Environmental Assessment
Dispersed Winter Recreation Management
In The Crested Butte Area

April 1995

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I. Introduction - Purpose & Need

The purpose of this Environmental Assessment (EA) is to describe the environmental effects of a proposal (See Alternative #2) to better manage dispersed winter recreation in the Crested Butte Area defined by the map in Figure 1.

The goal in undertaking these actions is to insure Crested Butte is able to maintain a variety of high quality dispersed winter recreation opportunities for the people who live in the area, as well as the people who visit the Crested Butte area.

Over time Crested Butte has become a national and international destination winter recreation area. In addition, the recreation opportunities around Crested Butte contribute a vital role to the quality of life of those who reside in the community. The unique combination of excellent snow, beautiful scenery and accessible terrain makes the Crested Butte area unique in its opportunities for winter sports and recreation.

Crested Butte is surrounded by National Forest winter recreation opportunities. Existing activities include: snowmobiling, backcountry skiing, Nordic skiing, snowcat access, dog sledding, horse use, foot travel, and airborne travel. Each of these activities "competes" for the use of the 16 different areas around Crested Butte shown in Figure 1.

The Crested Butte Mountain Resort and the Crested Butte area in general are experiencing significant increases in popularity. More and more people are coming into the area to recreate and to live. User conflicts in the backcountry promise to escalate unless sensible strategies are implemented to manage use.

Currently the winter recreation occurring in the analysis area is managed under the "suggested use" concept. The areas suggested for motorized or non-motorized use were generated at a public meeting in 1987 in Crested Butte. The two major backcountry uses at that time were snowmobiling and cross country skiing. Snowmobiling was the suggested use in the Kebler Pass, Taylor Park, and Ohio Creek areas. Cross country skiing was the suggested use in the Gothic, Brush Creek, Cement Creek, Mill Creek and Slate River areas. The Washington Gulch area was suggested for dual use of snowmobiling and cross country skiing. Under the "suggested use" concept, no uses were specifically prohibited.

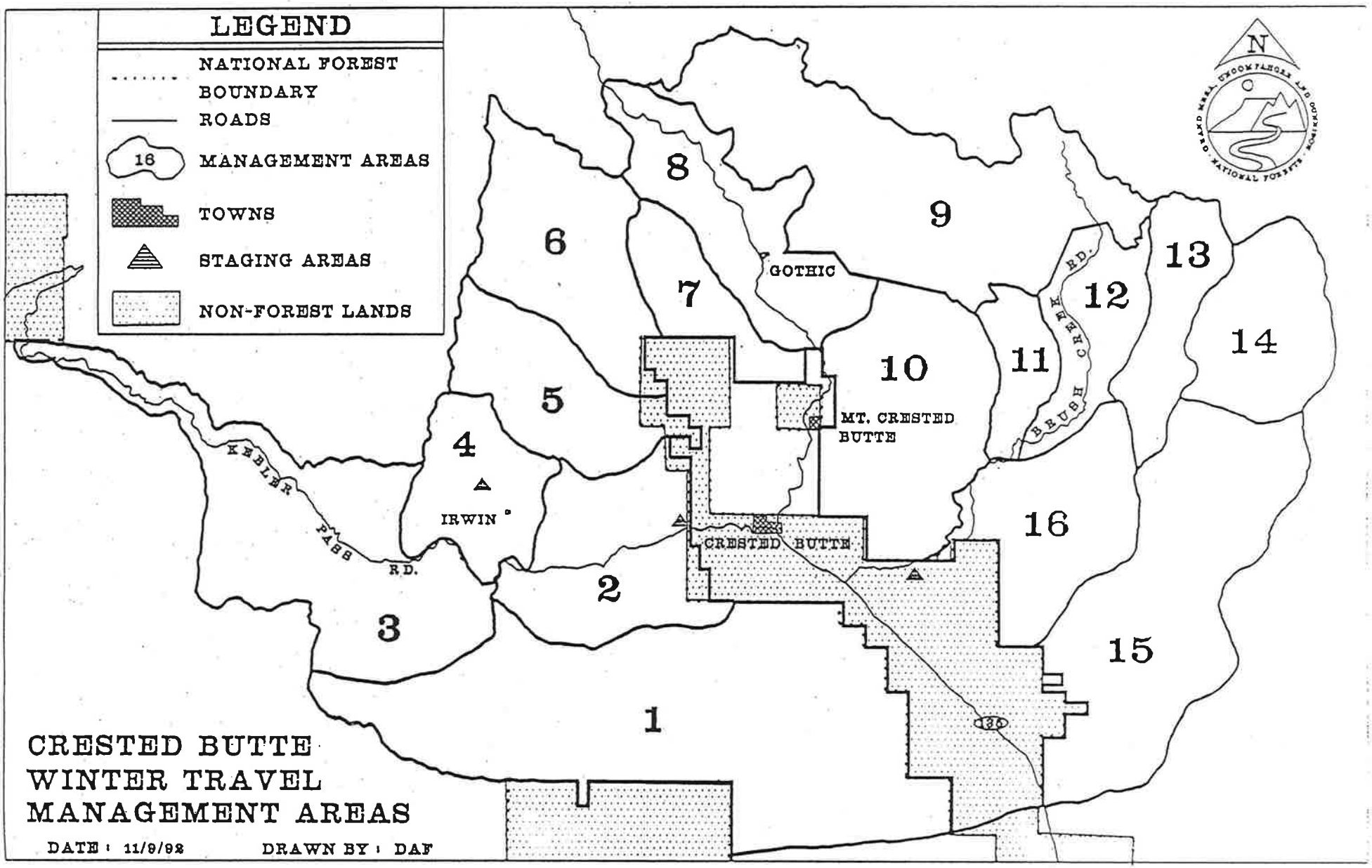
Increased pressure has resulted in less ability to accommodate other types of user in the same area. New uses, like "skating" on nordic skis, and dogsleds with their desire to use groomed snowmobile tracks, created new allocation questions. Access to backcountry ski runs by snowmobile has become more common. Paragliders on skis opened the airborne resource. Specifically there are existing conflicts between users in the Kebler Pass, Lake Irwin, Washington Gulch, Gothic, and Lower Cement Creek Areas. Additional management could improve the recreation experience in these areas. There are foreseeable conflicts in the future, which a pro-active management plan can help avoid.

The increase in use and types of use has also created stress upon the finite resources of the land. Some areas where wildlife and natural forces dominated the winter ecosystem have now become human dominated.

Commercial outfitting and guiding of winter recreation users increased during this same time. As a result competition for use areas between private and commercial users increased.

The determination of resource capacity and allocation of areas to types of uses could reduce conflict and provide a limited amount of desired opportunities for all. User conflicts in the backcountry promise to escalate unless sensible strategies are implemented to manage use. The current situation presents both a need and an opportunity to make appropriate choices for the use of these winter recreation resources.

FIGURE 1


LEGEND
NATIONAL FOREST BOUNDARY
ROADS
16 MANAGEMENT AREAS
TOWNS
STAGING AREAS
NON-FOREST LANDS
N
GRAND MESA, UNCOMPAHGRE AND GUNNISON NATIONAL FOREST
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
GOTHIC
MT. CRESTED BUTTE
CRESTED BUTTE
IRWIN
KEBLER PASS RD.
BRUSH CREEK RD.
CRESTED BUTTE WINTER TRAVEL MANAGEMENT AREAS
DATE: 11/9/92
DRAWN BY: DAF

This document will assess the effects of a decision to determine the mix of dispersed winter recreation opportunities that is most appropriate for the Crested Butte area. This EA will not address the effects of helicopter skiing, that decision was documented in a previous EA and Decision Notice.

This EA is *not* a decision document: it does not describe the decision that will be made by the Forest Supervisor with regard to this proposed project. This EA discloses the environmental consequences of implementing the proposed action and alternatives to that action. The Forest Supervisor's decision will be stated and explained in a Decision Notice which will be developed after this EA undergoes a 60 day public comment period, and the comments from that review have been analyzed and addressed.

This EA focuses on the environmental effects associated with the proposed action on the Gunnison National Forest. Impacts which may occur on lands adjacent to the National Forest, and impacts which may occur in surrounding communities also are described in this document so that other landowners and decision-makers may be aware of the implications of this Forest Service project. Other Federal, state and local jurisdictions have assisted in the analysis and disclosure of these environmental consequences and in the development of alternatives to the proposed action. (See "Agencies and Organizations Consulted")

II. Proposed Action

The proposed action prescribes management of recreation activities in 16 different watersheds centered generally around Crested Butte. The proposed action begins with the current system of cross country ski and snowmobile suggested uses for eight different areas and expands this concept to consider sixteen different areas and six different kinds of winter recreation activities. It also proposes that management go beyond the suggested use system to allow closures to some activities in some areas when conditions warrent. The proposed action also proposes where and what kind of commercial winter activities are and are not appropriate. Table 4 details the specific elements of the proposed action.

The proposed action is not connected to or dependent upon any other action in this same area. It does not establish a precedent for other actions which may result in significant environmental effects.

