

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

JULY 1992

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MOTORIZED ACCESS AND TRAVEL MANAGEMENT

Heppner Ranger District

Morrow, Grant, and Wheeler Counties, Oregon

Responsible Agency

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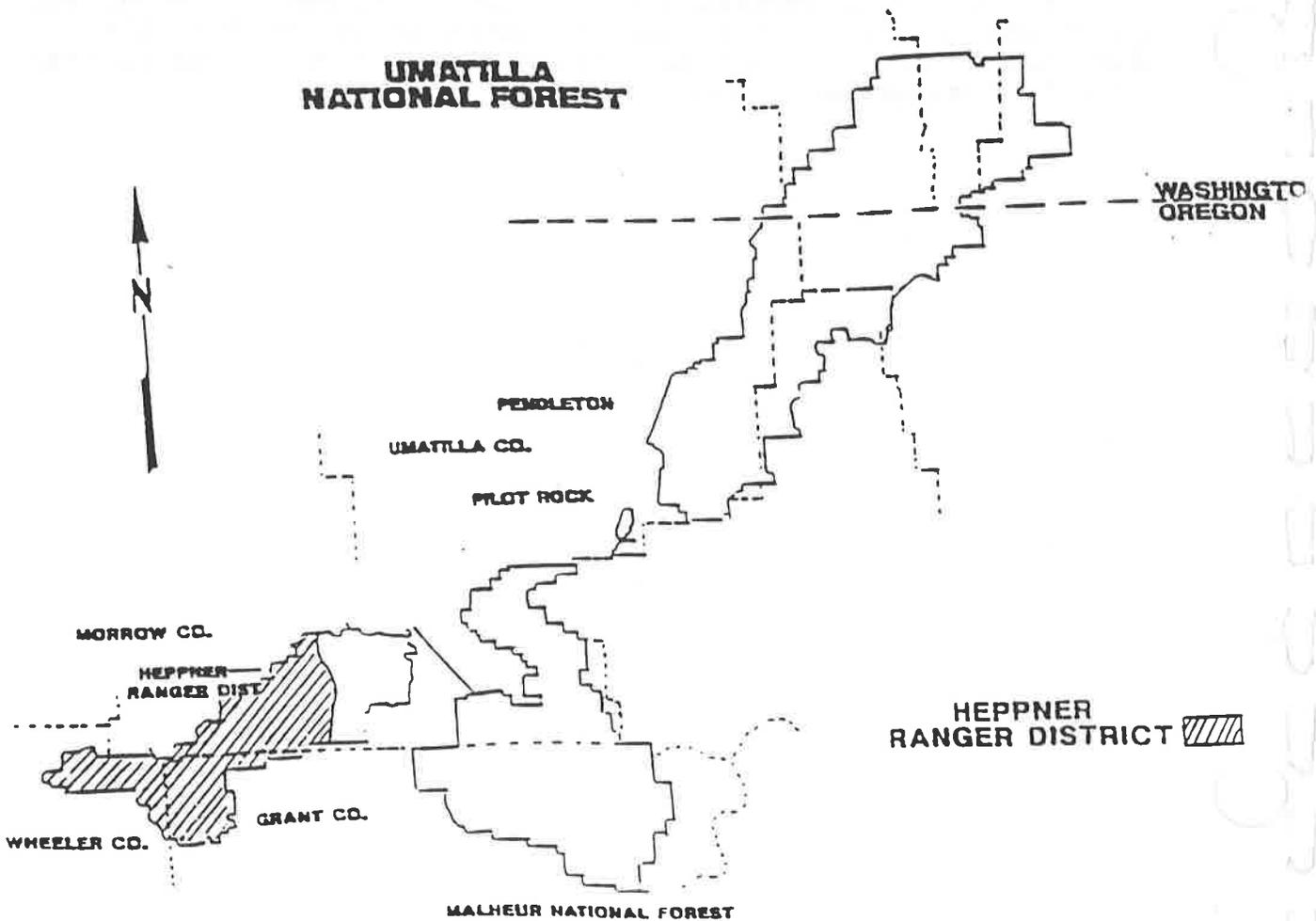
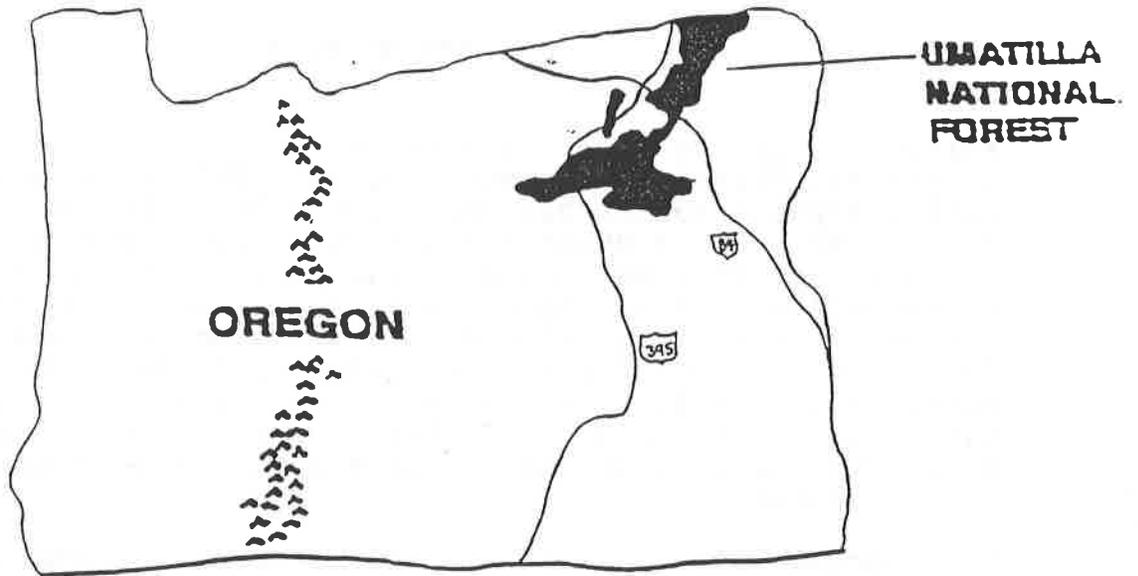
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INTRODUCTION

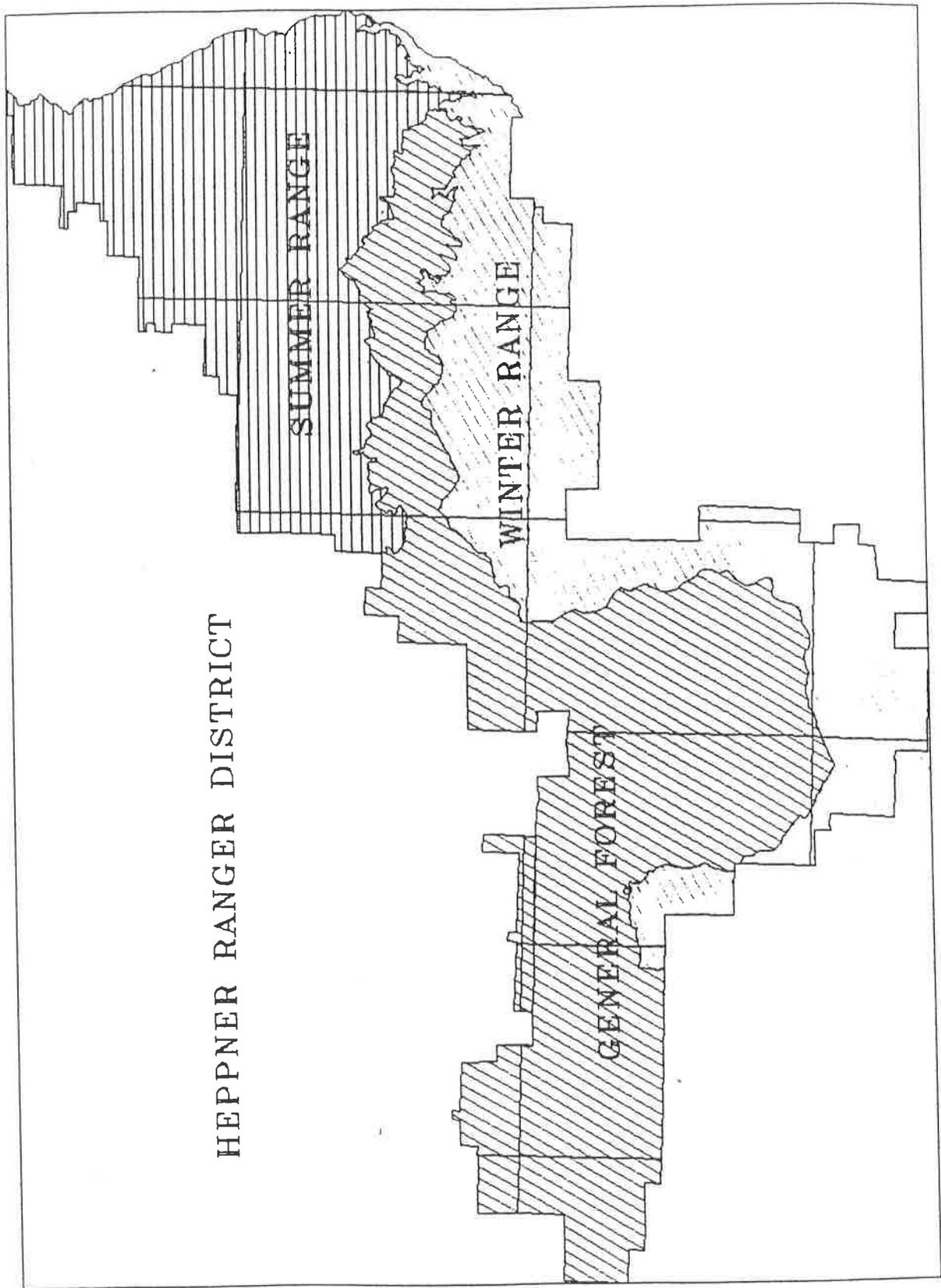
Following, is the EA (Environmental Assessment) for the Motorized Access and Travel Management Program. This program covers the entire Heppner Ranger District of the Umatilla National Forest in Morrow, Grant, and Wheeler counties of northeastern Oregon (Figure 1). This EA documents analysis of the environmental consequences of the proposed action and various alternative courses of action; it also provides the decision-maker, Jeff Blackwood - Forest Supervisor, with sufficient environmental and economic information to aid in the selection of the preferred alternative. The preferred alternative is the course of action which best meets combined resource needs while responding to public issues.

