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# Environmental Assessment

## Disabled Hunter Access Enhancement Project

**Colville National Forest**
**Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille Counties, Washington**

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# SUMMARY

The Colville National Forest proposes to add up to four new DHA (Disabled Hunter Access) routes to the existing DHA route system starting with the 2009 fall hunting season. Additional routes analyzed in this document may be selected for addition to the system after 2009. The project area consists of six potential new routes located on the Colville National Forest in Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille counties. (See maps in appendix). This action is needed because existing routes have become overgrown and need to be improved and/or augmented with additional routes to meet increased demands.

The proposed action (Alternative 2):

- Will result in increasing the number of DHA routes from 3-4 active in 2006-2008, to a minimum of 6 active routes in 2009 and beyond.
- Will roughly double the mileage of active DHA routes on the Colville National Forest starting with the 2009 fall hunting seasons.
- Will not adversely affect wildlife, fisheries, sensitive plants, or archeology/historic preservation issues as long as proposed mitigation measures are implemented.

In addition to the proposed action, the Forest Service also evaluated the following alternative:

*Alternative 1 – No Action*
Continue to utilize the three existing Disabled Hunter Access routes (Boundary Mountain, Middle Fork Calispell Creek, and Snyder Hill) for 2009 and beyond, and re-open a fourth existing route, Aladdin, once the temporarily closure due to timber sale activity is no longer required.

*Alternative 2 - Proposed Action:*
The Colville National Forest proposes to open up to four new areas to administrative use by permit for disabled hunters. Additional routes analyzed in this document may be selected for addition to the system after 2009. The existing routes described in Alternative 1 would also be maintained as Disabled Hunter Access routes as long as they continue to provide suitable habitat conditions for a high quality hunting experience, and user safety and other resources considerations are met. As conditions change over time, it is anticipated that some or all of the existing routes may be closed and/or replaced with other routes.

In a related action, limited road maintenance would be conducted on the six potential new Disabled Hunter Access routes as part of the Colville National Forest's on-going road maintenance program. This maintenance would consist of activities such as clearing deadfalls and brush that block the roads, felling danger trees, and clearing plugged culverts. Rock barriers would also need to be installed on two routes to close user created trails around existing gates.

Based upon the effects of the alternatives, the responsible official will decide whether or not to add new routes (Alternative 1 vs. Alternative 2), and, if new routes are to be added, which routes will be added, and which will allow off-highway vehicle use as well as highway-legal vehicle use.

Potential new routes that are proposed across the Forest include:

| Route Name | Ranger District | County | Roads Affected | Total Road Length (miles) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Betty Creek | Three Rivers | Ferry | 9565-810/811/812/813/832/833/834 | 12.39 |
| Brewer Mountain | Three Rivers | Stevens | 9521-145/146/147 | 2.39 |
| Mitchell | Three Rivers | Stevens | 9521-015/041/043 | 7.78 |
| Renshaw | Sullivan Lake | Pend Oreille | 3140-445 | 2.86 |
| Ruby Creek | Newport | Pend Oreille | 2700-300/310/320/323 | 9.28 |
| Tom Creek | Three Rivers | Ferry | 6100-090/120 | 5.85 |
| Total | | | | 40.55 |

# INTRODUCTION

## Background

The four existing DHA (Disabled Hunter Access) routes on the Colville NF (one on each Ranger District) were originally established in the early 1990's to give disabled hunters an opportunity to hunt along selected roads without the disturbance of other vehicle traffic. Over time, these routes have become overgrown, and need improvement or replacement to maintain the desired hunting experience. User demand for this type of program has also increased since the 1990's. Prior to the 2008 hunting season, access procedures and open periods for these routes varied considerably from District to District, causing confusion for both hunters and Forest Service staff. In order to provide better customer service, reduce confusion, and provide for a higher quality hunting experience for disabled hunters, the Colville National Forest revised and standardized the registration process, improved the information and outreach materials available for the program, and expanded and standardized the time periods the routes were available. These changes, implemented with the beginning of the 2008 hunting season, were necessary to better administer the existing program, as well as prepare the Forest for the possible expansion of the number of Disabled Hunter Access routes to be made available.

The overall goal of the Disabled Hunter Access Enhancement Project is to enhance and expand the current program by improving existing routes and establishing new routes that can provide suitable and quality hunting opportunities for disabled hunters.

## Purpose and Need for Action

The WDFW (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife) operates a program to identify and issue special permits to hunters with permanent disabilities under certain circumstances, and provides these hunters with opportunities to have motor vehicle access to roads on WDFW lands that are otherwise closed to such use by the general public. This program also encourages other land owners and land management agencies to offer similar access opportunities when possible. As stated above, the Colville National Forest currently has four areas managed for disabled hunter access. These routes were established in the early 1990's, and were formerly administered at the District level. Most of these routes are now becoming overgrown, and need improvement and/or replacement.

On August 17, 2007, Executive Order 13443, *Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation*, was issued which directed the USDA Forest Service to "*facilitate the expansion and enhancement of hunting opportunities and the management of game species and their habitat*". One of the listed objectives was to implement actions that enhance and expand hunting opportunities on National Forest System lands. In order to implement this order, the USDA Forest Service has attempted to identify actions and opportunities that would address this objective. Establishment and enhancement of Disabled Hunter Access routes has been identified as one such action.

Because demand for Disabled Hunter Access routes has grown over time, the Colville National Forest, in cooperation with WDFW, recognizes the need to provide additional hunting opportunities for disabled individuals on National Forest System lands. Although almost all of the Colville National Forest is already open to hunting, disabled hunters are more sedentary than able-bodied hunters, and are physically limited to the extent that it is difficult for them to compete with able bodied hunters when both have motorized access to the same areas. Therefore, there is a need to provide higher quality hunting experiences for disabled hunters that provide them a reasonable opportunity to harvest an animal. To meet this need, the Colville National Forest has identified six sites that could each potentially provide disabled hunters with at least two miles of roaded, motorized access within habitats that have sufficient big game presence, good visibility, moderate topography, and where vehicular travel by able-bodied individuals is already restricted.

## Decision Framework

Given the purpose and need, the deciding official reviews the proposed action and the other alternatives in order to decide whether or not to add new routes (Alternative 1 vs. Alternative 2), and, if new routes are to be added, which routes will be added, and which will allow off-highway vehicle (OHV) use as well as highway-legal vehicle use. In order to make these decisions, the following questions must also be considered:

***Has the program been included in travel analysis and the requisite environmental analysis associated with the designations*?**

Because the Disabled Hunter Access Program is being implemented by issuing special use permits to eligible hunters (and their designated companions), it is being treated as a separate program and not included in the travel analysis process. Only roads that are currently closed to public use are being considered for the Disabled Hunter Access Program and addressed in this Environmental Analysis. A separate Forest-level travel analysis process has already been completed and Motor Vehicle Use Maps have been published In some cases, the closed roads currently designated or proposed for inclusion as part of the Disabled Hunter Access Program may also be considered in the future for other uses. Those roads will be addressed on a case-by-case basis during the appropriate analysis process.

***If limited motor vehicle use is acceptable, is the use being administered in a non-discriminatory manner?***

Road use by disabled hunters (and their designated companions) under the Forest's Disabled Hunter Access Program is administered by issuance of a special use permit for specified roads and time periods. Any hunter registered by the State of Washington and issued a state Disabled Hunter permit is eligible for participation in the Forest's program. The Colville National Forest does not apply any further criteria regarding eligibility for this program.

***If motor vehicle use is acceptable for people with disabilities, why isn't the route or area open to the entire public? Regardless of best intentions, will the decision be defensible against discriminatory objections?***

Road use by Disabled Hunters is administered by issuance of a special use permit, and expected to be occurring at relatively low levels. Under the terms of the permit, use can be revoked for violations of permit provisions, or modified/cancelled if environmental conditions warrant. If the roads were open to the general public, the Forest would lose the ability to control levels of use on these roads.

***What monitoring will be done to ensure that there are no unacceptable resource impacts or use conflicts associated with the motor vehicle use?***

Roads included in the Disabled Hunter Access Program will be monitored to assess road condition each summer so necessary road maintenance, and/or brush and downed tree removal can be scheduled before hunting season use begins. Each road will also be monitored post-hunting season when gate combinations are changed. As part of their permit, and during a post-hunt survey, disabled hunters will be asked to report road closure violations or other use conflicts.

Because use on these roads is by permit only, any roads experiencing unacceptable or unmanageable resource impacts or use conflicts can easily be withdrawn from the Disabled Hunter Access Program.

***What written authorization for an exception to designations would be used?***

All road use under the Disabled Hunter Access Program is and would be administered by issuance of a Special Use Permit which authorizes use on specific roads for a specific time period.

***What is the cost of administering the system?***

Costs of administering the system include staff time, as well as costs of conducting the required road maintenance and providing outreach products. Much of this cost, including some road maintenance and the development and distribution of outreach products are expected to be funded by one or more grants, or accomplished with the assistance of volunteers.

Once fully in place, it is anticipated that staff time will be relatively limited and likely consist of some time for front desk personnel to register hunters, and a few hours or days of time for other staff to participate on an internal ad hoc DHA committee to evaluate possible program modifications, change combination locks before and after fall hunting seasons, and coordinate annual road maintenance activities. This staff time will be covered by a combination of programmatic funds and grant funds.

***What certification process will be used to determine eligibility and prevent abuse of the system (note that medical confidentiality precludes asking questions about a person's disability)?***

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife administers a well established program to certify hunters eligible for a Disabled Hunter permit. Presentation of a state-issued Disabled Hunter permit is the only eligibility certification the Colville National Forest Disabled Hunter Access Program requires. The Forest does not ask for or collect any medical information from program participants.

***How will long term maintenance of roads be conducted and paid for?***

Most DHA routes are Level 1 roads. Level 2 maintenance is required for "public use." Road maintenance for some DHA routes will be incorporated into the Forest's regular road maintenance program, and maintenance on some routes will be accomplished using grant funds to pay for road maintenance contracts or equipment, and/or volunteers, depending on the type of maintenance required.

***The Region 6 danger tree policy has not been fully implemented on most of these Disabled Hunter Access routes. Will the Forest accept the liability risk or will R6 danger tree work be conducted?***

The Region 6 danger tree policy will need to be followed and necessary danger tree removal will need to be conducted.

***Would the Forest need to evaluate the road maintenance priorities to include the DHA roads?***

7CFR 15e 103 (*Enforcement of Nondiscrimination on the basis of handicap in programs or activities conducted by the USDA, Definitions*) states that programs are not to be fundamentally altered solely for the purpose of accessibility (as interpreted by Janet Zeller, Accessibility Program Manager, Washington Office).

The selected Disabled Hunter Access routes will need to be incorporated into the Forest's overall road maintenance program. Where applicable, other funding sources and/or volunteers will be scheduled to accomplish the necessary maintenance. All work will need to be accomplished to the appropriate Forest Service standard.

## Relevant Forest Plan Direction

The guiding management direction for the project area is provided in the 1988 Land and Resource Management Plan, Colville National Forest, as amended (Forest Plan). This Environmental Assessment is tiered to the Forest Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement. The following Forest Plan Management Areas are affected by the Disabled Hunter Access Hunter Enhancement Project:

**Table 1: Forest Plan Management Areas within the DHA Enhancement Project**

| Management Area | Emphasis | Relevant Direction from Forest Plan |
|---|---|---|
| MA-1 | Old Growth Dependent Species Habitat | Areas will be managed to provide dispersed recreation opportunities (including hunting) that are compatible with maintaining species habitat.<br><br>A Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS class may be allowed when compatible with maintaining integrity of habitat. |
| MA-5 | Scenic/Timber | Recreation facilities and uses shall be compatible with Roaded, Natural or Semi-Primitive, Motorized ROS setting. |
| MA-6 | Scenic/Winter Range | Recreation facilities and uses shall be compatible with Roaded, Natural or Semi-Primitive, Motorized ROS setting and with big game winter range use. |
| MA-7 | Wood/Forage | Recreation uses shall be compatible with Roaded, Modified ROS setting.<br><br>Roaded and non-roaded dispersed recreation uses are permitted. |
| MA-8 | Winter Range | Recreation uses shall be compatible with Roaded, Modified ROS setting.<br><br>Roaded and non-roaded dispersed recreation uses are permitted. Roads and/or areas may be closed to motorized use seasonally. |

## Public Involvement

This proposal was originally listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions on July 1, 2008 and provided to the public and other agencies for comment during scoping from August 12, 2008 through September 12th, 2008. Legal notices were posted in several local newspapers including the Colville, Republic, and Spokane newspapers, on August 12$^{th}$. In addition, a scoping letter and mailing was conducted, with scoping letters being sent to a variety of government and non-government organizations and individuals, including tribal, county, state, and other federal agencies. Comments are found in the project files. As part of the public involvement process, the Colville National Forest also conducted a field tour in May 2008 of the potential new routes for disabled hunters and representatives of various sportsmen's organizations. Attendees were asked to help evaluate the potential new routes that they visited. Evaluations are found in the project files.

Because of delays in completing this Environmental Assessment, a second legal notice was published in the Colville Statesman Examiner on May 27, 2009, and a second comment period, closing on June 26, 2009, was made available. People responding to the first round of scoping were contacted to make them aware of this additional opportunity to comment.

Using the comments from the public, other federal, state, and local agencies, tribal organizations, and non-governmental organizations and individuals, the following list of issues was developed.

## Issues

The Forest Service separated the issues into two groups: significant and non-significant issues. Significant issues were defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action. Non-significant issues were 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)…"

### Significant issues

The Forest Service identified three topics raised during scoping. These issues include:

| | |
|---|---|
| Issue #1 | Interest in allowing OHV access for disabled hunters on all, or on as many as possible, of the Disabled Hunter Access routes. |
| Issue #2 | Concern that use of routes behind closed gates will increase the risk of invasive plants becoming established. |
| Issue #3 | Concern that adding routes which were closed for "wildlife protection purposes" will compromise the reason the route was closed and adversely affect wildlife. |

### Non-significant Issues

1. There is a concern that enforcement of the program will be inadequate and that the proposed action will exacerbate illegal activity.

2. The Forest should ensure appropriate vegetation conditions in vicinity of DHA routes.

# ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

This chapter describes and compares the alternatives considered for the Disabled Hunter Access Enhancement Project.

## Alternative 1 – No Action

Continue to utilize three of the existing Disabled Hunter Access routes (Boundary Mountain, Middle Fork Calispell, and Snyder Hill) for 2009 and beyond, and re-open a fourth existing route, Aladdin, once the temporarily closure due to timber sale activity is no longer required. See Figure 1 for existing route locations.

## Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

The Colville National Forest Disabled Hunter Access Program would be enhanced and upgraded. Six potential new Disabled Hunter Access routes have been identified and will be evaluated for inclusion in the Disabled Hunter Access Program. The six potential routes are shown below in Table 1. Maps of each route are located in Appendix 1.

The Boundary Mountain, Middle Fork Calispell, and Snyder Hill routes would continue to be utilized for 2009 and possibly longer as long as they continue to provide suitable habitat conditions for a high quality hunting experience, and user safety and other resources considerations are met. As conditions change over time, it is anticipated that some or all of the existing routes may be closed and/or replaced with other routes. In addition, up to four of the six potential new routes would be added to the program starting with the fall 2009 hunting season. The Aladdin route would be re-opened once the temporary closure for timber sale activity is no longer required.

In a related action, limited road maintenance would be conducted on the six potential new Disabled Hunter Access routes as part of the Colville National Forest's on-going road maintenance program. This maintenance would consist of activities such as clearing deadfalls and brush that block the roads, felling danger trees, and clearing plugged culverts. Rock barriers would also need to be installed on two routes to close user-created trails around existing gates.

Depending upon user demand, and the ability of the Forest to manage additional routes, the Forest will also consider the possibility of adding one or more of the remaining routes addressed in this analysis to the Disabled Hunter Access Program in 2010 or subsequent years.

The six new routes identified for possible inclusion in the program are currently gated and closed to motorized access by the public. Any routes identified for inclusion in the Disabled Hunter Access Program would not have their closed-road status changed. They would still be classified as closed roads with administrative access only. Use by disabled hunters would be authorized through issuance of a U.S. Forest Service road access

permit. For analysis purposes, it is assumed the permit would allow disabled hunters to use either highway –legal vehicles or OHV's (as described in the Administrative Requirements section below) on any of these routes depending on their needs and preferences. Anticipated demand for these special use permits is expected to be approximately 200 permits per year.