The National Forest Lands around the Crested Butte Area have been divided up into 16 different areas for this analysis (See also figure 1):

Table 1 - Crested Butte Dispersed Winter Recreation Areas

Figure 1 Reference #	Winter Travel Management Area Name
1	Ohio Creek
2	Kebler East
3	Kebler West
4	Irwin
5	Oh-Be-Joyful
6	Slate River
7	Washington Gulch
8	Upper East River
9	Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness
10	Lower East River
11	West Brush Creek
12	Middle Brush Creek
13	East Brush Creek
14	Upper Cement Creek
15	Lower Cement Creek
16	Farris Creek

The proposed action and the alternatives include a number of different winter dispersed recreation activities. The dispersed winter recreation activities considered in this analysis are listed below:

Table 2 - Dispersed Winter Recreation Activities

Activity	Notes
Snowmobiling	
Cross-Country Skiing	
Snowcat Travel	Using a snowcat to view scenery, or provide access for cross-country or downhill skiing.
Dogsledding	
Snowshoeing	
Walking	
Airborne	Using a non-motorized means to become airborne; hanggliding, parasailing, hot-air ballooning, etc.

III. Forest Plan Direction for the Crested Butte Winter Travel Management Areas

All of the alternatives considered in this EA are consistent with the overall management direction provided within the Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, & Gunnison National Forests (GMUG NF). The Forest Plan for the GMUG NF is being implemented as required by the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 (RPA, P.L. 93-378) and the National

Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA, P.L. 94-588). This Forest Plan provides the framework for the action proposed here, and the action is being undertaken as one step in implementing the Forest Plan. The proposed action meets the Forest Plan Goals of:

- *Meet demand for dispersed recreation outside wilderness.*
- *Emphasize primitive wilderness opportunities within wilderness.*
- *Provide the opportunity for economic growth of industries and communities dependent upon Forest outputs, including tourism.*

These goals are listed in the Forest Plan in Chapter III, pages 2-4.

The Crested Butte Winter Recreation area (figure 1) covers many different Forest Plan management emphases; range management, timber management, recreation management, wilderness management, and a few acres of wildlife and special interest management emphasis (See Gunnison Forest Plan Map available upon request). Most of these management emphasis are fully compatible with all forms of dispersed winter recreation. The few that are not compatible are described below:

All wilderness areas have a Forest Plan wilderness management emphasis. They are closed to all motorized, mechanized, and airborne forms of winter recreation.

A small amount of big game winter range (less than 40 acres) exists in the lower corner of area 15 (Lower Cement Creek) south of Round Mountain. Winter travel in this area can be managed to avoid disturbing wintering big game.

A Special Interest management emphasis exists in a 160 acre parcel approximately three miles west of Crested Butte along the Kebler Pass Road in winter recreation area 2 (Kebler East). This 160 acre area is closed year round to all motorized use.

The Gothic Natural Area in winter recreation area 8 (Upper East River) is listed in the Forest Plan as a Research Natural Area management emphasis and is closed to all motorized use year round.

A final Forest Plan concern is with another non-motorized recreation emphasis area north of the West Elk Wilderness generally between West Beckwith Mountain and Beckwith Pass. This area is identified as closed to all motorized use year round on the Gunnison Basin Map. The boundaries of Area 3 (Kebler West) have been drawn to exclude most of this area.

The environmental analysis documented in this Environmental Assessment is tiered to pages 103-105 & IV 93-95 of the *Final Environmental Impact Statement* For *The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, & Gunnison Land and Resource Management Plan* approved in September 1983.

IV. Decisions to Be Made

The Forest Supervisor's decision will be documented in a Decision Notice accompanying the final Environmental Assessment. Two levels of decisions will be made. The first decision level addresses the overall winter recreation emphasis that will be provided around Crested Butte. This decision involves the OVERALL collection of recreation activities (snowmobiling, cross-county skiing, dogsledding etc.) to be allowed in the sixteen areas. The three alternatives considered in the EA are made up of a different combination of recreation activities in the sixteen analysis areas. Each alternative would provide a different overall recreation emphasis in the project area.

The second level of decision involves choosing the specific kinds of winter recreation activities to be allowed, promoted, discouraged, or disallowed in EACH of the sixteen specific areas of National Forest Lands around Crested Butte. The second level of decision also involves whether commercial outfitter and guide operations should be permitted, and for what specific kinds of recreation activities and in which of the sixteen areas.

V. Scoping and Environmental Issues

There are some important environmental issues to consider in determining how best to manage current and future dispersed winter recreation in the Crested Butte area. Those issues were identified by the Forest Service after review and consideration of public comments on the proposed action.

A news release dated November 16, 1992 described the proposed action and requested comments from the public on the possible effects of the proposal. The news release also stated that the Forest Service would analyze the environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives to it, in an environmental assessment.

A Forest Service interdisciplinary team was formed to participate in the development of the environmental assessment. This Interdisciplinary Team reviewed Forest Planning documents and all the public comments collected through scoping. The team then developed a list of the major social and environmental issues to be analyzed in this EA. Some of the issues relate to specific activities. Other issues relate to the more general use of the area or to the interaction between types of activities. There are three major environmental issues to be analyzed in this EA.

Issues:

Impacts of recreation activities on vegetation and wildlife

Cooperation and conflict between recreation users, including noise, crowding, naturalness of appearance, trailhead facilities, and safety.

Impact upon community lifestyles and local economy

VI. Alternatives

Three alternatives were studied in detail and are presented here for consideration. Each alternative outlines where each winter recreation activity would occur. Each alternative also outlines where and what kind of commercial activity would be permitted.

A recreation activity occurs commercially when a guide or outfitter provides recreation equipment and or services on the National Forest. All outfitter and guide activities on National Forest System lands require a permit.

Winter recreation using horses (such as for sleighs, wagons, or horseback riding) was considered but has been dropped from the proposed action and the alternatives because it is unlikely to occur within the analysis area in the future.

None of the alternatives proposes any changes to the following existing closures:

A Special Interest management emphasis exists in a 160 acre parcel approximately three miles west of Crested Butte along the Kebler Pass Road in winter recreation area 2 (Kebler East). This 160 acre area is closed year round to all motorized use.

The Gothic Natural Area in winter recreation area 8 (Upper East River) is listed in the Forest Plan as a Research Natural Area management emphasis and is closed to all motorized use year round.

There is another non-motorized recreation emphasis area north of the West Elk Wilderness generally between West Beckwith Mountain and Beckwith Pass. This area is identified as closed to all motorized use year round on the Gunnison Basin Map. The boundaries of Area 3 (Kebler West) have been drawn to exclude most of this area.

Motorized equipment, hanggliders, and mechanical means of transport are prohibited in Wilderness areas.

In addition any new closures to travel would not result in restricting owners of private land inholdings within the National Forest from continuing to access their land using traditional or historic means.

Alternative 1 (No Action) - Emphasis on Motorized Use
This alternative would involve no efforts or action to designate or limit specific kinds of recreation activities to specific areas, except as already prohibited by law or regulation. This would result in more areas being more readily available to motorized uses than exists with the current suggested use system.

Alternative 2 (Proposed Action) - Emphasis on Balancing and Allocating Motorized and Non-Motorized Uses
This alternative attempts to balance the needs of major types or winter recreation pursuits. It combines both motorized and non-motorized uses in some areas, and segregates them in other areas. It attempts to recognize traditional uses while recognizing the needs of new emerging types of winter recreation.

Alternative 3 - Non-Motorized Emphasis
This alternative provides a greater emphasis on providing undisturbed areas for cross country and other non-motorized recreation as compared to alternatives one and two.

All alternatives would include mitigation measures, monitoring measures, and all conform to the Forest Management Standards and Guidelines. (The Forest Management Standards and Guidelines are published in the Forest Plan on pages III-9a through III-202.)

Alternatives 1, 2, and 3 are consistent with Forest Plan Management Direction and with area specific Manage Prescriptions (Forest Plan, pages III-9a through III-202). Any of these alternatives could be implemented without amending the Forest Plan.

DEFINITIONS:

Open:	The listed recreation activity is allowed. Commercial use is allowed, unless otherwise stated.
Closed:	The listed recreation activity may be prohibited by Forest Supervisor's closure order; violators of closure may receive a violation notice.
Discouraged	The listed recreation activity is discouraged by any or all of the following; 1)Provide no facilities for the activity and indicate where facilities do exist, 2)Do not indicate activity on area recreation maps, 3)Place signs indicating activity is discouraged with other suggested locations.

Table 3 - Alternative 1 - No Action - Emphasis on Motorized Use

National Environmental Policy Act procedural regulations require the Forest Service to study the NO Action alternative in detail, and to use it as a baseline for comparing the effects of the other alternatives (40 CFR 1502.14(d), and Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, 23.1). In this case, the No Action alternative also is a genuinely viable alternative.

Winter Dispersed Recreation Area	Snowmobiling	Cross-Country Skiing	Snowcat	Dog Sledding	Snowshoe - Hike	Airborne
1. Ohio Creek	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open
2. Kebler East	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open
3. Kebler West	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open
4. Irwin	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open
5. Oh-Be-Joyful - Wilderness is closed to all motorized and airborne uses.	Open outside of wilderness, closed within wilderness.	Open	Open outside of wilderness, closed within wilderness.	Open	Open	Open outside of wilderness, closed within wilderness.
6. Slate River	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open
7. Washington Gulch	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open
8. Upper East River	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open
9. Maroon Bells- Snowmass Wilderness - Wilderness is closed to all motorized and airborne uses.	Closed within wilderness.	Open	Closed within wilderness.	Open	Open	Closed within wilderness.