This document is divided into four chapters: purpose of and need for action, alternatives, environmental consequences, and agencies and persons consulted. In addition, a list of references, glossary of terms, and 2 appendices complete the package. The appendices present additional information on: applicable goals, desired future conditions, and standards and guidelines per management area as outlined in the Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan; and an example of a Road Management Objectives form.

MAP 1: DISTRICT LOCATION MAP



ACCESS STRATEGY AREAS



CHAPTER 1: PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

This chapter establishes the need for action, the proposed action, and resources that could be affected by the proposed action.

HISTORY OF USE

In the past, the Heppner Ranger District constructed roads to support the timber sale program. The road system was managed through a number of separate plans (i.e., road management objectives, ED - 10 process, road management plan, etc.). The district did not have a road management plan that integrated other resources; as roads were needed, they were built. Many of these remained regardless of whether the area was to be logged again at a later date. Other roads were originally wheel tracks that developed into roads through frequent use. The extensive miles of roads began to provide easy access to an increasing number of forest visitors. Uses included hunting, firewood gathering, sightseeing, OHV riding, horseback riding, bicycling, and mushroom picking.

As conflicts and demands in resources other than timber increased, it became obvious to resource managers that a reduction in the number of open roads was necessary. Biologists realized that to sustain big game populations (for which the heaviest recreation use occurs during hunting season), open road mileage would need to be reduced. The District received many comments from interested publics such as day-users, hunters, and members of local communities. Viewpoints were also expressed during development of the Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. Public responses showed conflicting opinions: there was a strong interest to reduce access to protect a number of resources and an equally strong concern to keep roads open for public use (mainly recreation).

Nearly ten years ago, the District began closing roads. Some were closed because they were replaced by new roads, others were closed to protect sensitive soils or provide a quality hunt. In many cases, the District did not adequately explain or seek public involvement in these road closures, and forest visitors often found themselves locked out of their favorite areas.

CURRENT SITUATION

The Heppner Ranger District needs to develop a way to manage its road system in order to: reduce conflicts between recreational user groups while still providing a variety of recreation opportunities; reduce vehicular disturbance to soil, vegetative, and wildlife resources; eliminate roads (and associated maintenance costs) that are not needed for resource management; cooperate with adjacent private land owners in providing access to private lands; and provide for commodities and administrative activities. To achieve this, the District established an interdisciplinary team in November of 1989 to examine the situation and develop ways to improve the conditions. In addition, the public was invited to comment on the project. At one public meeting, a Public Working Group was selected by attendees to represent public concerns and assist in development of the Access and Travel Management program.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Heppner Ranger District, with input from the Public Working Group, proposes to adopt Alternative C which would trend toward Forest Plan desired future conditions and resolve public issues by:

- a. closing the roads least needed for recurring management or public access, saving taxpayers dollars in road maintenance
- b. identifying roads to be opened or remain open, yearlong or seasonally, for public or administrative access.
- c. allow overland snowmobile use yearlong in Summer Range and General Forest and seasonally in the Winter Range. This overland snowmobile use in the Winter Range would be allowed except when restricted to designated routes as follows: 1) west of Ditch Creek from December 15 through April 14 and 2) east of Ditch Creek from August 15 through April 14.
- d. allow OHV use on designated trails yearlong in Summer Range. In General Forest, overland OHV use would be allowed in E1 management areas west of Ditch Creek yearlong, and in E1 management areas east of Ditch Creek except from August 15 through December 14, when they would not be allowed. In the Winter Range west of Ditch Creek, overland OHV use would be allowed in C3 and C8 management areas except from December 15 through April 14, when they would be restricted to designated routes. In the Winter Range east of Ditch Creek, overland OHV use would be allowed in C3 and C8 management areas except from August 15 through April 14, when OHV's would not be allowed.

Activities resulting from the proposed action could include: installing a gate, guard rail, earthen barricade, or other obstruction at entrances of roads to be closed; installing informative and restrictive signs to assist users and control use; obliterating roads determined to be unnecessary or contributing to environmental damage; constructing OHV and snowmobile routes; educating the public through maps and brochures; and enforcing signing and closure regulations.

TIERING AND INCORPORATION BY REFERENCE

Tiering to higher-level direction is appropriate to narrow the analysis, to focus on the issues which are ripe for decision, and to exclude from consideration issues already decided or not yet ripe [40 CFR 1508.28]. Ripeness means the issue is timely and can be addressed within the scope of this proposal and decision to be made. This document is tiered to the following: Best Management Practices [40 CFR 130.2]; Clean Water Act; Regional Guide; Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation Final Environmental Impact Statement and its Mediated Agreement; and the Forest Plan.

The FEIS and Record of Decision for the Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (June 1990) provides discussions of associated environmental impacts and provides direction for management of the Heppner Ranger District, Umatilla National Forest for the next 10 to 15 years.

In order to eliminate repetition and focus on site-specific analysis, material from documents in the bibliography (both NEPA-related and research) are incorporated into this document by reference. The Analysis File for Access and Travel Management, which provides a more detailed description of analysis, is also incorporated by reference.

All supporting material is available for review at the Heppner Ranger District office.

PURPOSE AND NEED

During the development of the Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, Access and Travel Management was a highly controversial issue. The Record of Decision (ROD) for that document, pages 11, 20, and 21 states that a District Access and Travel Management Plan will be completed.

The purpose of this proposal is to progress toward the desired future condition of the management areas located on the District. Because of the problems stated in the sections 'History of Use'

and 'Current Situation', areas of the District do not meet the desired future conditions described in the Forest Plan. This is particularly apparent in the level of road density (linear mile of road per square mile of area).

In order to move toward the desired future condition, goals, and objectives of each management area (summarized in the following section - "Management Direction"), the following needs were identified:

- * There is a need to examine options and define a plan for making the transition toward the desired future condition over time.
- * There is a need to create a plan which is understandable, implementable, and enforceable.
- * There is a need to create a plan that is consistent District-wide and with Access and Travel Management on the North Fork John Day District.
- * The Heppner Ranger District needs to develop a plan to manage its road system in order to: reduce conflicts between recreational user groups while still providing a variety of recreation opportunities; reduce vehicular disturbance to soil, vegetative, and wildlife resources; eliminate roads (and associated maintenance costs) that are not needed for resource management; cooperate with adjacent private land owners in providing access to private lands; and provide for commodities and administrative activities. This plan must address public needs in its development and must be fair, providing for a wide range of recreational and seasonal uses and physical limitations (public access to public lands).
- * There is a need to base road closures on resource objectives to improve conditions or prevent damage.

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

The implementation of this proposal would comply with direction stated in the Forest Plan. Like the Forest Plan, this EA is programmatic; it defines a broad design across the District. Project planning, like timber harvest, is the second level of planning and concentrates analysis on characteristics distinct to a particular site. Though this EA recommends the status of each inventoried road on the District, future, more site-specific projects may identify new facts which could show a need to adjust a road's status.

Access and Travel Management affects all forest resources. Outputs of these resources are dependent on Access and Travel Management, and the development of a plan to manage access and

travel must consider forest management goals, [see Forest Plan pages 4-1 to 3].

The Access and Travel Management analysis area includes all area within the congressionally designated boundary of the Heppner Ranger District. Some acres of private land are included within the analysis boundary; they have only been included so that cumulative effects may be accurately analyzed. Roads on those lands are shown as closed on maps only to indicate that they are not available for public use. Private use of these roads is not within the authority of this project.

The analysis area includes 14 management areas, as defined in the Forest Plan. The amount of the District allocated to each management area is displayed in Figure 1 below.

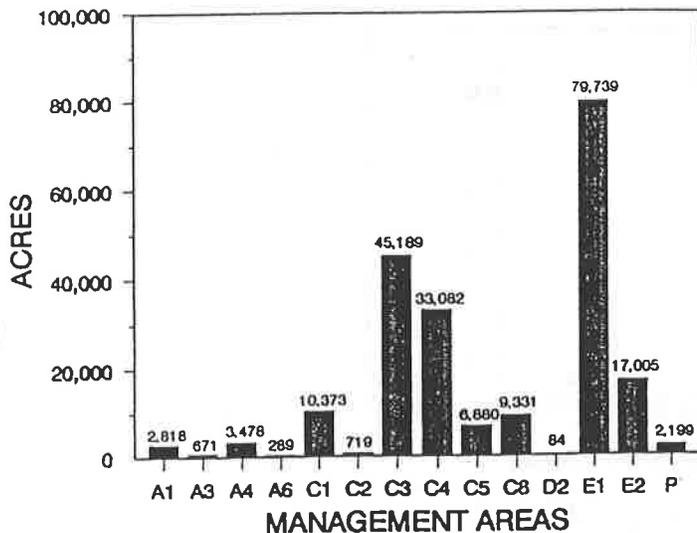


FIGURE 1: Management Area Distribution

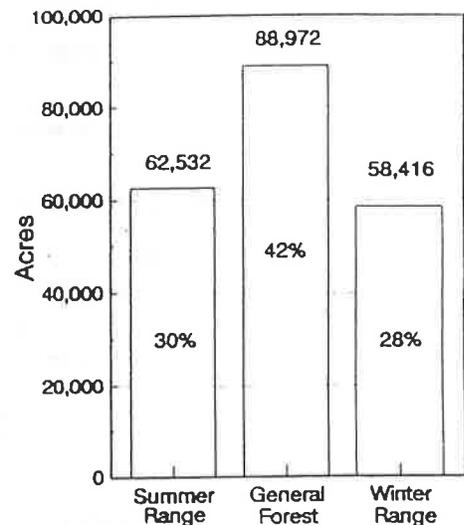


FIGURE 2: Access Strategy Area Distribution

To effectively analyze and compare the proposed action with various alternatives, access strategy areas, which are coordinated with the direction for each management area, were identified. The access strategy areas include: General Forest, Summer Range (for big game) and Winter Range (for big game). These categories are consistent with the Forest Plan and do not replace management area designations, desired future conditions, or standards and guidelines. The distribution of these areas is shown in Figure 2 and Map 2 shows the location of these areas on the District. Figures 3, 4, and 5 show the distribution of management allocations in Summer Range, General Forest, and Winter Range respectively.