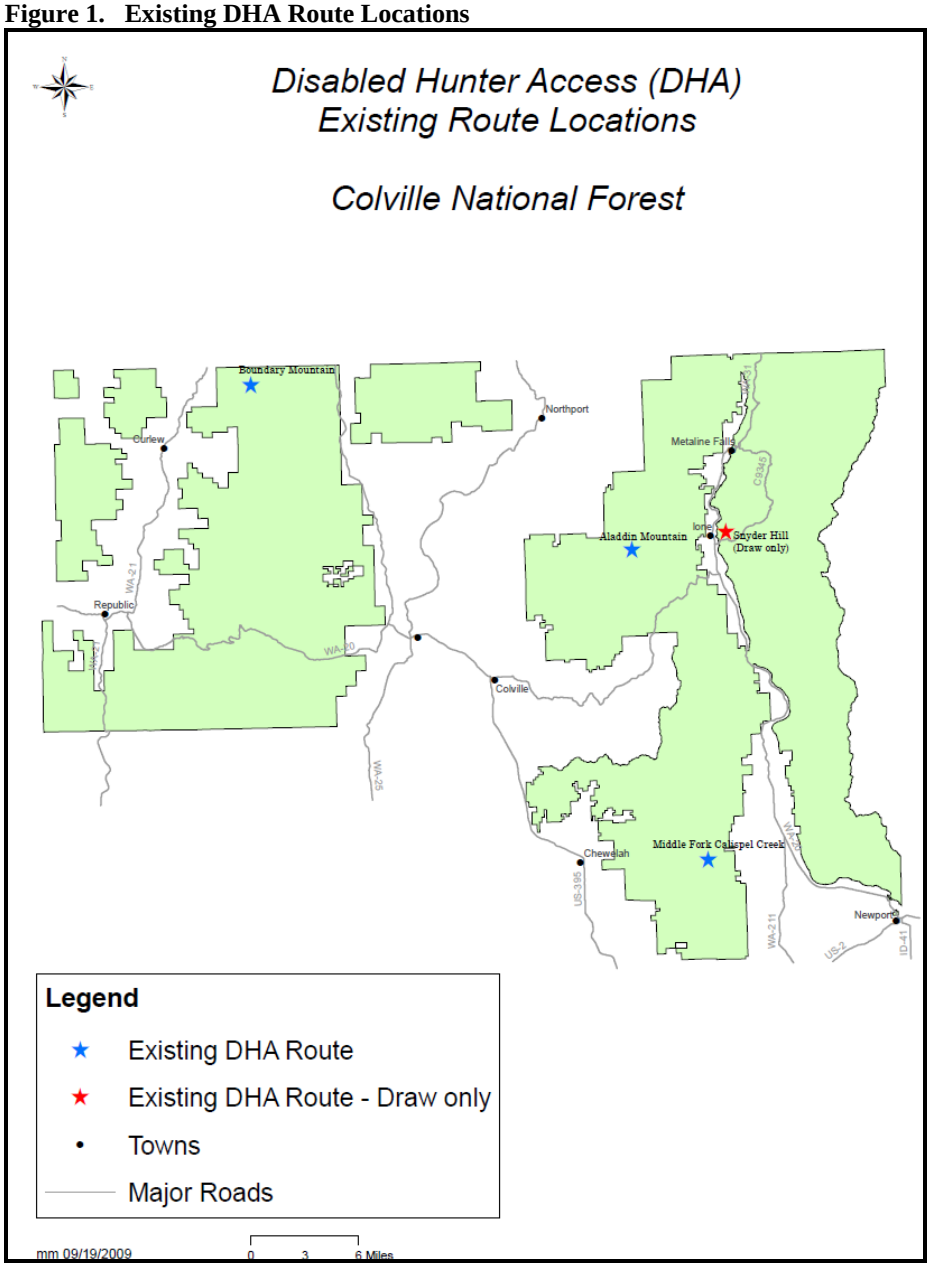
**Table 2: Proposed Disabled Hunter Access Routes ***

| Route Name | Ranger District | County | Roads Affected | Total Road Length (miles) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Betty Creek | Three Rivers | Ferry | 9565-810/811/812/813/832/833/834 | 12.39 |
| Brewer Mountain | Three Rivers | Stevens | 9521-145/146/147 | 2.39 |
| Mitchell | Three Rivers | Stevens | 9521-015/041/043 | 7.78 |
| Renshaw | Sullivan Lake | Pend Oreille | 3140-445 | 2.86 |
| Ruby Creek | Newport | Pend Oreille | 2700-300/310/320/323 | 9.28 |
| Tom Creek | Three Rivers | Ferry | 6100-090/120 | 5.85 |
| Total | | | | 40.55 |

* Initial scoping for this project also addressed a seventh route: Eagle Mountain - Road 4300-800 in Stevens County. This route has been eliminated from further consideration as a Disabled Hunter Access route because it is a Maintenance Level 2 road and shown on the 2009 Motor Vehicle Use Map as already open to the general public (including disabled hunters).

The proposed action addresses only the designation of specific roads as Disabled Hunter Access routes. It does not include any vegetative management activities to create better visibility or enhance habitat conditions for game animals. Over the long term, the need for additional and/or replacement Disabled Hunter Access routes will be incorporated into the planning for timber sales and other vegetative management projects.

**Figure 1. Existing DHA Route Locations**



## Administrative Requirements Common to Both Alternatives

The following requirements are currently specified as part of the conditions for obtaining the Disabled Hunter Access Road Use Permit for existing routes. The same requirements would apply to any additional routes added under Alternative 2.

- Eligible disabled hunters must possess a Disabled Hunter permit issued by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

- Eligible disabled hunters must sign in at a Colville National Forest, or other authorized location, provide information regarding their designated companions and vehicles to be used, and be issued a US Forest Service road access permit for the Disabled Hunter Access routes and associated roads

- Party sizes would be limited to no more than 3 people, of which 2 may be hunters, and one highway-legal vehicle such as a 4-wheel drive truck or sport utility vehicle.

- OHV access would be allowed on specified routes only. OHV use would be limited to a maximum of two OHVs, or one OHV and one highway-legal vehicle. All vehicle use is limited to established roadways only. No off-road use is permitted.

- Disabled hunters would be issued a combination to the existing lock on the closed gate, and would be held responsible for re-securing the lock after entry and exit.

- In general, access on these all routes, both existing and new, would be allowed from September 1 to November 30 annually for the purpose of hunting and harvesting legal game animals. Route opening/closing dates may be modified on an individual route basis as necessary to accommodate route specific conditions such as ongoing timber sales or other activities that would preclude use of the route for certain periods of time

- Vehicle traffic speeds would be expected to be no more than 10 miles per hour. Use by low clearance type vehicles such as passenger cars, and recreational vehicles such as motor homes and trailers would be discouraged.

- Hunting parties may <u>not</u> cut firewood, remove other forest products, or camp behind the route access gates.

## Mitigation Common to Both Alternatives

In response to initial public comments and management concerns on the proposal, the following mitigation measures were developed to reduce some of the potential impacts of the Disabled Hunter Access Program. The mitigation measures are applicable to either alternative.

- All disabled hunters registering with the Forest will be provided with information concerning proper identification of grizzly bears versus black bear during the registration process. This will help reduce the likelihood of incidental mortality to grizzlies caused by mistaken identity.

- All disabled hunters will be provided with noxious weed prevention and identification material and will be encouraged to utilize the management practices found in the materials.

- The Renshaw and Ruby Creek routes would not be available for permitted motorized use until they and the roads leading to them have had noxious weed treatments applied.

- Operators will be encouraged to inspect the underside of their vehicles for noxious weed seeds and plant parts prior to accessing routes and remove any said items.

- Disabled Hunter Road Access Area signs will be posted at the gated closure to help identify the route.

- Press Releases will be submitted to local newspapers covering when and where hunters can register, where the routes are, and where to go for further information.

- Periodic monitoring will be conducted by Forest Service personnel and/or volunteers to assess levels of use and identify potential problems.

- Program monitoring will also include a periodic post-hunt survey of registered disabled hunters to collect information regarding their perception of unauthorized use on the routes, the quality of their hunting experience, and other information relative to managing the overall program.

- If new information regarding any threatened, endangered or sensitive species or archeological/historic resources is discovered within the project area (the active DHA routes) while activities are occurring, the appropriate resource specialist will be consulted as soon as possible to determine if additional mitigation or protection measures are required.

- All road maintenance activities on selected DHA routes will adhere to existing policy, direction, and established Best Management Practices for road maintenance on the Colville National Forest.

## Comparison of Alternatives

This section provides a summary of the effects of implementing each alternative. Information in the table is focused on activities and effects where different levels of effects or outputs can be distinguished quantitatively or qualitatively among alternatives.

**Table 3: Alternative Comparison.**

| | Alternative 1 | Alternative 2 |
|---|---|---|
| Total Number of Disabled Hunter Access Routes Available | 3-4 | 6-8 |
| Total Milage of Disabled Hunter Access Routes | Approximately 18 miles | Between approximately 19 and 53 miles, depending upon which routes are in use.[1] |

# ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This section summarizes the affected physical, biological, social, and economic environments of the project area and the potential changes to those environments due to implementation of the alternatives. It also presents the scientific and analytical basis for comparison of alternatives presented in the chart above. Additional information can be found in the individual specialist reports located in the project files.

## Recreation

**Affected Environment**
This project utilizes existing closed roads at designated locations across the Colville National Forest to provide permitted motorized access for disabled hunters.

**Existing Condition**
The current Forest Plan management direction is based on using the Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS), which is one of the tools that the Forest Service uses to frame the setting when describing the potential for the recreation experience, thereby allowing administrators to manage, and users to enjoy, a variety of outdoor environments. The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum is not a land classification system; it is a method of describing and providing a mix of recreation opportunities.

In the 1980 inventory and mapping of the Colville National Forest, acres were classified as Roaded Modified, Roaded Natural, Semi-Primitive Motorized, Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized, and Primitive. This original assessment included acres under private, state and federal ownership, and was mapped using the following criteria from the ROS Users Guide: Level of Access, Remoteness, Social Encounters, Level of Visitor Management, and On-site Development.

The existing and proposed disabled hunting routes fall within areas that can be characterized by the Roaded Modified and Roaded Natural ROS classes. Under current Forest Plan direction, these routes are to be used for dispersed recreation opportunities that involve use of motorized vehicles along system roads. The use of system roads closed to motorized use for non-recreational reasons (i.e., wildlife habitat protection),

[1] The total mileage of DHA routes could be as few as 19 miles if the six shortest routes are used, or as many as 53 miles if the eight longest routes are used.

requires a permit to access that route but does not alter the ROS designation. In 2008, 16-18 miles of closed roads were made available on the Colville National Forest, under permit, to disabled hunters.

Use of motor vehicles off of established roads and trails has been identified as a critical issue for National Forests and Grasslands. To address the issue, a new national rule defining regulations for use of motor vehicles in National Forests and Grasslands was implemented. The objective of the rule is to protect resources, provide for safety, and to minimize conflicts among multiple users, while maintaining legitimate uses of motor vehicles. Individual National Forests are now required to designate which roads and trails are designated as open to motor vehicle use. Other areas are, by definition, closed to motor vehicle use.

**Public Comment**

Comments specific to the recreational values of the areas with proposed routes, taken from the public scoping for this analysis, include:

- The proposed route in the Tom Creek area would increase motorized activity in a largely unroaded area;
- OHV use would be difficult to monitor and enforce;
- OHVs should be allowed on all routes; and
- The Forest should enhance the opportunity for a successful hunt by creating larger openings in the vegetation.

**Environmental Consequences**

This analysis focused on the following question: Does the proposed action preserve the character of the recreating experience?

Alternative One – No Action:

No immediate change would occur in the quality or character of the recreation experience. The existing route locations would continue to be made available to disabled hunters under the permit process. Of the 1,886 miles of closed road available to able-bodied hunters (walking, on horseback, or other non-motorized means), approximately 18 miles (1 percent) of those miles would continue to be available under permit to disabled hunters utilizing motor vehicles.

Activities, while not directly impacting the long term recreation use of these areas, do have an impact on public perception of access to the areas. Occasionally there may be user conflicts, where the presence of motorized vehicles changes the experience of the non-motorized user that wishes to hunt these same areas.

Alternative Two – Proposed Action:

This alternative identifies additional routes, thereby potentially increasing the miles of permitted access up to 35 additional miles. Routes and access points were selected based on road conditions, access conditions, road maintenance frequency, effectiveness of existing closure, adequate visibility for hunters, and game presence.

Of the 1,886 miles of closed road available to able-bodied hunters, up to approximately 2.8 percent of those miles would be made available under permit to disabled hunters utilizing motor vehicles.

By adding routes, there is an increased potential for conflict. The proposed activities, while not directly impacting the long term recreation use of these areas, will have an impact on public perception of access to the areas. There may be user conflicts where, prior to the disabled designation the area was used by non-motorized hunters and now there is a process in which, by permit, a select group will be able to access the area with a motorized vehicle. The presence of motorized vehicles will change the experience of the non-motorized user that wishes to hunt these same areas.

Concern has been expressed about the proposed Tom Creek route because it lies between two IRAs (Inventoried Roadless Areas), however the Tom Creek route and adjacent area is not located within any IRA. In fact the nearest Inventoried Roadless Areas are the Profanity IRA which lies approximately four miles west of the Tom Creek route, and the Twin Sisters IRA which lies approximately five miles southwest of the Tom Creek route. It is possible that the commenter was referring PWAs (Potential Wilderness Areas), however, it can hardly be said that the Tom Creek route is “sandwiched” between PWAs: The Deer Creek PWA lies approximately 1.5 miles to the north and there are three open roads between the Tom Creek route and the Deer Creek PWA; The Jackknife PWA lies approximately 1.5 miles southeast of the Tom Creek route and there is one open road between the Tom Creek route and the Jackknife PWA; and the Profanity PWA (boundary was revised from the IRA boundary) lies approximately three miles west and there is one open road between the Tom Creek route and the Profanity PWA.

The route is currently closed to the public, but vegetative treatments have been conducted along this route within the last 10 years, and the area remains eligible for future timber and/or fuels treatments as needed. Designating this route as a Disabled Hunter Access route will not change the closed road status of this route. Access will be controlled with the Special Use Permits issued to disabled hunters. These permits specify that all vehicle use (including OHVs) is limited to the existing roadway and that no off-road use is permitted. The proposed use of this route by disabled hunters will not change the roadless character of any IRA or PWA. Use of the Tom Creek route (Roads 6100-090 and 6100-120) by disabled hunters will not adversely affect any IRA or PWA, nor change the closed road status of the designated routes.

**Cumulative Effects**

The proposed alternatives are consistent with the Forest Plan management area prescriptions for recreation, and proposed activities would meet Forest Plan standards for recreation.

A change in experience and displacement of non-motorized recreation users will likely occur where new routes are proposed. Since these designated roads are currently closed to motorized use, it will not impact the motorized recreation use.

The Colville National Forest manages many roads for Off Highway Vehicle use and access to dispersed campsites. Currently most of those routes follow roads open to all vehicles (refer to Colville National Forest Motor Vehicle Use Maps).

**Summary**
The existing and proposed routes will continue to provide a spectrum of recreation experiences compatible with the Roaded Modified and Roaded Natural ROS designations.

**Recommended Mitigation Measures**
The intent is to minimize disruption of the existing recreation use patterns within the areas accessed by these routes.

The following mitigation measures are recommended to minimize the effects on Forest visitors.

1. Post and maintain Disabled Hunter Road Access Area signs at the gated closure.
2. Submit press releases to local newspapers covering when and where hunters can register, where the routes are, and where to go for further information.

**Monitoring Recommendations**

1. Monitor to determine if there is an increase in illegal access to these routes.
2. Monitor for route effectiveness relative to how well it serves the disabled hunting program user.

## Terrestrial Wildlife: Management Indicator Species; Other Species of Concern; and Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species

**Affected Environment**
Terrestrial wildlife habitat conditions on the Colville National Forest range in general from relatively open, dry forests on the west side to more moist, closed forests on the east side and in higher elevation areas. The Forest contains a mosaic of predominately coniferous timber types and age classes, ranging from early succession/stand initiation stages to old growth. Numerous openings (natural and man-made), wetlands, lakes and ponds, riparian areas, and stands of deciduous trees and/or shrubs distributed across the Forest provide additional and important habitat diversity.

This section describes the existing conditions, desired conditions, and estimated effects of the alternatives on habitats utilized by selected terrestrial wildlife species. For each selected species, the key habitat components and/or conditions of concern relative to this project analysis, and an assessment of the direct, indirect, and/or cumulative effects of each alternative are addressed. The key habitat components/conditions of concern for each species were derived from the applicable standards and guidelines relating to each species (Forest Plan – Chapter 4) and/or important habitat needs listed in published recovery plans for threatened or endangered species. Species (or species groups) to be discussed in this analysis include:

## Management Indicator Species

Current information indicates that approximately 324 species of vertebrate wildlife occur on and around the Colville National Forest: 230 species of birds, 75 mammals, 8 amphibians, and 11 reptiles. To address this wide variety of species, and their often conflicting habitat needs, Management Indicator Species (MIS) were selected during the development of the Forest Plan to provide habitat needs of all vertebrate species, to monitor selected habitats that could become limiting to some species through forest management activities, and to provide sufficient populations of selected species to meet demands for wildlife-related recreation. Effects to each MIS are to be evaluated during the NEPA process and the analysis is used to represent effects on a broader array of wildlife species requiring similar habitat conditions and components. The Management Indicator Species, and the habitats they represent on the Colville National Forest, are listed below. Appendix F of the Forest Plan further describes the rationale behind the selection of each Management Indicator Species.

### *Deer and Elk*

**Existing condition:** White-tailed deer, mule deer, and elk were selected as MIS because they are more generally distributed within their ranges on the Forest, and because special monitoring and management are required to maintain available and suitable habitat to support stable populations of these species. The Forest Plan focuses on the winter range habitat conditions for these species because it is the most limiting habitat for deer and elk.

Management emphasis on these big game species and their winter range needs varies across the Forest. East of the Pend Orielle River elk needs are emphasized, while the needs of deer are emphasized west of that river, with mule deer receiving primary emphasis west of the Columbia River.

**Environmental consequences**: The primary issue relating to deer and elk winter range conditions relative to this analysis is the effect of allowing motorized access in locations where public motorized access is not currently allowed. The Forest Plan prescribes specific open road density standards for deer and elk winter range (Management Areas 6 and 8) because regulation of motorized vehicle access within these areas is important to maintain adequate habitat security, especially during the winter months when disturbance by people and/or vehicles can require deer and elk to use their stored nutrient reserves at higher than normal rates. Seasonal and permanent road closures in designated big game winter range areas are utilized as a management technique to limit and control the amount of disturbance experienced by wintering deer and elk. During other times of the year, the presence of people and vehicles is a factor in the distribution and rate of spread of noxious weeds, which can adversely impact big game winter range by displacing more desirable plant species and reducing overall forage availability. Motorized vehicle use is also known to displace deer and elk and affect their movements within an area.

Under Alternative 1, no new DHA routes would be established, therefore there would be no changes to the existing on-the ground situation with respect to deer and elk. Changes to the DHA program would be administrative only, and would not result in any new or cumulative effects to existing deer and elk habitat conditions.

For the Proposed Action, the designation of new DHA routes would result in low to moderate traffic volume on the selected routes during the open period (September 1 to November 30). Of the six potential routes, four routes pass through designated Big Game Winter Range (Management Area 6 or 8). To meet Forest Plan open road density standards, these roads are managed with winter range closures and are closed to public motorized use from December 1 to March 31 each year. Opening these roads for disabled hunter access prior to November 30 will not violate any Forest Plan road density standards or big game winter range management objectives.

All of the proposed routes are already open to, and do receive, public non-motorized use by hunters and other recreational users, as well as occasional motorized administrative use. Opening new routes for motorized use by disabled hunters will potentially result in some incremental additional disturbance and displacement of deer and/or elk in the immediate vicinity of each route. However, none of the proposed routes are located in areas considered significant or requiring additional management considerations for deer and/or elk during the proposed use period. This additional use will not occur during crucial spring fawning/calving or winter range time periods, and is not expected to result in any immediate or cumulative effects to overall deer habitat suitability conditions on the Forest.

Any additional deer or elk harvest resulting from improved access for disabled hunters is expected to be within the overall harvest parameters and herd management objectives established by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. The establishment of additional DHA routes is not expected to have any immediate or cumulative adverse effects on overall deer population levels on the Colville National Forest.

