DISPERSED WINTER RECREATION
IN THE CRESTED BUTTE AREA

DECISION NOTICE
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests
Taylor River and Cebolla Ranger Districts
Gunnison County, Colorado

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Decision Notice is to document the decision of the Forest Supervisor, regarding the management of dispersed winter recreation on National Forest Lands surrounding the Towns of Crested Butte and Mt. Crested Butte. This Decision Notice will also provide a review of the public involvement, the issues and alternatives considered, and the reasons for the decision.

The Forest Service formed an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists to review the need for action, identify issues, develop management alternatives, and study the environmental effects of each alternative. The need for action, the alternatives, the issues identified, and the environmental consequences are described in the Environmental Assessment for Dispersed Recreation Management in the Crested Butte Area. The Environmental Assessment (EA) is available for public review at the Taylor River and Cebolla Ranger Districts office at 216 North Colorado in Gunnison, Colorado.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Although there were public meetings as early as 1987, the public involvement for this process started with the formation of the Winter Recreation Working Group in January of 1992. This nine person group was made up of members of the Crested Butte and Gunnison communities, and represented various aspects of community interests as follows:

Darcy Gordon- Chamber of Commerce
John Biro- commercial snowmobile industry
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 skiing industry
Rich Curtis- Snowcat skiing and touring industry

This group held over 10 meetings open to public attendance, where they forged through collaboration and compromise, a recommendation concerning the management of recreation in the analysis area. In April of 1992 the group presented the Forest Service with it's recommendation. News releases, describing this proposal were published in the Crested Butte Chronicle and Pilot and the Gunnison Country Times during the week of November 16, 1992. The

news releases asked for the public to review the proposal and asked for public comment regarding issues, concerns and suggestions on the proposal. The news release also stated that the Forest Service was adopting the groups recommendation as the Forest Service proposed action in an environmental analysis. Some elements of the groups recommendation were not included in the proposed action either because they were beyond the scope of the decision to be made or were inconsistent with Forest policy.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed in April of 1995. This EA described the environmental effects of three different alternatives including the proposed action. The EA was made available for public comment for 60 days. News releases were published in the local papers announcing this opportunity to review and comment on the EA. A copy of the EA was mailed directly to 203 individuals, who had previously expressed interest in the proposal. An additional 24 individuals received copies after seeing the news release and requesting a copy be provided. As a result, a total of 186 letters were received that expressed comment on the EA. Those comments have been provided as Appendix A to this Decision Notice, along with Forest Service responses to those comments.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES CONSIDERED

There are important environmental issues to consider in determining how best to manage dispersed recreation on the National Forest Lands surrounding Crested Butte. Agencies, organizations and members of the public provided valuable input. The Forest Service interdisciplinary team identified and further refined the major public and environmental issues, which were then addressed in the EA. Those issues are as follows:

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

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Three alternatives were studied in detail and are presented in the EA for consideration. Each alternative outlines where each winter recreation activity would occur. Each alternative also outlines where and what kind of commercial outfitter and guide activity will be permitted. Refer to pages 6 through 13 of the EA for detailed descriptions of the three alternatives considered.

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 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 is based on the recommendation of the Winter Recreation Working Group as proposed to the Forest Service. This alternative represents their compromises to balance the needs of major types or winter recreation pursuits. This alternative 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 - emphasis on non-motorized use
This alternative provides a greater emphasis on providing areas for non-motorized recreation as compared to alternatives one and two.

None of the alternatives propose, nor would my decision implement, 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 to protect a rare plant.

The Gothic Research 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, hang gliders, and mechanical means of transport are prohibited in Wilderness areas.

THE DECISION

Based on the EA and review and consideration of the comments received during scoping and the public comment for the EA, my decision is to implement winter recreation management in the Crested Butte area that incorporates elements of Alternatives 1, 2 and 3. Table 1 displays the specific details of my decision. Refer also to Map 1 which identifies the areas referred to in this decision. This decision only applies to the winter recreation activites listed in Table 1.