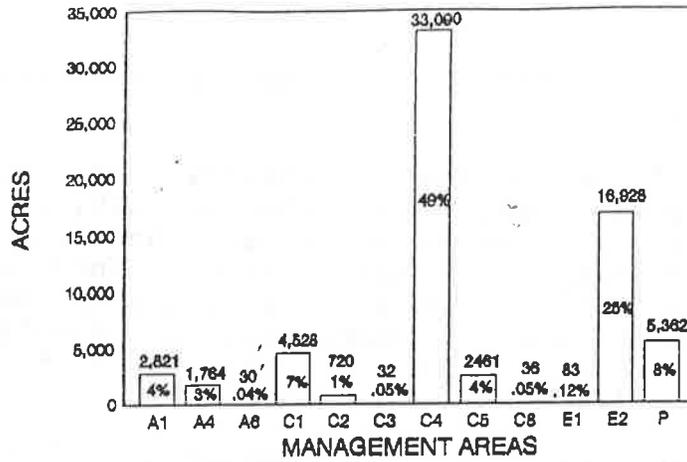


Figure 3: Management Allocations in Summer Range

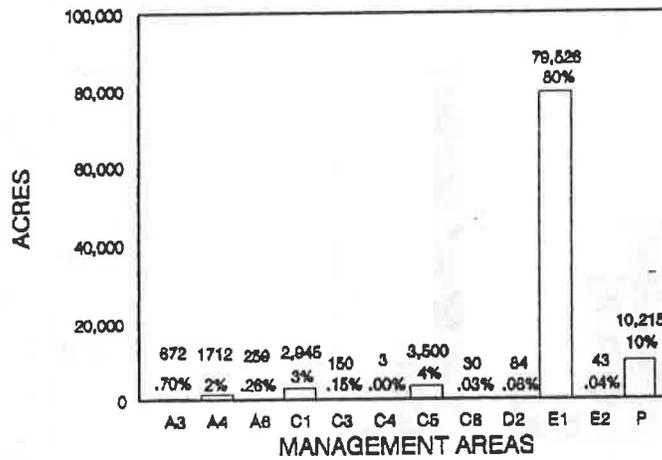


Figure 4: Management Allocations in General Forest

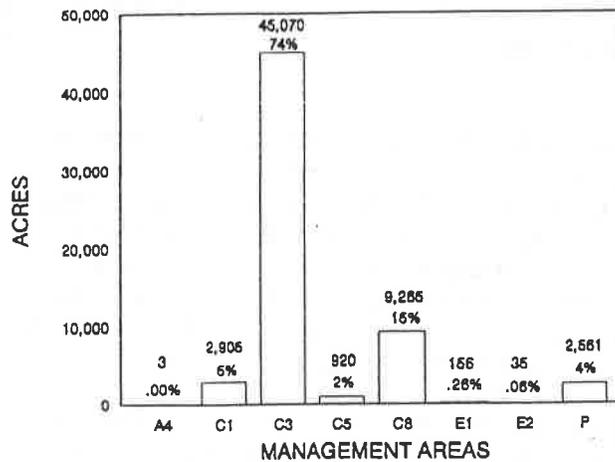


Figure 5: Management Allocations in Winter Range

DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION OF THE FOREST

Desired future condition statements from the Forest Plan are paraphrased here to provide a focus relevant to this assessment. For the full text, please refer to the Forest Plan, which is available at the Umatilla National Forest Supervisor's Office and all Districts. Each Management Area has its own set of goals and objectives, Standards and Guidelines, and Desired Future Condition. A list of those which relate to access and travel management can be found in Appendix A; they can also be found in Chapter 4 of the Forest Plan.

RIPARIAN/FISH [Forest Plan page 4-7]

- * Significant increases in the production of both anadromous and resident fish will occur on the Forest.

- * Fisheries habitat capability will improve Forest-wide as a result of management emphasis and activities. Stream temperatures will be maintained or improved, instream diversity increased, sediment production decreased, and stream channel stability maintained. Trends in improving vegetative, soil, and other conditions on Forest riparian areas will continue. Overall riparian condition will be better than the present riparian status.

RECREATION [Forest Plan page 4-5]

- * Some decreases in road-related hunting will occur as additional road closures are used to improve big game habitat.

- * The trail system will be expanded.

- * Off-highway vehicle use will be accommodated through development of loop trails, closed road systems and staging areas.

BIG GAME [Forest Plan page 4-7]

- * About half the roads will be closed.

MINERALS AND ENERGY [Forest Plan page 4-10]

- * The demand for Forest Service road construction and reconstruction for access to these minerals will remain at about current levels.

TRANSPORTATION [Forest Plan page 4-11]

- * During the first decade, planned local roads needed to support the timber management program will be constructed. The Forest road system will continue to be operated to meet Forest goals, a process which will include an active program of road closures to meet elk habitat requirements, dispersed recreation needs, and soil, water, and economic criteria, as described in District access management plans. Most local

roads will be closed to motorized use. Even though additional roads are constructed, the density of open roads will decline below current levels to an average of about 2.0 miles per square mile, Forest-wide. The miles of road suitable for passenger cars will increase slightly as roads reach their objective level of maintenance. All of the arterial and about half the collector roads will be managed for passenger cars; the remainder will be managed for high clearance vehicles.

RESOURCE SUMMARIES

TRANSPORTATION [Forest Plan page 4-45]

Each ranger district will develop access management programs within 2 years in order to determine the nature and extent of road access that will best meet resource requirements as well as address the public's desire for access to those resources. The access management programs will be developed through the NEPA process that involves interested and affected publics. The effect of these programs will mostly likely be a reduction in the amount of open road available on the Forest. A Forest-wide average open road density of 2.0 miles per square mile is anticipated to result from implementation of management area direction; open road density will vary between allocation zones in response to objectives. All of the arterial and about half the collector roads will be managed for passenger cars, and the remainder will be for high clearance vehicles.

ISSUES

Concerns or conflicts between project needs and alternative uses of resources were identified as issues. These issues were mainly identified at a public meeting on January 15, 1991, although letters, District recreation surveys, and specialists' opinions also contributed. The interdisciplinary team further defined the issues by comparing desired future conditions with existing resource conditions and the proposed action. Issues were then separated into three categories: issues that will drive the alternative development process (key issues), other issues addressed through mitigation, existing laws, or policy, and issues beyond the scope of the project.

KEY ISSUES

The following issues provide the foundation for the development of alternatives and the environmental analysis process. The highlighted titles for these key issues are used consistently throughout this document to permit easy comparison of alternatives. Key issues identified include:

ISSUE 1: ROAD-ORIENTED RECREATION

Open roads provide opportunities for people limited to motorized access (senior citizens, families with young children, and the physically challenged) to enjoy the Heppner Ranger District. They also provide recreation opportunities, such as viewing scenery, hunting, motorhome camping, and driving for pleasure. Often, diverse road standards (paved, gravel, high clearance) are desired to provide a variety of driving experiences. Some areas have been used traditionally by recreationists who pass on their favorite spot from generation to generation. Native Americans also need access to lands historically used by their ancestors; treaties and laws have guaranteed certain rights to use such lands.

Restricting motorized access may reduce the enjoyment of a particular area for these users. Access to dispersed campsites may be eliminated in some areas, which may cause crowding and competition for the remaining available sites. This may result in more damage to those sites and their immediate surroundings through vegetation loss, soil disturbance or compaction, and loss of snags and wildlife trees due to the gathering of firewood. This reduction in dispersed campsites could also cause visitors to randomly create new campsites which could impact previously unaffected areas. High levels of road closures could also impact roads which remain open, as the amount of use from displaced recreationists increases. Visitors may become dissatisfied and the quality of their recreation experience could be reduced.

Alternatives will be compared in Chapter II using the following measurements:

1. Miles of open road by maintenance level - Maintenance levels indicate road conditions: level 5 would be a paved, two lane road useable by low clearance vehicles, while level 2 would require a high clearance vehicle for passage. This provides information about the variety and availability of roaded recreation. Opportunities for both pleasure driving and a more rugged experience can be measured with this criteria.

2. Miles of road by access management area - This indicates the variety of areas and landscapes available across the district.

ISSUE 2: OHV AND SNOWMOBILE USE

Unrestricted use has provided OHV and snowmobile users with a wide range of recreation opportunities. However, if such use continues to increase, as current trends indicate (Oregon Department of Motor Vehicles, 1989-1991), other resources may be impacted. Such impacts may not be easy to locate or repair, since they would be dispersed across the District. Conflicts between recreational uses can increase; for instance, some hunters prefer a more primitive experience. Likewise, snowmobiles and cross-country skiers are often incompatible on the same trails. OHV and snowmobile use can disturb wildlife, especially big game, and could cause animals to be displaced. Sensitive soils and riparian areas may be damaged by careless or uninformed OHV users. This damage can cause a chain of problems such as erosion, sedimentation of streams, or a reduction in vegetation which shades streams, keeps water cool, and stabilizes stream channels. Ultimately, water quality and quality of fish habitat may be reduced. OHV use also has the potential of spreading the seeds of noxious weeds to new areas. Although snow should adequately protect soils, riparian areas, and most vegetation, overland snowmobile travel could damage uncovered tops of young trees.

