

DECISION MEMO
Forest Plan Amendment Number 8
Custer National Forest

The purpose of Amendment Number 8 is to include Management Standards and Guidelines in the Forest Plan in response to passage of the Federal Cave Resources Protection Act of 1988. The Forest Plan was developed prior to the passage of this act and therefore direction was not contained in the Forest Plan.

I am amending the Forest Plan by adding the Management Standards and Guidelines that were proposed. The attached amendment should be added to the Forest Plan, as an addition to Chapter II (Forest-wide Management Direction), Section E (Management Standards), subsection 2 (Recreation), page 16, immediately following part i, Research Natural Areas (RNA's).

Comments related to this amendment were received from two respondents and both favored inclusion of the new direction.

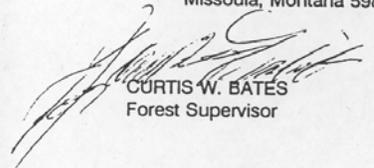
Adoption of this amendment will not significantly change the forest-wide environmental impacts disclosed in the Custer National Forest Plan Environmental Impact Statement. This amendment is categorically excluded from further documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement or Environmental Assessment (FSM 1950 Interim Directive No. 18 and FSH 1909.15 Interim Directive No. 2).

Additional information can be obtained from:

Custer National Forest
Leroy White
PO Box 2556
Billings, Montana 59103
(406) 657-6361

Implementation of this decision shall not occur for seven days following publication of the legal notice (36 CFR 217.0). This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 217.8 and 36 CFR 217.9. Two copies of the notice of appeal and statement of reasons must be in writing and submitted within 45 days following the publication of this decision to:

Regional Forester, John W. Mumma
USDA Forest Service
PO Box 7669
Missoula, Montana 59807


CURTIS W. BATES
Forest Supervisor


Date

**Forest Plan Amendment Number 8
Custer National Forest
Billings, Montana**

The following amendment provides Management Standards and Guidelines for cave management. It should be inserted in your Forest Plan on page 16, immediately following part i. Research Natural Areas (RNA's).

j. Cave Resources

1. An analysis should be prepared for caves, sinkholes, and other unique geological features prior to ground disturbing activities which may adversely affect them. The analysis should document their biological, hydrological, cultural, recreational, geological, mineralogical, paleontological, educational and scientific values and provide the classification and appropriate management direction. It should also be consistent with all identified values and include necessary protection or rehabilitation measures.

2. CLASSIFICATIONS:

CLASS 1: SENSITIVE CAVES

Caves considered unsuitable for exploration by the general public either because of their pristine condition, unique resources or extreme safety hazards. They may contain resources that would be impacted by low levels of visitation. These caves are not shown on maps or discussed in publications intended for general public use such as guides, brochures and magazines.

CLASS 2: UNDEVELOPED CAVES

Caves that are undeveloped or contain unmaintained or minimal developments that are suitable for exploration by persons who are properly prepared. In general, these caves contain resources that resist degradation by recreational use. However, public use will not be directed toward them.

CLASS 3: DIRECTED ACCESS CAVES

Caves with directed public access and developed for public use. These caves are shown on maps or have signs directing visitor access; frequently have guided tours and artificial lighting. Regardless of the level of development, public visitation is encouraged. The caves may have sensitive resources that are protected.

Newly discovered caves will be temporarily managed as Class 1 until an analysis of resource values can be made.

3. A Forest-wide, comprehensive cave management analysis should be completed. Individual cave management plans may be prepared for caves with: high resource, educational or recreational values, hazardous conditions, heavy use.
4. Caves, sinkholes, and other unique geological features will be protected based on their classification and resource values. The following standards apply:
 - a. Logging, road construction, and other uses of heavy equipment above or in the vicinity of a cave with a thin roof, or the course of such a cave, will be restricted if there is a potential for damage.
 - b. Vegetation in the vicinity of a cave or cave course will be retained if it is required to protect the cave's microenvironment.

- c. If timber harvesting is permitted in the vicinity of a cave, trees will be directionally felled away from the cave and its course.
 - d. Cave entrances will not be altered or used as disposal sites for slash, spoils, or other refuse.
 - e. Management activities will not be permitted within any area draining into a cave if they may affect the cave ecosystem with sedimentation, soil sterilization, the addition of nutrients or other chemicals, including pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers or change the cave's natural hydrology.
 - f. Surface drainage will not be diverted into caves.
 - g. Public access will be limited if required to prevent damage to cave resources. Access may also be limited if there are safety hazards.
 - h. Scientific or educational use of caves may be permitted by the Forest Supervisor.
5. Caves will be evaluated and proposed for listing on the National Significant Caves List. Specific location information of Significant Caves is exempt from disclosure to the general public.