Table 3 - Alternative 1 - No Action - Emphasis on Motorized Use (continued)

Winter Dispersed Recreation Area	Snowmobiling	Cross-Country Skiing	Snowcat	Dog Sledding	Snowshoe - Hike	Airborne
10. Lower East River	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open
11. West Brush Creek	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open
12. Middle Brush Creek	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open
13. East Brush Creek	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open
14. Upper Cement Creek	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open
15. Lower Cement Creek	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open
16. Farris Creek	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open

took a lot to get to this point
5 yrs signed decision -
log pub inv process

Article in paper about travel restrictions
Fall media blitz

State Wash Gothic
redo boards

Table 4 - Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

Alternative 2 proactively manages winter use around Crested Butte to maintain a balance of winter recreation opportunities now and in the future. Areas which are predominately used by cross-country skiers, are closed to motorized users. In areas predominately used by motorized users, information will be provided to inform users of the motorized emphasis and suggest better places for non-motorized winter recreation. In areas for mixed motorized and non-motorized use, information will be provided that users should anticipate the mix of uses in these areas. Area closures are used to enforce certain management emphases where needed. Outfitter-guide management and use will follow the direction and emphasis established for the winter recreation areas and be implemented through permit administration. The number of snowmobile outfitter and guide permits (total of 5 in the analysis area) will not be increased in specific areas over the current number. Numbers of snowmobile permits would be reduced if permits are combined.

Winter Dispersed Recreation Area	Snowmobiling	Cross-Country Skiing	Snowcat	Dog Sledding	Snowshoe - Hike	Airborne
1. **Ohio Creek** - General use area.	Open with continued cross-country skiing compatibility. No commercial use.	Open with continued snowmobiling compatibility.	Discourage private use, no commercial use.	Open	Open	Open
2. **Kebler East** - Emphasis Snowmobiling.	Priority use is snowmobiling.	Discouraged	Closed, except for trail grooming.	Closed	Open	Open
3. **Kebler West** - Emphasis Snowmobiling.	Priority use is snowmobiling.	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open
4. **Irwin** - Emphasis is Snowmobile and Snowcat use.	Priority is given to snowmobile and snowcat use.	Open	Priority is given to snowmobile and snowcat use. No increase in number of snowcat permits.	Open, No commercial use.	Open	Open
5. **Oh-Be-Joyful** - Emphasis is Non-Motorized and Non-Commercial.	Discouraged outside of wilderness, Closed in wilderness, No commercial use.	Open, but no commercial use.	Discouraged outside of wilderness, Closed in wilderness, No commercial use.	Closed	Open, No commercial.	Open outside of wilderness, Closed within wilderness; No commercial use.
6. **Slate River** - Emphasis is Non-motorized and Non-Commercial use.	Open, no commercial use.	Open, no commercial use.	Open, no commercial use.	Open, no commercial use.	Open, no commercial use.	Open, but non-motorized commercial access only.

Winter Dispersed Recreation Area	Snowmobiling	Cross-Country Skiing	Snowcat	Dog Sledding	Snowshoe - Hike	Airborne
7. Washington Gulch-Emphasis is Cross Country Skiing	Discouraged; Commercial use is limited.	Open, With cross country ski emphasis. No additional ski permits.	Closed	Discouraged; No commercial use.	Discouraged; No commercial use	Discouraged; Commercial use limited to non-motorized access, or access via existing snowmobile outfitter.

Table 4 - Alternative 2 - Proposed Action (continued)

Winter Dispersed Recreation Area	Snowmobiling	Cross-Country Skiing	Snowcat	Dog Sledding	Snowshoe - Hike	Airborne
8. Upper East River - Emphasis on Non-motorized and Non-Commercial use.	Limited to the main roadway only, and only before 11/15 and after 4/15, and no commercial use.	Open, but commercial use is limited to the main road only.	Closed	Closed	Open	Open, but limited to non-motorized access.
9. Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness - Non-Motorized Emphasis	Closed	Open	Closed	Open, but no commercial	Open	Closed
10. Lower East River - General use area.	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open
11. West Brush Creek-Emphasis is Cross Country Skiing	Open, Limited to Brush Creek Road and Deer Creek Road; No commercial use.	Open - Cross country skiing emphasis.	Closed	Open, Limited to Brush Creek Road and Deer Creek Road; No Commercial	Open	Open, No motorized access.
12. Middle Brush Creek - Emphasis is to provide solitude for the cross-country skier.	Closed	Open; with cross country skiing emphasis	Closed	Discouraged; Restricted to the main road; No Commercial Use.	Open	Open; No motorized access.
13. East Brush Creek - Emphasis is to provide solitude for the cross-country skier.	Closed	Open	Closed	Discouraged; Restricted to the main road; No Commercial Use	Open	Open; No motorized access.
14. Upper Cement Creek - Emphasis on Ski Touring.	Closed	Open	Closed	Discouraged; No Commercial.	Open	Open; No motorized access.
15. Lower Cement Creek - Emphasis on general Non-Commercial use.	Open; On main road only; No Commercial	Open	Open; On main road only; No Commercial	Discouraged; No Commercial.	Open	Open; No commercial motorized access.
16. Farris Creek - General use area.	Open, No Commercial	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open

Table 5 - Alternative 3 - Emphasis on Non-Motorized Use

Alternative 3 actively manages winter use around Crested Butte with a greater emphasis toward non-motorized uses. The number of snowmobile outfitter and guides would be reduced from the current five permits to four by removing the outfitter in Washington Gulch.

Winter Dispersed Recreation Area	Snowmobiling	Cross-Country Skiing	Snowcat	Dog Sledding	Snowshoe - Hike	Airborne
1. Ohio Creek - General use area.	Open with continued cross-country skiing compatibility. No commercial use.	Open with continued snowmobiling compatibility.	Discourage private use, no commercial use.	Open	Open	Open
2. Kebler East - Emphasis is Snowmobiling.	Priority use is snowmobiling.	Discouraged	Closed, except for trail grooming.	Closed	Open	Open
3. Kebler West - Emphasis is Snowmobiling.	Priority use is snowmobiling.	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open
4. Irwin - Emphasis is Snowmobile and Snowcat use.	Priority is given to snowmobile and snowcat use.	Open	Priority is given to snowmobile and snowcat use. No increase in number of snowcat permits.	Open, No commercial use.	Open	Open
5. Oh-Be-Joyful - Emphasis is Non-Motorized and Non-Commercial.	Closed	Open, but no commercial use.	Closed	Closed	Open, No commercial.	Open outside of wilderness, Closed within wilderness; No commercial use.
6. Slate River - Emphasis is Non-motorized and Non-Commercial use.	Closed	Open, no commercial use.	Closed	Open, no commercial use.	Open, no commercial use.	Open, but non-motorized commercial access only.
7. Washington Gulch-Emphasis is Cross Country Skiing	Closed	Open, With cross country ski emphasis. No additional ski permits.	Closed	Discouraged; No commercial use.	Discouraged; No commercial use	Discouraged; Commercial use limited to non-motorized access, or access via existing snowmobile outfitter.

Winter Dispersed Recreation Area	Snowmobiling	Cross-Country Skiing	Snowcat	Dog Sledding	Snowshoe - Hike	Airborne
8. Upper East River - Emphasis on Non-motorized and Non-Commercial use.	Closed	Open, but commercial use is limited to the main road only.	Closed	Closed	Open	Open, but limited to non-motorized access.

Table 5 - Alternative 3 - Emphasis on Non-Motorized Use (continued)

Winter Dispersed Recreation Area	Snowmobiling	Cross-Country Skiing	Snowcat	Dog Sledding	Snowshoe - Hike	Airborne
9. Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness - Non-Motorized Emphasis	Closed	Open	Closed	Open, but no commercial	Open	Closed
10. Lower East River - General use area.	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open
11. West Brush Creek-Emphasis is Cross Country Skiing	Closed	Open - Cross country skiing emphasis.	Closed	Open, Limited to Brush Creek Road and Deer Creek Road; No Commercial	Open	Open, No motorized access.
12. Middle Brush Creek - Emphasis is to provide solitude for the cross-country skier.	Closed	Open; with cross country skiing emphasis	Closed	Discouraged; Restricted to the main road; No Commercial Use.	Open	Open; No motorized access.
13. East Brush Creek - Emphasis is to provide solitude for the cross-country skier.	Closed	Open	Closed	Discouraged; Restricted to the main road; No Commercial Use	Open	Open; No motorized access.
14. Upper Cement Creek - Emphasis on Ski Touring.	Closed	Open	Closed	Discouraged; No Commercial.	Open	Open; No motorized access.
15. Lower Cement Creek - Emphasis on general Non-Commercial use.	Open; On main road only; No Commercial	Open	Open; On main road only; No Commercial	Discouraged; No Commercial.	Open	Open; No commercial motorized access.
16. Farris Creek - General use area.	Open, No Commercial	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open

red crossbill, white winged crossbill, and three races of rosy finch. There are meadow voles, deer mice, and shrews living under the snow and active all winter. Least chipmunks and golden-mantled ground-squirrels are active irregularly in winter, depending on daily conditions. Marmots hibernate in rocky slopes and in burrows in alpine meadows. Winter mammals include elk, badger, beaver, pine marten, rabbits, bobcat, mountain lion, coyote, long-tailed, short-tailed and least weasels, red fox, pine marten, porcupine, striped skunk and red squirrel (Rocky Mountain chickaree).

Known rare plants within the affected area are *Drosera rotundifolia L.* (round-leaved sundew), *Astragalus molybedenus* Barneby (Leadville milkvetch), *Erigeron lanatus* Hooker (woolly daisy), *Eriophorum altaicum* Meinshausen (Altai cotton-sedge), *Penstemon mensarum* Pennell (type of beardtongue), and *Sullivantia hapemanii* var. *purpusil* (Brand) Soltis (no common name.