Restricting OHV and snowmobile use to designated routes may eliminate access to favored areas, limit the variety of challenging terrain, and increase competition for areas where these uses are permitted; this could reduce the quality of the recreation experience. Designated routes could have serious impacts by concentrating use, which may cause safety hazards from crowding, or damage to adjacent areas and the trail itself. There would be an increase in cost from having to build trails, post signs, and enforce restrictions. Enforcement of restrictions may also be more difficult. However, routes would also direct use away from sensitive areas, reduce disturbance to wildlife, permit monitoring and repair of impacts, and allow recreationists who prefer a more primitive experience to avoid disturbance from these activities.

Alternatives will be compared in Chapter II using the following measurements:

1. Miles of designated OHV and snowmobile routes - This measures opportunities available in areas which prohibit overland use.
2. Acres of area open to overland OHV and snowmobile use - This measures the potential for a variety of opportunities and landscapes for this activity.

ISSUE 3: NONMOTORIZED RECREATION

Many nonmotorized recreation activities, including mushroom hunting, root digging, hiking, hunting, horseback riding, mountain biking, and cross-country skiing occur on the Heppner Ranger District. Open roads and unrestricted OHV/snowmobile use can result in noise, safety hazards, a high concentration of people, and in the case of OHVs, dusty conditions. These factors can decrease or eliminate solitude, reduce enjoyment, and result in a low quality experience for nonmotorized recreationists. These users may elect to go elsewhere.

Road closures and restrictions placed on OHVs and snowmobiles could enhance opportunities for nonmotorized recreation activities. However, road closures could also close access to routes which are not identified on the Forest trail system. This could increase use on the more accessible trails, which may cause erosion, soil compaction, a decrease in vegetation, and damage to the trailbed itself. Routes and areas limited to nonmotorized travel would eliminate opportunities for recreationists preferring a motorized experience.

Alternatives will be compared in Chapter II using the following measurements:

1. Acres within each disturbance zone - This measures the amount of area which experiences high, moderate, or low levels of disturbance from open roads. Because there is no data which indicates the amount of use each road receives, seasonally open roads were not considered in order to compensate for different levels of use on roads open yearlong.

2. Areas of unrestricted OHV and snowmobile use - This measures the potential for disturbance from OHVs and snowmobiles to the nonmotorized experience. Because this is also a measure for issue 4, it will be displayed under that issue to avoid repetition.

ISSUE 4: EFFECTIVE BIG GAME HABITAT

High open road densities and overland OHV and snowmobile travel limit the amount of big game habitat that remains unaffected by access. Motorized vehicles disturb animals, which can be harmful during critical periods in their life cycle. If disturbance occurs during calving/fawning, mothers may desert animals too young to take care of themselves. Disruption during breeding may reduce successful fertilization. During the winter, energy reserves are low due to a lack of food and poor weather conditions; disturbance causes animals to use that energy to flee instead of supporting their body functions. Disturbance may also cause big game to move onto private land, impacting crops and livestock forage which increases business costs for the land owner. Vulnerability of big game during hunting seasons is another effect of open roads. Hunters have easier access to their targets, increasing their success rate and encouraging a higher concentration of hunters. This can reduce the number and age of bulls/bucks, which can mean that cows/does are not successfully fertilized during their first breeding cycle. This causes offspring to be born later in the year; they then enter the winter period physically smaller and weaker, which may make them more susceptible to death.

Closing roads and managing OHV and snowmobile use would reduce access, reducing disturbance and vulnerability of big game. Access which is restricted seasonally in big game winter and summer ranges could reduce stress to animals during critical periods in their lifecycle.

Alternatives will be compared in Chapter II using the following measurements:

1. Open road density - This measures how close each alternative comes to the forest-wide average of 2.0 miles of open road per square mile of area (as well as the state recommended density of 1.5 miles of open road per square mile of area).

2. Areas open to unrestricted OHV/snowmobile use by access strategy area - This indicates where effects of OHVs and snowmobiles might occur in the three types of big game habitat on this District.
3. Acres greater than a half of a mile from roads, with and without seasonally open roads - This measures amount of habitat unaffected by roads. Including seasonally open roads measures the amount of potential disturbance to big game. Excluding seasonally open roads indicates the amount of big game vulnerability during hunting seasons.

ISSUE 5: ADMINISTRATIVE USE

Open roads, OHV, and snowmobile use provide easy access to conduct resource management activities and projects. This administrative use is not limited to Forest Service personnel; it also includes contract work (such as timber harvest, tree planting or vegetation surveys), permittees (for grazing and mining), and special use permits (access to private lands, firewood gathering, yew bark collection, etc.) Access is also necessary for fire fighting, search and rescue, medical emergencies, and law enforcement. Current administrative use by Forest Service personnel on closed roads is regulated, but does not consider frequency of travel on a closed road with respect to big game disturbance; four trips per month [Forest Plan pages 4-58 and 4-68] may still disturb big game and permits are easily obtained. Such privileged use can be resented by other forest users who contend that it is unfair.

Closing roads to administrative use and restricting use of OHVs and snowmobiles could increase the cost of resource management. Slower types of access (such as walking, horseback riding, and mountain biking) would decrease the time during a work day spent implementing a project; transporting quantities of equipment or supplies for a project would not be possible using these methods. A helicopter could also be used for access, but this is often too expensive. Seasonal restrictions could conflict with the proper timing for performing management activities. Fires may not be detected when they are still small; more area may be affected, if a fire occurs, since closed roads would need to be reopened to access the fire. Entire resource management programs may cease to exist as cost becomes prohibitive. This would affect all resources.

Contractors, permittees, and special use permittees may not be able to afford operations requiring nonmotorized access. Local economies may be affected as these operators shift their business elsewhere. In the long term, future forest health could be degraded as the reduced ability to improve planting stock, reforest areas, silviculturally treat stands, and the reduction in fire fighting capabilities are compounded.

Alternatives will be compared in Chapter II using the following measurements:

1. Miles of road open to administrative use - This measures the amount of motorized access.
2. Change in management costs - This measures the increase or decrease in the cost of doing business, resulting from the amount of motorized administrative access.

OTHER CONCERNS

The following list of concerns are recognized by the interdisciplinary team as important for this analysis, but are best addressed by Forest Plan direction, policies, laws, or special mitigation measures. Where appropriate, measures to meet these issues were included in design or mitigation, and are found in Chapter II. While the key issues are tracked consistently through the remainder of this document, these other issues will be briefly discussed only in Chapter III.

- (6) Watershed, Fisheries, Soils, and Riparian Areas.
- (7) Forest Health.
- (8) Access for Fire Suppression.
- (9) Noxious Weeds.
- (10) Access for Disabled and Senior Citizens.
- (11) Yearlong Access on Bull Prairie Road.
- (12) Access to Private Land.
- (13) Access for Snowmobiles/OHVs From Blake Ranch.
- (14) Access for Personal Uses.
- (15) Minimal Access Available to Areas Not Managed for Timber.
- (16) OHV/Passenger Vehicle Safety Conflicts.
- (17) Road Jurisdiction/Maintenance.
- (18) Management of Roads Not Shown on Maps.
- (19) Access Management May Affect the Well-being of Local Communities.
- (20) Access to Minerals and Oil Claims.

ISSUE BEYOND PROJECT SCOPE

The following issue was found to be beyond the project scope and so it has been dropped from further consideration.

(21) **Heavier Use of Kinzua Roads Due to Closures of Forest Service Roads.** The planning process for Access and Travel Management has not considered use on Kinzua roads other than those roads under cost share agreement between Kinzua and the Forest Service (see Issue 17 Road Jurisdiction/Maintenance for a discussion on those roads). Determining whether users of Forest Service roads would shift their use to roads on Kinzua-owned lands, move completely out of the area, or continue to use Forest Service roads which remain open is speculative and beyond the scope of this plan.

(22) **Global Warming.** The USDA is developing a Strategic Plan for Global Change which includes assessment and development of policy options, and research on the effects of management of forest and agricultural ecosystems on carbon dioxide and greenhouse gas cycling. Until research removes significant scientific uncertainties, NEPA disclosure documents at the regional or project levels are not the appropriate means for addressing global-change issues. [Forest Service Position on Global Warming 12/90].

DECISION TO BE MADE

This Environmental Assessment (EA) documents results of the environmental analysis conducted for the proposed project. This EA will provide the decision-maker with a basis on which to make an informed decision. The Umatilla Forest Supervisor is the official responsible for deciding:

1. Whether access should continue to be managed on a project by project basis as currently done (No Action Alternative).
2. Whether specific management activities or combination of activities presented in this assessment should be approved.
3. If implementation of the selected alternative would result in significant impacts on the environment.
4. If the selected alternative is consistent with the Forest Plan.

5. If the selected alternative is not in compliance with the Forest Plan, what amendments need to be made to permit implementation.
6. Initial decisions on which roads should remain open yearlong, which roads should remain open seasonally, which roads should be closed, which areas should be open to overland OHV and snowmobile use and when, which designated routes should remain open to OHV and snowmobile use and when, and which areas should be closed to OHV and snowmobile use and when.

CHAPTER 2: ALTERNATIVES

This chapter is the main part of the Environmental Assessment. Four alternatives for managing access and travel on the Heppner Ranger District are described, compared, and evaluated. Chapter II is intended to provide the decision-maker and public with a clear basis for choice.

Alternatives were designed to address each key issue and project objective (purpose and need) identified in Chapter I. The key issues were addressed to varying degrees in order to present a reasonable range of alternatives, while all the alternatives tried to satisfy project objectives. From this range of alternatives, the deciding official (Jeff Blackwood, Forest Supervisor) will identify the alternative which best responds to the issues and objectives. Each alternative would be consistent with the Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. Alternative D would work toward an interpretation of Desired Future Conditions that emphasizes big game and non-motorized use; alternative B would work toward an interpretation of desired future conditions that emphasizes more motorized recreation use while fitting with state recommendations for deer management in Heppner Ranger District.

ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Alternative development began with the assignment of a District interdisciplinary team (IDT) in November, 1989. Public comments were encouraged through notices, a survey of recreational users, two open houses, newspaper articles, meetings, and newsletters. Public meetings occurred January 15 and 29, 1991, to identify concerns and select representatives of the various user groups to serve on a Public Working Group. This Public Working Group met 23 times from February 1991 to February 1992 to assist the IDT in developing a design (later labeled Alternative C) which would achieve a balance between all recreational users, wildlife, and other resource needs.

As the project progressed and additional public comments were received, it became apparent that the project scope required an Environmental Assessment to be prepared. The interdisciplinary team reviewed agency and public concerns, identified the key issues, and determined how to measure the extent that an issue would be satisfied by each alternative. The key issues were then used, along with the desired future conditions stated in the

Forest Plan and comments made during the Public Working Group process, to design a wide range of alternatives; each alternative emphasizing a unique combination of the key issues. The Public Working Group reviewed the new alternatives on February 23, 1992 and agreed that a wide range had been developed. These alternatives were then displayed at a third public meeting on March 30, 1992.

The interdisciplinary team developed both mitigation measures to minimize potential environmental effects caused by this project and monitoring requirements to measure the success and effectiveness of project design and mitigation. Finally, the interdisciplinary team analyzed the environmental consequences of the alternatives and documented the results in this Environmental Assessment.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ALTERNATIVES

Alternatives were designed to manage access and travel across the District. Employee and local citizens knowledge was relied upon to identify the use and condition of each road. This information was then used to determine what roads to close or seasonally close according to each alternative's emphasis. Implementation of this program or other site-specific project plans (such as timber sales) may reveal further information which could result in changes to the status of a road. These changes have been anticipated and are considered acceptable, as long as the intent of the program remains the same across the District.

In most alternatives, Forest Service roads that access private lands were carefully considered and every effort was made to allow for access to those lands. Private roads on private land were considered closed (except for the purposes of analysis for wildlife disturbance) as the Forest Service has no jurisdiction over these roads. County and state roads were considered open unless otherwise closed by those governments. In all alternatives, the status of cost share roads would remain as it is now (in most cases, open), in order to honor the agreement through which they were constructed and maintained.

The open/closed status of newly constructed roads would be decided in the project which required the new road. Generally, new roads would not remain open after the project is completed.

The Access and Travel Management Plan (following the decision for this EA) will describe how the selected alternative will be implemented. This will include the type of closure device, closure location guidelines, and alternate access provisions (bypasses, parking, trailhead facilities). Monitoring and site-specific project EAs would verify road status with on-the-ground conditions, reevaluate or select road management objectives, and

choose what type of closure device would be used. When the status of a road needs to be changed, a Road Management Objective form will be revised and the revision approved by the District Ranger. An example of this form is displayed in Appendix C.

ALTERNATIVE A

This is the "No Action" alternative required by NEPA and is the baseline for comparison of the action alternatives (B, C, and D). The "No Action" alternative has two basic parts: current situation and future actions. Currently, all existing open roads would remain open, seasonal roads would remain seasonal, and closed roads would remain closed. No additional measures would be undertaken to close additional roads. In the future, open/closed status of roads would be determined on a project by project basis; management would continue as it occurs now.

Mitigation measures that would reduce environmental impacts would be different with each project. This alternative also represents the existing condition of access and how it effects various resources (such as big game, OHV use, non-motorized opportunities). Map 3 shows the project area boundary and current road status.

Mitigation Measures which currently exist

- * The Texas Butte Cooperative Closure Area was established to mitigate the effects of the Texas Timber Sale by providing a quality hunt area and a disturbance-free zone for deer and elk. Within this area, roads are closed three days prior to the first rifle elk season through the end of the last rifle elk season. The closure was first implemented in 1976.
- * The Wickiup Cooperative Closure Area was established to decrease open road density in this area during deer and elk rifle seasons. Within this area, roads are closed three days prior to rifle buck deer season through the end of the last rifle elk season. The closure was first implemented in 1985.
- * The Texas Butte Cooperative Closure Area is also closed to commercial activities during the calving/fawning season.
- * Several miles of road are closed yearlong on the district to motorized use by CFR order. In addition, several miles of road are effectively closed by some type of barricade; although these roads may not be closed by order, traffic has been effectively eliminated.

ALTERNATIVE B

This alternative was designed to respond to the issue of road oriented recreation, additional motorized access, those OHV and snowmobile users who would like additional access, and those who want more administrative access for commodity uses. This alternative shows what would result if more roads were opened than there are now.

Roads would be closed only if they duplicate access or obviously degrade the environment (such as roads located in streams). In Winter Range and Summer Range, major roads along ridges would be left open year round, while other roads in these areas would be seasonally open. OHV and snowmobile use would be unrestricted over most of the District and restricted to designated trails in sensitive areas or during critical seasons for big game. Administrative use would be possible to most of the District. Permits for administrative use would be issued for those few closed roads that would remain on the Forest Development Transportation System. Map 4 displays open, seasonal, and closed roads; designated OHV and snowmobile trails; suggested snowmobile trails; and areas where overland OHV and snowmobile use is allowed for this alternative. Mitigation measures and monitoring, which are all a key part of alternative design, can be found on pages 23-31.

Mitigation Measures specific to this Alternative

- * In Summer Range and General Forest, overland snowmobile use would be allowed with no seasonal restrictions. In Winter Range, overland snowmobile travel would be allowed except from December 15 through April 14, when snowmobiles would be restricted to designated routes. (see Table 2, page 38)
- * In Summer Range and General Forest, suggested snowmobile routes would be mapped and signed on the ground, to provide users a more guided opportunity without restricting overland travel.
- * In Summer Range, OHVs would be restricted to designated routes yearlong. In General Forest, overland OHV use would be allowed in E1 management areas yearlong. In Winter Range, overland OHV use would be allowed in C3 and C8 management areas except December 15 through April 14, when OHV's would be restricted to designated routes. (see Table 2, page 38).
- * Seasonal roads in Summer Range would be closed May 1 through June 30 to protect big game during the calving/fawning season.

- * Seasonal roads in Winter Range would be closed December 15 through April 14 to reduce disturbance to big game.
- * Administrative use may be allowed, by permit, on the following yearlong closed roads: 2100160 (access to Tupper Work Center), 2105033 (access to seed orchard), 5326030 (access to radio tower), 2100051 (access to Ditch Creek Guard Station), and on 2104120 to Ditch Creek (access to ISCO water monitoring study).

ALTERNATIVE C

This alternative was developed using input from the Public Working Group. It was designed to "balance" user demands and move the District toward the desired future conditions identified in the Forest Plan. This alternative develops an Access and Travel Management Plan that provides some resolution for each key issue as well as other issues identified in the planning process.

Roads in Summer Range would be managed similar to the way they are now (although the Texas and Wickiup Cooperative Closure areas would end, replaced by seasonal roads with set dates of closure), while more roads would be closed in General Forest and Winter Range. OHV and snowmobile use would be unrestricted over most of the District and restricted to designated trails in sensitive areas or during critical seasons for big game. Security areas (developed in coordination with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife) would be scattered across the District. These would limit motorized access in order to provide areas of low disturbance for big game during this period of poor cover and wide-spread salvage activities. Administrative use would be possible over most of the District. Permits for administrative use would be issued for closed roads that are not obliterated. Map 4 displays open, seasonal, and closed roads; designated OHV and snowmobile trails; suggested snowmobile trails; and areas where overland OHV and snowmobile use is allowed for this alternative. Mitigation measures and monitoring, which are all a key part of alternative design, can be found on pages 23-31.

Mitigation Measures specific to this Alternative

- * In Summer Range and General Forest, overland snowmobile use would be allowed with no seasonal restrictions. In Winter Range west of Ditch Creek, overland snowmobile use would be allowed **except** from December 15 through April 14, when they would be restricted to designated routes. In Winter Range east of Ditch Creek, overland snowmobile use would be allowed **except** from August 15 through December 14 and from December 15 through April 14, when they would be restricted to designated routes. (see Table 2, page 38)

- * Suggested snowmobile routes would be mapped and signed on the ground to provide users a more guided opportunity without restricting overland travel.
- * In Summer Range, OHV use would be restricted to designated routes yearlong. In General Forest west of Ditch Creek, overland OHV use would be allowed yearlong only in E1 areas outside of security areas. In General Forest east of Ditch Creek, overland OHV use would be allowed in E1 areas outside of security areas except from August 15 through December 14, when OHV's would not be allowed. In Winter Range west of Ditch Creek, overland OHV use would be allowed in C3 and C8 management areas outside of security areas, except from December 15 through April 14, when OHV's would be restricted to designated routes. In Winter Range east of Ditch Creek, overland OHV use would be allowed in C3 and C8 management areas outside of security areas, except from August 15 through December 14 and December 15 through April 14, when OHV's would not be allowed. (see Table 2, page 38).
- * Seasonal roads in Summer Range would be closed May 1 through June 30 to protect big game during calving/fawning season and again August 15 through December 14 to reduce big game vulnerability during hunting seasons.
- * Seasonal roads in Winter Range would be closed December 15 through April 14 to reduce disturbance to big game.
- * Areas which restrict motorized entry would be scattered across the District to provide areas for big game to escape disturbance. Motorized access would be allowed with a permit.

ALTERNATIVE D

This alternative focuses on the resolution of the key issues of big game and non-motorized recreation. It shows what would result if access were much more limited than it is now. Roads would only be left open if they are major routes (like roads 21 and 53); access trailheads, campgrounds, or facilities; lead to private land or are share-cost roads; or are not under Forest Service jurisdiction (such as county roads). Map 5 displays open, seasonal, and closed roads; designated OHV and snowmobile trails; suggested snowmobile trails; and areas where overland OHV and snowmobile use would be allowed for this alternative. Mitigation measures and monitoring, which are all a key part of alternative design, can be found on pages 23-31.

