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Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

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File Code: 1950-1

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Decision Memo

Crooked Creek Snowmobile/ATV Trail Re-route

USDA Forest Service
Shoshone National Forest
South Zone / Wind River Ranger District
Fremont County, Wyoming
(T42, R109W, Portions of Section 13, 14, 15 and 22)

Decision

Summary of Decision

It is my decision to implement the Crooked Creek Snowmobile/ATV Trail Re-route project. The intent is to re-route a portion of an existing snowmobile trail and designate an all-terrain-vehicle trail connection between Crooked Creek and Green Creek. Additionally, I intend to designate a suitable ATV trail from the end of the Crooked Creek Road #542 to the Warm Springs Loop Road #532 near Green Creek, utilizing the old logging roads in the area as well as the "J" snowmobile re-route around Inspiration Point. The project is located approximately 12 miles northwest of Dubois, Fremont County, Wyoming (See Map 1). I considered both the input of the interdisciplinary team and the public in my decision.

This project is in conformance with the Shoshone National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and the prescribed Management Area Direction. Floodplain, wetlands, prime farmlands, threatened and endangered species, and cultural resource management implications have been considered and these resources will not be adversely affected.

The planned action was evaluated pursuant to Categorical Exclusion 1(a), in Section 31.2 of the Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 – *Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook*: "Construction and reconstruction of trails."

Project

Background

Snowmobile use, on the Wind River District, has notably increased over the last decade. With more users on the trails, the District had become aware of the public safety concern along the "J" snowmobile trail, where the trail climbs Inspiration Point. Field review on the trail also identified ATV use during the spring and summer along logging roads that are closed to vehicular traffic. A big reason for this use is that currently there is an open route that nearly



connects the two roads (#542 and 532) and it is confusing as to where the legal route ends when there are numerous old logging roads which give the appearance of being open. Therefore, the proposed action was developed to alleviate both the public safety concern for the snowmobile community and to better manage the off-road use of ATVs between Crooked Creek and Green Creek.

Purpose & Need

The primary purpose of the project is to reduce public safety concern and to manage ATV use between Crooked Creek and Green Creek.

Project Description

The project will include two actions. The first is a re-route of the “J” trail for approximately one mile in Section 14 around the extremely steep portion of Inspiration Point. The route will require clearing all vegetation within a 12-foot wide corridor to support trail-grooming equipment. The second part is designation of a suitable ATV trail from the end of the Crooked Creek Road #542 to the Warm Springs Loop Road #532 near Green Creek, utilizing the old logging roads in the area as well as the “J” trail re-route. Additionally, all of the undesignated roads and trails in this area will be signed and physical barriers installed to eliminate illegal travel by both ATVs and full-size vehicles. Rehabilitation will include soil ripping, installation of waterbars and seeding on the by-passed section of Inspiration Point (See Map 2).

Project Design

I have decided to implement the planned action as described, including specific project design features (PDFs) and mitigation measures to minimize environmental effects. PDFs are integral and critical elements of the planned action; their purpose is to reduce potential impacts and ensure that the proposed fuel reduction treatments are consistent with the management objectives for a variety of resources (e.g., fisheries, wildlife, and botanical) in the project area. Their basis includes the management direction of the Shoshone National Forest Plan, as amended to which the project is tiered, pertinent best management practices, and the professional expertise of the interdisciplinary planning team.

Soils, topography, slope and aspect, elevation, access, recreation, wildlife and other environmental considerations are part of the PDFs for the planned action, along with additional concerns and issues identified through scoping. An interdisciplinary team of resource specialists was involved with project design, and reviewed and analyzed the planned action for compliance with the limitations for categorical exclusions, extraordinary circumstances, applicable laws and commensurate with the issues and concerns raised from the scoping, public involvement cooperation process. Specific PDFs related to this action include, but are not limited to:

- Using appropriate trail engineering standards to avoid surface drainage and erosion concerns.
- Conduct appropriate post-project monitoring to assess effectiveness of construction, treat noxious and invasive plant species and to maintain traffic management structures.