Unless otherwise stated in Table 1 of this Decision Notice, new commercial permits or additions to existing permits will only be considered in areas where that activity is designated as "open". Consideration of an application for new permits, or additions to existing permits involves public scoping and the appropriate environmental analysis, and does not mean permits would necessarily be granted.

The number of snowmobile outfitter and guide permits (a total of 5 in the analysis area) will not be increased, or increased in any individual area, over the current number. Numbers of snowmobile permits would be reduced if permits are combined.

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

The Forest Service does not have the authority to regulate method of travel within Gunnison County's road easement or Right-of-Way. Therefore nothing in this decision determines uses on the Kebler Pass Road (County Road 12) or on the Gothic Road up to the point where it becomes a Forest road (FDR 317) at the Forest Boundary located on the northern edge of the Town of Gothic.

I recommend that the Gunnison County Board of Commissioners review this decision and consider actions to regulate uses on county roads and road easements that take this decision into account.

REASONS FOR MY DECISION

Upon examining the EA, I have found no strong and compelling biological or physical resource reasons to choose one alternative over another. It is apparent that social concerns are the most important considerations in making this decision.

The social concerns include very individual preferences, desires and perceptions of both conflict and cooperation among recreationists, and between recreationists pursuing various recreation activities.

These concerns also include different beliefs about the appropriate role of the Forest Service in managing recreation and providing recreation settings. Some individuals do not believe that non-motorized settings should be provided on National Forest Lands. Others would prefer that many National Forest areas be converted to non-motorized settings.

Because these concerns and perceptions are individual, and are in some cases very different, it is not possible to find one solution or approach to managing recreation that will suit all people. I believe the approach represented by this decision provides reasonable balance and compromise between the preferences, desires and perceptions expressed by the people of the Crested Butte and Gunnison communities and the people that visit the area.

General Reasons For The Decision:

1. Winter Recreation use in the Crested Butte area has grown to the point that more intensive management is needed. Proactive management before conflict occurs in all areas, is a reasonable and responsible approach.

2. This system of encouraging uses in some areas, and discouraging and in some cases restricting them in others will help people find the recreation setting they are seeking, thus improving the recreation experience.

3. Of the 17 areas involved in this decision, ten will emphasize general use and or have a motorized emphasis and seven will have an emphasis on non-motorized use.

4. Most areas, (thirteen of seventeen), will provide for some forms of both motorized and non-motorized recreation.

5. The full range of winter recreation settings appropriate to the National Forest will be provided, primitive (or Wilderness), semi-primitive non-motorized, and semi-primitive motorized.

6. Opportunities for the public to have the assistance of an outfitter can be provided for all identified forms of winter recreation activity.

The Reasons For The Decision In Terms Of The Issues:

1. Impacts of recreation activities on vegetation and wildlife

This decision will discourage use or impose restrictions on some uses in some areas. This will reduce effects from recreation in those areas. I am aware this may increase effects from recreation in unrestricted areas, where use may become more concentrated.

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

Identifying recreation uses that will occur in specific areas and communicating that information to the visitor will reduce conflict in two ways: 1) Some people will be able to select areas in order to avoid another kind of recreation activity they perceive as conflicting, 2) People's expectations will be changed to expect other forms of recreation should they choose an area open to many kinds of recreation.

As an example, the perception of noise as a problem for some non-motorized users should be reduced by their ability to choose areas that will not contain motorized activities. In addition, should they knowingly choose an area that includes motorized activities, they will expect to see these uses and there will be a reduced perception of conflict when they are encountered.

The existence of areas dedicated to certain kinds of uses will provide a higher quality experience for each user.

Crowding will be moderated by limiting growth in commercial uses. Crowding in some sense can be increased by creating some segregation of uses. But the perception of crowding overall should be reduced. Causing skiers or snowmobilers to congregate in fewer locations that will contain mostly their own form of recreation will result in less of a perception of crowding than if the uses are always completely intermixed.