Mitigation Measures specific to this Alternative

- * Road 2119033 would be seasonally open from July 1 through August 14 to provide access to the Madison Butte Lookout. The portion of Road 2115 which is within Winter Range would be seasonally open to provide access to the Skookum Game Exclosure.
- * In Summer Range and General Forest, OHV use would be restricted to designated routes. In Winter Range, OHV use would also be restricted to designated routes, except from December 15 through April 14, when OHV's would not be allowed.
- * In Summer Range and General Forest, overland snowmobile use would be allowed with no seasonal restrictions. Snowmobile use would not be allowed in Winter Range.

MITIGATION REQUIREMENTS COMMON TO ALTERNATIVES B, C, AND D

LANDLINES

Present survey corners or references will be protected when the possibility of disturbance exists. Mining claim markers will also be protected during installation of closure devices, road obliteration, and construction of OHV routes.

WILDLIFE

Temporary roads constructed for timber sales may be obliterated after harvest or post-harvest activities are completed. Identified roads designated as closed and not required for natural resource management will be obliterated also (see Soil/Site Productivity section).

The status of any permanent roads that are reopened or newly constructed for resource management activities will be determined in that project's analysis and NEPA document.

Nest and roost sites for snag dependant wildlife will be protected during installation of closure devices or obliteration.

RANGE

All fences, trend study plots, trails, and water improvements will be protected, where possible, during installation of closure devices, road obliteration, and construction of OHV routes. Any damages resulting from such activities will be repaired.

Motorized use for movement of livestock will comply with the Access and Travel Management Plan.

WATER/FISHERIES/RIPARIAN AREAS

Streams, springs, and other riparian areas will be protected during installation of closure devices, road obliteration, and construction of OHV routes. Closure devices will be located and installed such that ground disturbance in riparian areas is minimized. New roads and OHV routes will be located outside of riparian areas, except at designated crossings. Areas dominated by riparian vegetation will be administered to meet the direction for management of wetlands and floodplains in accordance with Executive Orders 11990 and 11998, and Best Management Practices [Forest Plan page 4-59].

Existing roads located along stream banks, in riparian areas, and those that duplicate access will be closed where such roads are not necessary for resource management. If a closed road is not needed for administrative use, it may be obliterated (see Soil/Site Productivity section). The method of obliteration will depend on site specific factors and will be accomplished such that sedimentation is minimized and site productivity is increased. Allowing existing vegetation and large woody material to remain in the old roadway after obliteration will be used to increase soil productivity and reinforce the closure. Construction of waterbars and the seeding of ground disturbed during closure device construction or during road obliteration activities will be used to minimize loss of soil and stream sedimentation from these areas. These areas will be placed back into resource production where possible and revegetated in accordance with the District erosion plan.

Roads next to streams or in riparian areas that are designated open will continue to receive road maintenance activities in accordance with the level of maintenance associated with that road. These maintenance activities are designed to reduce sedimentation from the roadway. Road maintenance activities also work toward keeping the roadway travelable, thus keeping vehicles within the roadway and protecting vegetation and soils nearby.

Culverts that are unstable or at risk of failure will be stabilized; on roads to be obliterated, they will be removed permanently. On other closed roads, they may be removed and the stream channel stabilized until they can be replaced under a project. On open and seasonal roads, unstable culverts will be replaced as soon as possible.

If, through implementation and monitoring, previously unidentified roads are discovered in riparian areas, they may be closed and obliterated if they are not needed for resource management.

SOIL/SITE PRODUCTIVITY

All cut banks and fill slopes suitable for revegetation will be revegetated after road construction. All ground disturbed during road obliteration activities that is suitable for revegetation will be revegetated.

Roads to be obliterated may be treated with one or a combination of many techniques. Such techniques include, but are not limited to the following: mechanical, winged subsoilers which break soil compaction, placing rocks and logs in the old roadbed, planting trees and shrubs as well as grass seed in old roadbeds, constructing structures in streams (which can obliterate nearby roads), scarifying only the surface of a road (for instance in terrain where solid rock lies just beneath the road surface) which would encourage revegetation, or recontouring the fill material back into the old roadbed. Note: Roads on scab land or in riparian areas will be obliterated in such a manner to protect the fragile ecosystem of such features.

RECREATION

OHV routes will avoid threatened, endangered, or sensitive plant populations, cultural resource sites, and, where possible, sensitive soils and riparian areas. Designated and suggested routes will be delineated on maps with appropriate dates of use.

Vehicles will be permitted up to 300 feet off an open road for dispersed camping, firewood collection, and unloading trailers. Closure devices on closed roads that intersect open roads will be placed to allow for such use. Vehicles will not be allowed behind closure devices without a permit.

If access is closed to a trailhead, the closed road may be added to the trail and the trail head moved to a more accessible site.

This plan is not intended to overrule any applicable State laws that regulate use or operation of motorized vehicles.

ADMINISTRATIVE USE OF CLOSED ROADS

Administrative use includes Forest Service administration, contracts, and permitted use. Administrative use is infrequent, but necessary to accomplish specific work tasks. It will be limited to actual work, which does not include traveling through a closure for convenience only. Administrative use will be tightly controlled and administered through a permit system managed by the District Ranger. Permits will be issued, to individuals, organizations, and companies that have valid operational use of the National Forest and can comply with requirements for permit issuance. Individuals or Forest Service employees who need a permit to enter a closure must submit a request in advance of the actual trip. Requests could identify the following: the date or inclusive dates for entry, the number of entries required, the number of vehicles to be used, the distance to be travelled, and the purpose of the work trip. All forms of transport or entry must be explored, rather than assuming that vehicular access is the only alternative. All requests will be evaluated to determine the effect of the entry on the stated objective for the closure. Additional restrictions may be added to the permit to aid in mitigation of entry. If entry is determined to be detrimental to the stated closure objective, entry may be denied or rescheduled to a more suitable time. A permit must be in the vehicle during the time of entry. Violations of the entry permit requirements may result in termination of the permit, denial of re-entry, or a citation.

The following administrative use data table for closed roads (CFR), is an example of the types of activities that may request permitted use on closed roads during the restricted motorized use periods. The table is separated into the dates of restricted use by access strategy area and then is further divided into the alternatives which apply. This table does not list every potential activity that may have a need for permitted entry; activities which are not listed would be evaluated according to the most similar activity listed. Administrative use activities not included because they are infrequent and variable in nature are: wildlife, recreation, fisheries, watershed, fire prevention, etc.

Restricted Motorized Use Period Definitions

Big Game Calving and Fawning Period (May 1-June 30)

This is the time when cow elk and doe deer give birth to their young. It is very critical to the survival and early growth of the young that during this time period, any physical disturbance to these animals (mothers included) be kept to a minimum. In general, calving and fawning areas are usually dependent on areas where certain habitat features are unique. The Summer Range areas on the District provide the needed habitat required for the survival of mother and offspring, and receive heavy use for this purpose.

Big Game Hunter Access Restricted Periods (August 15-October 14 & October 15-December 14)

To provide big game a better chance of surviving the hunting season and to provide hunters a quality hunting experience. This restriction period may be applied in Summer Range, General Forest, or Winter Range. Some motorized use may be restricted to designated routes, while other motorized uses may be completely eliminated during this restricted use period. The closure dates include the time when the bow hunting season begins until the end of elk rifle season. Public comment suggested that bow hunters should have the same set of rules as rifle hunters. Part of this period also corresponds to the elk rutting season; limited disturbance from motorized vehicles would enable cows to successfully conceive during their first cycle. The restriction period was divided into two parts: August 15 through October 14 and October 15 through December 14. Administrative activities may be restricted during either part or during the entire period depending on the reasonable length of time needed to complete that type of activity, and other additional restrictions imposed on that activity such as during the Big Game Calving and Fawning period.

Big Game Winter Range Restricted Period (December 15-April 14)

This period is for the benefit of wintering deer and elk. Periods of severe weather can stress big game; the conditions require them to eat twice as much food to maintain body functions. Human disturbance can cause displacement to lower quality habitat, adding further stress during this critical period. By limiting the number of roads open to motorized travel in winter range habitat during the winter, big game may remain in high quality areas and stress could be reduced. This restriction could also assist in keeping big game animals on the forest during the winter use periods, which would help reduce the amount of animal damage to private lands.

Table 1: Restricted Motorized Use Periods - Administrative Use

ACCESS STRATEGY AREA	SUMMER RANGE						WINTER RANGE			SECURITY AREAS
	5/1-6/30			8/15-10/14		10/15-12/14	12/15-4/14			YEARLONG
ALTERNATIVES	B	C	D	C	D	C	B	C	D	C
FOREST SERVICE										
Contract Admin.	Y ₂	Y	Y ₂	Y	Y	Y ₂	Y	Y	Y ₂	Y
Permit Admin.	N ₂	Y	N ₂	Y	N ₂	Y ₂	Y	Y	N ₁₋₃	N ₂
Project work	N ₁	Y	N ₁	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N ₁₋₃	Y ₅
CONTRACTS										
Timber sales	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N
Tree planting (4/1-5/31)	Y	Y	Y	-	-	-	Y	Y	Y	Y
Thinning (8/1-11/15)	-	-	-	Y	N	N	-	-	-	N
Road Obliteration	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	-	Y
Road Maintenance	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y
Road Construction	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	Y
Fence Construction	N	N	N	Y	N	Y ₄	N	N	N	Y
Gopher Control (10/1-10/30)	-	-	-	Y	N	Y ₄	-	-	-	Y
Porcupine Control (3/20-10/15)	Y	Y	N	Y	N	-	Y	Y	N	N
Big Game Control (4/1-5/31)	Y	Y	N	-	-	-	Y	Y	Y	Y
Commercial firewood /post & poles	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
Cone collection (8/15-10/15)	-	-	-	Y	N	-	-	-	-	Y
Stocking surveys (9/1-12/5)	-	-	-	Y	N	N	-	-	-	Y
Stand exams (6/15-9/30)	N	N	N	Y	N	-	-	-	-	N
Implant/fertilize (12/15-4/15)	-	-	-	-	-	-	Y	Y	N	Y
Select Trees maint./culture (5/31-9/30)	N	Y	N	Y	N	-	-	-	-	Y
Subsoiling (7/15-11/1)	-	-	-	Y	N	N	-	-	-	Y
Prescribed burn (3/1-6/15)	Y	Y	N	-	-	-	Y	Y	Y	Y
PERMITS										
Grazing	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	-	-	-	N
Personal firewood	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
X-mas tree cutting	-	-	-	-	-	N	N	Y	N	N
Personal posts & poles	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
Mushrooming	N ₂	Y	N ₂	N	N ₂	N ₂	N ₂	Y	N ₂	N ₂
Special Uses	N ₂	Y	N ₂	Y	N ₂	N ₂	N ₂	Y	N ₂	N ₂

- = Non-applicable
 Y = Access permit would be issued
 N = Access permit would not be issued

- 1 Except for tree planting and prescribed burning.
- 2 Access to Special Use electronic sites; exceptions made on case-by-case basis for Special Us
- 3 Prescribed burning permitted.
- 4 No access permitted during elk rifle season.
- 5 If necessary to maintain the objectives of Big Game Security Areas.