The establishment of new DHA routes will create additional opportunities for the introduction and/or spread of noxious weeds along the roadways and adjacent areas. Noxious weeds can adversely affect winter range habitat conditions by displacing more valuable forage species for deer and elk. Although noxious weeds can be spread by many vectors, motorized vehicles are a major contributor, and most new infestations occur along roadsides. The proposed new DHA routes are all along existing roads, where the ground disturbing activities that usually precede noxious weed establishment have already occurred, and noxious weeds are already present along or near most of the proposed DHA routes. Although the establishment and operation of the new DHA routes will result in little to no new ground disturbance, any vehicle use along these routes increases the risk of

spreading noxious weeds into important big game winter range areas. To help minimize this risk, disabled hunters (and their companions) need to be encouraged to inspect their vehicles and be sure they are not transporting weeds into new areas. The DHA routes will also need to be monitored and treated as necessary as part of the Forest's on-going noxious weed control program.

### Pileated Woodpeckers

**Existing condition:** This species was selected as a Management Indicator Species to represent species, especially cavity dependent species, using mature and old-growth habitats within the Douglas-fir and cedar/hemlock timber types. Minimum nesting tree diameter for this species is reported to be 20 inches.

During the development of the Forest Plan, the Regional Forester directed that specific "management requirement" (MR) areas to address the habitat needs of pileated woodpeckers would be established. To provide for a population density great enough to ensure against loss of viability through population fragmentation, the management requirements were set to distribute one pileated woodpecker habitat unit per 12,000 acres (about every 5 miles).

The Region-wide requirement is to have 300 acres of old-growth or mature stands as nesting area, and 300 acres of feeding area, preferably as a contiguous unit within each MR. Within the nesting area, 2 hard snags/acre ($\geq$12" DBH) should be maintained, with 45 of those snags more than 20 inches DBH. Within the feeding area, at least 2 hard snags/acre (> 10 inches DBH) are to be maintained.

**Environmental consequences:** The issue relative to this analysis is the way each alternative impacts the Forest's ability to maintain desired habitat conditions within the pileated woodpecker MR areas. It is primarily tied to public access for firewood gathering.

Under both the no action and proposed action alternatives, the revised procedures for obtaining a DHA permit specify that no firewood harvest, or other removal of forest products, is allowed behind the gates. Neither alternative will have any immediate or cumulative effects on pileated woodpecker habitat conditions.

### Barred Owls

**Existing condition:** This species was selected to represent approximately 112 other species that inhabit mature and/or old-growth forests. During the development of the Forest Plan, the Colville National Forest established that Management Area 1 (MA-1) would be used to address habitat needs of barred owls. To provide a distribution of habitat across the planning area to insure continuity in the population, and ensure that fragmentation will not isolate segments of the population, the Forest Plan established the requirement to distribute one barred owl habitat unit (MA-1) per 50,000 acres (about every 10 miles). Each MA-1 unit is to be at least 600 acres in size; ideally with a "core" having at least 300 acres of contiguous old-growth with relatively open understory conditions and crown closure of 60-100%. Snags and understory logs

should be retained at their natural density within the core area, and at sufficient numbers to provide for 100% of potential populations of cavity nesting wildlife within the "foraging" area (the remainder of the MA-1).

**Environmental consequences:** As with the pileated woodpecker, public access for firewood gathering is the primary issue relative to this analysis because it can impact the Forest's ability to maintain desired habitat conditions within MA-1 areas.

Under both the no action and proposed action alternatives, the revised procedures for obtaining a DHA permit specify that no firewood harvest, or other removal of forest products, is allowed behind the gates. Neither alternative will have any immediate or cumulative effects on barred owl habitat conditions.

### *Marten and Northern Three-toed Woodpeckers*

**Existing condition:** Marten, sometimes called pine marten, was selected as a Management Indicator Species to represent species that require certain habitat components of mature and old-growth forests. Marten inhabit higher elevation mesic forests, with a preference for older forests containing snags, wind-thrown trees, and canopy cover of at least 30 percent. The types of habitat selected by marten are important to at least 54 other species of wildlife. Northern three-toed woodpeckers were selected as Management Indicator Species to represent species, especially cavity dependent species, using mature lodge pole pine and sub-alpine fir timber types. Minimum nesting tree diameter for this species is reported to be 12 inches.

To address the habitat needs of each of these species during development of the Forest Plan, additional "management requirement" areas were established. Marten habitat units (minimum size 160 acres) were initially set up at a rate of one per 4,000-5,000 acres (about every 3 miles). For three-toed woodpeckers, the requirement was for one unit (of at least 75 acres) every 2,000-2,500 acres (about every 2 miles).

To accomplish both of these objectives on the Colville National Forest, three-toed woodpecker MR areas were combined with marten MR areas, and distributed on a grid system with one unit (of at least 160 acres) located every 2-2.5 miles. This strategy provided for a greater number of marten MR units across the Forest than required by the Regional Forester, and reduced the average dispersal distance between them, allowing for potentially greater marten movement across the landscape. It also provided areas that are large enough to support at least 2 pair of three-toed woodpeckers. This Forest-wide MR network meshed with the areas established for pileated woodpeckers and barred owls. At grid locations where barred owl MA-1 sites and/or pileated woodpecker MR areas overlapped marten/three-toed woodpecker MR areas, the larger owl or pileated woodpecker areas were established because they exceeded the minimum requirements for marten and three-toed woodpeckers.

Within these marten/three-toed woodpecker areas, the Forest Plan standard is to provide units with at least 160 acres in old-growth or mature condition (if no old-growth is currently available), with crown closure of 50 to 100 percent. Natural densities of snags and wind-thrown trees are to be maintained in these units, with a minimum objective of having 2 snags per acre more than 12 inches DBH, with at least one in every 7 acres being greater than 20 inches DBH, and at least 6 downed trees (at least 12 inches diameter and 20 feet long) per acre, preferably with root wads attached.

**Environmental consequences:** Public motorized access for firewood gathering has bearing on the management of snags and downed logs in marten/three-toed woodpecker MR areas. Under both the no action and proposed action alternatives, the revised procedures for obtaining a DHA permit specify that no firewood harvest, or other removal of forest products, is allowed behind the gates. Neither alternative will have any immediate or cumulative effects or affect pine marten or northern three-toed woodpecker habitat conditions.

### *Beaver*

**Existing condition:** This MIS species is widespread across the Colville National Forest, and plays an important role in maintaining and enhancing riparian and aquatic ecosystems for wildlife and other Forest resources. Beaver were designated as a Management Indicator Species representing species that use riparian areas dominated by aspen and willow.

**Environmental consequences:** Forest Plan standards and guidelines specify that beaver habitat will be maintained or enhanced. Motorized access adjacent to streams and ponds potentially impacts the Forest's ability to manage beaver habitat. Adverse effects to beaver habitat can occur when vehicles cause sedimentation to streams and ponds or destroy riparian vegetation. Such damage is usually the result of un-authorized off-road vehicle use. Under the conditions of the DHA permit for both the no action alternative (existing DHA routes), as well as the proposed action alternative (new, additional DHA routes), all vehicle use will be limited to the existing roadways. No off-road vehicle use will be allowed. Neither alternative is expected to have any immediate or cumulative effects on beaver habitat conditions on the Colville National Forest.

### *Blue Grouse*

**Existing condition:** Limiting factors for blue grouse are winter habitat and brood habitat. Blue grouse were designated as a Management Indicator Species because these important habitat elements could be affected by management activities. Winter habitat concerns are focused on the availability of mature open forest conditions, especially large trees, or patches of trees, near ridgetops. Blue grouse breed in open foothills and are closely associated with streams, springs, and meadows. Much of the food they require comes from succulent vegetation growing in these areas. During the spring and summer, blue grouse broods use areas with high plant density, interspersion of types, and high canopy coverage.

Maintenance of these habitat conditions around springs, ponds, seeps, streams, and other natural water sources is especially important for blue grouse.

**Environmental consequences:** The Forest Plan contains standards and guidelines designed to protect winter and brood habitat for blue grouse. It requires maintenance of hiding cover around at least 50 percent of the perimeter of springs or other water sources, with no breaks in cover exceeding 600 lineal feet along the waters edge. These conditions could be impacted by off-road motorized vehicle use. Under the conditions of the DHA permit, off-road travel is prohibited; therefore neither the no action alternative nor the proposed action is expected to have any immediate or cumulative effects on blue grouse habitat conditions on the Colville National Forest

### *Franklin's (Spruce) Grouse*

**Existing condition:** This species was designated as a Management Indicator Species because if it's reliance on young, dense lodgepole pine stands, with some mature spruce. This habitat condition is often the result of large stand-replacing wildfires (with spruce growing in the riparian areas that the fire skipped over). Franklin's grouse inhabit young, dense lodgepole habitats and some mature spruce stands. Their diet consists primarily of conifer needles and leaders (new spring growth).

**Environmental consequences:** The Forest Plan contains standards and guidelines to provide for retention of these young dense stands and provides direction that areas dominated by lodgepole pine stands be managed to maintain 20% in young age classes. Off-road vehicle use could potentially impact establishment of lodgepole pine stands following timber harvest and/or fire. Permits issued to disabled hunters specifically prohibit off-road travel; therefore neither alternative is expected to have any immediate or cumulative effects on spruce grouse habitat conditions on the Forest.

### *Other Woodpeckers*

**Existing condition:** The remaining woodpecker species occurring on the Colville National Forest have been grouped as Management Indicator Species representing cavity dependent species in all the diverse habitats of the Forest. Forest Plan standards and guidelines require the maintenance of dead and defective trees in all habitat types, as well as the retention of hardwood trees (aspen and cottonwood). Minimum nesting tree diameter for other woodpecker species is reported to be 6 inches, which is the minimum reported for use by downy woodpeckers.

**Environmental consequences:** The Forest Plan, as amended by Regional Forester's Forest Plan Amendment #2 (Eastside Screens), requires retention of sufficient snags to provide for 100% of potential populations of cavity excavating species. In practice, this has resulted in prescribed snag retention levels of a minimum of four large snags per acre. Downed log densities should be managed to provide a minimum of 20 logs (at least six feet long and > 12 inches diameter) within mixed conifer stands, and 6 logs in ponderosa pine stands. The

maintenance of these habitat conditions for woodpeckers is strongly tied to public access for firewood gathering. Under the conditions of the permit to be issued to disabled hunters, firewood cutting is prohibited along DHA routes. Neither alternative is expected to have any immediate or cumulative effects on snag or downed log levels on the Forest.

### Large Raptors and Great Blue Heron

**Existing condition:** The Forest Plan designated large raptors and great blue herons as MIS to monitor the effects of forest management activities on nest trees and nesting habitat. Nests for these species are commonly associated with large trees in suitable habitat areas. Riparian areas, especially those with hardwoods (i.e. cottonwood), are very important for some raptors and great blue herons. Forest Plan standards require nest sites, and the surrounding areas, to be managed to insure their continued usefulness to the respective species. Maintenance of forest conditions providing suitable nest, perch, and roost trees, maintenance of adequate food supplies, and relatively low levels of disturbance are essential to providing for these species over time.

**Environmental consequences:** The Forest Plan standards and guidelines state that nest sites and surrounding areas will be managed to ensure their continued usefulness. Management direction specific to goshawk nest area stands is found in the Eastside Screens. This direction calls for the protection of all known goshawk nests that have been active within the last 5 years. Motorized public access has the potential to affect the Forest's ability to maintain suitable nest and roost trees and maintain minimal disturbance levels near nests. Access provided to disabled hunters is limited to September 1 thru November 30 each year; therefore there will be no disturbance to nesting raptors or great blue herons along any route. Because firewood cutting and harvest of other forest products is prohibited under the terms of the permit, there are no expected effects to existing nest trees under either alternative.

### Northern Bog Lemming

**Existing condition:** This MIS species occurs in high elevation bogs, meadows, and riparian areas (spruce-fir communities), and is known from only a few locations on the Colville National Forest. Because it occurs in very limited areas, motorized access adjacent to suitable streams and other areas potentially impacts the Forest's ability to maintain habitat for this species.

**Environmental consequences:** Under the conditions of the permits to be issued to disabled hunters, off-road vehicle use is prohibited and vehicle travel is limited to the existing roadways, which do not contain suitable habitat for northern bog lemmings. Neither alternative is expected to affect this species or its habitat.

## Other Species

### *Waterfowl*

**Existing condition:** Ducks, geese, and other waterfowl were not designated as MIS under the Forest Plan. However, the Forest Plan provides direction to maintain or enhance waterfowl habitats. The Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines recognize that small wetlands (i.e. wet meadows), beaver ponds, natural ponds and lakes, some stream reaches, and the uplands immediately adjacent to these areas may serve as locally important staging, breeding, and migratory sites for waterfowl. Waterfowl breeding densities in these areas can vary greatly, largely as a function of wetland density and availability of open water. In some areas, breeding densities of waterfowl in montane wetlands compare favorably to those found in the best prairie habitats. Wetland areas larger than 1 acre receive most use by breeding ducks, although smaller areas are also used. Larger wetland areas are needed to attract and hold molting birds and fall migrants.

**Environmental consequences:** Motorized access adjacent to streams, ponds, and wetlands potentially impacts the Forest's ability to manage waterfowl habitat. Because the permits to be issued to disabled hunters specify that no off-road travel is allowed, neither alternative is expected to affect waterfowl habitat conditions.

### *Migratory Landbirds*

**Existing condition:** In September, 2000, the USDA Forest Service Landbird Strategic Plan was issued. With this plan came direction to assess and disclose the effects of management action on landbirds in NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) documents. In addition, on January 10, 2001, President Clinton signed an executive order outlining responsibilities of Federal agencies to protect migratory birds. Among the many requirements of this order were provisions directing agencies to:

> Support the conservation intent of the migratory bird conventions by integrating bird conservation principles, measures, and practices into agency activities, and by avoiding or minimizing, to the extent practicable, adverse impacts on migratory bird resources when conducting agency actions;
> Restore and enhance the habitat of migratory birds, as practicable;
> Ensure that environmental analyses evaluate the effect of actions on migratory birds, especially species of concern.

A Memorandum of Understanding between USDA Forest Service and USDI Fish and Wildlife Service (January 17, 2001) further directs that the Forest Service shall:

a. Incorporate migratory bird habitat and population management objectives and recommendations into agency planning processes; and

b. Strive to protect, restore, enhance, and manage habitats of migratory birds, and prevent the further loss or degradation of habitats on National Forest system lands.

The Colville National Forest contains a variety of habitat types and conditions including upland and riparian forest habitats ranging from early successional to late successional forest stands; wetlands; open water; and non-forested areas. All of these diverse habitat types provide habitat for migratory birds.

**Environmental consequences:** Off-road motorized use has the potential to affect migratory bird habitat by removing suitable nesting and roosting vegetation and disturbing nesting birds during critical time periods. Activities conducted under the DHA program will occur after the nesting season for migratory landbirds has been completed; therefore there will be no effect to any active nests. Permits issued to disabled hunters will specify that off-road vehicle use as well as removal of firewood or other forest vegetation is prohibited; therefore neither alternative is expected to alter habitat conditions for migratory landbirds.

## Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species

The Endangered Species Act (P.L. 93-205, Section 7) requires the Forest Service to address the effects of proposed management activities on threatened and endangered species. In addition to species listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, each Forest Service Region maintains a list of Sensitive Species that must be addressed during project analysis. Sensitive Species are species whose population viability is a concern because of significant current or predicted downward trends in population numbers or density, or significant current or predicted downward trends in habitat capability that would reduce a species' existing distribution. This analysis addresses Region 6 Sensitive animals, as identified by the Regional Forester on January 31, 2008, which occur, or are suspected to occur, on the Colville National Forest.

### *Great Basin Fritillary (Speyeria egleis)*

**Existing condition:** This Sensitive Species is suspected to occur on the Colville National Forest, but its occurrence here has not yet been documented. It uses forest openings and edges, generally at higher elevations.

**Environmental consequences:** Off-road motorized use has the potential to affect potential habitat for this species. Permits issued to disabled hunters will specify that off-road vehicle use is prohibited; therefore neither alternative is expected to alter potential habitat conditions for the Great Basin Fritillary. The implementation of either alternative is expected to have no impact to this species.

### *Meadow Fritillary (Boloria bellona)*

**Existing condition:** This Sensitive Species is more common in the eastern US where it is found in hayfields and human-disturbed habitats. In the west, it occurs in meadows and openings in aspen or pine forests. It has been documented on the Colville National Forest.

**Environmental consequences:** Off-road vehicle use, and/or alteration of vegetative conditions, in meadows or openings at lower elevations (within aspen and pine stands) may affect nectar producing plants used by meadow fritillaries. Under both alternatives, all proposed activities are limited to the existing roadway, therefore there is little to no risk of adversely affecting meadow fritillary habitat. Both the no action alternative and the proposed action are expected to have no impact to this species.

### *Fir Pinwheel (Radiodiscus abietum)*

**Existing condition:** This Sensitive Species is most often found in moist and rocky Douglas-fir forest at mid-elevations in valleys and ravines and sometimes in western redcedar. It is often found in or near talus of a variety of rock types or under fallen logs. It has been documented to occur on the Colville National Forest

**Environmental consequences:** Neither alternative allows for vegetative manipulation or off-road vehicle use that would affect potential habitat for this species. Implementation of either alternative is expected to have no impact to this species.

### *Rosner's Hairstreak (Callophyrys nelsoni rosneri)*

**Existing condition:** This Sensitive Species occupies cedar habitat types, especially openings and edges in coniferous forest around red cedar. It has been documented to occur on the Colville National Forest.

**Environmental consequences:** Neither the no action or proposed action alternatives would alter vegetative habitat conditions used by this species. Under both alternatives, project activities are limited to use of the existing roadways and no further vegetative manipulation or off-road use would be allowed. Implementation of this project under either alternative is expected to have no impact to Rosner's hairstreak or its habitat.

### *Magnum Mantleslug (Magnipelta mycophaga)*

**Existing condition:** This Sensitive Species is found in a variety of low- to mid-elevation sites, usually with water in the general vicinity. It has been documented to occur on the Colville National Forest. The species occurs on land and is not strongly associated with riparian habitats.

**Environmental consequences:** Project activities under both alternatives will not alter habitat conditions required by magnum mantleslugs. Neither alternative permits vegetative manipulation or off-road vehicle use that could adversely affect habitat for this species. Both the no action alternative and the proposed action are expected to have no impact to this species.

### *Masked Duskysnail (Lyogyrus n. sp. 2)*

**Existing condition:** This Sensitive Species is an aquatic species, primarily associated with kettle lakes. It has not been documented yet to occur in any lakes on the Colville National Forest.