Certain wildlife species in the affected area are considered management indicator species. The following species are associated with certain habitat types that are found in the affected area: pine marten (old growth spruce-fir), red crossbill (mature conifer types), hairy woodpecker (conifer types), goshawks (mature and old growth timber), blue grouse (elevations above 10,000'), and bighorn sheep (cliffs with open grazing areas). In addition, Black bear, Colorado native cutthroat trout, brown trout, rainbow trout, elk, and mule deer also can be found in the subject Winter Travel Management Area but are not endemic to specific habitat types. They are economically important and are commonly hunted, fished, or trapped.

Endangered and Sensitive species that may be in the project area during the winter months are listed below. Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, and Sensitive species that may be present in the project area at other times of the year but are not winter residents are not listed. Potential effects to summer habitat for these non-wintering species by winter recreationists are expected to be negligible. The only Endangered species present in the project area during the winter months is the bald eagle. No Threatened nor Proposed species are winter residents in the project area. Winter resident Sensitive species which may be present include: Colorado River cutthroat trout, boreal toad, northern leopard frog, tiger salamander, dwarf and pygmy shrews, lynx, pine maten, ringtail, wolverine, boreal owl, golden-crowned kinglet, merlin, northern goshawk, pygmy nuthatch, and three-toed woodpecker.

Crested Butte is a world-class winter destination ski resort, featuring the Crested Butte Ski Area, and the Towns of Crested Butte and Mount Crested Butte. The economy is dependent on tourism from all over the world, including repeat business from tourists who visited Crested Butte before and liked it enough to visit again. While winter tourists to the area are predominately interested in downhill skiing, other winter recreation opportunities support the downhill ski industry and help bring back repeat business to the area. Many tourists to the area are not familiar with the winter backcountry and/or do not have the necessary equipment to safely enjoy dispersed winter recreation opportunities. These people are dependent on outfitter-guides for those services. Outfitter-guides also provide jobs and income to the local economy.

B. Existing Status Of Winter Travel Management Areas

Each of the 16 Crested Butte winter travel management areas (See Figure 1) is used differently and has slightly different recreation, social, and economic characteristics. Each is described below.

1. Ohio Creek

The area includes the headwaters of Ohio Creek. Access to the Ohio Creek area is mainly by trail. Ohio Creek road connects Kebler Pass with the town of Baldwin to the south and bisects the area with the West Elk Wilderness to the west and generally unroaded country to the east. The western most part of the Ohio Creek area is the Anthracite Range section of the West Elk Wilderness. The Ohio Creek road is adjacent to and parallels the West Elk Wilderness boundary.

The area is bordered by private property along Highway 135 on the east, and a few parcels along Ohio Creek road north of Baldwin, and a single 160 acre section in the middle of the area serviced by a four-wheel-drive road (FDR 737) out of Baldwin. There are no winter residents in the area.

Currently there is some snowmobiling and cross-country skiing use in the area. There is no crowding, little noise, and no trail head facilities. The area appears to be rugged wilderness in the winter. There are no winter outfitter or guide services available for the area except commercial dog sled tours from Ohio Trailhead to Ohio Pass on the road. With the high avalanche danger on Ohio Pass many local recreationists choose to play elsewhere. Carbon Peak is an important playground for Gunnison and Western State backcountry skiers.

2. Kebler Pass East

The area is bisected by Kebler Pass road which is a Gunnison county road. Coal Creek parallels this part of the Kebler Pass road. Kebler Pass road is not plowed for automobile traffic in the winter and is available for dispersed winter recreation use by snowmobiles, skiers, snowcats, and pedestrians.

Private property consists of a 320 parcel just south of Kebler Pass. There are also scattered private mining patents along the Mount Emmons road (FDR 732). The Mount Emmons road is gated about three-quarters of a mile above where it forks off of the Kebler Pass Road.

Kebler Pass East is heavily used by private and commercial interests in the winter. A snowcat currently grooms trails for its customers as well as the general public. Crowding, speeding, excessive noise, danger of collisions between skiers and snow machines, and inadequate trailhead facilities are considered problems along the road corridor. Speed limits would help alleviate some of the problem. Speed limits would have to be enforced by the State or County.

Higher elevations and steep slopes are used by both snowmobilers and backcountry skiers. The highest peaks and cirques retain a wilderness feeling.

There are a few winter residents who commute to work in Crested Butte by snowmobile or skies. Currently three USFS permittees operate snowmobile tours through the area. Past the gate on the Mt Emmons road, Amax maintains a minimal year-round operation at the Keystone Mine largely related to treatment of mine wastewater. Near the Keystone mine there exists a 160 acre tract of land that is closed to all motorized use year-round.

3. Kebler Pass West

The area is bisected by Kebler Pass road which is a Gunnison county road. Kebler Pass West is at the headwaters of Anthracite Creek which eventually drains into the North Fork of the Gunnison River.

There are scattered private parcels of land at the west end of the area, which are also to the south of the Kebler pass road and outside this winter recreation area. The eastern most part of the area near Kebler Pass also contains about 2,500 acres of private land south of Kebler Pass adjacent to the West Elk Wilderness, most of which is in Winter Travel Management Area #1.

Recreational use of the area, includes snowmobiling and cross-country skiing. A commercial snowmobile permittee travels to Lost Lake and Ericson Springs. There is no crowding, little noise, and no trailhead facilities. Much of area appears to be rugged wilderness in the winter.

A few winter residents live at lower elevations in the western most part of the area. One family is a resident at Lost Lake Lodge. They commute by snowmobile to Crested Butte and Gunnison for supplies. Other residents are ranchers and farmers.

4. Irwin

The Irwin area is dominated with Lake Irwin, the Lake Irwin Campground, the Irwin Lodge, and the Town of Irwin. A Forest Service Road (FDR 826) is a loop road, which connects with the Kebler Pass road and provides access into the Lake Irwin area. The area drains into both Anthracite Creek to the west and Coal Creek to the East. Private land in the form of scattered patented mining claims exist throughout the area.

There is a long-established and successful snowmobile tour company that uses the area as its primary destination. The Irwin Lodge offers snowcat skiing and snowmobile tours. In areas snowmobiles use, there is a perception of machine noise. Irwin residents use snowmobiles for access and transport. Their routes are not a pleasant recreational experience for cross-country skiers. The higher meadows and slopes of the area still provide a pristine wilderness cross-country experience for a variety of users. The access corridor to Irwin Lodge and the Irwin Townsite is perceived as crowded, noisy and heavily used. There is some conflict between recreational snowmobilers, who often trespass in the Irwin Townsite, and residents of the Townsite.

As many as 20 people live in the Irwin Townsite and commute to Crested Butte to work. The number of winter residents is increasing yearly. They use snow machines for commuting, but do not want their homesites to become a destination for snowmobile recreationists.

The Irwin Lodge is removed from the Irwin Townsite, and houses a residential staff to run the lodge. The lodge is supplied by snowcats and snowmobiles.

Several Irwin residents operate businesses out of their homes. The Irwin Lodge is one of the largest snowcat operations in Colorado. There is a long-established and successful snowmobile tour company in the area.

5. Oh-Be-Joyful

Oh-Be-Joyful contains part of the Congressionally designated Raggeds Wilderness. The wilderness part of the area is closed to all motorized and mechanized travel including hanggliding (or similar airborne travel). The management emphasis for the part outside of wilderness is for recreation. A road bisects the area up to the wilderness boundary where it becomes a trail into the wilderness. The terrain in Oh-Be-Joyful has a high avalanche danger, and a large number of river crossings.

The area has no winter residents and no commercial dispersed winter recreation operations.

6. Slate River Valley

This area is very accessible from Crested Butte and receives a lot of cross-country skiing and snowmobile/telemarking combination use. The Slate River area is served by four-wheel drive roads (FDR 734, 811, & 522), which access current or historic mining operations. FDR 734 eventually connects with the Schofield Pass road at Schofield Pass on the White River National Forest side of the mountain. Scattered mining patents exist throughout the area, but are generally located adjacent to the four-wheel drive roads. Two separate private homesteads also exist in the area. The area drains into the Slate River.

There is currently some private recreational use of the area, including snowmobiling and cross-country skiing. Some skiers access the slopes using snowmobiles. There is no crowding, little noise, and no trailhead facilities. The area appears to be rugged wilderness in the winter.

The townsite of Pittsburgh is within this area. Although no year round residents currently exist, some landowners continue to visit their cabins throughout the winter. In the past, permission has been given to one landowner to plow the road through the Christmas season.

Commercial cross-country skiing, dog sledding, and paragliding occur in the area.

7. Washington Gulch

This area is very accessible from Crested Butte and Mt Crested Butte, and receives quite a lot of cross-country skiing use. Washington Gulch is serviced by FDR 811 out of the town of Created Butte. The area drains into Slate Creek. A few scattered private mining patents exist along FDR 811. The area also contains Snodgrass Mountain, which is a proposed site for the expansion of the Crested Butte Ski Area.

There is a fair amount of recreational use of the area, mostly cross-country skiing. There is a cross-country hut for rent to skiers only. There is a commercial snowmobile operation that uses all but the upper mile of the valley. Occasionally there are conflicts between cross country skiers and snowmobiles, both of whom

must share a narrow part of the valley for a few miles. Complaints include the danger of being run over, having to breathe gas fumes while skiing, and noise. There are no trailhead facilities.