Public Involvement

Scoping

Scoping is to determine the scope of the issues to be addressed and to identify significant issues related to the proposed action (40 CFR 1501.7). The proposed action was included on the Shoshone National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) providing opportunity to the public to request project information. The project proposal was mailed to 72 tribal, public and agency addresses providing opportunity to comment during the scoping period June 9, 2004 until July 9, 2004. The project was advertised in the *Dubois Frontier*, a general circulation newspaper in Dubois, Wyoming, as well as online at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/shoshone/>. There were four responses to the proposed project. All comments received through scoping and public involvement processes were considered in developing the project action and directed the analysis process. Using the comment from the public, other agencies, and tribes, the interdisciplinary team developed a list of key issues to address and activities to implement.

Key Issues

Key issues identified through public scoping and the interdisciplinary team included effects to public safety, soil stability, erosion, recreational opportunities and travel management. The interdisciplinary team evaluated and addressed these key issues, adding appropriate mitigation and monitoring requirements to the proposed action, also included in this decision.

Findings Required by Other Laws

Compliance with the Forest Plan

Mechanical treatment and trail construction are consistent with activities identified in the Forest Plan. The decision is consistent with the Shoshone National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as required by the National Forest Management Act. The project was designed in conformance with forest plan standards and incorporates appropriate Forest Plan guidelines for the given management areas. The project area is within Forest Service Management Areas 2B (Rural and Roaded Natural Recreation Opportunities) and 7E (Wood-fiber Production and Utilization). Management Area 2B emphasizes rural and roaded natural recreation opportunities. Motorized and non-motorized recreation activities such as driving for pleasure, viewing scenery, picnicking, fishing, snowmobiling and cross country skiing are possible. The specific proposal is consistent with the following recreational management directions for this area:

- Provide roaded natural or rural recreation opportunities along Forest arterial, collector, and local roads, which are open to public motorized travel. Manage recreation use to provide moderate to high incidence of contact with other groups and individuals. Where arterial, collector, or local roads or areas are closed to public motorized recreation travel, provide for dispersed non-motorized recreation with a moderate to high incidence of contact with other groups and individuals in a roaded natural or rural setting (p. III-127).

Management Area 7E emphasizes wood-fiber production and utilization of large roundwood of a size and quality suitable for sawtimber. Roaded natural recreation opportunities are provided along forest arterial and collector roads. Semi-primitive motorized recreation opportunities are

provided on those local roads and trails that remain open. Semi-primitive non-motorized opportunities are provided on those that are closed. The specific proposal is consistent with the following wood-fiber production and utilization management directions for this area:

- Semi-primitive non-motorized and semi-primitive motorized, roaded natural and rural recreation opportunities can be provided (p. III-174).
- Prohibit motorized vehicle use (including snowmobiles) off Forest Service roads and trails in alpine shrub and Krummholz ecosystems. Prohibit motorized vehicle use off Forest System roads and trails (except snowmobiles operating on the snow) in other alpine, and other ecosystems where needed to protect soils, vegetation, or special wildlife habitat (p. III-176).

Clean Water Act

The planned action will comply with the Forest Plan while pursuing project objectives. Best Management Practices (BMPs) will minimize sediment production during and following treatment. Prior to treatment, each unit designated for mechanical treatment will be surveyed with any waters of the United States marked and avoided. No Section 404 (Clean Water Act) Permit is required for this project.

National Forest Management Act

The planned action will meet all requirements of the National Forest Management Act.

National Historic Preservation Act / Section 106 Compliance

The proposed action was coordinated with the Forest Archeologist and the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). Previously recorded sites and newly identified sites will be identified prior to treatment within each unit. All sites, regardless of eligibility on the National Register of Historic Places, will be marked and avoided. The Forest Archeologist conducted a pre-construction survey and determined that no cultural and/or historic properties would be affected by the proposed action. Based on the Memorandum of Understanding between the Shoshone National Forest and the Wyoming SHPO, no additional coordination with the SHPO was necessary.

Endangered Species Act

Forest Service policy is to protect the habitat of federally listed proposed, candidate, threatened or endangered species from adverse modification or destruction, as well as to protect individual organisms from harm or harassment. Biological assessment was prepared to determine possible effects the proposed activity may have on threatened and endangered (T&E) species. Biological assessment process is intended to conduct and document activities necessary to ensure proposed management actions will not likely jeopardize the continued existence or cause adverse modification of habitat for T&E species.

