Environmental Assessment), I have decided to implement the proposed action as summarized here.

- ◆ In the Willett Creek Forest Service Road 226 Reroute project area, a new 0.14 mile segment of Forest Service Road 226 will be rerouted and constructed at the unnamed tributary to Willett Creek (downstream of the current crossing at a narrower portion of the stream).
- ◆ In the Willett Creek Forest Service Road 226 Reroute project area, there will be a closure and decommissioning of the old water crossing including those portions of the old road (0.1 mile) from where the new segment starts and rejoins the existing road. See figure 1 in the Environmental Assessment.

All design features (table 2 in the Environmental Assessment) and monitoring (table 3 in the Environmental Assessment) will be adhered to during implementation of the project.

DECISION RATIONALE

I have reviewed the environmental analysis and the project record for the Willett Creek Forest Service Road 226 Reroute project area. I have determined that the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment; therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required.

My decision to implement the proposed action is consistent with the purpose and need of the project. The no action alternative was not selected because it would provide for the continuation of existing conditions, which are inconsistent with the purpose and need of this project and the objectives, guidelines, and desired conditions of the Bighorn National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) (Environmental Assessment pages 5 and 6). The project will provide for the desired conditions of public use while improving aquatic and soil conditions within the Willett Creek tributary riparian corridor. My decision is consistent with the Forest Plan. The management area prescription for the project area is 3.31 backcountry recreation, year-round motorized use, which includes desired conditions and guidelines for providing opportunities for semi-primitive motorized use.

I am selecting the proposed action because it is the result of the continuous improvement process that occurred during the development of the Environmental Assessment. It reflects changes made in response to issues, concerns, and new information as they surfaced. Public input, primarily from off-highway vehicle users, supported the project and dominated the process which affected my decision. The Environmental Assessment and the project record document the analysis of environmental effects and conclusions that I considered in making my decision.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This project was listed on the Bighorn National Forest's schedule of proposed actions report and updated periodically during the analysis. People were invited to review and comment on the proposal through letters, web postings, legal notices, and personal contacts. The Environmental Assessment lists agencies and people consulted on page 4. The complete public involvement process is described in the Environmental Assessment on pages 4 and 5.

The project proposal was announced in a legal notice of proposed action, which was printed in the Casper-Star Tribune on February 23, 2015, initiating a 30-day public scoping period ending March 25, 2015. The project was listed on the Bighorn National Forest's projects website beginning in February 2015. An information letter and scoping document were distributed to 15 individuals, organizations, agencies, and American Indian tribes for their comment. Comments were primarily received from off-highway vehicle users and organizations.

The Environmental Assessment lists the issues developed from internal and external scoping, including consideration of the comments received. A list of all issues and concerns is in the project record. The 29 comments received during the scoping were used to refine the proposed action and I considered them in my decision.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

National Forest Management Act: My decision is consistent with the Forest Plan. The project will implement the Forest Plan through strategic actions that address the following objectives:

- ◆ Attain or maintain water quality necessary to comply with state of Wyoming water quality standards in all streams on the forest. Water must be of sufficient quality to support state-designated beneficial uses and healthy riparian, aquatic, and wetland ecosystems (chapter 1, goal 1, objective 1a, strategy 1).
- ◆ Complete watershed scale improvement projects, such as road relocations or improvements, on at least three 5th-level Hydrologic Unit Code watersheds within 15 years. Annually complete an average of three watershed improvement projects in priority watersheds, such as road/trail stabilizations, culvert replacements, and dispersed campsite management. Prioritize watersheds considered in degraded condition by Winters et al. 2004 (chapter 1, goal 1, objective 1a, strategy 2).
- ◆ Manage riparian and aquatic habitat, including springs and fens, to support well-distributed populations of native plant, invertebrate and vertebrate riparian and aquatic-dependent species (chapter 1, goal 1, objective 1b, strategy 11).
- ◆ Provide for motorized and nonmotorized dispersed recreation opportunities (chapter 1, goal 2, objective 2a, strategy 10).
- ◆ Provide recreation opportunities to accommodate a wide range of abilities and activities and ensure non-discrimination in the delivery of Bighorn National Forest programs (chapter 1, goal 4, objective 4a, strategy 2).
- ◆ Improve travel management, provide a wide range of recreation opportunities, and maintain forest facilities, buildings, roads, and trails in an efficient manner (chapter 1, goal 4).
- ◆ Maintain 20 percent of all objective maintenance level 2 roads to standard annually (chapter 1, goal 4, objective 4a, strategy 4).
- ◆ Improve the safety and economy of Forest Service roads, trails, facilities, and operations (chapter 1, goal 4, objective 4a).