**Environmental consequences:** Because neither alternative in this analysis will affect any lakes, potential habitat for this species will not be altered. Both alternatives are expected to have no impact to masked duskysnails.

### Northern Leopard Frog

**Existing condition:** This species is listed as a Sensitive Species for all Washington National Forests, and could potentially occur on the Colville National Forest. However, surveys of suitable habitats so far have only located this species adjacent to the Pend Oreille River, outside of lands managed by the Colville National Forest.

**Environmental consequences:** Off-road vehicle use in riparian areas in the Pend Oreille valley could potentially damage habitat for this species and/or affect its distribution. Activities conducted under both the existing and proposed DHA programs are limited to the existing roadways. There will be no impact to this species or its habitat from either alternative.

### Eared Grebe

**Existing condition:** This Sensitive Species occupies marshes and lakes and nests in colonies. The nearest known nesting colony is on the Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge near Cheney, Washington, about 60 miles from the Colville National Forest boundary. Eared Grebes are also found on the Columbia River near the confluence with the Spokane River, though their nesting status is unknown. Reports of individual birds have come from Heritage and Thomas Lakes in the Pend Oreille chain of lakes.

**Environmental consequences:** Off-road vehicle use adjacent to suitable lakes could damage suitable habitat and/or displace this species. Neither alternative for the DHA program allows off-road vehicle use, so there will be no impact to this species or its habitat from either alternative.

### Bald Eagle

**Existing condition:** The bald eagle (Sensitive Species) is a raptor that preys largely upon fish and is most often associated with rivers or lakes. Primary habitat components include clean water with abundant fish populations and large, perch trees and roost sites located nearby. In winter and during migration, bald eagles may scavenge in agricultural valleys and wetlands. During these times, eagles may congregate in winter roost sites found within suitable timber stands (usually mature and/or old-growth timber) located close to an available forage base.

**Environmental consequences:** Maintenance of forests with suitable nest, perch, and roost trees and maintenance of adequate food supplies are critical to sustaining bald eagle populations over time. Unauthorized motorized use near nests and/or roosting areas has the potential to disrupt nesting activities and displace bald eagles. None of the existing or proposed DHA routes are located near known bald eagle nests, roost sites, or large water bodies. All project

activities occur after the nesting season. There will be no impact to bald eagles or their habitat as a result of either alternative in this analysis.

### Sandhill Crane

**Existing condition:** Sandhill cranes (Sensitive Species) are not known to nest on the Colville National Forest, and there are no important wintering areas or migratory stop-over sites on the Forest. Occasionally, a few sandhill cranes migrate through the Colville, Columbia and Pend Oreille River Valleys. Sandhill cranes have also been observed during fall migration in the corridor created by Curlew Creek, Curlew Lake, and the Sanpoil River. Sandhill crane use of National Forest lands is expected to be very limited, with only sporadic use of riparian areas along the major river corridors and large wet meadows by migrating birds.

**Environmental consequences:** Off-road vehicle use within large meadows and/or riparian areas has the potential to damage habitat and displace sandhill cranes. Neither alternative for the DHA program allows off-road vehicle use, so there will be no impact to this species or its habitat from either alternative.

### Common Loon

**Existing condition:** Common loons are a Sensitive Species that breed on larger secluded lakes, usually nesting on the waters edge or on floating mats of vegetation. Loons require fairly large lakes (generally, at least 50 acres in size) with abundant fish and secluded nest sites. Loon nests are generally found within 1.5 meters of the waters edge on islands or peninsulas with emergent vegetation. Wintering occurs in coastal areas and on large inland lakes that do not freeze over.

**Environmental consequences:** Loons have nested and/or attempted to nest on several lakes within the Colville National Forest. The Forest Plan has no specific direction relative to loons or loon habitat. The Forest Plan does contain general direction to maintain or enhance waterfowl habitat. Forest Service policy is to avoid or minimize impacts to species whose viability has been identified as a concern. Because loons are very susceptible to disturbance during the breeding season, human disturbance is considered one of the limiting factors to successful loon nesting in Washington. However, none of the existing or proposed DHA routes are located near lakes, and all activities under the DHA program occur after the nesting season. There will be no impact to loons or their habitat as a result of either alternative.

### Peregrine falcon

**Existing condition:** Peregrine falcons (Sensitive Species) are crow-sized birds of prey that usually inhabit open country such as tundra, seacoasts, wetlands, mountains, or agricultural valleys where their high speed can be used to capture prey. Other birds comprise the majority of their diet and species as large as ducks may be hunted. Essential habitat elements for peregrine falcons include nesting cliffs greater than 100 feet in height and large, open foraging areas with abundant bird populations.

There are currently no active peregrine falcon nest sites on the Colville National Forest, but several areas have potential. Peregrine falcons are occasionally observed in the vicinity of the Colville National Forest during spring and/or fall migrations. Most of these sightings are along major river corridors, where the migrating peregrines are presumably hunting migrating waterfowl and other birds.

**Environmental consequences:** The primary focus of management regarding the peregrine falcon is on protection and enhancement of essential breeding habitat, primarily at and around known cliff nesting sites. Off-road motorized vehicle use in these areas could be disruptive to peregrine falcon nesting activities. All project activities occur after the nesting season, and neither alternative under the DHA program allows off-road vehicle use. There will be no impact to peregrine falcons or their habitat under either alternative.

### *Great Gray Owl*

**Existing condition:** The great gray owl (Sensitive Species) is a bird of dense, northern boreal forests. It ranges south into the northern Rocky and Sierra mountains. Feeding primarily on rodents, this species favors areas near bogs, forest edge, meadows, and other openings. Open mature and older forests may also be important foraging habitat, especially in winter. Nest site and prey availability appear to be limiting factors for great gray owls. Nests occur most often in mature and older forests. Preferred nest sites are the abandoned nests of other raptors, but it will nest on broken tops of trees and artificial platforms. Nest sites are often reused for several years.

**Environmental consequences:** The Forest Plan has no specific direction relative to the great gray owl. Forest Service policy is to avoid or minimize impacts to species whose viability has been identified as a concern. Off-road motorized use can potentially disrupt great gray owl nesting activities and/or displace these birds from suitable habitat. Permits issued under the disabled hunter program do not allow off-road vehicle use and all activities occur after the nesting season. There will be no impact to great gray owls or their habitat under either alternative.

### *Harlequin Duck*

**Existing condition:** This Sensitive Species occupies and breeds in cold, high-gradient streams. Although known to occur on the Colville National Forest, none of the streams where this species has been documented are in the vicinity of any active or proposed DHA routes.

**Environmental consequences:** None of the existing or proposed DHA routes are located near streams associated with harlequin duck use and all project activities occur after the breeding season, therefore neither harlequin ducks nor their habitat will be affected by this project. There will be no impact to this species from either alternative.

### *White-headed woodpeckers*

**Existing condition:** This Sensitive Species is associated with older ponderosa pine forest types and large trees. Potential habitat for white-headed woodpeckers occurs along some DHA routes.

**Environmental consequences:** Neither the no action alternative nor the proposed action will affect habitat conditions used by this white-headed woodpeckers. All project activities occur after the breeding season, so there will be no disturbances to nesting activities. There will be no impact to white-headed woodpeckers or their habitat under either alternative.

### *Red-tailed chipmunks*

**Existing condition:** This Sensitive Species is associated with dense coniferous forests at higher elevations. There is very little potential habitat for this species associated with any DHA route.

**Environmental consequences:** Neither alternative allows for vegetative manipulation or off-road vehicle use that would alter habitat conditions for this species. There will be no impact to red-tailed chipmunks or their habitat as a result of either alternative.

### *Pygmy shrews*

**Existing condition:** Pygmy shrews are a Sensitive Species that occupy a wide variety of habitats, including those found along some DHA routes. This species is suspected to occur on the Colville National Forest.

**Environmental consequences:** Neither the no action alternative nor the proposed action will affect habitat conditions potentially used by pygmy shrews. There will be no impact to this species under either alternative.

### *Pacific Fisher*

**Existing condition:** Like the closely related pine marten, fisher (Sensitive Species), are associated with mature and old growth forest structures (snags, downed trees, high canopy cover, etc.). The presence of a breeding population of fisher on the Colville National Forest has not been documented, although there have been reports of individual fisher sightings over the years.

**Environmental consequences:** Public motorized access for firewood gathering has bearing on the management of snags and downed logs in potential fisher habitat. Under both the no action and proposed action alternatives, the revised procedures for obtaining a DHA permit specify that no firewood harvest, or other removal of forest products, is allowed behind the gates. There will be no impact to potential fisher habitat under either alternative.

### *Wolverine*

**Existing condition:** Wolverines (Sensitive Species) are solitary, highly mobile animals that utilize a variety of habitat types and conditions. Wolverines are most often associated with boreal woodlands, but may be found in almost any habitat

type. Wolverines establish their dens in cirque basins or other high elevation openings. A study in Montana indicated that wolverines frequently used subalpine fir, lodgepole pine, and western larch stands. Large areas of medium or scattered mature timber and ecotonal areas associated with cliffs, slides, swamps, and meadows were particularly important in this study area, but wolverines were rarely located in dense, young timber, burned over areas, or wet meadows. Large openings and clearcuts were also generally, but not always, avoided, and travel was typically along timbered ridges and creek bottoms. Other radio-tracking studies indicate that wolverines will separate themselves from human activities if undisturbed, more inaccessible areas are available.

Wolverines are known to utilize a wide variety of food sources and have been described as opportunistic omnivores in summer and primarily scavengers in winter. Localized and seasonally abundant sources of food such as carrion, small mammals, and possibly berry patches are important to wolverines. Den sites are typically high elevation areas associated with steep, inaccessible terrain (such as avalanche chutes) and rocks or fallen timber.

**Environmental consequences:** On the Colville National Forest, confirmed wolverine sightings occur very infrequently. The Forest Plan has no specific direction relative to wolverine or wolverine habitat. Forest Service policy is to avoid or minimize impacts to species whose viability has been identified as a concern.

Although land use activities, including motorized use on roads, may impact wolverine habitats and wolverine movements, in practice, management activities that promote or maintain abundance and diversity in small mammal populations and healthy big game winter ranges will favor wolverine use. The retention of undisturbed habitat adjacent to managed timber stands and travel corridors will enhance wolverine movements through managed areas.

Under the no action alternative, there will be little to no increase in motorized use and no changes in vegetative condition along the existing DHA routes. There should be no impact to any existing or potential wolverine habitat and/or movements under this alternative.

Wolverines could potentially occur in any habitat; therefore the increased motorized use resulting from the establishment of additional DHA routes under the proposed action alternative could potentially displace or disturb wolverines and their use of areas along a DHA route. The likelihood of this occurring is considered very small because traffic volumes along any particular DHA route will be low to moderate, none of the project areas are currently providing high levels of seclusion, any displacement would be for short time periods and temporary, and wolverine (if present at all on the Forest) currently occur at very low densities. The proposed action may affect individual wolverine, but is not likely to lead to a trend toward Federal listing or loss of viability.

### Townsend's (Pacific Western) Big-eared Bat

**Existing condition:** This Sensitive Species may occupy almost any type of habitat, from grasslands to mixed conifer forest. This bat roosts and hibernates in unoccupied buildings, caves or mine shafts. It may also summer roost in holes in snags. They forage for insects over a variety of habitat types ranging from open meadows to closed forest. Preferred forage is butterflies and moths.

**Environmental consequences:** The Forest Plan has no specific direction relative to big-eared bats. The Forest Plan does contain general direction to give special consideration to management or protection of unique habitat components not covered by Management Indicator Species, which would include caves, mine shafts, and old buildings of potential use by big-eared bats. Motorized use near these habitat features has the potential to disturb and/or displace big-eared bats during critical time periods.

Under the no action alternative, there will be little to no increase in motorized use, no changes in vegetative condition along the existing DHA routes, and project activities will not occur during critical time periods. There should be no impact to any existing or potential big-eared bat habitat and/or use of project areas under this alternative.

Although no vegetative changes are expected, there will be an increase in motorized use along selected DHA routes with the proposed action. However, most motorized activity will be during daylight hours and should have little to no effect on big-eared bat feeding activities. The risk of this motorized use causing disturbance to roosting sites is also considered to be very low. The proposed action is expected to have no impact to big-eared bats or their habitat on the Colville National Forest.

### Grizzly Bear

**Existing condition:** Grizzly bears (Threatened Species) are large carnivores requiring extensive areas of undisturbed habitat. Where they exist, they are at the top of the food chain, and they will eat anything from ground squirrels to elk. Although they are classified as carnivores, vegetative material often comprises the bulk of most bear's diets. Grass, roots, and berries all provide crucial food in grizzly bear diets. Both habitat loss and human-caused mortality have been identified as the limiting factors to species recovery.

In general, within suitable habitats, grizzly bears move seasonally, seeking low elevation, low gradient riparian areas, meadows, south facing ridges, and graminoid parks in the spring for snow-free sites with an abundant grass/forb component. In the summer, grizzly bear use higher elevation areas where they forage for grasses, forbs and shrubs. In the fall, berry-producing plants located in mixed shrub fields, old burns, meadows, and timber harvest units receive heavy use by grizzly bear. In addition, grizzly bear are extremely sensitive to human disturbances.

The Forest Plan standards and guidelines, Appendix H of the Forest Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement, the Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines, and the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan all provide management direction for the Colville National Forest. The Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan identifies specific "grizzly bear ecosystems" which contain specific recovery areas. The recovery plan delineated available habitat into five "Management Situations" based on the needs of the bears and the capabilities of the areas to supply those needs. Potential, but unoccupied, habitat outside of the officially designated grizzly bear recovery areas falls into Management Situation 5. In these areas individual grizzly bears are still protected, but habitat management for grizzly bears is not mandated. The only limitation to management activities is avoiding the creation of a barrier to grizzly bear emigration between recovery ecosystems.

Important grizzly bear habitat, and most grizzly bear sightings, on the Colville National Forest fall within the Selkirk Recovery Zone as identified in the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan. Areas outside of the designated recovery area are considered to fall under Management Situation 5 as described in the Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines.

Most areas of the Forest (outside of the established recovery area) do not provide the level of solitude necessary to be considered good grizzly bear habitat. Grizzly bear sightings have been reported outside the designated recovery area, but these sightings are uncommon and usually unverified. Grizzly bears may potentially occupy or pass through the any area of the Forest, but the probability is low.

**Environmental consequences:** As mentioned above, grizzly bears are extremely sensitive to human disturbance. Also, the time period when the DHA routes are active (September 1 thru November 30) overlaps the end of the active bear year when grizzly bears are actively feeding in preparation for winter hibernation. The additional motorized use resulting from the proposed action has the potential to affect grizzly bear seclusion opportunities and/or displace any grizzly bears that may be in the area of a DHA route. However, none of the existing or proposed DHA routes are located within the designated grizzly bear recovery area. All routes are located within Management Situation 5 areas where providing or maintaining seclusion opportunities are not considered necessary for grizzly bear recovery. Additionally, the use of any route by disabled hunters is a permitted activity, and if grizzly bear use is known to be occurring in any given area, the CNF has the ability to cancel or discontinue that use. Based on historical sighting records, the likelihood of grizzly bears occurring in areas adjacent to any of the routes is considered low.

Under the no action alternative, there will be no changes to grizzly bear habitat conditions or seclusion opportunities. The no action alternative is expected to have no effect on grizzly bears.

Although there is some potential for displacement of individual grizzly bears during the time period when the DHA routes are active, the proposed action does not create any permanent barriers to grizzly bear movements across the landscape or prevent them from occupying areas near any of the routes in the future. The proposed action does not include any vegetative treatments or other activities that would alter potential grizzly bear forage or cover. There will be some limited vegetative treatments (road brushing and danger tree removal) along most DHA routes to facilitate access by disabled hunters as a connected action to this proposal, but this has already been addressed in other analyses and will have a minimal effect on grizzly bear habitat conditions or movements.

The areas contained in the proposed action are already open to hunting, including bear hunting, under WDFW regulations, and are used for that purpose. The proposed action will create additional hunting opportunities for disabled hunters and may potentially increase the total number of hunters using any area in a given year. With increased hunter activity, the risk of grizzly bear mortality due to mistaken identity must be addressed. Because the DHA areas are located outside the designated recovery area, the chances of a hunter encountering a grizzly bear are considered to be low. However, to help prevent cases of mistaken identity between black bears and grizzly bears, each instruction packet provided to disabled hunters will contain information to help them distinguish between the two bear species.

Although the proposed DHA routes all occur in areas designated as Management Situation 5 and are not necessary for grizzly bear recovery, the proposed action poses a small risk of temporarily displacing any grizzly bear that may be near a route when it is being used, and a slight increase in the potential for a grizzly bear to be mistaken as a black bear by a hunter. Because the likelihood of either of these events occurring is very low, and the CNF retains the ability to discontinue the activity if the risk to grizzly bears increases (such as verified reports of grizzly bear activity adjacent to a DHA route), the proposed action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect grizzly bears or grizzly bear recovery efforts.

### *Canada Lynx*

**Existing condition:** Lynx, a Threatened Species, occupy the boreal, sub-boreal, and western montane forests of North America that have cold, snowy winters and provide a prey base of snowshoe hare upon which lynx prey almost exclusively. The best available information indicates that overall habitat suitability of any area for lynx is overwhelmingly tied to the availability of snowshoe hare, their principle prey species, especially during the winter. In Washington, lynx use a mosaic of high elevation forest types, from early successional to mature coniferous and deciduous stands, primarily in subalpine fir habitat types where lodgepole pine is a major seral species, generally between 4,100 – 6,600 feet. It is suggested that this is the elevation at which the lynx becomes a more efficient predator than the bobcat or coyote because the lynx's longer legs and larger feet enable it to traverse deep snow more efficiently. Moist grand fir and moist Douglas-fir habitat types, where they are intermixed with subalpine fir habitat

types, also provide lynx habitat. In the Selkirk Mountains, lynx habitat includes the cedar/hemlock habitat types.

In February 2000, the USDA Forest Service entered into agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to promote the conservation of the lynx and its habitat on federally managed lands by:

- Coordinating assessment and planning efforts between the agencies and with other appropriate entities (e.g., Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, State and Tribal agencies) to assure a comprehensive approach to conserving lynx;

- Using "The Scientific Basis for Lynx Conservation" (Science Report) and the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy (LCAS) together with locally specific information as appropriate, as the basis for these actions; and

- Using the Science Report and LCAS, together with locally specific information as appropriate, as the basis for streamlining Section 7 conferencing and consultation between the USFS and USFWS.