Naturalness of appearance is affected by the form of recreation taking place and the tracks left behind. The greater segregation of uses will result in a greater segregation of the tracks left behind. Snowmobile tracks will be concentrated in some areas, ski tracks will be concentrated in others. Most areas will have a combination of tracks.

Trailheads will generally be unaffected by this action. Some redistribution of use will occur as a result of this decision, but effect to trailheads and trailhead parking should be minor and not noticeable.

Visitor safety will be improved by implementing this decision.

3. Impact upon community lifestyles and local economy

This decision will limit the growth of the outfitter industry in the analysis area. It will also help maintain the quality of the outfitter product by reducing crowding and conflict.

Some areas will be available for users to pursue their desired activities with reduced disturbance from conflicting activities. I am aware this may cause some people to feel a loss of freedom in those areas.

Specific Reasons For Choosing Elements of Alternatives 1 and 3.

1. The "Oh-Be-Joyful" area will remain open to dog sledding as proposed in Alternative 1, but commercial dog sledding will not be added to the area.

This area is available to all other uses, (except for the Wilderness portion which is closed to motorized and airborne uses). The adjacent "Slate River" area which is an access point to the "Oh-Be-Joyful" area is also open to all other uses. There were no compelling reasons to close "Oh-Be-Joyful" to dogsleds as proposed in Alternative 2. Avalanche hazards and difficult stream crossings which are present, do not provide adequate rationale for a closure to this use.

2. The "Slate River" area will emphasize general recreation as proposed in Alternative 1, and will emphasize non-commercial use of the area as proposed in Alternative 2.

Because all uses will be allowed in this area, the stated emphasis is more appropriately described as "general use", and not "non-motorized use" as defined in Alternative 2.

3. The "Washington Gulch" area will remain open to snowshoeing as proposed in Alternative 1. In this area, where a separate route for skiers is being packed smooth without a set diagonal stride track, it seems reasonable to expect skiers and snowshoers to recreate on the same trail.

4. The "Upper East River" (GOTHIC) area will be closed to snowmobiles during the entire winter use period as outlined in Alternative 3, as opposed to a closure between 11/15 and 4/15 as described in Alternative 2 of the EA. This area will also remain open to dogsledding as proposed in Alternative 1, although this use will be discouraged.

The intent of this decision is to provide a semi-primitive non-motorized setting for winter recreation in this area. Given this intent, there is no apparent rationale for providing for motorized use for the period before 11/15 and after 4/15. To do so is more likely to add to confusion and conflict. This closure does not apply to the portion of the Gothic Road under County jurisdiction located from Gothic to the Town of Mt. Crested

Butte. It also does not apply to the portion of this area currently within the ski area permit boundary for Crested Butte Mountain Resort.

The National Forest portion of the "Upper East River" area will remain open to dogsledding for several reasons: 1) It is an activity that is consistent with a semi-primitive non-motorized setting, 2) There are ample opportunities for track and skate skiing in the absence of dog sledding as provided by the Crested Butte Nordic Center. This will allow continued dog sled access to Wilderness terrain that can only be accessed through this corridor. Dog sledding in general will be discouraged in this area as it is in Washington Gulch due to the volume of other uses. Commercial dog sled use will not be permitted.

5. The "East Brush Creek" area will be divided into an "Upper" and "Lower" area. The Upper area will be managed for general recreation use. A mitigation measure is identified that encourages representatives of the Friends Hut and the Taylor Park Trading Post to work together to meet mutual objectives of keeping the area open to snowmobile access to Pearl Pass while accommodating the desire for a non-motorized setting near the hut. This decision reflects input from board members for the Friends Hut and from the Taylor Park Trading Post, and input received during the comment period.

The Lower East Brush Creek area will emphasize cross country skiing and will be closed to motorized uses. This area and Middle Brush Creek will be closed to motorized uses not because conflicts exist today that need correcting, but because non-motorized settings outside of Wilderness are appropriate on National Forest System Lands. In addition, there is an expressed public interest in managing these areas for this setting, and for the recreation activities appropriate to this setting. This decision is consistent with the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960 as well as the Forest Plan.