Biological Assessment. The Forest Service consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for this project and its effects on federally listed T&E species, or their critical habitat. Determinations are disclosed in the Biological Assessment (BA) in the project record. The BA was sent to the USFWS, which in turn concurred with our findings. Appropriate survey requirements and mitigation measures are included in this decision to ensure that the project does

not adversely affect T&E species and/or their critical habitat; therefore, consultation is completed.

Biological Evaluation. The Forest Service also conducted a Biological Evaluation (BE) for the R2 Regional Forester's Sensitive Species List and the appropriate Forest Management Indicator Species. The BE concluded that there will be no adverse effect on any such species and that this action will not have a measurable effect on Forest wide population trends or viability of any species.

Coordination with Other Agencies. Applicable plans and decisions of other agencies were reviewed and considered in respect to the project (Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan, Lynx Conservation Strategy, etc.).

Rationale for Decision

It is my decision to proceed with the project, with the included mitigation and monitoring, because it will provide continued safe recreational opportunities for the public, management of the transportation system and administrative use by the agency. I feel that taking no action will increase the risk for recreational users attempting to climb the steep "J" trail and will allow resource damage through unmanaged ATV use.

I have reviewed the proposal and determined that no significant effects will occur from its implementation, including no adverse effects to actual extraordinary circumstances (FR Vol. 69, No. 108, page 33814). The effects of the actions, as determined through scoping and interdisciplinary review, are not highly controversial and are similar to other actions that have been implemented in the area. I find that the planned action can be categorically excluded from further environmental documentation pursuant to USDA Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 30, Section 31.2 (1) – Construction or reconstruction of trail.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities and Implementation

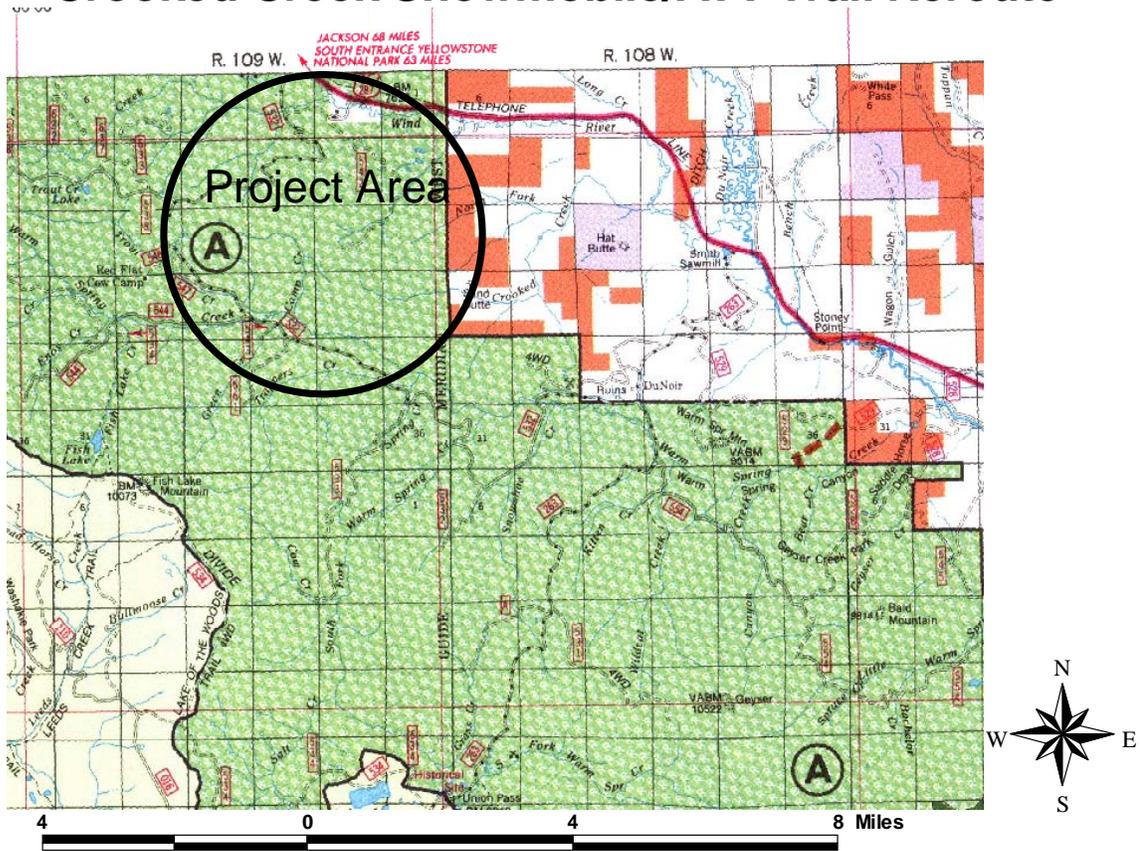
This decision is not subject to administrative appeal in accordance with 36 CFR 215.4 and may be implemented immediately.