In April 1993, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife released draft maps showing prime lynx habitat across the state. Within this primary lynx range, subdivisions called Lynx Analysis Units (LAUs) were identified to facilitate analysis of lynx habitat on a smaller scale. LAUs do not depict actual lynx home ranges, they were delineated generally along watershed boundaries, and their size approximates the home range area used by an individual lynx. In November/December 1999, the LAUs located on the Colville National Forest were re-examined using new guidelines provided in the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy. LAU boundaries were adjusted where necessary to remain consistent with the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy.

Analysis of lynx habitat generally focuses on the availability and interspersion of three key habitat components within one or more Lynx Analysis Units:

1. Forage cover - generally densely stocked regenerating timber stands of sufficient height (minimum 6 feet) and species composition (deciduous trees and shrubs or lodge pole pine) to provide food and cover for wintering snowshoe hare.

2. Denning Cover - generally mature and/or old-growth coniferous stands with high densities of fallen logs, and usually located on northerly aspects providing cooler microclimates.

3. Travel corridors and cover - generally linkages between foraging and den sites. Corridors are semi-permanent land features (forested ridges and

saddles, road edges) or general forest areas containing trees and/or shrubs of sufficient size and density (minimum 180 stems per acre) to provide cover for traveling lynx.

**Environmental consequences:** Under the no action alternative, there will be no changes to lynx habitat conditions. The no action alternative is expected to have no effect on Canada lynx.

Of the 7 proposed new DHA routes, 4 contain road segments above 4000 feet in elevation, but only 2 of these routes extend into a Lynx Analysis Unit:

**Table 4: Proposed Disabled Hunter Access Routes within Lynx Analysis Units**

| DHA Route Name | Lynx Analysis Unit Name | Approximate Road Mileage Within LAU |
|---|---|---|
| Tom Creek | North Boulder & Indian | 2 Miles |
| Ruby Creek | Ruby | 4.5 Miles |

Current information suggests that lynx might not directly avoid or be displaced by most low-use forest roads; however motorized access can still negatively affect lynx by allowing human disturbance in denning habitat and increasing access for incidental or illegal hunting or trapping. Plowing or packing snow on roads or snowmobile trails in winter may allow competing carnivores to access lynx habitat thus increasing competition for prey. The Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy guidelines recommend prioritizing roads for closure or seasonal restriction in areas within LAUs that have a road density of 2.0 miles/square mile or greater.

Under the proposed action, motorized use of the DHA routes will only be authorized from September 1 to November 30 each year. This time period is after the lynx denning period and therefore should not affect any potential lynx denning near these routes. In most years, the November 30 closing date is before snow accumulations are deep enough to permit snowmobile use or affect the movements of other predators that may compete with lynx. None of the proposed DHA routes will be plowed or groomed under the proposed action. In the occasional years when snow accumulation begins earlier than November 30, it is expected that motorized use by disabled hunters will quickly decline as snow depths increase, and the potential effects of any snow packing that may occur will quickly be mitigated by additional snowfalls after December 1.

The proposed action does not include any vegetative management; therefore there will be no alteration of any potential lynx foraging habitat, denning habitat, or travel corridors. In some years, when snow accumulations begin earlier than normal, lynx in 2 LAU's could potentially be subjected to increased competition from other predators that follow vehicle tracks through the snow from lower

elevations. The likelihood of this situation occurring is considered to be relatively low because:

- In most years, significant snow accumulations do not begin until December, after the DHA routes have closed;
- Most of the hunting pressure, and therefore hunter use of these routes, is expected to decline after the late firearm deer season ends in mid-November, and the remaining hunter use would be expected to be concentrated at lower elevations where the desired game species are more likely to be encountered; and
- Any "packed snow route" conditions that may occur would be short-lived as snowfalls after December 1 begin to accumulate.

Because the establishment of additional DHA routes does not alter vegetative conditions within lynx habitat, and poses only a slight risk of increased competition for prey, the proposed action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect Canada lynx.

### *Woodland Caribou*

**Existing condition:** In the early winter months, caribou, an Endangered Species, use mid-elevation, cedar / hemlock forest stands and stands on the ecotone with subalpine fir / spruce habitats. Mature and old stand conditions and good canopy closure (70 percent +) are important habitat components. In late winter, caribou use high-elevation timber stands dominated by mature to over-mature subalpine fir, spruce, and whitebark pine with 10-50 percent canopy closure. These stands are typically found along subalpine and alpine ridge systems. Suitable caribou habitat, and almost all caribou sightings, on the Colville National Forest are limited to the Recovery Area defined in the Recovery Plan for Woodland Caribou in the Selkirk Mountains. On the Colville National Forest, the Selkirk Mountains Woodland Caribou Recovery Area lies east of the Pend Oreille River and above 4,000 feet in elevation. Activities occurring within the recovery area have a moderate to high potential to affect caribou. Activities occurring outside the Recovery Area boundary are considered to have a low potential to affect caribou.

The Selkirk Mountains Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan, the Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, and the Amended Biological Opinion for the Continued Implementation of the Forest Plan all provide direction for caribou management. There is no direction for managing habitats for caribou outside of the recovery area, although animals that might occur there are protected. Caribou habitat is managed in accordance with Colville National Forest Guidelines for the Management of Caribou Habitat (Appendix I, FEIS), national policy, and the Caribou Recovery Plan. Appendix I of the Forest Plan identified 4 objectives for management of caribou habitat:

1. Produce a proper mix of seasonal habitats needed to support the Forest's share of a recovered caribou population,
2. Protect caribou habitat from destruction or adverse modification (fire, insects, disease, etc.),
3. Protect caribou from harassment and/or human caused mortality, and
4. Participate in caribou technical committees and recovery programs.

**Environmental consequences:** Under the no action alternative, there will be no changes to woodland caribou habitat conditions or seclusion opportunities. None of the existing routes are located within the Woodland Caribou Recovery Area. The no action alternative is expected to have no effect on woodland caribou.

None of the proposed new DHA routes occur within the designated caribou recovery area or even the east side of the Pend Oreille River, and there is very little suitable caribou habitat along any of the proposed routes. With respect to the Forest Plan objectives for woodland caribou, the proposed action does not alter any existing caribou habitat or the desired mix of seasonal habitat conditions. Additionally, based on historical sighting reports, the risk of an encounter between a disabled hunter using any of the DHA routes and a caribou that results in harassment or mortality of that caribou is essentially zero. As stated before, the use of any route by disabled hunters is a permitted activity, and if woodland caribou use is known to be occurring in any given area, the CNF has the ability to cancel or discontinue that use. The proposed action is expected to have no effect on woodland caribou or woodland caribou recovery efforts.

### *Gray Wolf*

**Existing condition:** The gray wolf is also an Endangered Species, and is managed under the Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Plan. This plan identified three recovery areas: the Yellowstone ecosystem, northwest Montana, and central Idaho. There are no designated recovery areas with the state of Washington. Although areas outside the designated recovery areas are not specifically managed to provide wolf habitat, any individual wolves located outside these recovery areas are still protected. Forest Plan direction calls for wolf monitoring by recording location and determining validity of reported sightings, and protection of any resident wolves. The Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Plan identifies key components of wolf habitat as:

1. A sufficient, year-round prey base of ungulates and alternate prey: Wolves prey upon a variety of food sources, but ungulates (deer, elk, moose) are the principle prey items, especially during the winter months and during fawning/calving times (May and June). In some areas wolves also prey upon beaver during ice-free times (spring-fall). Within the northern Rocky Mountains, the ungulate prey base provides a year-round food source. On a biomass basis, ungulates comprise more than 90% of wolves' diets during summer and fall. During winter, wolves in the Rocky Mountains prey almost exclusively upon deer, elk, and moose.

2. Suitable and somewhat secluded den and rendezvous sites: Denning sites in the northern Rocky Mountains are characteristically located on southerly aspects of moderately steep slopes in well-drained soils. Theses sites are usually within 0.25 miles of surface water and at an elevation overlooking surrounding low-lying areas. In some areas, wolf packs are sensitive to human disturbance near den sites and may abandon the den as a result of disturbance. However, recent studies suggest that wolves are becoming more adapted to human activities. Rendezvous sites are usually complexes of meadows and adjacent hillside timber stands with surface water nearby such as bogs, abandoned and overgrown beaver ponds, and stream corridors. The size of these areas may vary, but most are about 1 acre. The location of the rendezvous site will move during the summer as the pups grow. Both den and rendezvous sites may be used for several years. Wolves may be less affected by human disturbance at later rendezvous sites than they are at the first one.

3. Sufficient space with minimal exposure to humans: The degree of seclusion (exposure to humans) experienced by wolves within an area is directly related to the road and trail network within that area. Open road densities are one way to evaluate this habitat element.

Wolf sightings are occasionally reported from throughout the Colville National Forest. Records of wolf sightings on the Colville National Forest date from 1914, and continue to the present. Most reported sightings are of single wolves. At present, there are no known wolf dens or rendezvous sites on the Colville National Forest, and there is little evidence suggesting any wolf pack activity or breeding. For purposes of this analysis, it is assumed that single, transient wolves moving within large land areas could potentially use any portion of the Colville National Forest Specific surveys to determine presence of wolves were not considered necessary for this analysis.

**Environmental consequences:** Under the no action alternative, there will be no changes to gray wolf habitat conditions or seclusion opportunities. The no action alternative is expected to have no effect on this species.

Throughout the Colville National Forest, elk, moose, mule deer, and white-tailed deer comprise the bulk of the available ungulate prey base for wolves, but other wildlife species may provide alternate prey. Many areas of the Forest provide adequate seclusion for wolves. Under the proposed action, there will be a small to moderate increase in motorized public access that potentially affects the use and availability of habitats, as well as the distribution of wolves and their prey, within the Colville National Forest. The establishment of new DHA routes will create additional areas on the Forest where motorized use has the potential to temporarily displace wolves and/or their prey. However, this motorized use will occur during the fall of the year, and not during the more crucial breeding or wintering time periods. Motorized use along the DHA routes is scheduled to end

on November 30 each year, the same time that big game winter range closures go into effect across the Colville National Forest, to provide ungulates (deer and elk) as well as their predators (such as wolves) the seclusion they require as winter snows accumulate. With the exception of some limited administrative use, motorized activities on these routes will not resume until September 1 the following year, after important denning, fawning and calving activities have taken place.

The proposed action has the potential to temporarily displace wolves and/or their ungulate prey during the times the DHA routes are active. Because none of the proposed activities will occur during crucial denning or winter time periods, and the CNF retains the ability to discontinue the activity if the risk to wolves increases (such as verified reports of wolf activity adjacent to a DHA route), the proposed action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect gray wolves or gray wolf recovery efforts.

## Sensitive Plant Species

**Existing condition**
A review of the following sources provided the basis for the pre-field review:

- Sensitive Species Plant List, Region 6, U.S. Forest Service (USDA FS 2004)
- Federally listed species (USDI FWS 2008)
- Washington Natural Heritage sightings information (WNHP 2008a and 2008b, WNHP and USDI BLM 2008)
- Colville National Forest sensitive plant sightings database (USDA FS 2008)

No federally listed threatened or endangered plants or plants proposed for federal listing are known to occur in the Disabled Hunter Access Enhancement Project (USDI FWS 1999 and 2001). Forty-five plant species listed on the Regional Forester's Sensitive Species List (2004) are documented or suspected for the Colville National Forest. Although none are known from the proposed project areas, eight occur at 20 locations within two miles: crenulate moonwort *(Botrychium crenulatum)*, western moonwort (*Botrychium hesperium*), stalked moonwort, (*Botrychium pedunculosum*), bulb-bearing water hemlock (*Cicuta bulbifera*), beaked sedge (*Carex rostrata*), crested shield fern (*Dryopteris cristata*), green keeled cotton-grass (*Eriophorum viridicarinatum*), and adder's tongue (*Ophioglussum pusillum*).

**Environmental consequences:**
A risk assessment of the potential effects for sensitive plant species was conducted according to procedures outlined in Forest Service Manual (FSM) 2672.42, 8/90, R-6 Supp. 2600-90-5 for the two alternatives.

Alternative 1: No Action
Continuing to utilize the three existing Disabled Hunter Access routes (Boundary Mountain, Middle Fork Calispell, and Snyder Hill) for 2009 and beyond, and re-opening

the Aladdin route after completion of timber sale has a low risk of adverse effects to sensitive plant resources and the project could proceed as planned.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action
Enhancing and upgrading the Colville National Forest Disabled Hunter Access program with the addition of up to 4 new Disabled Hunter Access routes for 2009 and beyond would have a low risk of adverse effects to sensitive plant resources and the project as proposed under this alternative could proceed as planned.

**Cumulative Effects and Plant Management Recommendations:**
Since this project is occurring on previously disturbed ground and current road maintenance activities would continue, its cumulative effects are minimal. Risk assessment, effects, and findings described above assume that the mitigation measures specified in the environmental assessment are fully implemented.

**Summary of Effects:**
Adherence to Forest Plan standards and guidelines will prevent adverse effects to sensitive plants under the Proposed Action. There are no irreversible or irretrievable effects associated with it. In the event that sensitive plant species are found, modifications to the project will be made to prevent adverse habitat changes to the population.

**Mitigation Measures:**
The following measures are required to avoid a "may affect" determination for USDA Forest Service (Region 6) sensitive species.

1. If a sensitive species is found in the analysis area while project activities are occurring, a botanist will be consulted as to measures required to protect the species and its essential habitat.

## Transportation/Engineering Input

**Affected Environment**
There are transportation management concerns that apply to all routes. Most of these concerns have been incorporated into the Decision Framework presented earlier in this document. Concerns specific to a particular route are summarized in Table 4 below.

**Environmental Consequences**
The routes proposed for the Disabled Hunter Access Program are currently ML (Maintenance Level) -1 roads. This Maintenance Level is assigned to roads that are naturally or physically closed. Little to no maintenance is performed or funded on these roads on the Colville National Forest. Approximately 5 miles (.03%) per year of the 1800 miles of ML-1 roads on the Forest receive some monitoring.

By designating a road for disabled hunter access, the Colville National Forest is encouraging use. This would usually require that a road be maintained as ML-2. ML-2

is assigned to open roads maintained for high clearance vehicles; passenger car travel is not a consideration. Currently the Forest has very little funding for the maintenance of ML-2 roads, approximately 9% of the ML-2 roads on the Forest receive some maintenance each year.

Currently, there is no additional Forest Service maintenance expected on any of the Disabled Hunter Access Program routes if designated, except the minimal brushing that a volunteer group may complete. While some of the brushing is completed with volunteers, there is a concern about how the Forest will get surface blading, culvert and ditch cleaning, as well as road failure repairs, completed if and when they are needed. A possible solution is to pursue additional grant funding that can be used for FS wages (for force account work and contract administration) and equipment.

The majority of the Forest's road maintenance budget is used to maintain ML 3-5 roads (roads that fall under the Highway Safety Act).

The table below lists specific concerns for the proposed routes

**Table 5: Proposed Disabled Hunter Access Routes**

| Route Name | Road Number | CFR[2] closure? (Yes, No, order number) | Reason for Closure | Concerns |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Renshaw** | 3140445 | Yes, 04-05-07 | Wildlife habitat | |
| **Ruby Creek** | 2700300 | Yes, 94-03-07 | Wildlife habitat | Timber Sale road construction rock haul from Mile Post 0.00 to 1.6 |
| | 2700320 | Yes, 94-03-07 | Wildlife habitat | Traffic safety conflict w/ commercial use 2008, 2009 |
| | 2700323 | Yes, 94-03-07 | Wildlife habitat | Planned for decommissioning |
| **Brewer Mountain** | 9521145 | No CFR | | |
| | 9521146 | No CFR | | |
| | 9521147 | No CFR | | |
| **Mitchell** | 9521015 | No CFR | Wildlife habitat | Planned for earth berm closure 2009, Gate has history of being vandalized |
| **Betty Creek** | 9565810 | Yes, 00-02-10 | Wildlife habitat | Gate has history of breach |
| | 9565813 | Yes, 00-02-10 | Wildlife habitat | |
| | 9565830 | Yes, 00-02-10 | Wildlife habitat | Gate has history of breach |
| | 9565832 | Yes, 00-02-10 | Wildlife habitat | |
| | 9565833 | Yes, 00-02-10 | Wildlife habitat | |

[2] A CFR (Code of Federal Regulations) closure order is a formal order under 36 CFR 261 which makes use of a motor vehicle on the closed road, trail, or area an enforceable violation.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Tom Creek** | 6100090 | Yes, 00-02-07 | Wildlife habitat | Gate has history of breach |
| | 6100120 | Yes, 00-02-07 | Wildlife habitat | |

## Aquatic Resources (Hydrology and Fisheries)

This section provides the disclosure of effects associated with the Disabled Hunter Access Enhancement Project**.** For aquatic resources, the following effects will be discussed.:

- Effects on any flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.
- Effects on Federally listed threatened or endangered species, designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species. For this project, the only threatened or endangered, or sensitive species with potential to be affected is bull trout (a threatened species).
- Effects on any impaired watersheds.
- Effect with regards to steep slopes or highly erosive soils.

**Existing Condition**
Bull trout appear to have more specific habitat requirements than other salmonids. Habitat characteristics including water temperature, stream size, substrate composition, cover and hydraulic complexity have been associated with the distribution and abundance. Stream temperature and substrate composition may be particularly important characteristics of suitable habitats. Bull trout have repeatedly been associated with the coldest stream reaches within basins. The lower limits of bull trout distributions correspond to a mean annual air temperature of about 4 degrees C (range 3 – 6 degrees C) and should equate to ground water temperatures of about 5 to 10 degrees C.

Bull trout are more strongly tied to the stream bottom and substrate than other salmonids. Substrate composition has repeatedly been correlated with the occurrence and abundance of juvenile bull trout. Fine sediments may limit access to substrate interstices that are important cover during rearing and overwintering.

The Forest Plan standards and guidelines, as amended by the Inland Native Fish Strategy provide management direction for the Colville National Forest. Additionally, the draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan identifies specific "core area habitat" which contain specific spawning and rearing habitat based upon the needs of bull trout. These streams are all located within the Pend Oreille River subbasin.

Portions of several tributaries to the Pend Oreille River have been designated as critical spawning and rearing habitat for bull trout. One of the potential new routes is located within the Ruby Creek watershed. This watershed contains critical habitat. The route to be used by disabled hunters lies upstream of this critical habitat. This watershed is considered to be part of core area habitat for the recovery of bull trout in the Pend Oreille subbasin within the draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan. The remaining routes are not located in core area habitat nor do these watersheds contain critical habitat for bull trout.

