



## News Release

Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests &  
Thunder Basin National Grassland  
<http://fs.usda.gov/mbr>

**Media Contact:** Aaron Voos, (307) 745-2323

### **U.S. Forest Service Proposes Changes to Eastern Snowy Range Seasonal Big Game Road Closures**

**(LARAMIE, Wyo.) February 25, 2016** – As part of ongoing collaboration with the Wyoming Game & Fish Department (WGFD), the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has created a proposal to improve crucial big game habitat along the southeast boundary of the Snowy Range.

The Laramie Ranger District proposes to extend existing seasonal road closures on the Medicine Bow National Forest, as well as install new gates to assist with compliance, and place new sections of area roads under seasonal closures.

- In order to better protect deer and elk from disturbance during their most sensitive times, the Forest Service proposes to extend seasonal closures from the current dates of Nov. 15 - April 31 to a longer timeframe of Oct. 1 - June 15 each year. There are currently seasonal closures in place for 37 miles of roads on a narrow section of Forest that runs south from near Lake Owen along the foothills to the Wyoming/Colorado state line.
- Also proposed is the installation of five new gates at locations which access the seasonally closed roads. These gates are meant to better enforce the closures.
- In some cases, roads that do not currently have seasonal closures would have seasonal closures applied so that gates can be installed at practical traffic pinch points. Approximately 8.6 total miles of roads would have this new seasonal closure, spread over 10 different sections of road directly adjacent to crucial big game habitat.

The area on Forest affected by these closures is critically important to local deer and elk herds as it contains transition habitat, winter range, and fawning and calving areas. Typically, October begins the important transition period as big game animals move from summer to winter range. It is important that the animals maximize their forage intake during this time, so as to build up fat reserves for winter and early spring months. Late spring is when deer fawns and elk calves are born, also in the transition range, and a reduction in human disturbance gives the young animals time to become mobile and devote energy to growth.

“The habitat in this area is unique in that it provides multiple ranges which are important to the health of deer and elk,” said Laramie District Ranger Frank Romero. “The herds spend all or some of the fall, winter, and spring in this area, and the importance of this habitat is becoming increasingly apparent.

“By working closely with the Wyoming Game & Fish Department, we have the opportunity to solidify existing closures and improve habitat for herds that have struggled in recent years.”

Per direction from the Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, the USFS manages these specific areas to provide adequate amounts of quality forage, cover, and solitude for deer, elk, and other

species. The areas should provide sufficient habitat and protection from disturbance to support the population and management objectives for transitioning and wintering deer, elk and other species. The Forest Service develops these objectives in consultation with the WGFD.

“We have worked with the Forest Service on this proposal and believe that it will have a positive impact on the health of deer and elk herds,” said Corey Class, WGFD Laramie Wildlife Coordinator. “As proposed, the seasonal road closures will address multiple issues identified through the Sheep Mountain Mule Deer Initiative.

“By closing the roads in October it will primarily allow deer to utilize that transition habitat which has been determined to be very important longer, thus improving their body condition going into winter. The closures will also reduce hunter crowding, which we have heard is a concern for many in the affected areas. The later opening in June will again allow these animals to utilize this important transition range habitat longer, and have less disturbance during the critical fawning period.”

According to Lee Knox, WGFD Laramie Area Wildlife Biologist, “One of the common complaints we receive from hunters is that the elk and deer are pushed on to private lands where they are no longer accessible to the public. Over the last decade we have seen fewer deer and elk utilizing the habitat in the seasonal closure area during hunting season.

“According to several research studies deer and elk need at least one square mile of roadless habitat for security cover to continue utilizing an area during times of high disturbance. Closing the roads to vehicle traffic on Oct. 1 will increase security cover and in turn allow deer and elk to be more available to the public during hunting season.”

If respected, these road closures provide pockets of habitat where deer and elk find security and food during transition periods, the harsh winter months, and during birthing with minimal disturbance from human activities.

Big-game wintering grounds are characterized by areas of lesser snow depths due to lower elevations and southern exposures, and mountain shrub vegetation. The areas have been defined by WGFD through winter flight survey information. These areas of shallower snow provide critical food to deer and elk during the winter.

Project information, including a map that shows locations of roads with proposed seasonal road closures and gate locations is available on the Medicine Bow National Forest web site at: [http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa\\_project\\_exp.php?project=47351](http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=47351).

The Forest Service will be accepting comments on this proposal until March 15, 2016. A decision is expected in April, 2016.

Written comments should be submitted to the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests, Laramie Ranger District, Attn: Frank Romero, 2468 Jackson St, Laramie, WY 82070, or fax: 307-745-2398. Oral and hand-delivered comments must be provided at the Responsible Official’s office during normal business hours (8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday-Friday, excluding holidays). Telephone comments can be submitted to the Responsible Official at (307) 745-2300. Electronic comments can be submitted to [comments-rocky-mountain-medicine-bow-laramie@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-rocky-mountain-medicine-bow-laramie@fs.fed.us).

For additional information please contact Monique Nelson, Environmental Coordinator, at (307) 745-2310 or [moniquenelson@fs.fed.us](mailto:moniquenelson@fs.fed.us). Information can also be obtained by calling the Laramie Ranger District office at 307-745-2300, visiting <http://fs.usda.gov/mbr> or following the MBRTB on Twitter, **@FS\_MBRTB**.

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