Travel associated with active, operating contracts on roads designated as closed yearlong, is a form of administrative use and will require a permit. Public admittance to the area will be restricted. Although a closure device may be open, the road will still be closed, by a sign, to any use not covered by the permit. Entry devices will be closed during periods of inactivity or after the project is completed.

Each closure order will have a standard exemption for 36 CFR 261.50(e). It shall read as follows; Anyone engaged in an official search and rescue, fire fighting force, or law enforcement duty.

Road closure devices will be designed to fit the anticipated needs.

Discussion of the need for and purpose of administrative use will be included on access and travel management maps, signs, and other educational materials.

NOXIOUS WEEDS

Any treatment of noxious weeds would be in agreement with measures specified in the Managing Competing and Unwanted Vegetation Final Environmental Impact Statement, Record of Decision and Mediated Agreement (Nov. 1988).

Control of additional road construction and overland OHV travel can limit spread into new locations. Hand pulling of known populations of noxious weeds will continue, where possible. Known populations of noxious weeds which are located along roads designated for obliteration will be treated prior to implementation and the dead, seed-bearing noxious weed skeletons will be collected. Use of herbicides will be an option to control noxious weeds, when a NEPA document allowing such use is approved.

Areas of soil disturbance will be seeded with grasses and forbs to prevent invasion by noxious weeds. The rate of seeding will be at a level which will not deter reforestation of the site.

Measures to avoid the spread of noxious weeds will be included on maps, informational signs, and other education materials. Such education should encourage the following:

- i. Hunters with livestock to purchase pelleted feed, certified weed-free hay, or local weed free hay.

- ii. OHV users to stay on designated routes and to be sure machines are free of noxious weed seed prior to entering National Forest lands.

Knutson-Vandenburg funds are collected, through timber sales, to fund monitoring and control of existing populations.

MONITORING REQUIREMENTS COMMON TO ALTERNATIVES A, B, C, AND D

FOREST PLAN

Monitoring will be conducted in accordance with the Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, FEIS and ROD (June 1990).

PROJECT DESIGN

An interdisciplinary team will review the Access and Travel Management Plan after each stage of implementation and annually after implementation is complete, to monitor success and to determine if changes in program design are needed to achieve objectives. The Public Working Group may be included in such monitoring.

The effectiveness of the type and location of closure device, maps, signing, education, road obliteration, and law enforcement will be monitored through site specific reviews and public comment.

WILDLIFE

Big game herd composition data will be evaluated annually (in cooperation with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife), focusing specifically on bull/buck escapement and calf/fawn recruitment.

WATERSHED/FISHERIES

Existing stream sediment and water quality monitoring will continue.

RECREATION/VISUALS

Activity reviews comparing project planning and execution will be scheduled to track the effects and evaluate impacts of the Access and Travel Management Plan on recreation resources.

ADMINISTRATIVE USE

Monitoring of permitted use will be done on a yearly basis through a formal permit system. This monitoring will be analyzed annually by the IDT and District staff.

DISTRICT PROGRAM OF WORK

The District program of work will be monitored to evaluate the effects of implementation of the Access and Travel Management Plan. The District Staff and interdisciplinary team will monitor annually using various types of documentation, such as contract diaries, accomplishment report information, and other similar administrative sources of information. Included in monitoring will be project timing delays, significant organizational changes, unusual upward or downward changes in bids for government contracts, elimination or downsizing of existing programs, ability to execute projects within a biological window (such as planting or prescribed burning), and project and program unit costs.

COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES

A comparison of the alternatives and their corresponding effects on key issues are discussed below. Refer to Table 2, page 38, for a comparative summary of this discussion.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Alternative A would only achieve the objectives of moving toward the desired future condition and using road closures to improve or prevent resource damage. Since management would continue to develop on a project by project basis, the objective of consistency across the District and with our neighboring districts might not occur. Depending on the extent of inconsistency, the plan could be somewhat confusing and difficult to implement or enforce. Attempts would be made to consider public needs, but the extent to which these needs are met would be different with each project and access to historically favored areas might occasionally be closed with little notice to the public.

Alternative B would work toward Forest Plan desired future conditions (pp 4-7 and Appendix A), but with regard to big game, only minimally. Public needs of access, road-oriented activities, and OHV/snowmobile use would be satisfied at the expense of the needs for non-motorized recreation opportunities and a non-motorized hunting experience. Since most roads are open or seasonally open, this would be the most understandable, implementable, and enforceable plan. The dates of seasonal closure will be easier to understand than seasonal closures currently in place; instead of shifting with the various hunting seasons, closures will occur on the same dates every year. The plan would be consistent District-wide, although it may not be consistent with the North Fork John Day District. Road closures would

be based on resource objectives for soil, fish, and water to improve or prevent the most severe damage. Road closures based on resource objectives for big game would be minimal.

Alternative C would move the District toward desired future conditions stated in the Forest Plan by closing additional roads to accommodate big game, providing a trail system for OHVs and snowmobiles, and providing a wide range of recreation opportunities and access. During the transition, from current management to implementation of this alternative, confusion could occur regarding which roads are open; this would resolve as the new program becomes established, maps are distributed, signs are posted, and education efforts pay off. The dates of seasonal closure will be easier to understand than seasonal closures currently in place; instead of shifting with the various hunting seasons, closures will occur on the same dates every year. Because this alternative would be consistent across the District and with the North Fork John Day District, it would be reasonably easy to implement and enforce. A range of recreation opportunities, both seasonal and in a variety of settings, would be provided. Though access would be limited in some areas, this would provide opportunities for non-motorized recreation. Roads would be closed based on resource objectives to prevent damage and enhance resources.

Security areas are being considered as areas that will give big game a place to find refuge during the time it takes big game cover to be restored to surrounding areas where salvage efforts have been intense. Because of this, security areas are being considered a temporary mitigation measure and the interdisciplinary team felt this alternative would still be consistent with the Forest Plan.

Alternative D would move the District toward an interpretation of desired future conditions that strongly emphasizes big game and non-motorized recreation. It would be easy to understand and implement, since few roads would be open. It could be difficult to enforce OHV and snowmobile restrictions since motorized patrol would be confined to open roads. It would be consistent District-wide but not with the North Fork John Day District. The range of recreation opportunities would be narrow and much of the District would be unavailable to the public majority. Road closures would be based on resource objectives, with a large emphasis on big game, to prevent damage and enhance resources.

ISSUE 1: ROAD-ORIENTED ACTIVITIES



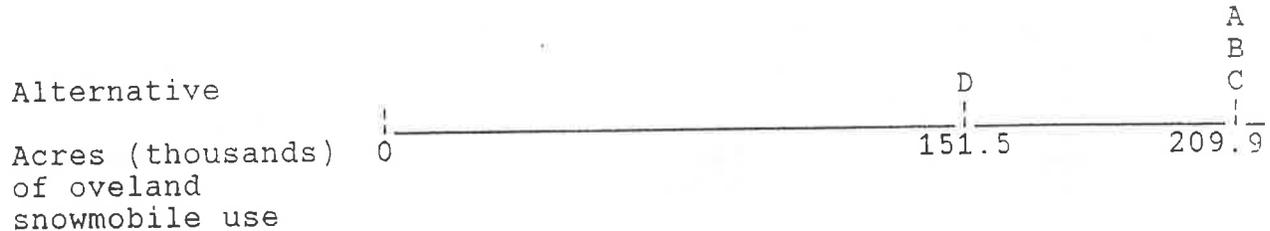
Alternative A would allow road-oriented activities throughout most of the District, but only seasonally in the Texas and Wickiup closures. The biggest concern is that areas providing road-oriented opportunities cannot be depended upon year after year, since access may change with every new resource management project.

Alternative B would maximize opportunities for road-oriented activities by providing the greatest amount and variety of open roads. The large amount of maintenance level 2 roads would provide the most variety and challenge for high clearance vehicle users.

Alternative C would supply a wide variety of road types to provide a more diverse driving experience. However, fewer roads would be available for road-oriented activities in Winter Big Game Habitat and General Forest and none would be available in security areas.

Alternative D would be the most restrictive, greatly reducing opportunities for road-oriented activities. This would particularly effect forest users who require motorized access (such as senior citizens, physically challenged persons, families with young children, and motor homes).

