



Bitterroot National Forest

1801 N. 1st Street

Hamilton, MT 59840

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot>



Frequently Asked Questions About Travel Plan

Q. Where can I get a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) or Over Snow Vehicle Use Map (OSVUM)?

A. Both the MVUM and OSVUM are available free of charge at all Bitterroot National Forest offices. They are also posted on our website www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot and can soon be downloaded directly to your mobile devices through the Avenza Map Store www.pdf-maps.com.

Q. What do the maps show me?

A. The maps display the National Forest System (NFS) roads, trails, and designated areas allowing public motor vehicle use. They also identify the types of vehicles that are allowed on each route and any seasonal restrictions that apply. Other public roads are shown for information purposes only.

Q. What was not put on the maps and why?

A. The maps do not show forest roads and trails that do not allow motor vehicle use. They also do not show topographic lines or streams. It would be too difficult to differentiate between non-motorized routes, topographic lines, streams, and designated routes.

Q. Why do I need a visitor map or topographic map in addition to the travel maps?

A. The MVUM and OSVUM are not intended to be a navigational tool. They also do not display all of the features shown on a visitor map or topographic map. The single purpose of the travel maps is to identify forest roads, trails, and areas that are open to motorized travel. Routes not shown on these maps are closed to motorized vehicles.

Q. How far can I park off a designated route and what about dispersed camping?

A. Parking off-road for purposes other than dispersed camping will be limited to the area immediately adjacent to the designated route, in a manner that does not cause resource damage. Motorized use will be allowed up to 300 feet off designated routes for dispersed camping only.

Q. How does this impact activities like firewood gathering, mushrooming, and big game retrieval?

A. Access to these activities through methods other than motor vehicles is not affected by the Decision. Also, as long as the motor vehicle use is consistent with the designations on the MVUM, the use is legal. However, there is no off-road motorized travel allowed for wood cutting, mushrooming, or big game retrieval on the Bitterroot National Forest. It is prohibited to operate any vehicle off National Forest System, State, or County roads in a manner which damages or unreasonably disturbs the land, wildlife, or vegetative resources.

Q. When the new maps are available to the public what will be the USFS enforcement strategy?

A. Whenever new regulations are posted, the Forest Service provides some time to educate the public about the specifics of the regulations. A law enforcement officer contact with the public is a great opportunity to provide information and create awareness of the MVUM and OSVUM. However, law enforcement officers can issue a violation any time after the maps are available to the public. It is up to forest users to know where they are traveling and for motorized users to use only routes designated for motorized travel.

Q. What is the fine for violations?

A. Violations of 36 CFR 261.13 (MVUM) and CFR 261.14 (OSVUM) are subject to a fine of up to \$5,000 and/or 6 months imprisonment (18 U. S. C. 3571 (e)).

Q. Why is the Bitterroot National Forest updating its travel plan?

A. All National Forests are required to update their travel plans as a result of the 2005 Travel Management Rule. The new rule requires designating a system of road, trails and areas for motorized use. Methods of designation are maps, and motorized routes signed on the ground.

Q. When was the Bitterroot travel plan last updated?

A. The last major update occurred 40 years ago, in 1976. Ravalli County's population has increased from around 18,000 to 45,000, since then. There are more people using the forest now and more conflicts between uses. Mountain biking was not nearly as popular as it is today, and motorized vehicles, including motorcycles, ATVs, and snowmobiles, are more powerful and able to access more difficult terrain.

Q. How many miles of roads and trails remain open to motorized use?

A. Approximately 2,246 miles of forest roads and trails are open to motorized/mechanized use (including bicycles) under the new plan. This is nearly the driving distance from Hamilton to New York City.

Q. How many acres remain open to over-snow use?

A. The decision designates 543,840 acres open to motorized over-snow vehicles (*one-third of the forest*).

Q. How will this affect Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) and Recommended Wilderness (RWAs)?

A. The decision prohibits all summer and over-snow motorized/mechanized use (including bicycles) in WSAs and RWAs to preserve their wilderness character. This insures that the plan is in compliance with all laws and regulations, including the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals' recent ruling regarding WSAs.

Q. How many WSAs are on the Bitterroot National Forest?

A. Two - the Sapphire and Blue Joint WSAs are a combined 101,974 acres. These areas were created by the Montana Wilderness Study Act of 1977, and are to be managed... "so as to maintain their presently existing wilderness character and potential for including in the National Wilderness Preservation System." Nearly 80,000 acres of the forest is also recommended for wilderness designation in the Forest Plan. Congress is the deciding authority.

Q. How many public comments did the forest receive during travel planning?

A. We received a record 13,400 public comments during the scoping period in 2007 and following the release of the DEIS in 2009. The forest hosted more than a dozen meetings and open houses and twice extended the comment period deadline to enable more public input/participation. Twenty-three objections were received in response to the draft ROD in 2015. The Forest corrected ten of 45 issues raised in public objections as instructed by the Deputy Regional Forester.