Contact Person

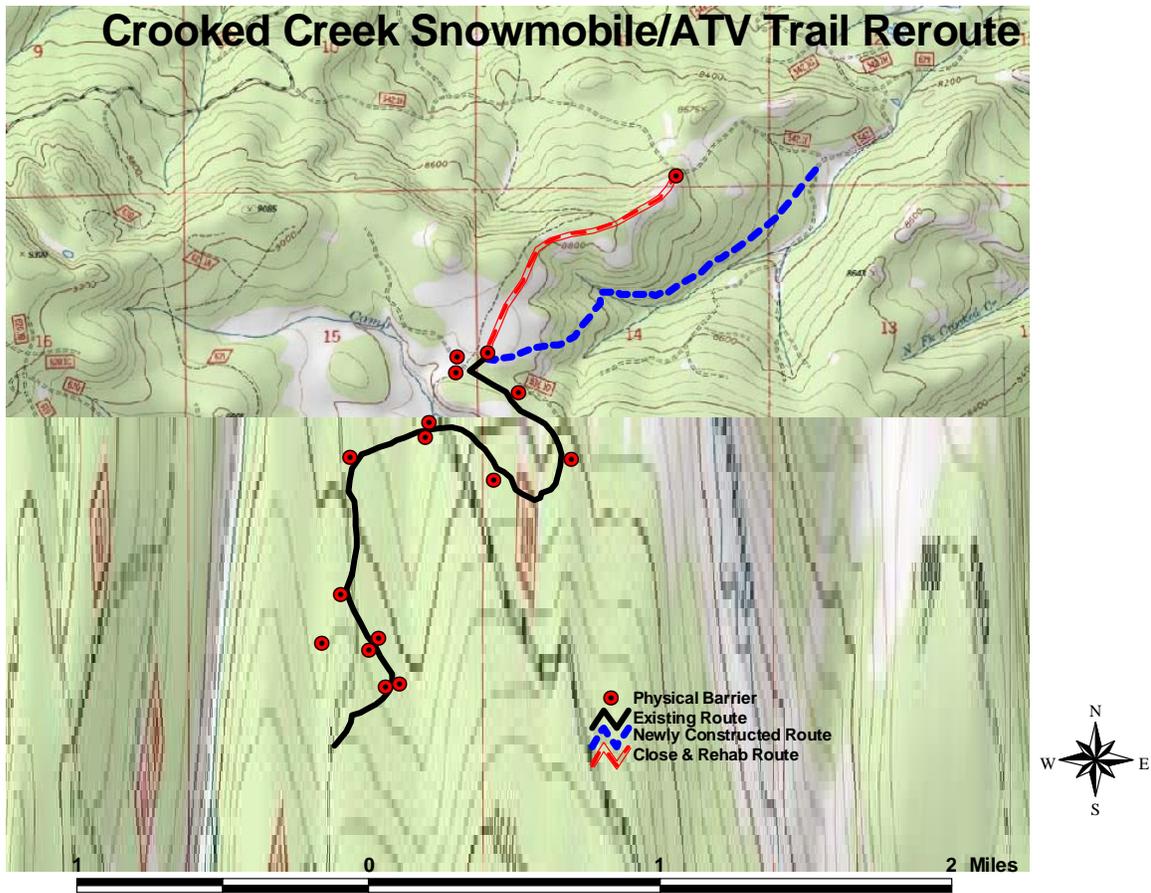
For additional information on this decision, contact: Mark King, South Zone NEPA Coordinator, Washakie Ranger District, 333 E. Main Street, Lander, WY 82520; phone (307) 332-5460 or email at jmking@fs.fed.us.

/s/ Rick Metzger
RICK METZGER
District Ranger

Crooked Creek Snowmobile/ATV Trail Reroute



Map 1



Map 2