**Environmental Consequences**
The proposed actions are on flat enough ground that there will be minimal effects to the nearby channels. The length of buffer between the management actions and the streams are great enough that given the amount of canopy cover, minimal soil disturbance, and the prescribed design features for the project, no direct, indirect and cumulative effects to sediment production, delivery, water yield, channel morphology or water quality are expected.

The sediment, for the most part, will be captured by the forest before it reaches the streams. Forest litter, debris and rock provide for storage cells that trap sediment before it reaches the stream courses. As delivery distance increases (buffer lengths), and slope decreased, the probability of sediment decreases.

This project is in compliance with the Colville National Forest Plan, specifically with regards to:

> **Water (CNF Forest Plan, p. 4 – 50-53):** National Forest System lands will be managed under the principles of multiple use and sustained yield without permanent impairment of land productivity.
>
> **Riparian (CNF Forest Plan, p. 4 – 53 -54):** Special attention shall be given to land and vegetation for approximately 100 feet from the edges of all perennial streams, lakes and other bodies of water. This area shall correspond to at least the recognizable area dominated by the riparian vegetation. No management practices causing detrimental changes in water temperature or chemical composition, blockages of water courses, or deposits of sediment shall be permitted within these areas which will seriously and adversely affect water conditions or fish habitat.

The existing condition of the road systems are expected to remain stable due the low level of additional use for the three month period. The action of providing disabled hunter access is not expected to result in any increase in introduction of sediment from these sites, decrease in the function of riparian vegetation or stream channel complexity where portions of these routes lie within the Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas of various streams. For this reason, the action is not expected to affect bull trout or their habitat.

As part of the regulations under section 3(5) (A)(i) of the Endangered Species Act, PCEs (primary constituent elements) have been developed along with critical habitat for bull trout.

When reviewing the PCEs for bull trout, the proposed action is **not** expected to:

1. increase contamination of water quality that would inhibit bull trout reproduction growth and survival;
2. increase water temperatures above the tolerance level of bull trout;

3. decrease the existing complexity of stream channels;
4. increase the level of instream fine sediment and substrate embeddedness, that would decrease the reproductive success for bull trout;
5. change the existing flow regime;
6. decrease water quality and quantity through detrimental effects to springs seeps, groundwater and subsurface water conductivity;
7. increase existing barriers to bull trout migration;.
8. decrease the abundance of the existing food base for bull trout;
9. introduce predatory, competing or interbreeding non-native species.

For these reasons, the proposed action is not likely to result in the destruction or adverse modification of bull trout critical habitat in Ruby Creek.

The Disabled Hunter Access Project will have no meaningful adverse effects to aquatic resources associated with the proposed actions.

## Timber and Other Vegetation

**Affected Environment**
Although these proposed areas display a variety of vegetation types and conditions, there is generally no distinction made between areas from the standpoint of effects. The proposed action and activities which would be enabled affect the vegetation in the same manner for each area.

Noxious weeds are non-native plants that have been introduced and can be highly destructive, competitive and difficult to control. Noxious weeds can lead to degraded plant and animal habitat, displace native vegetation, increase erosion and some are toxic to animals.

The Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board has developed control categories to prioritize noxious weed species based on the seriousness of the threat they pose. Noxious weeds are classified into three major classes; Class A, Class B, and Class C.

Class A weeds are non-native species whose distribution in Washington State is still limited. Preventing new infestations and eradicating existing infestations are the highest priority. Eradication of all Class A plants is required by law. There are no Class A plant species known to exist on or adjacent to proposed routes.

Class B weeds are species which are presently limited to portions of the state. These species are designated for control in regions where they are not yet widespread. Preventing new infestations in these areas is a high priority. In areas where Class B species are already abundant, control is decided at the county level with containment as a primary goal. If county noxious weed control boards have designated Class B noxious weeds for treatment they are considered a Class B Designate species, and control is required. There are Class B and Class B Designate noxious weeds in proximity to the proposed routes.

Class C weeds are species that are already present and widespread across the state and control is encouraged in areas of large infestations, but not required.
The following table displays the noxious weed and invasive species known to exist in the proximity of the proposed routes and their control category as determined by the Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board.

Several noxious weed or invasive species are present in the general location of the proposed routes though their precise abundance is not known due to the fact that noxious weed infestations fluctuate annually based on new plant recruitment and treatment efforts. Most noxious weed infestations do not occupy large areas and are often just a few plants at scattered locations.

Most noxious weed populations found across the Forest, and near the proposed routes are associated with forest roads, past log landings and skid trails. Roads and trails are areas of disturbance with bare soil, which is susceptible to noxious weed establishment, and they act as vectors to spread noxious weeds by vehicular use.

Noxious weeds such as Canada thistle, Bull thistle; Absinth Wormwood, Common Mullein, Diffuse Knapweed, St. Johnswort and Oxeye Daisy have all been known to exist on the Forest for many decades. Diffuse knapweed and St. Johnswort are some of the first noxious weeds known to exist on the Forest and have been observed in northeast Washington since the 1950s. The previously mentioned noxious weed species found within the project area can usually be found growing along forest roads, in forest openings, created meadows and timber stands having a sparse canopy cover. Noxious weeds are most often found in these locations because they require adequate sunlight to establish and grow. Most densely forested areas do not provide adequate growing conditions for noxious weeds to become established.

Plumeless thistle has been observed on the Ruby Creek road, near the proposed Ruby Creek route. Plumeless thistle has been observed in the past in the Deadman Creek and Boulder Creek areas, which are near the Betty and Com Creek routes, though infestations have not been observed recently. Plumeless thistle is a fairly large thistle that reproduces by windblown seed, and therefore has the potential to infest areas disconnected from the main population.

Houndstongue is a biennial plant growing 1 to 4 feet tall with a prickly seed covered in Velcro-like hooks that is easily transported on livestock, wildlife, clothing, shoelaces, pets, etc. Houndstongue is known to be toxic to livestock, but they are unlikely to consume it in a rangeland setting as there are far more desirable plants available. This noxious weed is most wide spread in the Deadman Creek area and therefore the Betty route, though it is found in many locations across the Forest.

Yellow and Orange hawkweed are known to exist in many locations throughout the Forest, and all proposed routes have invasive hawkweeds growing on them, adjacent to them or on Forest roads accessing them. Hawkweeds have been observed on the Forest since the mid 1990s. They have a dense rhizomatous root system, are very aggressive

and seem to easily out-compete desirable vegetation and eventually can displace all grasses in a site. These weeds also spread by wind-blown seed. Yellow hawkweed is unique among noxious weeds because it has the ability to move into and propagate in a forested setting with moderate canopy coverage.

Hoary alyssum is a fairly new and aggressive invader on the Colville National Forest. Hoary alyssum has been observed in the North and South Forks of Chewelah Creek, which is near the Brewer Mountain, and Mitchell routes. Hoary alyssum appears to have the ability to establish and move into areas with existing desirable vegetation and displace it.

Yellow and Dalmation Toadflax can be observed in areas with sandy soils on south facing slopes. It has been observed in the Deadman and Chewelah Creek areas, which are in the vicinity of the Brewer Mountain, Mitchell and Betty Routes. This noxious weed is a class C noxious weed and does not pose a substantial threat to larger areas. There are effective biological agents that exist on the Forest to control this noxious weed.

Tansy Ragwort occurs in various locations across the Forest and has been observed in the Ruby Creek area, which is adjacent to the Ruby Creek route. Tansy Ragwort is toxic to cattle and horses.

The following table summarizes the known noxious weed species near the proposed Disabled Hunter Access routes.

**Table 6: Known Noxious Weeds Species Near Disabled Hunter Access Routes**

| SPECIES | CONTROL CATEGORY |
|---|---|
| Canada Thistle | Class C |
| Bull Thistle | Class C |
| Absinth Wormwood | Class C |
| Common St. Johnswort | Class C |
| Yellow Toadflax | Class C |
| Plumeless Thistle | Class B |
| Houndstongue | Class B |
| Yellow Hawkweed | Class B |
| Orange hawkweed | Class B |
| Diffuse knapweed | Class B |
| Spotted knapweed | Class B |
| Hoary Alyssum | Class B |
| Oxeye Daisy | Class B |
| Sulfur Cynquefoil | Class B |
| Tansy Ragwort | Class B |
| Common catsear | Class B |
| Dalmatian toadflax | Class B |

The Colville National Forest has documentation of noxious weed treatments dating back to the late 1970s, though utilizing herbicides to control noxious weeds was not common until the late 1990s. Applications of herbicides to control noxious weeds have been occurring annually at specific areas across the Colville National Forest since 1998. These efforts acted to reduce the amount of noxious weed infested acres across the Forest and reduce the potential for spread.

Current noxious weed treatments have been occurring under the direction of, and in compliance with, the Colville National Forest's 1998 Environmental Assessment for Integrated Noxious Weed Treatment and the 2005 Pacific Northwest Region Invasive Plant Program Environmental Impact Statement.

Currently the Colville National Forest uses an integrated approach in managing noxious weeds which includes prevention measures, inventory, treatment and monitoring. Integrated pest management is the coordinated use of multiple tactics to assure stable ecosystem function and maintain pest damage below economic levels, while minimizing hazards to human, animals, plants and the environment (U.S. Congress Office of Technology Assessment, 1993). The Forest uses a variety of treatment methods to control noxious weeds and treatment methods are determined by site specific attributes found at treatment locations. The different treatment methods employed by the Colville National Forest Include:

1. **Manual Removal** – Hand pulling and digging of noxious weeds is used where noxious weed populations are relatively small and isolated. This is an effective way to treat noxious weeds that are newly established in an area. Hand pulling or digging, along with mechanical and chemical control methods, are most effective if conducted prior to the plants producing seed.

2. **Mechanical Treatment (mowing)** - Mechanical treatments are typically used on the Forest in locations where other methods are not appropriate to control noxious weeds such as in the Forest's seed tree orchards.

3. **Release of Biological Control Agents (Host specific insect parasites)** - The Forest has a variety of locations where biological control agents are employed to control noxious weeds. There are effective biological control agents on the Colville National Forest for knapweed, St. Johnswort, toadflax, musk thistle and plumeless thistle. Most other state listed noxious weed species do not have approved biological control agents that are available for release. Houndstongue does have a biological agent that is proving to be effective in controlling this species, but it is not available for release in the United States. Houndstongue biological agents are only available for use in Canada at this time, but some have been observed in the United States near the U.S./Canadian border. Biological agents approved for use in the United States that control noxious weeds have been observed on host plants within the project area. While biological agents reduce populations, eradication of the weed populations generally does not occur due to the predator/prey relationship.

4. **Chemical (Application of herbicide) -** The Forest treats the most acres of noxious weed infestations by using a select number of approved herbicides. Most of the acres treated are accomplished by the responsible application of herbicides within existing road corridors, since this is the location where most noxious weeds first become established. Herbicide application methods are determined by the size and location of the noxious weed infestation. Generally, smaller infestations, and/or application in sensitive areas (such as near water or sensitive plants) is accomplished with spot spraying from a backpack sprayer or the hand wand of a truck or ATV mounted sprayer. Larger infestations are generally treated by using a truck mounted, articulated boom-type sprayer. Though the Forest does broadcast spray noxious weed infested areas, application is limited to areas that have targeted noxious weeds present. Therefore, the Forest does not apply herbicides in areas where noxious weeds are not observed or present. The Colville National Forest does not have the ability to utilize herbicides designed for aquatic settings; therefore no herbicides will come in contact with surface water.

The Forest is required to monitor at least 50% of the area where noxious weeds have been treated using herbicides. It is common for the Forest to significantly exceed this requirement, as nearly all of the areas that are treated under service contracts are inspected and monitored for effectiveness and compliance with the contract terms.

**Environmental Consequences**

**Firewood Program**

By utilizing areas where roads are already closed with gates, the public should already be used to the idea that these areas are closed to firewood cutting. Any activity behind a locked gate, however, seems to draw attention to the areas which may result in closure violations. Additional enforcement measures (patrols, surveillance) may be necessary in the first few years of the new program in order to discourage illegal firewood removal. Insuring that gates remain locked during disabled hunting use periods may require additional emphasis by wildlife management or law enforcement personnel. Disabled hunters would be aware that other activities behind closures are not permissible, and may aid in detection of any violators. If any additional firewood harvesting takes place, it is predicted to be confined to a few problem areas, resulting in effects that are too small to quantify when considered on a landscape scale.

**Noxious Weeds**

The primary issue to be addressed is the spread of noxious weeds as a result of permitted motorized access on closed, Level 1 roads.

Many noxious weed species are present and established on and adjacent to the proposed routes, therefore; only the prevention of weed spread and/or the compounding of weed problems that could result from the alternatives will be discussed. The project will not address the treatment of existing weed locations or the spread of weeds that could occur

independently of the actions proposed in alternatives. Treatment of existing noxious weeds within the project area is addressed in the Colville National Forest Integrated Noxious Weed Treatment Environmental Assessment (1998) and supported by the Pacific Northwest Region Invasive Plant Program EIS and ROD (2005).

The desired future condition is based on assumptions, allocations and direction given in the Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. This is not a direction statement, but rather conclusions drawn as to the changes that would occur as a result of management activities over the next 10 years. The following desired future condition is an excerpt from Chapter 4, page 64 of the plan: *"The occurrence and spread of noxious weeds will be reduced as a result of integrated pest management."*

Management direction provided in the Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan is *that "emphasis will be given to the control and reduction of noxious weed infestations"*. The Forest has also developed the Seeding and Planting Guide for the Colville National Forest, which addresses the need to seed vegetation such as grasses and legumes on highly disturbed sites and provides guidance to match sites with appropriate plant species.

Direction is also provided by the Colville National Forest Weed Prevention Guidelines document, which was developed to minimize the introduction of noxious weed, minimize conditions that favor the establishment of noxious weeds and minimize conditions that favor the spread of noxious weeds. The following are eight major objectives of the Colville National Forest Weed Prevention Guidelines:

1. Education: Ensure public and employee knowledge of noxious weeds to help reduce both the spread rate of existing weeds and the risk of infestation by new noxious weeds.

2. Project Need: Weigh the need of the proposed project against the risk of weed infestation.

3. Minimize Transportation of Weed Seed: Reduce the spread of existing weeds across the Forest and the risk of introducing new weed species to project sites and other areas of the Forest.

4. Incorporate Weed Prevention Measures into project planning and design, and special use permit administration: Ensure that the risks of weed introduction and/or spread, and the mitigation required to minimize that risk are properly considered before ground disturbing activities begin.

5. Pre-activity, inventory and Analysis: Minimize the spread of existing weeds into new project areas.

6. Minimize ground disturbance and the exposure of mineral soil during project activities: Reduce the potential for weeds to become established on new sites and the need to conduct re-vegetation activities.

7. Re-vegetate disturbed areas: Re-establish desirable vegetation of exposed mineral soil due to project activity and unplanned events such as fire, flood, or other disturbances to minimize the introduction and/or spread of noxious weeds.

8. Monitor: Conduct project follow-up and review to determine success of weed treatments sand re-vegetation efforts to detect new weed sites requiring treatment and make corrections as necessary. Monitoring is a part of every project and as such, needs to be covered in NEPA discussions, and planned for as a part of implementation.

The Preventing and Managing Invasive Plants Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Record of Decision (October 11, 2005) provides for seven new standards for prevention of noxious weeds. There is one that applies to this project which is:

- 1. Prevention of invasive plant introduction, establishment and spread will be addressed in ….fire and fuels management plans; vegetation management plans and other land management assessments.

The following are the five major objectives of the 2005 EIS and Record of Decision.

Goal 1 – Protect ecosystems from the impacts of invasive plants through an integrated approach that emphasizes prevention, early detection and early treatment. All employees and users of the National Forest recognize that they play an important role in preventing and detecting invasive plants.

Goal 2 – Minimize the creation of conditions that favor invasive plant introduction, establishment and spread during land management actions and land use activities. Continually review and adjust land management practices to help reduce the creation of conditions that favor invasive plant communities.

Goal 3 – Protect the health of people who work, visit or live in near the National Forest, while effectively treating invasive plants. Identify, avoid or mitigate potential human health effects from invasive plants and treatments.

Goal 4 – Implement invasive plant treatment strategies that protect sensitive ecosystem components, and maintain biological diversity and function within ecosystems. Reduce loss or degradation of native habitat from invasive plants while minimizing effects from treatment projects.

Goal 5 – Expand collaborative efforts between the Forest Service, our partners and the public who share learning experiences regarding the prevention and control of invasive plants and the protection and restoration of native plant communities.

The **no action alternative** would mean that the six proposed routes for disabled hunter access would remain closed and vehicles would not be permitted to go behind the closure devises. Use of the Boundary Mountain, Middle Fork Calispell, and Snyder Hill routes for disabled hunter access would be continued. This alternative would be the most desirable to reduce the risk of invasive noxious weeds becoming established on the proposed routes since vehicles and motorized use are the largest influence on spreading noxious weed seed.

Having the proposed routes closed to all motorized access does not ensure that noxious weeds would not become established or spread since they are known to be on, adjacent to or near all of the routes currently.

Unauthorized use by motor vehicles is occurring on some of the proposed routes by vehicles being driven around road closure devises. This would remain a threat and continue to be a risk for spreading noxious weeds on the closed roads proposed for use in this project.

Potential for the establishment of noxious weeds exists where noxious weeds that reproduce by wind blown seed occur adjacent to the proposed routes. Species near proposed routes that reproduce by such means are Canada thistle, bull thistle, plumeless thistle, orange hawkweed and yellow hawkweed. If wind blown seeds fall in desirable locations for plant establishment they could germinate and reproduce. Areas with exposed mineral soil that exist behind road closures may be attributed to burrowing rodents, wildlife, livestock or unauthorized motorized use.

Under the **proposed action**, six potential new Disabled Hunter Access routes have been identified and proposed for use. The only activity in this proposed project that has the potential to spread noxious weeds is allowing motorized access on roads where it is not currently allowed. The related clearing of dead and down trees, removing brush from roads, felling danger trees and placing boulders does not contribute to the spread of noxious weeds.

Noxious weed spread can be attributed to there being nearby populations that will provide a seed source and the amount of roads open to vehicles. Forest roads have the potential to act as conduits for noxious weeds and provide habitat for their establishment. Ownership of the roads within the Forest boundary are is a combination of private, county and Forest Service therefore; there is the potential for noxious weeds to be transported in the vicinity of the proposed routes across jurisdictions besides Forest Service.

