

SNAPSHOT: Land Status and Ownership; Use and Access Patterns

1 Status

- The Forest Service manages about 3.1 million acres within the 3.4 million acre National Forest boundary.
- Longstanding Forest Service policy for the Landownership Adjustment Program is to acquire and consolidate key tracts of private land to protect and enhance wildlife and fish habitat, wilderness, recreational opportunities, wetlands and riparian areas, and to improve legal access and long term management effectiveness.
- The Forest acquired and consolidated over 150,000 acres of critical private land inholdings within the Greater Yellowstone Area by purchase and legislative exchange since the last Forest Plan was signed in 1987.
- The primary methods used by the Forest Service to acquire and protect access to NFS lands are land adjustment (land exchange and purchase), cooperative or reciprocal access arrangements, direct negotiation, establishing existing rights through negotiation or legal action, and condemnation.
- Forest access can be limited or blocked by private property owners through fragmentation or subdivisions of larger parcels. Private property owners make the decision whether to provide forest access via an easement across their land.
- Since the Gallatin Forest Plan went into effect in 1987, the Forest Service has secured legal access rights to 17 access corridors.
- Some 24 additional access routes are needed to the former Gallatin Forest boundary to properly manage Forest lands. Areas most in need of improved access include portions of the Crazy Mountains, Paradise Valley, Cinnabar/Tom Miner Basin, north Bridgers and north Madison ranges.
- The Forest currently administers 850 special uses (477 recreation uses and 373 land uses).
- There are 58 different types of land uses (non-recreation) authorized on the Forest ranging from research activities to more extensive uses such as water systems, communications facilities, road and powerline transmission line rights-of-way.

3 Information Gaps

- Identify existing communication sites within the plan area.
- Identify locations where access to the National Forest boundary is inadequate. The Gallatin Plan identified these needs and the summary was updated in the Travel Plan in 2006; however, this information needs to be summarized for the Custer portion of the Forest.

2 Trends

- Increased housing density in areas adjoining NFS lands can increase the potential for encroachment, trespass, and unauthorized use and occupation of the public's land and resources.
- Situations exist within the Forest where access across private ownership on existing Forest Service system trails and roads is not secure because no recorded easements exist. Private land within and adjacent to this Forest continues to be sold, and often subdivided, by owners who may not support or recognize the historic public access through their lands. As a result, numerous Forest Service system trails on private land are gradually being lost or deteriorated through subdivision, closure or obliteration.
- Partnerships with national nonprofits (RMEF, TPL, etc.), local access advocacy groups, and the State have been productive in resolving access issues and are becoming more necessary as the Forest Service is faced with reduced budgets and staffing in lands.

4 Need to Change Existing Forest Plans

- Identify areas where existing utilities are located (power transmission lines, fiber optic cable, telephone, oil and gas), where uses overlap and where future growth is expected to determine lands suitable for utility right-of-way corridors
- There is a need for the Forest Plan to recognize the existence and location conservation easements acquired by the Forest Service, protecting over 3000 acres of private lands.
- Consider compatibility of the revised plan with the land use planning direction and policies of jurisdictions adjacent to the plan area (ie. County growth policies, plans of adjacent Forests, National Parks, State, etc.).
- Consider including coordination over the larger landscape for topics such as open space, wildlife corridors, and connectivity.