The townsite of Elkton supports a few year round residents and a cross-country ski hut.

Some of the residents of the housing development at Meridian Lake object to the snowmobile operation, which uses the adjacent area. There is also a good deal of support for the snowmobile operation.

Commercial uses of the area include snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, and paragliding.

8. Upper East River Valley

The Upper East River Valley contains the Gothic road (FDR 317) which leads to Schofield Pass, the Town of Gothic, home of the Rocky Mountain Biological Lab, and the Gothic Natural Area. The area is closed to off-road motorized travel except along designated routes and special travel restrictions posted on site. The Gothic road itself is a Gunnison County road to and through the town of Gothic. A few scattered private mining patents are also located in the area. The Gothic Townsite is also private property. Although there are several ways to reach Schofield Park by snowmobile and snowcat, the route through Gothic is preferred. Homeowners in Gothic and Schofield Park need to have reasonable access to their land.

Currently winter residents of Gothic (variously three to seven people) do not use snow machines to access their homes, but instead commute to town for mail and supplies on skies. For the last 20 years there has been no motorized access by year round residents in Gothic. As a result, Gothic is a popular destination for cross-country skiers because of the lack of snow machines. However, private snowmobile use has been increasing each year, and there are an increasing number of encounters between skiers and snowmobiles. Recent counts of day visitors during holiday seasons show as many as 65 skiers and 4 or 5 snowmobiles per day. Avalanche terrain along the road limits the number of days each winter that travel is safe. There is a hut for rent at the Gothic field station for skiers only. The area is rugged in winter, and has many snow-safety hazards.

The Rocky Mountain Biological Lab functions year-round. During the winter months, most of the 85 buildings are closed, and the staff that remains varies from three to seven people each year. They ski to town (4 miles to where vehicles are left) to shop, get and send mail, and attend to other activities. Occasionally the electric utility company or the federal auditors for the weather station snowmobile along the road to Gothic. Administrative activities and some research continues through the winter. There are no other winter residents in the area.

Commercial use of the area includes cross-country skiing and a ski hut. cross-country skiers can rent the hut in Gothic for a fee, which keeps the hut supplied and maintained.

9. Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness

The area is part of the Congressionally designated Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness and is closed to all motorized and mechanized travel including hanggliding. There are a few private mining patents in the area and a section of Colorado State land within the area.

Currently there is some private cross-country skiing occurring in the area. There is no crowding, no noise, and no trailhead facilities. The area is rugged wilderness.

There are no winter residents or winter commercial operations in the area.

10. Lower East River

The East River area contains the Crested Butte Ski area. The backcountry area north of the ski area area is in general controlled by private land owners. There are a number of private land parcels along the bottom of the East River.

The dominant recreation feature of this area is the ski resort on Crested Butte Mountain. There are also opportunities for commercial and private snowmobiling and for cross-country skiing.

About 250 people live year-round in the town of Mt. Crested Butte adjacent to the ski area. In winter this number can swell to 5000. There are several ranches in the area that maintain year-round operations. These residents have vehicular access to their homes.

In addition to the Created Butte Ski area, there is dispersed recreation economic activity occurring in the area from commercial snowmobile and cross-country skiing opportunities.

11. West Brush Creek

The area is serviced by the West Brush Creek four-wheel-drive road (FDR 738.2A), which takes off of the Brush Creek Road (FDR 738). West Brush Creek and West Brush Creek road bisect the area.

Currently some private cross-country skiing occurs in the area. There is no crowding, little noise, and no trailhead facilities. The area appears to be gentle wilderness in the winter. There are no winter commercial operations in the area.

12. Middle Brush Creek

Middle Brush Creek is bisected by the Brush Creek Road (FDR 738) which is a rugged four-wheel drive road in the summer and a snowmobile and cross-country ski route in the winter to Pearl Pass and Castle Creek on the White River National Forest and eventually the Town of Ashcroft. There is one small block of private land along the Brush Creek Road. There are no winter residents in the area.

Currently there is commercial and private cross-country skiing occurring in the area. The Friends' Hut is located in this area, which is a skiers destination from both Crested Butte and Aspen. There is no crowding, little noise, and no trailhead facilities. The area appears to be rugged wilderness in the winter.

Commercial cross-country skiing related to the hut rental occurs in the area.

13. East Brush Creek

The area is accessed from the East Brush Creek four-wheel-drive road (FDR 738.28) which in turn is accessed via the Brush Creek Road (FDR 738). The East Brush Creek road bisects the area. There a few scattered private mining patents in the vicinity of Star Peak, but no winter residents.

Currently there is some private cross-country skiing. There is no crowding, little noise, and no trailhead facilities. The area appears to be rugged wilderness in the winter. The area provides a route to the Friend's Ski Hut.
Outfitting for backcountry skiing occurs at low levels in this area.

14. Upper Cement Creek

The area is accessed from the Cement Creek Road (FDR 740), which turns into a four-wheel-drive road after the first 7 or 8 miles. The Cement Creek Road bisects the area. There are a few scattered private mining patents in the extreme upper end of the area.

Currently there is private recreational use of the area, including snowmobiling and cross-country skiing. One commercial back country ski operation may make some use of this area. There is no crowding, little noise, and no trailhead facilities. The area appears to be rugged wilderness in the winter. There are no winter residents.

15. Lower Cement Creek

The area is accessed from the Cement Creek Road (FDR 740), which bisects the area. There are three blocks of private land in the area, two are along the Cement Creek Road, and a third is up Walrod Gulch. This area is the backyard playground for residents of the Crested Butte South Subdivision. These residents use the first few plowed miles of Cement Creek Road for jogging walking, and exercising dogs. A Cement Creek Home owner has been granted a permit to plow an additional two miles of the Cement Creek road. At present, winter recreation parking will be maintained where it has existed in the past. Some snowmobilers believe that it is important to provide access to Taylor Park from Crested Butte in either Brush Creek or Cement drainage. There is occasional crowding along the road, and some conflict between skiers and snowmobiles. There are no trailhead facilities at the trailhead.

There are several winter residents who have road access to their properties. Residents of adjacent Crested Butte South use the lower reaches of this area extensively for recreation. Commercial activities consist of the Star Valley Lodge and some private home businesses and a small backcountry ski operation.

16. Farris Creek

The Farris Creek area is accessed via FDR 736 which branches off the lower end of the Brush Creek Road (FDR 738) and the Brush Creek road itself. The Brush Creek Road is the western boundary of the area. There are a few private parcels of land along the lower end of the Brush Creek Road.

Currently there is some private recreational use of the area, including snowmobiling and cross-country skiing. This area includes the flat portion of the Brush Creek Road that is very popular with beginning cross-country skiers. There is one commercial snowmobile operation, but no winter residents. There is no crowding, little noise, and no trailhead facilities. The area has a wilderness appearance in winter.

IX. Environmental Consequences

A. Effects of Recreation Activities

Commercial use does introduce more use to an area, thus adding to the magnitude of an activities impacts on the environment. The impacts are not necessarily different than those described in the section below, just greater. The perception of other users is that commercial outfitting introduces fairly concentrated groups of otherwise novice users. This reduces the sense of isolation, and the primitiveness of the experience for those who, by their own independence and ability have travelled to that environment.

In the description that follows, commercial use will not be differentiated from non-commercial use.

Refer to the mitigation section of this EA for actions that would be taken to further reduce the effects of implementing each alternative.

1. Impact of Recreation Users, their Equipment, and Dogs on Vegetation and Wildlife

Effects of various recreation activities on vegetation By the time snow depths are sufficient to support recreation use, there is a protective layer of snow which protects many low growing plants. This low growing vegetation should not be affected by backcountry skiing, foot, horse, dogs, or airborne travel.

If we assume that there will be 20 inches of snow on the ground at the time of winter travel, then there will be no effect on 3 of the 6 rare plants found in the affected areas, (*Astragalus molybdenus, Erigeron lanatus, and Sullivantia hapemanii purpus)*. Very little recreation occurs on their habitat area, which is windswept subalpine/alpine ridges where there is little snow. In the spring when the snow is melting, all types of snow travel except airborne may have an effect on rare plants, however, very little use occurs in this habitat. *Sullivantia hapemanii* var. *purpusii* (Brand) Soltis, is found in the affected area existing on limestone cliffs near waterfalls. Assuming that snow and ice would make these cliffs inaccessible in the winter months, winter travel of any type would not have an effect on this plant.

The effects that winter travel might have on *Drosera rotundifolia L.* found in Area 2 are unknown.

Eriophorum altaicum Meinshausen and *Penstemon mensarum* Pennell, which both lie in moist riparian areas, have also not had enough research to know whether or not they would be effected.

If the snowcats stay on established roads, or do not physically alter the ground area, there would be no effects.

Seedlings/saplings tree, shrubs, and riparian willow species may be affected by being run over by snowmobiles, dog sleds, or snowcats. Those plants which do grow high, such as some willows, shrubs, and sapling aspen are at risk of some damage from machines passing over them. This is minimal, however, in that if they do protrude above the surface of the snow, riders typically avoid them. In riparian areas, if machine use is concentrated, damage can occur. Backcountry and nordic skiing would not effect those species unless trails were made running through larger areas of new growth timber or riparian areas where the tips of young shoots or branches were sticking up out of the snow.

In areas where snow is compacted by heavy snowmobile use, such as meadows used as "play areas", studies have shown that plant germination can be reduced as much as 50%. This reduction occurred after one month of snowpack compaction in the spring.