Vehicles that travel along roads infested with noxious weeds have the potential to spread noxious weeds if the plants reproductive parts become attached to and transported by the vehicle. Vehicle skid plates, suspensions, bumpers, radiators, etc. are places where noxious weed seeds can accumulate if vehicles are driven through infested areas. These seeds can then fall off later to infest new areas.

Existing forest vegetation on timbered sites provides a natural deterrent to noxious weed invasion. The noxious weeds identified above are not generally shade tolerant, and usually require areas of soil disturbance to establish. Areas of soil disturbance could create unoccupied niches for noxious weeds and invasive species to establish given that potential seed sources exist on or near the proposed routes.

Though there is no road construction, reconstruction or maintenance planned with this project there is still some potential for soil disturbance, which is a key factor to the establishment of noxious weeds. Soil disturbance could occur it areas where vehicles turn around or where tires may spin on loose soils. These areas should be relatively small and isolated on the proposed routes.

All of the proposed routes access areas that were logged several, but less than ten, years ago. Desirable forest vegetation such as trees, shrubs, grasses and forbs have become established in treated areas and along and on roads. This vegetation acts as a natural deterrent to the establishment of noxious weeds because of the competition it produces and the shade that it provides to the soil surface. These areas proposed for use will become more resistant to the noxious weeds known to exist on the Forest as time goes on because forest vegetation continues to advance and mature thereby reducing sunlight to the forest floor. Adequate sunlight is needed for the establishment of most noxious weeds.

Effective road closures are very important in limiting the extent of noxious weed infestations. Effective closure methods ensure that unauthorized vehicle traffic cannot access these proposed areas. The placement of boulders to ensure effective road closures would reduce unauthorized road use and therefore the risk of noxious weed spread.

Treating noxious weed infestations along Forest roads within, and leading to, the proposed routes would greatly reduce the amount of noxious weed seed that would be available to germinate in areas of soil disturbance. Treating noxious weeds prior to ground disturbing activities would result in their seed and reproductive parts not being transported by vehicles.

**Cumulative Effects**
No cumulative effects to noxious weeds have been identified from the proposed action assuming that all mitigating measures are implemented and followed.

There are no irreversible and irretrievable effects concerning noxious weeds from the Disabled Hunter Access Enhancement Project

**Mitigation Measures**

The mitigation measures identified here are those that address noxious weed concerns that are specific to this project. These measures should be implemented in a timely manner in order to successfully mitigate anticipated effects.

1. The Renshaw and Ruby Creek routes would not be available for permitted motorized use until they and the roads leading to them have had noxious weed treatments applied.

2. Operators will be encouraged to inspect the underside of their vehicles for noxious weed seeds and plant parts prior to accessing routes and remove any said items.

3. Noxious weed prevention and identification material would be provided to each person permitted to access the proposed routes.

**Related Road Maintenance Activities**
Behind road closures, these actions normally are conducted only when roads are reopened in support of project activities such as timber sales. In order to maintain routes for disabled hunters, these actions would need to be conducted in a cyclic manner, similar to that on the open road system as a part of routine road maintenance. Brushing roadsides and removing hazard trees has virtually no effect upon the vegetation structure of the surrounding landscape. “Hazard” trees would normally fall anyway within a few years of that designation, becoming part of the downed woody component of the landscape. Vegetation management would not be affected by this project.

Maintenance through brushing, hazard tree removal, and limited culvert replacement on the 43 miles of roadway closed to the general public would provide an additional measure of protection to forested areas surrounding the closed roads. By having roads cleared on a cyclic basis, fire-fighting crews and equipment could respond more quickly to wildfire emergencies in closed areas during the dry seasons of the year. The potential for human-caused fire in these areas may also be increased, however, due to the increased presence of the public during dry seasons. Fire restrictions, if needed in the general forest, would also be applied to disabled hunting areas. This would mitigate the presence of hunters in areas normally closed to the public during high fire danger.

**Timing of Other Treatments**
Once the amended program is in place, there may be some effect upon timing of proposed treatments when projects are planned in the same area as the Disabled Hunter routes. This does not appear to be a serious problem, but more of an issue to keep in mind when proposed projects intersect with the Disabled Hunter Access Program.

## Historic and Cultural Resources:

A Section 106 Compliance Report was signed by the Forest Archeologist, meaning the project would have no adverse impact to historic resources. The compliance report stated that no mitigation was proposed, and the project (proposed action) may proceed as planned. The Section 106 Compliance Report may be found in project file.

There are no known Native American religious sites within the affected areas. The Kalispel Tribe of Indians, the Spokane Tribe, and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation were invited to consult on this Forest Plan Amendment; none chose to respond.

## Other Effects

### Public Health and Safety

Opening routes to disabled hunters presents no direct public health and safety hazards. Such road use is not considered unusually hazardous, similar to the many miles of other National Forest System roads that are also available for hunting associated with motor vehicle use.

### Unique Characteristics of the Area

The proposed disabled hunting routes contain no unique characteristics that would be affected by the proposal. There are no parklands (i.e., National Parks, National Monuments, National Recreation Areas, etc.). Prime farmlands, range lands, or forest lands; wild and scenic rivers; or ecologically critical areas would not be adversely affected. Wetlands and floodplains would not be adversely affected. The project is not in Inventoried Roadless Area or on land tentatively identified as Potential Wilderness Area.

### Civil Rights, Environmental Justice, and Social Effects

Environmental Justice means that, to the greatest extent practicable and permitted by law, all populations are provided the opportunity to comment before decisions are rendered on, are allowed to share in the benefits of, are not excluded from, and are not affected in a disproportionately high and adverse manner by, government programs and activities affecting human health or the environment (USDA, 1997). In examining the proposed action, the environmental effects, and the fact that no public comments were received claiming any disproportionate effects, there is no indication of any disproportionately high or adverse effect to Indian tribes, low income populations, or minority populations.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination in Federal program delivery, employment, and housing. It is the policy of the Forest Service that the Responsible Official review proposed actions for civil rights impacts, and either prepare a civil rights impact analysis and statement of its findings for any proposed policy or organizational action which may have a major civil rights impact, or document the determination that a civil rights impact analysis and a statement of findings are not needed.

Review of the proposed action, the environmental effects, and the responses to scoping indicate no impacts to women, minority groups, or low income people, and no civil rights or social impacts associated with the proposed action to disabled hunting on certain National Forest System roads. A Civil Rights Impact Analysis is not needed.

## Unavoidable Adverse Effects

There are no important unavoidable adverse effects associated with the project. Potential adverse effects were identified for Recreation and Wildlife resources, but these are minor or would be avoided by applying mitigation measures.

## Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

Irreversible commitments of resources are those that cannot be regained, such as the extinction of a species or the removal of mined ore. Irretrievable commitments are those that are lost for a period of time such as the temporary loss of timber productivity in forested areas that are kept clear for use as a power line rights-of-way or road. There would be no irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources associate with this project.

## Cumulative Effects

Cumulative effects are defined as: "*the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time (40 CFR 1508.7).*" Cumulative effects have been discussed previously for each resource; none were described as important.

## Other Required Disclosures

- There are no highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risks identified with the proposal to open routes to disabled hunters.
- The proposal to open routes to disabled hunters is not a precedent-setting action. The Colville National Forest has existing disabled hunting routes.
- The project is consistent with the Colville Land and Resource Management Plan. See discussions in the EA on pages 14, 16-39, 40, and 43.
- The project is consistent with the NFMA (National Forest Management Act), because: a) the action is consistent with the Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan; b) economic and environmental aspects were considered, including recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife, and fish; and c) provision for the diversity of plant and animal communities was considered. The project does not propose to meaningfully alter vegetation, so NFMA requirements related to alteration of vegetation do not apply.

  The project is consistent with the Endangered Species Act because there would be no adverse effects regarding threatened, endangered, or proposed species, and no meaningful effects regarding sensitive fish, plant, or wildlife species (see Environmental Consequences, Wildlife, and Aquatic Resources, pages 15-44. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was consulted regarding effects to Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive species. Concurrence with the findings of the Biological Evaluation was received on September 3, 2008

- The project is consistent with the NHPA (National Historic Preservation Act). The NHPA requires the agency (i.e., the Forest Service) to:
  1. *Take into account the effect of the undertaking* (NHPA, Section 106). The effects of the project were evaluated and found to have no potential for adverse impact to historic resources.
  2. *Afford the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation a reasonable opportunity to comment* (NHPA, Section 106). The Forest Archaeologist concluded there would be no adverse effect. Therefore, there was no need to invite comments from the Advisory Council.
  3. *Evaluate historic properties for eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places* (NHPA, Section 110). There were no Historic Register-eligible properties with potential to be affected.
  4. *Assume responsibility for the preservation of historic properties which are owned or controlled by the agency. Properties under the jurisdiction or control of the agency as listed or eligible for the National Register are managed and maintained in a way that considers the preservation of their historic, archaeological, architectural, and cultural values* (NHPA, Section 110). There were no historic properties with potential to be affected.
- There have been no conflicts identified with local, State, or Federal land use plans, policies, or controls for the area concerned.

# CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

The Forest Service consulted the following individuals, Federal, State, and local agencies, tribes and non-Forest Service persons during the development of this environmental assessment:

## Interdisciplinary Team Members:

David Bostick, Wildlife Biologist, ID Team Leader
James McGowan, Forest Wildlife Biologist
Michael Borysewicz, Wildlife Biologist
Jann Bodie, Recreation Specialist /Landscape Architect
Carmen Nielsen, Recreation Technician
Seth Krohn, Recreation Technician
Mary Hendricks, Engineering Technician
Tom Shuhda, Forest Fisheries Biologist
Steve Kramer, Forest Archeologist
Tom Pawley. Forest Silviculturist
Jennifer Hickenbottom, Forest Hydrologist
Travis Fletcher, Rangeland Management Specialist

## Federal, State, and Local Agencies:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Spokane, WA.
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

## Tribes:

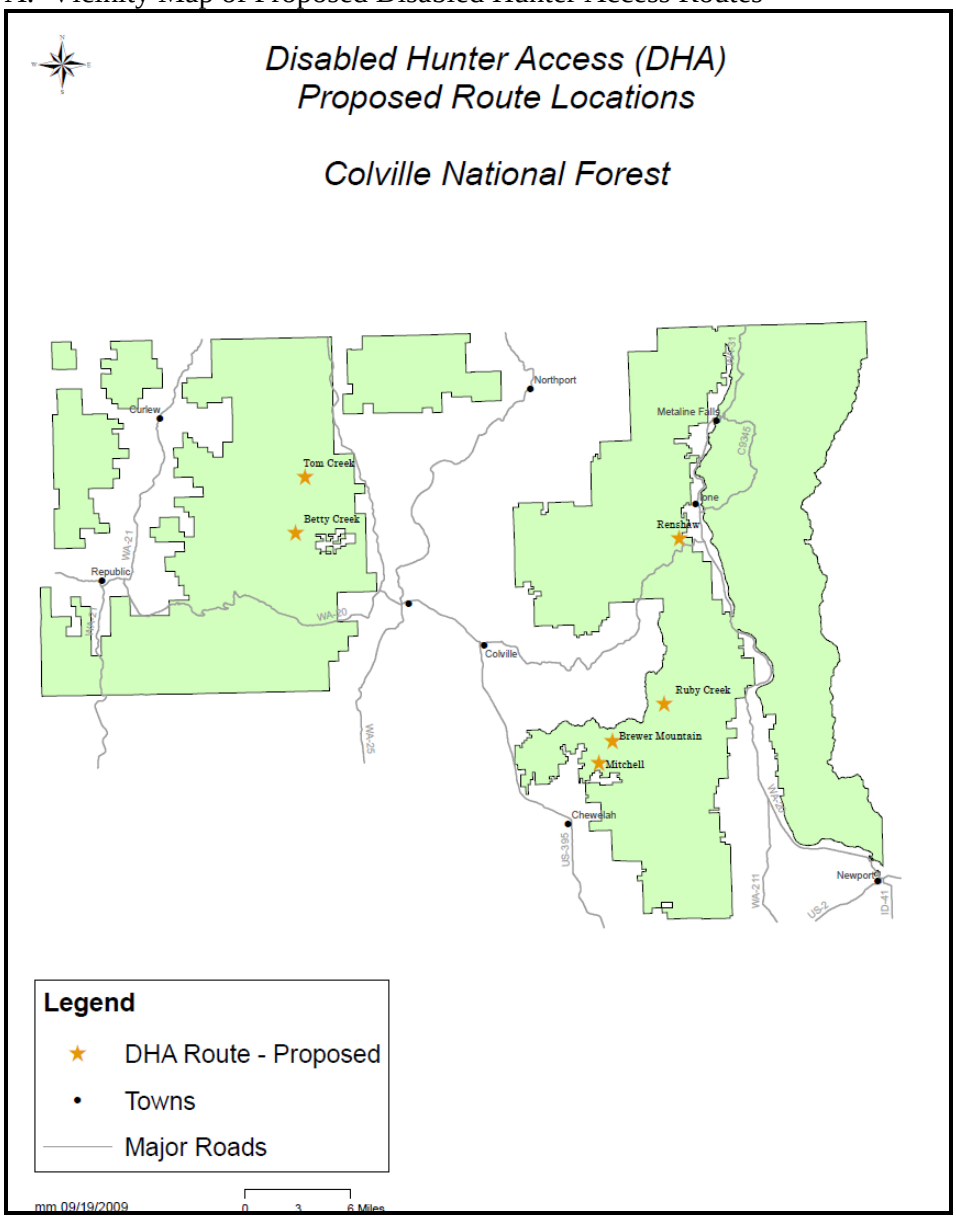
Confederated Colville Indian Tribes, Spokane, Kalispell tribes

# APPENDICES

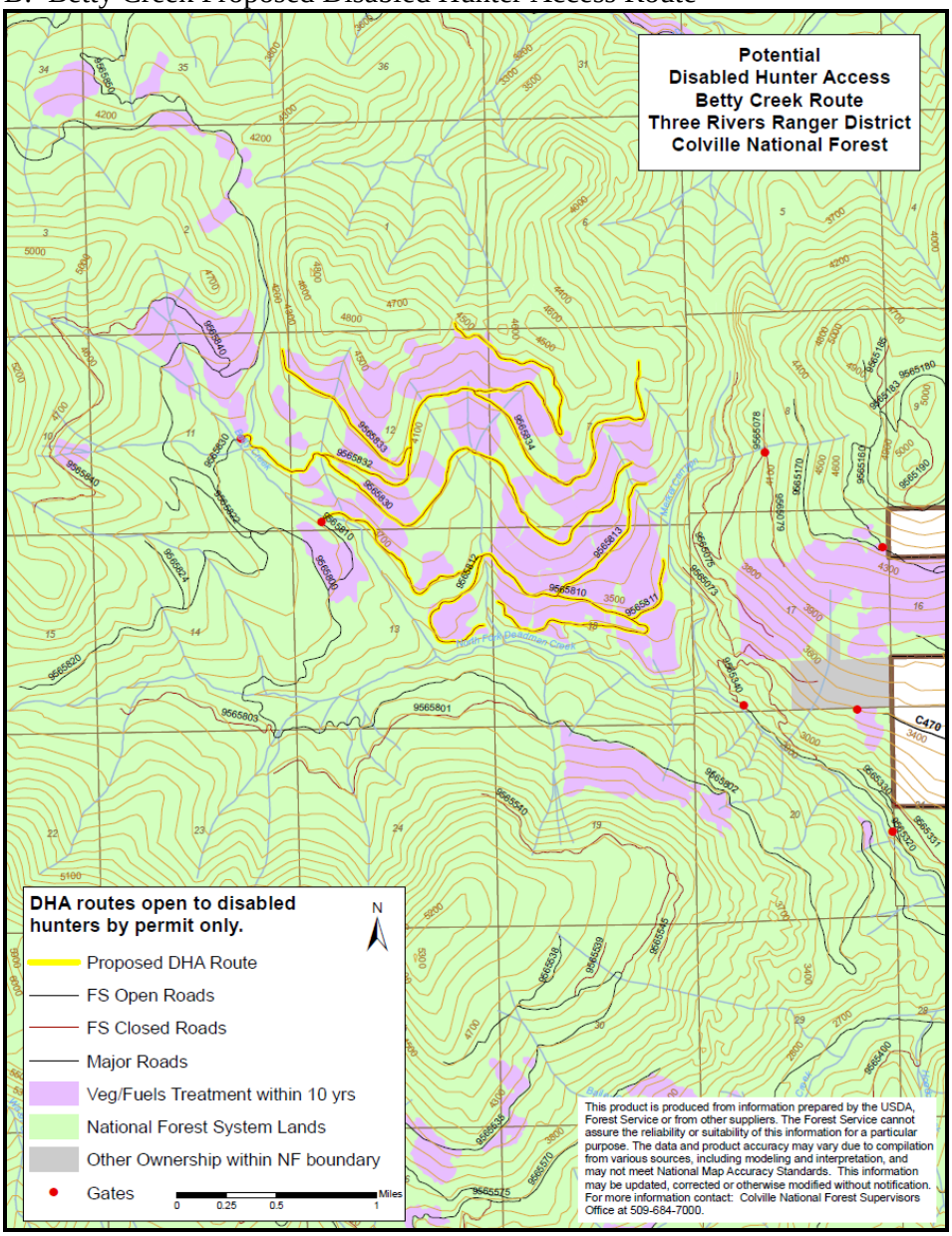
## Appendix 1 - Maps of Proposed New Routes (7)

A: Vicinity Map of Proposed Disabled Hunter Access Routes
B: Betty Creek Proposed Disabled Hunter Access Route
C: Brewer Mountain Proposed Disabled Hunter Access Route
D: Mitchell Proposed Disabled Hunter Access Route
E: Renshaw Proposed Disabled Hunter Access Route
F: Ruby Creek Proposed Disabled Hunter Access Route
G: Tom Creek Proposed Disabled Hunter Access Route