6. The "Upper Cement Creek" area will remain open to snowmobile use and to motorized access for airborne activities, as proposed in Alternative 1, (airborne activities include non-motorized activities such as use of a hang glider or parasail). Comments received on the EA indicate that this area is important terrain for snowmobilers that access the area from Taylor Park. By leaving this area open to snowmobiling, the entire Cement Creek drainage will be managed for general recreation use. Snowmobilers will be able to make connections between Taylor Park and Aspen via Taylor Pass, and to the Crested Butte area via Reno Divide and Cement Creek.

Motorized access (snowmobile access) by airborne users will be maintained in this area in order to provide consistency in recreation access within the area.

7. The "Farris Creek" area will remain open to the existing snowmobile operator, as proposed in Alternative 1. Commercial snowmobile operations will be limited to the existing operation, due to the relatively small size of the area.

8. Motorized access for outfitters of "Airborne" activities (hang gliders and parasails), would be allowed in areas where motorized access for the

general public is also allowed. This includes the following areas: Ohio Creek, Kebler East, Kebler West, Irwin, Slate River, Lower East River, West Brush Creek, Upper East Brush Creek, Upper and Lower Cement Creek and Farris Creek. As these areas will be open to motorized access for the general public, there is no rationale for preventing an outfitter of "airborne" activities from using a snowmobile to access these areas.

There are no permitted airborne outfitters in the analysis area at this time. This decision does not mean these outfitters would necessarily be permitted.

Table 1 - Recreation Management

Winter Dispersed Recreation Area	Snowmobiling	Cross-Country Skiing	Snowcat	Dog Sledding	Snowshoe - Hike	Airborne
1. Ohio Creek - General use area.	Open, No commercial use. (1)	Open	Discourage private use. No commercial use. (1)	Open	Open	Open (1)
2. Kebler East - Emphasis Snowmobiling.	Open (1)	Discouraged	Closed, except for trail grooming. (1)	Closed	Open	Open (1)
3. Kebler West - Emphasis Snowmobiling.	Open (1)	Open	Open (1)	Open	Open	Open (1)
4. Irwin - Emphasis is Snowmobile and Snowcat use.	Open	Open	Open, 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.	Open, No commercial use.	Open, No commercial use.	Open outside of wilderness. Closed within wilderness. No commercial use.
6. Slate River - Emphasis on General Non-Commercial use.	Open, no commercial use.	Open, no commercial use.	Open, no commercial use.	Open, no commercial use.	Open, no commercial use.	Open
7. Washington Gulch-Emphasis is Cross Country Skiing	Discouraged, Commercial use is limited.	Open, No additional ski permits.	Closed	Discouraged, No commercial use.	Open, No commercial use.	Discouraged, Commercial use limited to non-motorized access, or access via existing snowmobile outfitter.
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	Discouraged, No commercial use.	Open	Open, but limited to non-motorized access.
9. Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness - Non-Motorized Emphasis	Closed	Open	Closed	Open, No commercial Use.	Open	Closed
10. Lower East River - General use area.	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open

Table 1 - Continued

Winter Dispersed Recreation Area	Snowmobiling	Cross-Country Skiing	Snowcat	Dog Sledding	Snowshoe - Hike	Airborne
11. West Brush Creek-Emphasis is Cross Country Skiing	Open, Limited to Brush Creek Road and Deer Creek Road. No commercial use.	Open	Closed	Open, Limited to Brush Creek Road and Deer Creek Road. No commercial use.	Open	Open
12. Middle Brush Creek - Emphasis is cross-country skiing.	Closed	Open	Closed	Discouraged, Restricted to the main road. No Commercial Use.	Open	Open, No motorized access.
13. East Brush Creek - Upper - General Use Area Lower - Emphasis is Cross Country Skiing (2)	 Upper - Open, No Commercial Use. Lower - Closed	Upper & Lower-Open	Upper & Lower-Closed	Upper & Lower - Discouraged, Restricted to the main road. No commercial use.	Upper & Lower-Open	 Upper - Open Lower - Open, No motorized access.
14. Upper Cement Creek - General Use Area	Open, No Commercial use.	Open	Closed	Discouraged, No commercial use.	Open	Open
15. Lower Cement Creek - Emphasis on general Non-Commercial use.	Open, On main road only. No Commercial use.	Open	Open, On main road only. No commercial use.	Discouraged, No commercial use.	Open	Open
16. Farris Creek - General use area.	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open	Open

