

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest

Summary of Five Year Proposed Program of Work

Introduction

National forests and grasslands provide a variety of recreation opportunities for the public, and visitor preferences, populations and on-the-ground conditions continue to change over time. Many Forest Service recreation sites built 30 to 50 years ago are seeing the effects of age and use. Some recreation sites have declining or infrequent visitation, while others are receiving higher use. As our communities grow and use and desires shift, the need to assess and take a more strategic approach to managing developed recreation sites and services has become apparent.

In response to this need, the Forest Service has developed a Recreation Facilities Analysis (RFA) process. The RFA is being conducted across the country to help national forests and grasslands create an environmentally and economically sustainable program, focused on matching developed recreation sites and experiences with visitors' desires and use. The RFA process involves seven steps (http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/recreation_r1/rec_facil_plng.shtml#steps) that take each national forest or grassland from an assessment of current conditions to a proposed program of work that prioritizes recreation sites and services, in accordance with environmental and economic constraints and desired experiences. The Proposed Program of Work for the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest describes the vision for the forest's recreation program.

Niche

National forests and grasslands have different natural and cultural characteristics, and how the public uses the land differs, as well. People do not necessarily want or expect to recreate in the same way on every landscape. An objective of the RFA is to identify the key characteristics that create a particular niche for recreation experiences and opportunities.

The Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest is described with the following niche statement:

“Bridging the Divide and Yesterday with Today”

“On the surface, the vast, expansive landscapes of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest teem with elk, and a variety of other species. Nested beneath the surface other riches - copper, gems, silver and gold are found. Over time, these treasures have both attracted and supported people, from Native Americans, to early ranchers, to miners. Today, these building blocks form the foundation for local livelihoods and lifestyles. Hunting, fishing, rock hounding, or simply roaming the Forest to enjoy scenery, explore history, and appreciate wildlife year round are traditions that continue to span generations.”

On the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, one can see from here to yesterday. Although changes over time are evident, our broad, cohesive landscapes, large, visible populations of wildlife, working ranches and remnant mines allow visitors to experience a connection with the past.

Recreation sites, experiences and opportunities on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest occur in four types of areas, described in a way that bridges with the niche:

- In *frontcountry* areas, visitors are more likely to experience higher concentrations of use, particularly near communities. Such areas include Georgetown Lake and the Pioneer

Mountains Scenic Byway. Daily backyard access for trails, driving for pleasure, OHV and snowmobile riding are common, as are opportunities to visit developed campgrounds, resorts and interpretive sites.

- In *roaded backcountry* areas, use concentrations thin out, allowing visitors on foot or by vehicle to experience more wild-feeling landscapes and observations of wildlife. Driving for pleasure, OHV and snowmobile riding are common, but are more dispersed, along with activities such as mountain biking, hiking, skiing, and dispersed camping. Historic rental cabins are most common here.
- *Backcountry* areas take visitors to more remote landscapes, where, other than by snowmobiles, access is non-motorized. Greater opportunities for solitude are found here. Activities include hiking, stock use, mountain biking, dispersed camping, snowmobiling and skiing. Historic cabins provide a unique overnight destination in backcountry areas.
- *Wilderness* and *proposed wilderness* areas are the most wild and rugged landscapes, where visitors experience remoteness, solitude, challenge and self-reliance. Hiking and stock use occur mostly as day-trips, but multi-day treks and primitive camps occur here, as well.

Analysis and Results

The Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest currently manages 197 developed recreation sites. The developed sites are summarized into the following categories:

- 58 Campgrounds
- 37 Cabin/ Lookout Rentals
- 28 Developed Trailheads
- 18 Picnic Sites
- 14 Dispersed Camping Areas
- 11 Interpretive Sites
- 8 Fishing Sites
- 7 Boating Sites
- 6 Group Picnic Sites
- 6 Winter Parking/ Shelters/ Snowparks
- 2 Overlook/ Observations Sites
- 1 Nordic Ski Area
- 1 Fish Viewing Site

Each of the forest's 197 recreation sites were ranked, based upon four criteria:

- How well does the site and its use conform to the niche?
- Is the site cost-effective to operate and maintain?
- Can environmental effects related to the site be maintained or reduced to low-impact levels over the long term? (Is it environmentally sustainable?)
- Is the site supported by local communities and does it contribute to their stability? (Does it affect community stability?)

Each recreation site was ranked on how well it met these criteria, and a list was ranked by a score illustrating order of priority. Sites highest on the list indicate those that most closely meet the four criteria and those lowest on the list indicate sites that are not capable being sustainable (see page 9 in Proposed Program of Work).

On the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest:

- 185 of the total 197 recreation sites meet our niche; meaning that they are environmentally sustainable within the capability and capacity of the natural resources; are supported by and provide support to local communities; and have a sustainable management cost-benefit ratio (see page 2 of the Proposed Program of Work).

- 78 of the 185 sites are proposed for no change in the next five years, and the rest of the sites are proposed for changes that focus on eliminating burdensome sources of expense, reducing deferred maintenance and increasing revenue that would be used to maintain local recreation sites.
- Of the total 197 sites, 12 do not meet all of the criteria; or fall sufficiently short in one or more of the criteria so as to render the capability of meeting it unsustainable. These 12 sites fall are proposed for decommissioning (closure) or partial decommissioning, as displayed in the table below, but may be managed for dispersed recreation opportunities.

As a result of the Recreation Facilities Analysis, the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest is proposing the following management actions over the next five years:

Management Option Categories	Site Count	Percent of Total Sites
Decommission/ Remove Site (includes partial decommission of some sites)	16	6.3%
Closure (but not removal)	1	0.4%
Change Operating Season	5	2.0%
Remove or Eliminate A Cost Source or Service Season	16	6.3%
Reduce Service Frequency	2	0.8%
Increase/ Improve Services	11	4.3%
Construct a New Area	0	0.0%
Change Operator or Workforce	29	11.5%
Change Fees	74	29.2%
Change Capacity	0	0.0%
Site Conversion (change development scale or type of site)	5	2.0%
Replacement/ Repair (to reduce deferred maintenance)	16	6.3%
No Change	78	30.8%

Note: Some sites have proposals for more than one action.

The 16 sites proposed for Decommissioning/ Removal fall into three categories, shown below. Decommissioned sites are proposed to be managed for dispersed recreation use. Dispersed sites are open for recreational use, but have very low levels of maintenance, usually have no toilets, no treated water, and fire grates are generally not provided.

Decommission as soon as practical:

- Balanced Rock Campground
- West Fork Rest Area
- Crystal Creek Campground
- Orofino Picnic Area
- Stewart Lake Fishing Access
- Warm Springs Campground
- Warm Springs Picnic Area

Begin incremental steps toward decommissioning:

- Aspen Picnic Area
- Basin Canyon Campground
- Elkhorn Picnic Area
- Ladysmith Campground
- Mud Lake Fishing Access

Partial decommissioning (such as removal of some sites or features):

- Clover Meadows Picnic Site
- Elder Creek Picnic Area
- Beaverdam Picnic Area
- Lowland Picnic Area

Conclusion

People’s preferences for recreation evolve and populations change, creating a need to evaluate conditions and prioritize investments that best meet recreation demands. The Recreation Facilities Analysis is a tool that allows us to analyze where and how to prioritize our investments and align priorities with our niche. The resulting Proposed Program of Work is a strategic plan designed to direct actions over the next five years, but can be adjusted as conditions change. The Recreation Facilities Analysis does not make decisions; site-specific proposals would undergo a separate evaluation to meet the requirements of National Environmental Policy Act.