Many of the effects previously described occur when snowmobiles leave established roadways and travel cross country. These effects would not occur when machines stay on Forest development roads.

Snowcats are heavy machines and they can damage underlying vegetation if allowed to travel over plants like willows, shrubs, and sapling trees before full snow coverage. The effect on grasses and forbs is likely to be minimal, however this compaction can delay the germination of plants.

Effects of various recreation activities on wildlife Any human activity can be disruptive to over-wintering wildlife. In remote areas where big game populations concentrate, human travel can induce stress in animals. These hunted populations are nervous at the sight and sounds of humans. This induces stress and causes animals to run to escape at the cost of valuable energy reserves at this time of the year.

People are naturally attracted to the sight of wildlife and may unknowingly harm animals through their pursuit of a wildlife viewing experience. Areas which are known to have wildlife may be discovered and then visited more often by the public. This would make that particular habitat ineffective due to excessive human disturbance. The animals would be displaced to less desirable and capable habitats. Such public visitation to wildlife concentration areas pertain mainly to big game species which are highly visible and easy to find. Most other wildlife species do not congregate in winter or are not easily found by recreationists.

Motorized recreation users move more quickly through the animal's habitat than non-motorized users. Some studies have shown big game animals to be more stressed by humans on foot than by humans on machines, due to the longer duration of contact. However, motorized recreation users are more able to follow wildlife for "a better look" than non-motorized users.

While there is some elk and deer winter range at the southern part of the winter travel plan area in Unit 1, the bulk of the area does not contain normal nor critical winter range.

No matter what the mode of transportation, primary travel routes for recreationists are often along creeks and bottoms of drainages. Such creeks and riparian areas are often important food/prey sources for wildlife. Human disturbance may cause some wildlife species to avoid those travel corridors, making these important habitats less effective and displacing wildlife to other areas which may or may not be able to support them through the winter. Sensitive species that use riparian habitats include the ringtail and merlin.

Potential impacts from winter recreationists on bald eagles is expected to be rare. There is not much bald eagle use of the project area after approximately mid-December. Bald eagles concentrate along river corridors where they prey primarily on fish. Drainages in the project area do not support major fisheries and water is usually frozen over by mid-December.

Recreation use is much less likely to disturb forest interior species. Users typically do not travel into the trees very far, unless on specific trails. These interior species have much better hiding cover. The distance of disturbance is greatly reduced, because sight and sound distances are so much shorter. Sensitive species that use forest interiors include the pine marten, boreal owl, golden-crowned kinglet, northern goshawk, and three-toed woodpecker.

Many wintering birds including the golden-crowned kinglet, hairy woodpecker, merlin, pygmy nuthatch, red crossbill, three-toed woodpecker, and many other species, may be temporarily disturbed by winter recreationists as they pass through an area (especially if they are in noisy vehicles or dog sleds), but they are not likely to be permanently displaced from their habitat. Such birds are rarely bothered by the presence of humans, especially outside of their breeding season.

Snowmobiles and snowcats can affect the habitat of small winter active mammals by compacting the snow. Weasels, shrews, voles, mice, and other mammals have extensive tunnel systems in loose snow. These mammals feed on seeds and bugs above the frozen soil. Compaction will make their habitat less usable.

There is a possibility of a delayed effect on small hibernating wildlife species when they try to emerge from burrows which have been covered by a compacted snow from tracks. Adult boreal toads and tiger salamanders are amphibians that hibernate underground. Northern leopard frogs and the larval stages of the other two amphibian species hibernate under frozen ponds and pools and are not expected to be affected by winter recreation activities.

Snowcats and snowmobiles are loud and are likely to move noise sensitive animals out of the areas of frequent use. These vehicles are unlikely to be traveling into forest interior habitats.

Although uncomfirmed sitings of lynx and wolverine are reported once in a while in the Gunnison Basin, these species are not positively known to be present on the Taylor River/Cebolla Ranger District. Both lynx and wolverine are rare animals with large territories. They also avoid human contact. Although lynx and wolverine are not positively known to be present, the remote winter backcountry of the project area is considered potential habitat for these two rare species. Human disturbance caused particularly by loud mechanized winter travel (snowmobiles, snowcats) would result in lynx and wolverine avoiding the areas where these uses occur. Riparian areas are important hunting areas for these two species so consistent recreational use of stream corridors may prevent use by lynx and wolverine if they are present in the project area.

Dogs accompanying backcountry skiers can be disturbing to some animal species. If they are controlled by voice or physical restraint this would be minimal. However, some dogs are not kept in control and subsequently harass wildlife. Dogs can chase animals and dig after small mammals. Since dogsled dogs area under physical restraint, they are not likely to chase wildlife.

In perennial streams in the affected area, there is concern for fish habitat for Colorado River cutthroat, rainbow, and brown trout if there were to be a fuel spillage during snowmobile, or snowcat winter use. This would have an effect on the fish species and all aquatic organisms.

Some goshawks utilize this area in the winter and some goshawks move to lower elevations in the winter. the migratory goshawks return to the area as early as March. This is the critical time of the year when they begin nesting and may be affected by mechanized vehicular travel, noise, or human contact. Goshawks starting to nest may abandon their nest sites when disturbed.

2. Conflict and cooperation between recreation users and their dogs, including noise, crowding, naturalness of appearance, trailhead facilities, and safety

Effects of Each Winter Use on other Winter Uses

Different types of dispersed winter recreation users affect each other in both positive and negative ways. It is important to know what these effects are to provide high quality dispersed recreation opportunities, while minimizing negative interactions, and emphasizing positive ones. The table below describes these effects.

Table 6 - Cross Effects of Different Winter Recreation Uses

Activity	Positive Effects	Negative Effects
Outfitter & Guide Operations	Outfitter & guide operations introduce people to dispersed or remote winter recreation who would not normally get such an opportunity. Outfitter & guide operations provide additional business, jobs, and income to the local economy	Outfitter & guide operations add to the existing use levels of an area and may displace non-commercial users.
Snowmobiling	Snowshoers and cross-country skiers enjoy using tracked or groomed snowmobile trails.	Faster snowmobiles raise the risks of collision with slower moving non-motorized users.
	Snowmobiles can aid in search and rescue operations.	Snowmobiles degrade the track for cross-country skiers.
	Some backcountry skiers use snowmobiles to get to their favorite areas.	Snowmobile noise, smell and high speeds can disturb non-motorized users.
Snowcat Skiing and Touring	Creates opportunities on groomed trails for skate skiers, snowshoers, and dog sleds	Noise may disrupt non-motorized uses.
Snowshoers		Can degrade cross-country tracks.
		May get in the way of faster snowmobilers.
Cross-Country Skiers		May get in the way of faster snowmobilers.
Dogsledding		May get in the way of faster snowmobilers.
		Dogs and Dog sleds degrade the ski tracks for skiers.
		Some cross-country skiers do not want to find dog feces left by dog sled teams predominantly at trailheads and along trails.

Table 6 above indicates that cross-country skiers are the most sensitive group to the effects of other users. They generally do not like to be near the smells, sights, and sounds of mechanized equipment. The tracks, many cross-country skiers prefer to ski on, are easily destroyed by dogs, snowmobiles and snowcats. Skiing off trails can be disrupted when a cross-country skier crosses a packed snowmobile track. On the other hand some cross-country ski trails are groomed by snowcats or snowmobiles. Many cross-country skiers are proud of the physical conditioning and skill needed to partake in the sport, and at times may resent those who have not earned that conditioning yet can out-distance them using some other means of transport. Snowmobilers are generally not affected by other types of users, except when slower moving users must be avoided when traveling on trails.

Dog sledding can have an adverse impact on many other users, but dog sleds mostly impact cross-country skiers. The impact of dog traffic on a trail can ruin the track for cross-country skiers. Fecal matter left predominately at the beginning of the trail degrades the setting for other users. Barking dogs are viewed as a negative to other users. Dog sledding is a minor component of the dispersed recreation picture in the Crested Butte area, but it can impact other users.

Snowcats are used to take people on to slopes so they can ski down either with cross-country or with downhill skies, or to use airborne transport down. It is a relatively minor component of total dispersed winter recreation use. Some people object to it because it tracks up snow, previously accessible only after many hours of cross-country skiing.

Noise: Noise is one of the most disruptive effects of snowmobile and snowcat use in the backcountry to other users. In addition to the loud sound of nearby machines, the sound of the whine of

snowmobiles in the distance can be enough to degrade the quality of the remote recreation experience for non-motorized users. Any form of motorized use, with its associated noise, could have this type of disruptive effect on dispersed non-motorized users.

Crowding: Many Nordic skiers find motorized use to be in direct conflict with the experience they seek. Others seek solitude even from other skiers. This pristine experience is becoming more difficult to find.

Snowmobiling introduces relatively large numbers of people into backcountry areas. The mechanized aspect of snowmobile travel makes areas more accessible to more people. The ease of travel around the area coupled with the noise and tracks associated very quickly provides the perception of heavy use.

A positive effect of snowmobile use for other users is that the wider track of snowmobiles does provide a base for skiing. Skaters, snowshoers, and dogsledders particularly like the wider track in the absence of grooming. Snowmobile access also provides access for people who would otherwise never experience the backcountry.

The sight and sound of snowcats very quickly gives others the sense of a lot of use.