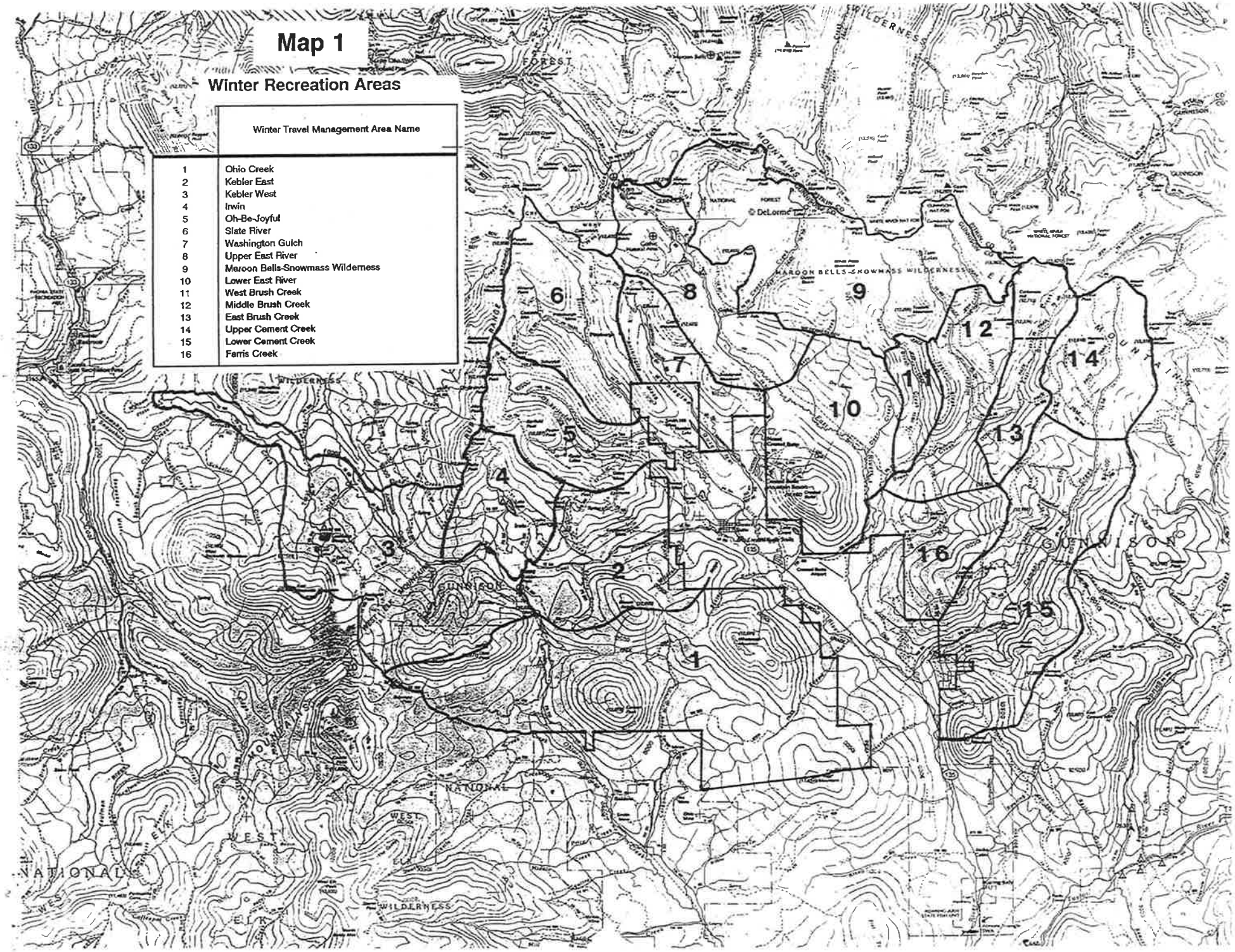
(1) The existing Travel Restrictions for Portions of these areas, will remain in effect.

