



Helena – Lewis and Clark National Forest

Forest Plan Revision

Scoping Comment Summary and Issues

Introduction

In November 2016, the proposed action (draft revised forest plan) and Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement were released for a 120 day comment period. Nine community open houses were held. Over 300 people attended those open houses. Almost 1,000 comment letters and/or emails were received from the public, with about 40 different groups/agencies represented. After the comments were reviewed and analyzed, the interdisciplinary team started crafting alternatives to the proposed action. A summary of those public comments is provided here, as well as the issues that were used to develop alternatives.

Public Comment Summary

Comments included, but were not limited to, the following general topics described below. Many of the comments addressed specific geographic areas, while others addressed topics more generally across the Forest. Very often, comment letters included more than one topic.

The number of comments for or against forest uses or management were not tabulated as “votes”, nor were less common topics or issues ignored. All comments were considered in the development of issues and alternatives.

- The most common topic was the concept of recommended wilderness or designated wilderness. Roughly 46% of the comments offered input related to these designations, including desires for more, less, specific area or boundary suggestions, and input as to what uses should be allowed in such areas. An additional 4% of comments referenced primitive recreation opportunity settings, including desires for either more or less of these opportunities.
- Many comments included input related to motorized uses, nonmotorized uses, trails, roads, access, and other travel planning issues on the Forest. Comments related to these topics represent about 28% of all comments received and spanned a wide variety of interests, including desires for more or less motorized access versus nonmotorized access, desires to provide access for the elderly or disabled, concerns over road decommissioning, and input related to the extent and uses allowed on roads and trails on the landscape. *NOTE:* Forest Plan Revision is not travel planning. The Forest travel plans have been recently completed and decided.
- Wildlife and wildlife habitat were also important to many commenters, including input related to species such as grizzly bear, Canada lynx, bighorn sheep, elk, and bison; as well as concepts related to habitat management such as connectivity. Comments about wildlife and habitat frequently overlapped with comments about motorized use, recommended wilderness, and other resource management issues. Comments that included input on these topics represented roughly 21% of the total comments received.



- Aviation, airstrips, and recreational aviation as a desired use of national forest system lands were also brought forward (roughly 17%).
- Mechanized use in recommended wilderness areas was a popular theme of many comments (roughly 15% of those received), including desires for more and less access and restrictions for this recreational use of the forest.
- Watershed health and related topics such as water quality, municipal watersheds, irrigation, aquatic resources, and fisheries were also included in many comments (about 10%). Many of these comments included related concerns about wildfire and prescribed fire activities. An additional 4% of comments specifically referenced riparian areas, often with concerns related to grazing and other potential impacts from management in these areas. About 3% of comments were specific to bull trout.
- Fire and fuels management, including wildfires, fuel reduction, and prescribed fire, were the focus of approximately 7% of the comments received. These topics were often related to concerns over wildfire risk in wildland urban interface areas, concerns over the extent of fire that occurs in the wilderness and in key watersheds, and comments that focused on the importance of fire on the landscape as an ecosystem process.
- Climate change and carbon sequestration were noted as concerns in about 7% of the comments, primarily related to comments that stressed the need to address these concepts in the revision process.
- Overall vegetation health, forest health, and vegetation management were the focus of about 7% of the comments received, including concepts of both forested and nonforested plant communities, restoration, old growth, and snags. Input related to vegetation management often overlapped with the topics of timber harvest and prescribed fire as well as wildlife and wildlife habitat. Invasive plants (weeds) were a specific concern in about 3% of the comments.
- Other specific multiple uses of the national forest were common themes of comments, including timber, grazing, and mining/minerals/oil/gas leasing, each being a focus of about 4% of the comments received. The timber and mining comments were related to providing either more or less of this use on the forest. Grazing comments were generally related to either providing more or fewer restrictions for this use, especially related to riparian area and vegetation health.
- The management of several particular areas was commonly the focus of comments, including, but not limited to, the South Hills Recreation area; Badger-Two Medicine area, the Showdown Ski Area, the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail; the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail; and the Elkhorns Wildlife Management Unit. A variety of input related to the desired management of and uses allowed within these areas were included in comments.



- Many other topics were included in comments, including, but not limited to, native plants, best available science, caves, cultural and historic resources, economics, human health, inventoried roadless areas, outfitter and guides, eligible wild and scenic rivers, wilderness study act areas, research natural areas, scenery, tribal rights, soils, hunting, pollinators, and other specific desired recreation uses.

Issues Used to Develop Alternatives

Alternatives to the proposed action were developed in response to public comments and address the following issues:

- **Motorized and mechanized means of transport in recommended wilderness areas** – alternatives analyze the effects of allowing as well as not allowing motorized and mechanized means of transport within recommended wilderness areas.
- **Recommended wilderness and undeveloped areas** – alternatives reflect different amounts and locations of recommended wilderness areas and undeveloped areas.

Timber harvest – alternatives address the identification of lands suitable for timber production, estimated volume outputs of timber, and timber harvest conducted for both timber production and other purposes.