ISSUE 2: OHV AND SNOWMOBILE USE



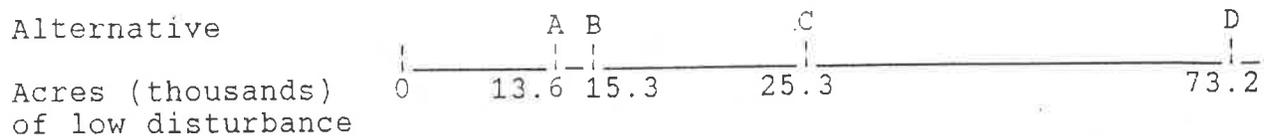
Alternative A would allow the most freedom across the District for OHV and snowmobile use. However this unrestricted use may result in conflicts with other recreationists and disturbance to wildlife. Any damage to natural resources would be difficult to monitor and control, including the spread of noxious weeds.

Alternative B would place some restrictions on time of use and overland travel, but there would be an increase in designated and suggested routes. OHV opportunities would be less than alternative A because OHV's are restricted to designated routes yearlong in the Summer Range and seasonally in the Winter Range. OHV opportunities would be greater than alternatives C or D because overland use is still allowed in E1 areas of General Forest and in C3 and C8 areas of Winter Range seasonally.

Alternative C would restrict overland travel for OHVs and snowmobiles even further, although there would be an increase in suggested and designated routes. OHV opportunities would be less than alternatives A or B because in addition to restrictions in alternative B, they would be completely eliminated seasonally east of Ditch Creek in the General Forest and Winter Range. Furthermore, OHVs would not be allowed at all in security areas. Snowmobile opportunities would be the same as alternative B except in the Winter Range east of Ditch Creek, where overland use would be restricted seasonally.

Alternative D would be the most restrictive to OHV and snowmobile use. No overland travel opportunities would exist for OHVs, severely limiting the recreation experience for these users. Designated routes could also concentrate use in certain areas of the District, which could lead to resource damage. Snowmobiles would be excluded, yearlong, from Winter Range.

ISSUE 3: NONMOTORIZED RECREATION



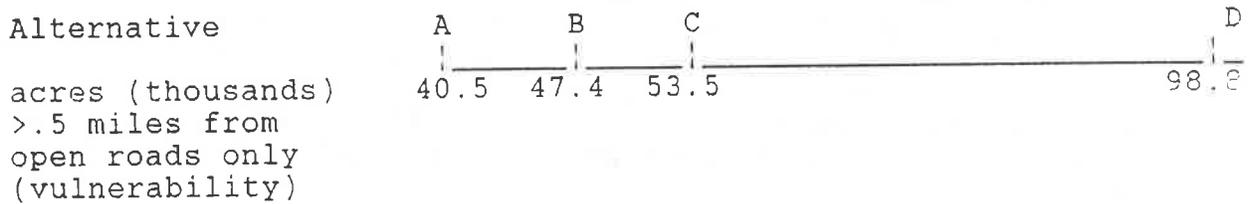
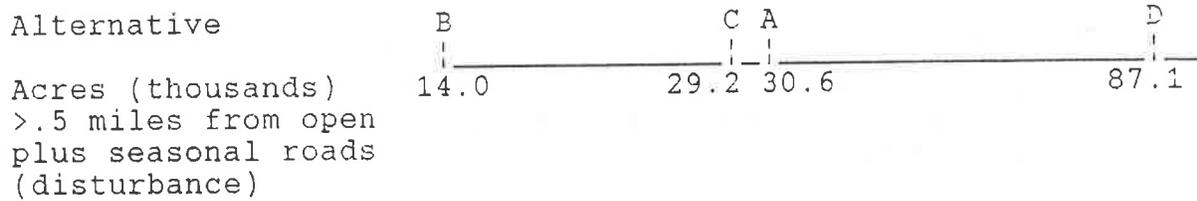
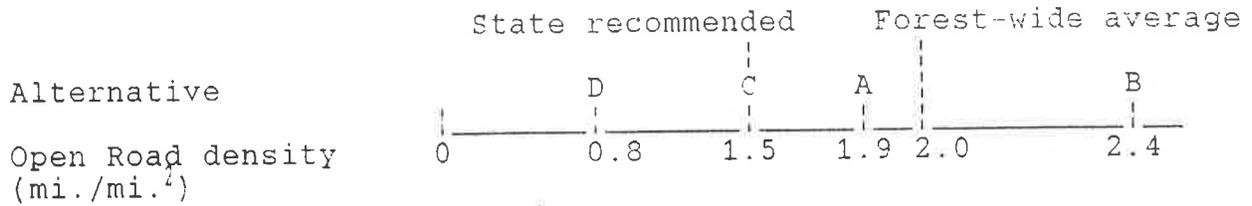
Alternative A would limit opportunities for and quality of non-motorized recreation. Because no routes exist specifically for OHV or snowmobile use, they use routes which would otherwise provide opportunities for non-motorized recreation. There is an opportunity to expand this resource by converting some closed roads to nonmotorized trails.

Alternative B would have the most impact on non-motorized recreation with the increased number of open roads. The increased number of seasonally open roads, primarily in the Summer Range, would further reduce non-motorized opportunities and experiences. Increased open roads could limit the opportunity to expand the non-motorized trail system.

Alternative C maintains almost the same amount of non-motorized opportunities as Alternative A, however the resource isn't as limited as in Alternative B. The large number of road closures would provide more opportunity to designate additional non-motorized trails than in Alternatives A or B.

Alternative D would benefit the non-motorized recreation resource the most of all proposed alternatives. Many more areas would be available for non-motorized activities, disturbance would be greatly reduced from other alternatives, and the opportunities for solitude would be maximized. This alternative would also provide the most opportunity to convert roads to non-motorized trails and existing trails would prohibit use by OHVs and snowmobiles.

ISSUE 4: EFFECTIVE BIG GAME HABITAT



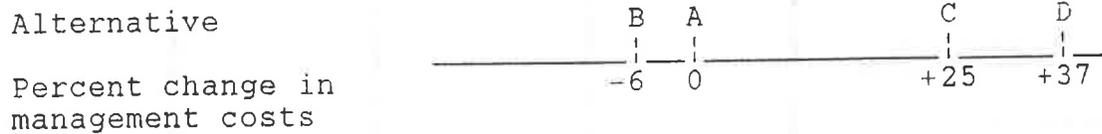
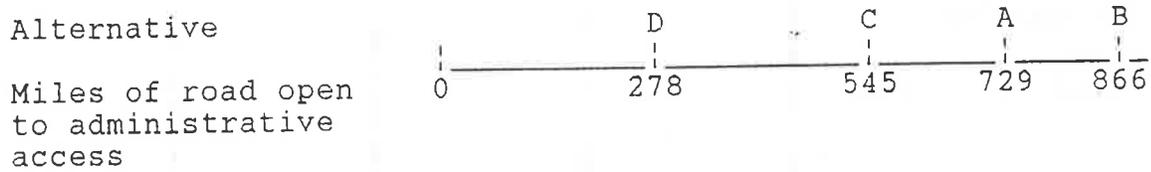
Alternative A would result in poor quality big game habitat across the District because of a high road density, unrestricted OHV and snowmobile use, and a minimal number of low disturbance areas. These effects may or may not be sufficiently reduced on a project by project basis.

Alternative B would provide the least amount of quality big game habitat. Improvement of habitat effectiveness would be heavily dependent on an adequate supply of quality cover or on further hunting restrictions. This may not be feasible, since the current forest health problem is depleting cover and hunting regulation is beyond the control of the Forest Service.

Alternative C would increase big game habitat quality. For additional protection, areas where big game could escape harassment (security areas) would be closed to most motorized access.

Alternative D would improve the quality of big game habitat the most of all the alternatives, since the number of open roads would be reduced in both winter and summer habitats, and OHV and snowmobile use would be greatly limited. This could make up for a loss of quality cover due to the poor forest health situation.

ISSUE 5: ADMINISTRATIVE USE



Alternative A would permit administrative access to most areas, with use limited seasonally only in the Texas and Wickiup areas.

Alternative B would allow the most administrative access of all the alternatives and the cost of doing business would be minimized.

Alternative C would be more restricted than in alternatives A and B. The permit system, which allows access during periods of road and area closure, would be more strictly controlled.

Alternative D would significantly reduce administrative access. Business costs would greatly increase, as sources other than motor vehicles are used. This could cause some District resource management programs to be dropped and contractors and permittees may be forced to work elsewhere. This may affect forest health and the economy of local communities in the long term.

TABLE 2: COMPARATIVE SUMMARY OF ALTERNATIVES

ISSUES & MEASUREMENT CRITERIA	ALTERNATIVES											
	A No Act.			B			C *			D		
<u>Road-oriented Activities</u>												
Miles of open road by:												
maintenance level	1	0		0		0		0		0		
	2	491		531		311		149		149		
	3	97		97		97		96		96		
	4	-		-		-		-		-		
	5	10		10		10		9		9		
Miles of yearlong and seasonally open road by:												
Summer Range	179			229			1.4 146			81		
General Forest	372			466			1.9 278			167		
Winter Range	138			165			1.1 101			49		
<u>Totals</u>	<u>689</u>			<u>860</u>			<u>525</u>			<u>297</u>		
<u>OHV & Snowmobile Use</u>												
	GF	SR	WR	GF	SR	WR	GF	SR	WR	GF	SR	WR
OHV Restrictions:												
Overland travel	1	1	1	3		5	4		6			
Designated routes					2	5		2	6	2	2	7
No use allowed							4		6			7
Snowmobile Restrictions:												
Overland travel	1	1	1	8	8	9	8	8	10	8	8	
Designated routes						9			10			11
No use allowed												
Miles of designated routes:												
OHV	0			17			17			70		
Snowmobile	0			9			9			0		
Acres of overland use:												
OHV	209,920			134,017			134,017			0		
Snowmobile	209,920			209,920			209,920			151,504		

- 1 Overland use is allowed except on roads, trails, and areas closed by CFR orders.
- 2 Restricted to designated routes yearlong.
- 3 Overland use in E1 management areas allowed yearlong.
- 4 West of Ditch Creek:
Overland use in E1 management areas outside security areas allowed yearlong.

East of Ditch Creek:
Overland use in E1 management areas outside security areas allowed except from August 15 through December 14 when use will not be allowed.