The most noticeable effect of dogs in the area would be droppings and tracks in the snow. Dog droppings are offensive to most users. Also, dog tracks and sled tracks combine to ruin groomed or established Nordic ski tracks. Dogsleds are more difficult to control and generally require the right-of-way.

Naturalness of Appearance: Some backcountry skiers seek out steep terrain for telemarking. The presence of tracks left on the hill reduces the natural appearance of the environment. Some people enjoy viewing well executed telemark turn tracks. These people gain vicarious enjoyment, knowing that someone else enjoyed the experience.

Snowmobiles have the power and speed necessary to cover a great deal of terrain. Even the appearance of one snowmobile track across otherwise undisturbed field of new snow can reduce the sense of pristineness valued by some. Snow play on machines degrades the quality of the experience for some foot, and dog sled travelers.

The trails and tracks in the snow left by recreation users very quickly give a landscape a "used" appearance. More so than at any other season, snow records the passage of every person until the next snowfall. Areas with heavy use lose the natural and pristine appearance that is a part of their appeal.

Snowcats leave wide tracks. They often travel along the same routes, usually following existing roads. This creates essentially a road in the winter. However they are able to travel cross country and will leave deep tracks in new snow.

Dogsled use is concentrated for the most part along established packed travel ways. Snow conditions are are unaffected except for along packed trails, which result from repeated use.

Trailhead Facilities: Trailheads for the use of snowmobilers and snowcats need to be considerably larger than those which just accommodate parking for cars carrying skiers, snow shoers, or the typical single truck dog sled users. The trailers and trucks which carry machines need larger turn arounds, and parking areas.

Trailheads that are heavily used can accumulate litter and human waste.

Safety: Backcountry skiing takes place on steep slopes and in the valley bottoms. Most of the use is concentrated on trails while some is dispersed. Occasionally, users in higher terrain will trigger avalanches which are a hazard, not only to themselves, but also to other users lower down.

Snowcats can pose a safety hazard for non-motorized uses, although it is not nearly as pronounced as with snowmobiles. Snowcats travel slower and can be heard from further away. They also are not nearly as numerous as snowmobiles. A particular safety concern is the mix of high speed snowmobiles and slower traffic on the Kebler Pass road.

3. Impact upon community lifestyles and local economy

The Crested Butte Area economy is heavily dependent upon recreation tourism, both winter and summer. Both locals and tourists use the National Forest for all of the activities in Table 1. Many of the tourists are guided by permitted outfitters, who employ locals who recycle the tourism dollars through the area gas stations, grocery stores, and rental apartments.

The community lifestyle is also heavily dependent on the proximity of "free" recreation on adjacent and nearby National Forest land. The ability to ski from one's doorstep to the National Forest is part of the Crested Butte mystique that is highly attractive to many locals. The community is very proud of their beautiful surroundings, and values the National Forest recreation opportunities. The community is concerned about the increase in both individual and commercial Forest recreation use.

B. Effects of Alternative 1 - No Action- Emphasis On Motorized Use

Impacts of recreation users, their equipment, and their dogs on vegetation and wildlife

Compared to alternative 2 and 3, this alternative would have the greatest effects to the plant species in the affected area, as a result of unrestricted motorized use. These effects would be located in the Brush Creek, Cement Creek and Slate River areas which are "not recommended" for snowmobile use under the current system. As described earlier in the Environmental Consequences section; these effects would be minimal.

Each type of recreation seems to bring its own unique effect to wildlife as described above. Effects of recreation users on wildlife is probably dependent more on volume of use than it is on type of use. As this alternative provides few restrictions to type or volume of use it would have the greatest impact on wildlife as compared to the other alternatives.

Conflict and cooperation between recreation users and their dogs, including noise, crowding, naturalness of appearance, trailhead facilities, and safety

This alternative would be expected to result in the greatest conflict and least cooperation between various types of recreation visitors. There would be no segregation of uses in any of the sixteen areas. Snowmobilers and snowcat users would have the greatest chance of finding the kind of recreation opportunity they are seeking. Even these users would have a diminished experience in some areas as an expected increase hostility from other users would detract from their experience. Conflicts would be greatest in the Upper East River, the forks of Brush Creek, Slate River, Oh-Be-Joyful, Washington Gulch, and Cement Creek areas.

Noise: In this alternative there would be no area to which users could retreat and be assured of the absence of motorized use. Noise would appear to increase in those same areas where the conflicts would increase as listed above.

Crowding: It is difficult to anticipate the distribution of users which would occur under an "all area open" policy. The more popular areas would likely attract all types of users, creating a sense of crowding for all. Some of the more primitive types of users (nordic skiers and snowshoers) would likely be displaced to less popular areas to find solitude.

Naturalness of appearance: Once again, areas which were most popular would get the highest use and would show it. Snow conditions in those watersheds with easiest access are likely to show significant use. There would be tracks of all types of users even though the tracks of certain uses may not be compatible with those of others. Under this alternative, it would be more difficult to anticipate where one type of user might find the snow conditions best suited for his/her use.

Trailhead facilities: Most winter trailheads are already too small. The greatest congestion occurs at trailheads where snowmobilers use trailers. This condition would exist at more trailheads. Trailheads that currently have a concentration of snowmobile use such as Kebler Pass East might see a reduction in crowding as snowmobilers disperse to other areas.

Safety: Safety would be reduced as the mix of high and slow speed uses would occur in more areas than at present. This increase would occur in the same drainages where general conflict would also increase.

Impact upon community lifestyles and local economy

Lifestyles in the community are closely tied to the quality of the National Forest setting. Lifestyles in the community include all of the forms of recreation being considered in this EA. This Alternative favors those who prefer snowmobile and snowcat access, to the detriment of those who prefer a more primitive setting, and a non-motorized method of access or recreation. Less balance in the recreation uses and the recreation settings would exist under this alternative than with Alternative 2.

Allowing snowmobile and snowcat use in all areas would lead to an expansion of commercial operations over time. The expansion of this industry would have a positive affect on the local economy. This may occur to the detriment of those dog sled and cross country ski outfitters that rely on more primitive settings which would be lost or degraded. Given the relatively larger incomes derived from the snowmobile guiding and renting and commercial snowcat operations, a net gain to the economy would be expected. The support industries are more dependent and the volume of business rather than the types, and would therefore experience a net growth as well.

C. Effects of Alternative 2 - Proposed Action

Impact of recreation users, their equipment, and dogs on vegetation and wildlife

This alternative would concentrate some types of recreation into specific areas. Impacts to vegetation and wildlife from motorized and non-motorized forms of recreation would be reduced relative to alternative 1.

Impacts from motorized forms of recreation would only occur in the twelve areas where motorized use would continue to occur. However, this effect would be further reduced in ten of those twelve areas by either prohibiting additional motorized commercial use, restricting the motorized use (to specific trails or roads, or for use during limited time periods), or by closing the areas to one of the forms of motorized use, or finally by simply discouraging one or more forms of motorized use.

Impacts to vegetation and wildlife, from the non-motorized forms of recreation would continue in all 16 areas around Crested Butte. In 12 of those areas the non-motorized forms of recreation would also have some form of restriction or closure which would further reduce the effects of this use. These restrictions or closures are in the form of prohibiting commercial non-motorized uses or prohibiting dog sleds, or discouraging one or more of the uses in an area.

Conflict and cooperation between recreation users and their dogs, including noise, crowding, naturalness of appearance, trailhead facilities, and safety

The partitioning of recreation activities would increase the opportunity for each activity to occur in the absence of conflict with other less compatible activities.

The difference between this alternative and the no action alternative would be in the segregation of uses to selected areas. Only Ohio Creek and Farris Creek would remain as general use areas, all others would promote certain recreation activities and discourage or eliminate others.

Noise: Those uses which would result in noise would, for the most part, be restricted to certain areas, and those uses which have a more primitive experience as their objective will be directed elsewhere.

Opportunities for conflicts would be greatly reduced. The existence of areas essentially dedicated to certain kinds of use would provide each use with a higher quality opportunity and experience.

Crowding: Perception of crowding for snowmobilers is likely to increase with this alternative as compared to alternative 1, as a result of being confined to fewer areas, and as a result of finding more snowmobilers in those areas. This effect may be most noticeable in the Kebler East and West areas, and the Irwin area.

The non-motorized recreational visitors are likely to experience an overall reduction in the perception of crowding. These individuals will generally avoid snowmobile areas and as a result experience less of a feeling of crowding due to the absence of snowmobiles. Those individuals who continue to cross-country ski or snow shoe in motorized use areas like Kebler Pass will continue to experience a feeling of crowding in those areas. The result of more skiers going to areas where motorized use is disallowed or discouraged would result in more crowding from other skiers. This effect is not likely to be noticeable. Limitations on commercial uses would reduce the potential of increased crowding in the future as compared to Alternative 1.

Naturalness of snow appearance: Snow appearance under this alternative would reflect the concentration of certain uses in certain areas. Those areas which allowed and encouraged snowmobile use, for example would show clear evidence of that use. The snow fields in these areas would be randomly tracked with snowmobile tracks. In those situations when new snow did not fall for a long period of time, these fields would show the signs of much use and snowmobilers would not be able to find the open untouched fields to traverse. Some areas would also show extensive use from skiers finding slopes for downhill runs.

Those users who do not track the open fields as much, such as nordic skiers, dog sledders, and snowshoers would more consistently be able to find less disturbed environments in which to recreate. These users more typically stay on single tracks. Their enjoyment has a lot to do with the fact that the snow has not been tracked, and that there are no sights or sounds of motorized use in the area.