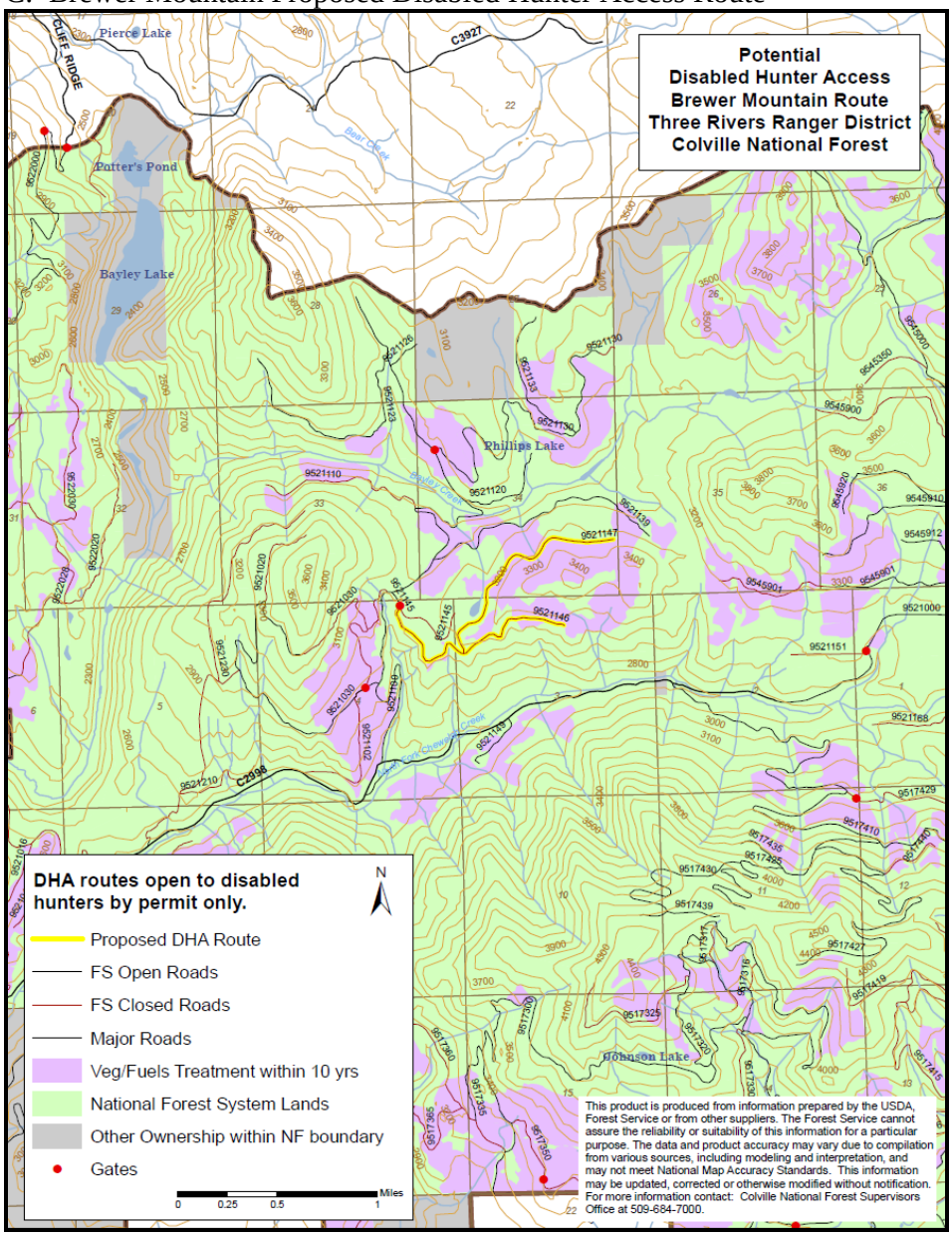
A: Vicinity Map of Proposed Disabled Hunter Access Routes



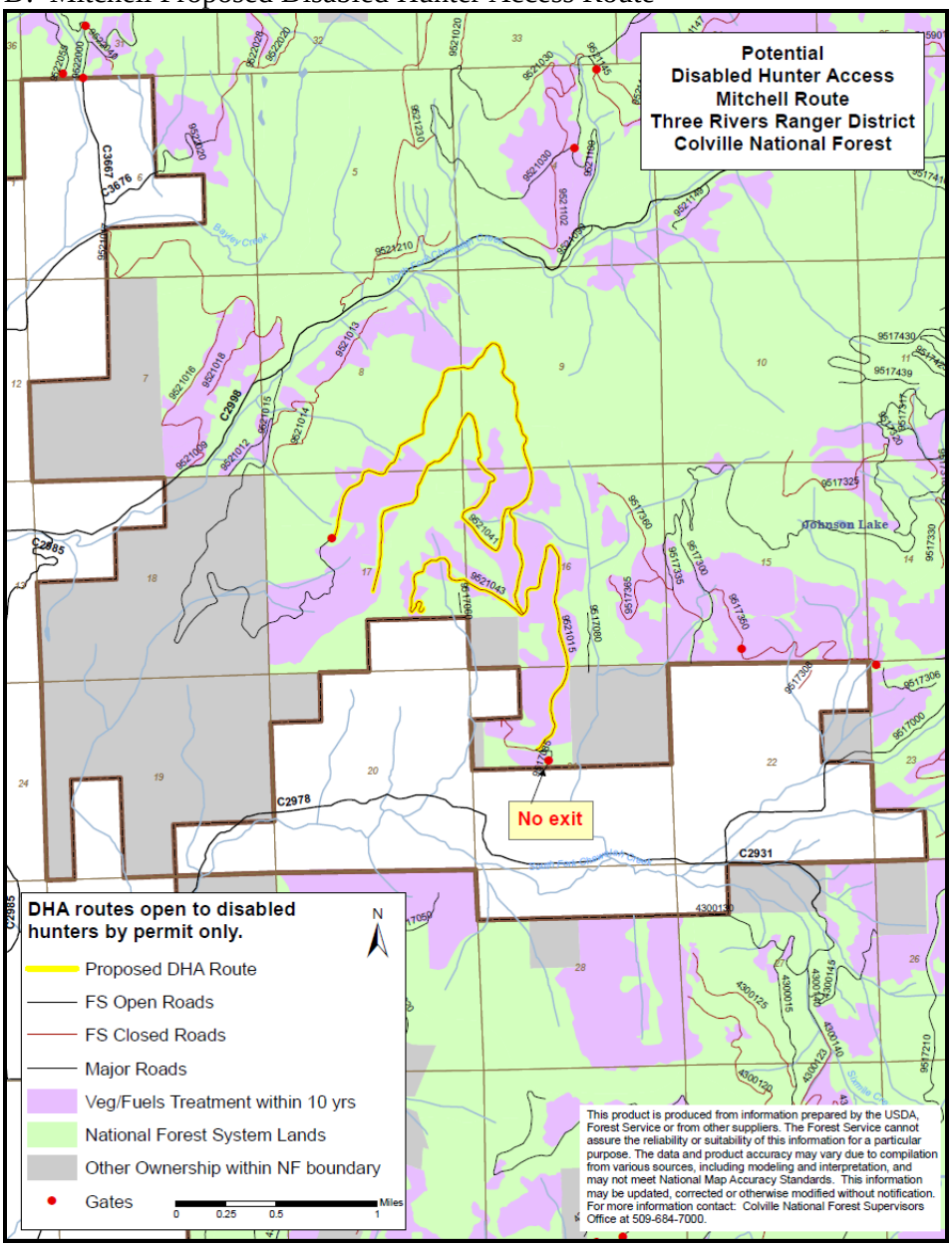
# B: Betty Creek Proposed Disabled Hunter Access Route



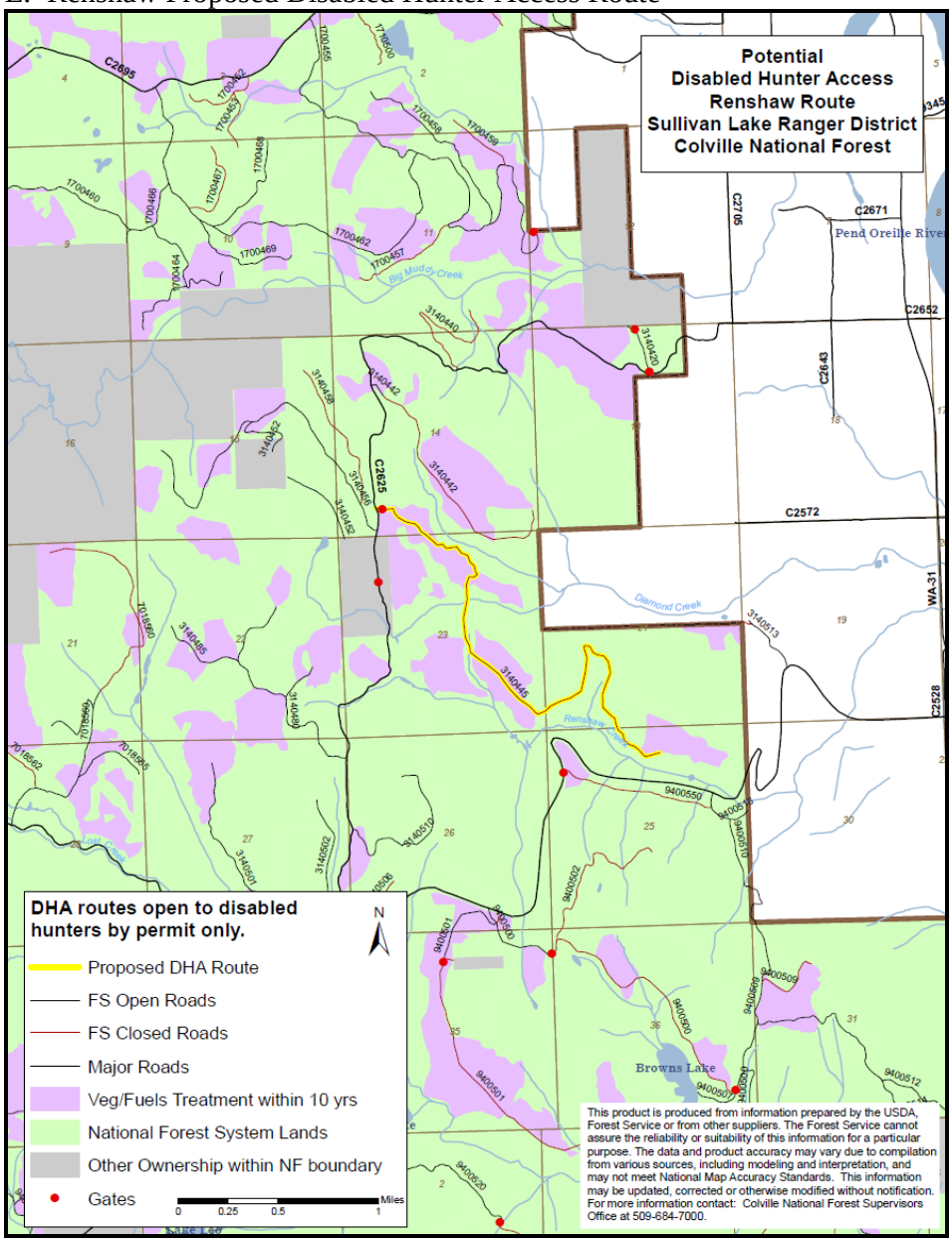
# C: Brewer Mountain Proposed Disabled Hunter Access Route



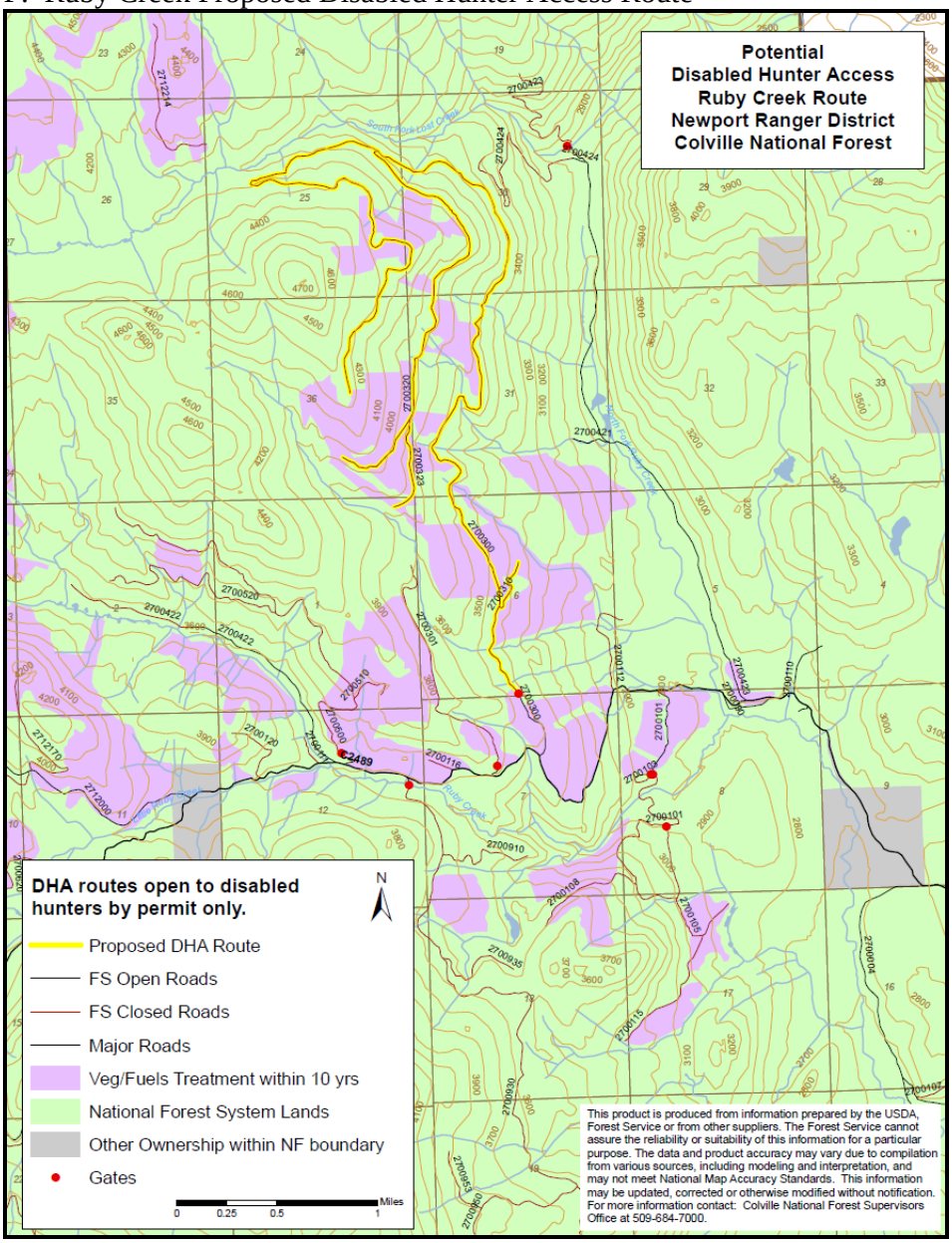
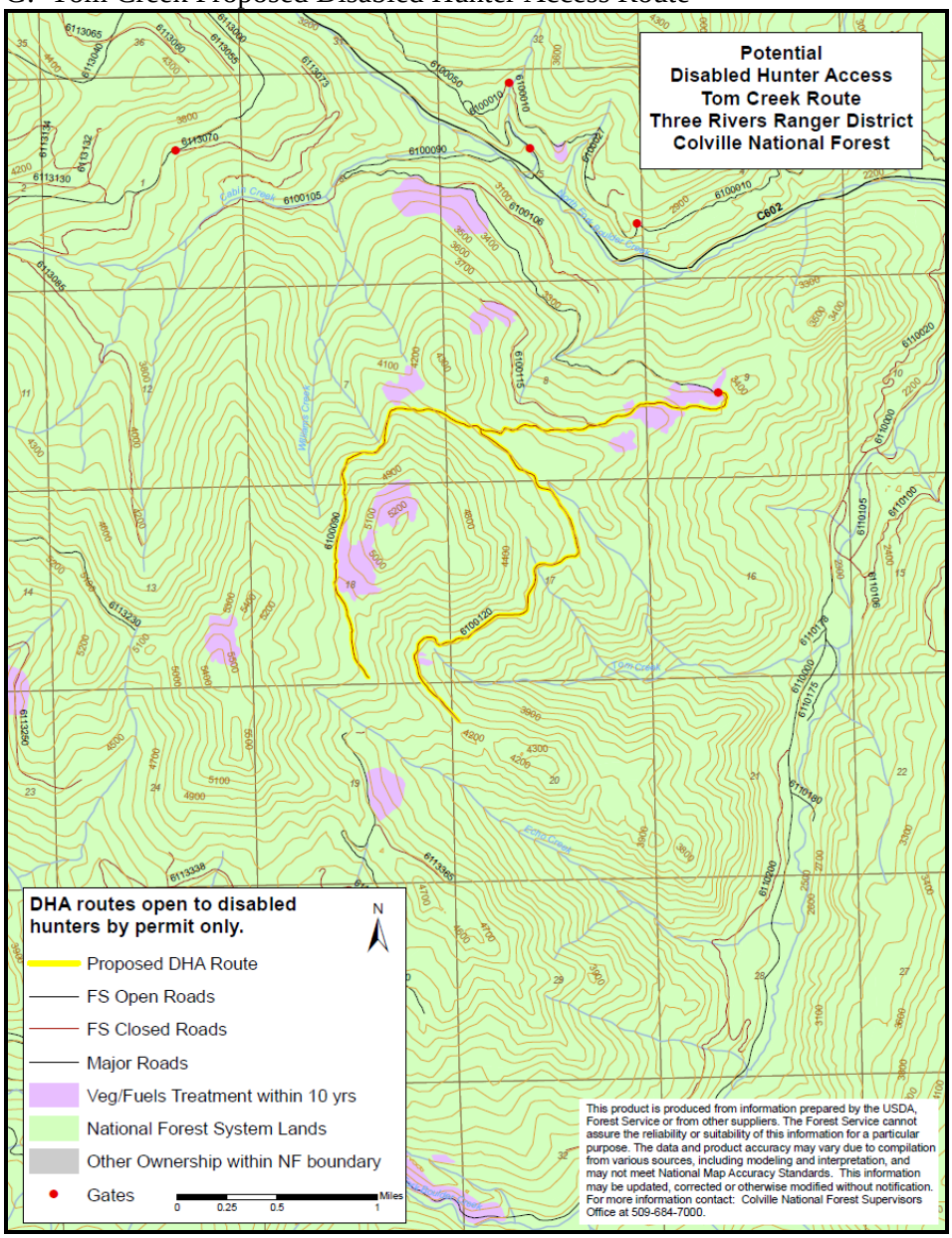
# D: Mitchell Proposed Disabled Hunter Access Route



E: Renshaw Proposed Disabled Hunter Access Route



# F: Ruby Creek Proposed Disabled Hunter Access Route



# G: Tom Creek Proposed Disabled Hunter Access Route