Endangered Species Act: Biological evaluations were completed for threatened, endangered, proposed, and sensitive animal species. No threatened or endangered animal will be affected by implementation of my decision (Environmental Assessment pages 11 and 12).

National Historic Preservation Act of 1966: Implementing my decision will not affect cultural resources in the project area. For the Willett Creek Forest Service Road 226 Reroute Project analysis area, the forest reached findings of *no effect* in 2015. Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office concurrence was documented in a letter dated April 15, 2015 (Environmental Assessment page 8).

Executive Order 12898 Environmental Justice: Implementation of this project is not anticipated to cause disproportionate adverse human health or environmental effect to minority or low-income populations.

OBJECTION OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is subject to objection pursuant to federal regulations at 36 CFR 218. This project implements an existing land management plan and is not authorized by the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. It is subject to 36 CFR subparts A and B. Objections, including attachments, must be in writing and filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand delivery, express delivery, or messenger service) with the objection reviewing officer (36 CFR 218.8) within 45 days following the date of publication of a legal notice announcing the opportunity to object in the Casper Star-Tribune. The publication date of the legal notice in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Those wishing to object should not rely on dates or timeframes provided by any other source (36 CFR 218.6(c)).

Objections will be accepted only from those who have previously submitted specific written comments during a designated opportunity for public comment (36 CFR 218.5(a)). Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project or activity and attributed to the objector, unless the issue is based on new information that arose after the opportunities to comment (36 CFR 218.8(c)). Objections must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 218.8(d) and include:

- ◆ Objector's name and address as defined in 36 CFR 218.2, with a telephone number, if available.
- ◆ Signature or other verification of authorship upon request. (A scanned signature for electronic mail may be filed with the objection.)
- ◆ When multiple names are listed on an objection, identification of the lead objector as defined in 36 CFR 218.2. Verification of the identity of the lead objector must be provided upon request or the reviewing officer will designate a lead objector as provided in 36 CFR 218.5(d).
- ◆ The name of the proposed project, the name and title of the responsible official, and the name(s) of the national forest(s) and/or ranger district(s) on which the proposed project will be implemented.
- ◆ A description of those aspects of the proposed project addressed by the objection, including specific issues related to the proposed project; if applicable, how the objector believes the environmental analysis or draft decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy; suggested remedies that would resolve the objection; and supporting reasons for the reviewing officer to consider.
- ◆ A statement that demonstrates the connection between prior specific written comments on the particular proposed project or activity and the content of the objection, unless the objection concerns an issue that arose after the designated opportunities for comment.

It is the objector's responsibility to ensure timely filing of a written objection with the reviewing officer (36 CFR 218.9(a)).

The objection shall be sent to:

William T. Bass
Objection Reviewing Officer
USDA Forest Service, Region 2
Rocky Mountain Region
740 Simms Street
Golden, CO 80401-4720

Office hours are Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. MT, excluding federal holidays.

Fax: 303.275.5134

Email: r02admin_review@fs.fed.us Acceptable formats for electronic objections are rtf, pdf, txt, doc, or docx, with "Willett Creek Forest Service Road 226 Reroute" in the subject line.

Objections, including names and addresses, will become part of the public record and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act.

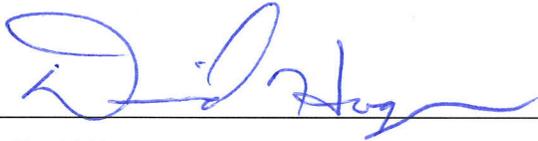
IMPLEMENTATION DATE

If no objection is filed within the objection filing period, approval of the proposed project may occur on, but not before, the fifth business day following the end of the objection filing period (36 CFR 218.12(c)(2)). If an objection is filed, the responsible official may not sign this decision until all concerns and instructions identified by the reviewing officer in the objection response have been addressed (36 CFR 218.12(b)).

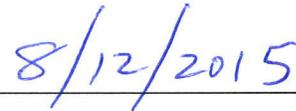
Implementation on the ground is expected to take place over the next two field seasons, depending on the necessary funding and resources. The project may be implemented in stages.

CONTACTS FOR MORE INFORMATION

For additional information concerning this decision, contact David Hogen, Medicine Wheel Ranger District, 95 Highway 16/20, Greybull, Wyoming 82426, telephone 307.765.4435; or Christopher D. Jones, Bighorn National Forest, 2013 Eastside 2nd St., Sheridan, WY 82801, or telephone 307.674.2627.



David Hogen



DATE

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