(2) The Boundary of the Upper and Lower East Brush Creek is an East/West line which intersects the forks of Upper East Brush Creek that are located in the SE 1/4 of Sec. 6, T.13S., R.84W., (See Map 1).

Map 1

Winter Recreation Areas

	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



MITIGATION MEASURES

Mitigating measures are actions taken to avoid, minimize, reduce or eliminate adverse effects as a result of implementing an alternative. The following mitigating measures will be implemented as a part of this decision.

1. Trailhead signs and brochures will be created to educate visitors about the winter recreation use system and about reducing visitor impacts.

3. The commercial snowmobile outfitter in the Washington Gulch area will continue to pack separate trails for motorized and non-motorized users.

4. Commercial outfitters that use the Kebler Pass road will be encouraged to cooperate in grooming a parallel track next to the road for non-motorized users. (As the Kebler Pass road is a County road, this mitigation is a recommendation to Gunnison County and the outfitters).

5. The Forest Service will work cooperatively with the Chamber of Commerce to educate area business employees on the winter travel management system and on public land access and private land trespass issues.

6. The number of commercial snowmobile permits, trips per day and machines per trip will be limited.

7. It is recommended that the County and the Town of Crested Butte work cooperatively to implement winter speed limits on the Kebler Pass Road.

8. Implement the existing motorized use closure to protect the plant population of Drosera rotundifolia L. in the Kebler East area.

9. Representatives of the Friends Hut and the Taylor Park Trading Post are encouraged to work cooperatively to meet the objectives of providing snowmobile access in upper East Brush Creek, while minimizing effects of this activity on the ski hut.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE QUALITY OF THE ENVIRONMENT

The Environmental Assessment indicates that:

The selected action will not have significant effects on the quality of the human environment, either as an individual action, or as part of the cumulative effect of other past, present and planned actions within this area.

The selected action does not affect public health and improves public safety.

There are no unique characteristics of this area which would be affected by the selected action.

The effects of the selected action are not highly controversial.

The effects of the selected action on the human environment are not highly uncertain, nor do they involve unique or unknown risks.

The selected action is not precedent-setting. It does not establish a precedent for future actions which may have a significant effect on the environment. It does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The selected action will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The selected action will not cause loss or destruction of significant cultural, prehistoric, or historic resources.

The selected action will not adversely affect endangered or threatened species or their habitat.

This action complies with other federal, state or local laws and requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

Based on the findings in the Environmental Assessment, I find that this decision will not have a significant effect on the human environment and is excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

The Forest Plan has been reviewed. I have determined that this decision is consistent with the direction provided in the Forest Plan. The actions in this project fully comply with the Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines, goals and management area direction.

Floodplains, wetlands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, cultural resources and mineral implications have been considered and these resources will not be adversely affected by this project. No threatened, endangered, proposed or sensitive species or their habitat will be negatively impacted by this project.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Implementation of this decision may take place five (5) days after the end of the appeal filing period, unless an appeal is received. The appeal filing period extends 45 days after the publication of Notice of Decision in the Grand Junction Daily Sentinel (Anticipated publication date is December 2, 1995.)

CONTACT PERSON

For further information concerning this decision contact Craig Magwire or Jim Dawson at (970) 641-0471.

APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES

This decision is subject to administrative review pursuant to 36 CFR 215. Any appeal of this decision must fully comply with the requirements of 36 CFR 215. Appeals must be filed with the appeal deciding officer within 45 days of the publication of Notice of Decision in the Grand Junction Daily Sentinel. The appeal deciding officer is:

Elizabeth Estill
Regional Forester
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OR
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Robert L. Storch 11/27/95

ROBERT L. STORCH DATE
Forest Supervisor