Trailhead facilities: Some trailheads might be less congested than with alternative 1, as a result of the absence of trailers or fewer trailers from motorized uses.

Safety: Safety would be improved as compared to alternative 1. The primary safety concern (beyond general avalanche concerns) occurs from slower non-motorized forms of travel mixing with fast moving snowmobiles on the same travel corridor. As compared to alternative 1 the following areas would have improved safety by eliminating, reducing or discouraging this mixing of uses: Oh-Be-Joyful, Slate River, Washington Gulch, Upper East River, the Brush Creeks, Upper Cement Creek, and lower Cement Creek.

Impact upon community lifestyles and local economy

Alternative 2 may result in a decrease in user conflict. Areas will be available for users to pursue their desired activities with less disturbance from conflicting activities. Individuals will know where they can go and have a better chance of finding a setting to meet their own recreation needs.

Alternative 2 may affect community lifestyles by increasing the feeling of restriction and loss of freedom on National Forest Lands.

Alternative 2 would reduce the growth potential of many outfitter and guide operations as compared to alternative 1. No additional Commercial snowmobile permits would be issued, and commercial uses for other winter recreation activities would be limited or prohibited in many areas.

D. Effects of Alternative 3 - Non-Motorized Emphasis

Alternative 3 is similar to alternative 2 except that it proposes additional restrictions to motorized uses in five areas, thereby establishing an emphasis toward non-motorized uses in the project area. The five areas and

additional restrictions would be as follows: Oh-Be-Joyful and Slate River would be closed to snowmobile and snowcat use; Washington Gulch, Upper East River, and West Brush Creek would be closed to snowmobiles. (Alternatives 2 and 3 both propose closures to snowcats in Washington Gulch, Upper East River and West Brush Creek.)

Impacts of recreation users, their equipment, and their dogs on vegetation and wildlife

As with alternative 2 this alternative would concentrate some types of recreation into specific areas, thereby rearranging where the effects occur without altering the overall magnitude of the effect in the project area. However, volume of use and the effect to vegetation and wildlife, would be further reduced as compared to alternative 1 and 2 with the absence of the snowmobile outfitter in Washington Gulch.

Conflict and cooperation between recreation users and their dogs, including noise, crowding, naturalness of appearance, trailhead facilities and safety

As with alternative 2, the general effort in alternative 3 to segregate less compatible uses should also reduce conflict. Cooperation may even increase in those areas where uses would continue to be mixed as individuals know they at least have some places they can go to avoid other types of users.

Eliminating the combined presence of motorized and non-motorized uses in five additional areas with alternative 3, could further reduce conflict and the potential for conflict in those areas, as compared to alternatives 1 and 2.

In the Oh-Be-Joyful area alternative 2 would discourage snowmobile and snowcat use. Conflict is still possible, perhaps likely between motorized and non-motorized users. In the Slate River area the emphasis is toward non-motorized uses with alternative 2, yet motorized and non-motorized uses and the potential for conflicts would both exist. In Washington Gulch alternative 2 would discourage snowmobile use, and provide an emphasis for cross country skiing yet still maintain a snowmobile outfitter making trips up to twice a day. Alternative 2 would have a non-motorized emphasis in the Upper East River Valley yet allow snowmobile use before 11/15 and after 4/15. Finally the West Brush Creek drainage would have an emphasis on cross country skiing in alternative 2, yet allow snowmobile use on the main road, maintaining opportunities for conflict.

As compared to alternative 2, alternative 3 could further reduce conflict, and the potential for conflict in each of these areas by eliminating the combination of motorized and non-motorized uses.

Noise: Noise as generated by motorized equipment would be concentrated to seven areas. This noise would be eliminated from the additional five areas as compared to alternative 2.

Crowding: The perception of crowding for snowmobilers would increase with this alternative as compared to alternative 1 and 2, as snowmobilers would be further confined to seven of the sixteen areas. Conversely, the perception of crowding would be reduced for other users in the five additional areas closed to snowmobilers.

Naturalness of snow appearance: The snow appearance would reflect the concentration of uses as with alternative 2. The appearance of snowmobile tracked snow would be accelerated in the seven areas remaining open to snowmobilers. A more primitive, less tracked appearance would occur in five additional areas as compared to alternative 2, and in eight additional areas as compared to alternative 1.

Trailheads facilities: Greater parking pressure would be expected in those areas where snowmobile use is concentrated. This pressure would be reduced in the five areas where snowmobile use is eliminated.

The existing outfitter in Washington Gulch does not park trucks, trailers, or vans at the trailhead in order to effectively mitigate impacts from this operation on trailhead parking availability. Removing this operation would not affect parking in Washington Gulch.

Safety: Given safety concerns are generated from the mixing of speeds on travel corridors, safety would be improved, as compared to alternative 2, in the five additional areas where snowmobile uses would be eliminated.

Impact upon Community lifestyles and local economy

Alternative 3 may result in a decrease in user conflict when compared to alternatives 1 and 2. More areas would be available for people to pursue their favorite activities in the absence of competing or less compatible uses.

Lifestyles in the community includes all forms of winter recreation being considered in this EA. This alternative favors the those individuals who prefer nordic skiing, snow shoeing, and dogsledding. This is to the detriment of those who prefer snowmobiling, snowcat access, and even airborne activities as their motorized access is further restricted when compared to alternatives 1 and 2.

This alternative would have a similar effect on the local economy as would alternative 2 by limiting the growth potential of many outfitters, and this industry in general in the Crested Butte area. However, in this alternative removing the snowmobile outfitter in Washington Gulch would further reduce business income as compared to alternatives 2 and 1.

E. Cultural Resource Effects

None of the alternatives propose ground disturbing activities which would affect cultural resources and a cultural resource report is not required.

F. Irreversible & Irretrievable Effects

Two terms are important to this discussion. An *irreversible commitment of resources* results from actions altering an area to the extent that it cannot be returned to its undisturbed condition through perpetuity or for a long period of time; or it is a commitment which completely utilizes a non-renewable resource. *Irretrievable commitments* are changes induced in the environment which cannot be called back, including lost production or lost use of renewable resources due to the passage of time.

None of the alternatives constitute an irreversible nor irretrievable commitment. Use occurs over snow, which provides a renewable protective layer for most ecosystem components. Compared to summer season use, dispersed winter use has negligible lasting or permanent effects on the environment.

G. Cumulative Effects

Apart from dispersed winter recreation, the National Forest System lands surrounding Crested Butte are generally void of any other activity. Dispersed winter recreation generally does not have a lasting effect which carries over into the summer, except for the possible effects on wintering big game herds which will be mitigated (See mitigation common to all Alternatives). Therefore, dispersed winter recreation activities will not have significant cumulative effects.

X. Coordination and Consultation

The Crested Butte Winter Recreation Group, also referred to as the "gang of nine" formed in January of 1992. This group was made up of community members representative of various recreation interests including motorized and non-motorized, commercial and noncommercial recreation interests. The following is a list of the individuals who participated in this group and the interests they represented:

Darcy Gordon- Chamber of Commerce
John Biro- commercial snowmobile industry
Duane Gray- recreation snowmobilers
Susan Lohr- environment

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Duane Gray- recreation snowmobilers
Susan Lohr- environment

Jan Runge- backcountry skiers
Keith Austin- commercial nordic ski industry
Roger Morris- general winter recreationist
Tim Shinn- helicopter ski industry
Rich Curtis- Snowcat skiing and touring industry

After many long and difficult meetings, and a great deal of public debate, in April of 1992 this group presented Forest Service with a recommendation on how to allocate and manage various winter recreation activities in the area around Crested Butte.

A news release was made available on November 16, 1992 which detailed the proposal made by this group. This news release asked for concerns or suggestions regarding the proposal.

Over 150 calls or letters were received in response to the news release. Some letters came in the form of petitions. In total nearly 275 individuals commented on the proposal and news release.

Comments received through the public involvement process were addressed in developing the list of issues, concerns and opportunities which guided analysis of the proposed action. The issues, concerns and opportunities are presented in this EA

Finally the EA is made available for 60 days for public review and comments. Comments will be reviewed and considered, and responded to by the Forest Service ID Team. Those comments and responses will be made a part of this EA.

Interdisciplinary Team

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Wendy Reinmuth	Wildlife Biologist
Craig Magwire	Recreation Specialist
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Gunnison County Commissioners
Gary Tomsic, Gunnison County Manager
Jace Dunkin, Mayor, Mt Crested Butte
Jim Schmidt, Mayor, Town of Crested Butte

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Don Sentor, MD Allergy Clinic
Steve Guerrieri, Alpine Expeditions
Kim Ferrenberg, Burt Rent./Lost Lake
David Baxter, Cement Creek Ranch
Nick Logan, Colorado Avalanche Information Center
Tim Shinn, Colorado Heli-Ski
Kim O'Connell, Connecting With Colorado
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Crested Butte Mt. Res. Ski Patrol
Kathy Frank, Crested Butte Nordic Council
Crested Butte Property Owners Assoc.
Robert Wojtalik, Crested Butte Search & Rescue
Evan Lukassen, Gunnison Country Times
High Country Citizens Alliance
Dennis Hall, High Country Citizens Alliance
Gary Sprung, High Country Citizens Alliance
Rich Curtis, Irwin Lodge
Becky Barkman, Lucky Cat Dog Farm
Riverbend Homeowners Association
Susan Allen, Rocky Mountain Biological Lab
Mark Schumacher, Three Rivers Resort