

EXISTING CONDITION OF RECREATION

INTRODUCTION

Recreation activities considered in this analysis consist primarily of dispersed recreation associated with trails and roads. The analysis area boundary is the Continental Divide to the west and south and private land to the north (Basin Creek) and east (Roosevelt Drive) including Thompson Park, west of Highway 2.

The area to the south and west is rocky and heavily timbered and has little development of recreation opportunities other than dispersed. There is one system trail that serves as the north boundary for the Basin Creek Municipal Watershed. The Basin Creek Roadless Area is located on the western portion of the project area. East of Basin Creek reservoirs, the area is rocky and timbered, however there is evidence of past timber and mining activities with associated roads. These roads provide access for dispersed recreation opportunities, mostly during the summer and fall big game hunting season.

DEVELOPED RECREATION, ROADS AND TRAILS

There are no developed recreation facilities within the project area except in Thompson Park, which is discussed below. Dispersed recreation activities dominate public use of the area to include hunting during the big game archery and rifle season, hiking, mountain bike and horseback riding, off-road vehicle (OHV) use on primitive (unclassified) roads and trails, snowmobiling, firewood gathering, and driving for pleasure. Highland Lookout is a popular destination point, outside of the project area, which is accessed via the Highland Road (FS Rd. #84). The heaviest use by the public is during the summer and fall big game hunting season. Winter use is low to moderate and consists primarily of snowmobiling at the south end of the Lime Kiln Road and Highland Road. There is some backcountry skiing to the south along the Continental Divide. There is a popular and well used dispersed recreation site at the junction of Forest Service Roads #84 and #8520. This site is used primarily as a trailhead and picnic area during the summer and fall. During the fall big game hunting season this site is used for camping by hunters. This site receives heavy use throughout the summer and fall. There are no constructed facilities at this site.

The primary road used by the public is the Highland Road (#84). The road provides access into the Highland Mountain Range from Montana Highway 2, south of Butte. There is one private residence on patented mining claims immediately south of the Basin Creek reservoirs that is accessed by the Highland Road. The road is open year round except for a two to four week period in the spring to protect the road during the spring thaw. The road is open for access by the private landowner during this time. The Herman Gulch Road (#8493) provides access to Roosevelt Drive from Basin Creek. The road was closed to full-size vehicles in the early 1990s because several segments of the road were causing resource damage from erosion. Berms and rocks were placed in the roadbed to prevent use by full-size vehicles. ATVs and motorcycles were still able to use the road along with non-motorized users. In October 2002 an emergency closure for all motorized use was placed on three quarters of a mile of road that had washed out at the north end. Non-motorized use (foot, horse, mountain bike traffic) is still allowed. There are other lower standard roads in the project area to the east that extend from the Herman Gulch road that are used by the public for dispersed recreation. The primary use of these roads is by OHV vehicles, mountain bicycles, hikers and horseback riders.

Within the project area there is one system trail, Bear Gulch #108. The five-mile trail begins at the Basin Creek County Park and continues westward across the Continental Divide to Burton Park in the Highland

Mountain Range. The trail is the primary access from Butte into the Highland Mountains except for the Highland Road (#84). The trail was most likely created for access to past mining and timber activities. Much of the trail is located on steep slopes from Basin Creek Park to the Continental Divide and needs to be relocated to reduce erosion issues and to meet trail design standards. Volunteer groups constructed bridges several years ago to protect stream crossings. The tread of the trail is decomposed granite, which along with the steep grades has many eroded segments. The trail is open to motorized use year round and receives moderate to high use during the summer and fall big game hunting season. Primary use of the trail is motorized (ATVs and motorcycles), but a small amount of hiking, mountain biking, and horseback does occur during the summer and fall big game hunting season. There are two old roads that extend from the trail, but they dead end and receive light use except during the fall big game hunting season.

The Continental Divide is the south and west boundary of the project area. In 1978 Congress designated the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST) as part of the National Trails Act. The Act and subsequent analysis (1989) designated a route from Canada to Mexico. The only portion of the nationally designated trail that has been built is located at Pipestone Pass and continues south and westward to the head of the Lime Kiln Road. The Highland Road is currently the designated route for the Continental Divide and receives moderate to heavy use during the summer by bicyclists and hikers of the Continental CDNST. There is minimal use by backcountry hikers who bushwhack the CDNST instead of using the Highland Road. There are plans to locate and construct the remaining segments of the CDNST in the next eight years. This will include the segments from the Lime Kiln Road west to Interstate 15.

TRAVEL MANAGEMENT

The municipal watershed has a yearlong travel restriction for all motorized vehicles. Butte-Silver Bow placed signs along the north and south side of the Highland Road that restrict recreation use to comply with the state requirements for A-Closed classification for the Basin Municipal Watershed. The Forest Service does not have an order restricting recreation use within this area. There are no travel restrictions south and east of the reservoirs to Roosevelt Drive.

THOMPSON PARK

A portion of the project area lies within Thompson Park. Thompson Park was designated, under an act of Congress in 1922, as a municipal recreation area. It consists of approximately 3500 acres within the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest and is managed for recreational purposes. A Cooperative Agreement signed by the City of Butte and Secretary of Agriculture outlines the roles and responsibilities of each entity. There are two areas within the Park that have developed recreation sites. Seven developed recreation sites are designated within Eagle's Nest and Lion's Den, however years of neglect and vandalism has caused most constructed features to be non-existent. There is a proposal for a Natural Resource Damage (NRD) Grant with Butte-Silver Bow to reconstruct the recreation sites.

There are approximately 33 miles of trails in Thompson Park, which includes a portion of the abandoned Milwaukee Railroad. Of that, approximately 3 miles of trail are within the project area. Recreationists including mountain bicyclists, horseback riders, and some OHV users, use these trails. Currently there are no restrictions for motorized use within the Park except for the Herman Gulch Road, which is under an emergency closure. These trails receive moderate use primarily during the summer and fall.

There is an archery range within the Park on the east side of Highway 2 that is under special use authorization by the Forest Service. The range is a premier local site and attracts several state tournaments annually along with weekly leagues from mid-May through August. The site has two shooting ranges, toilets, and picnic facilities.

SPECIAL USES

There are three recreation residences located in Herman Gulch and one in Basin Creek. Recreation residences are tracts of land leased to private individuals who have privately owned cabins on the property. Each tract is approximately one to two acres. There is one outfitter and guide special use authorization in the project area for road tours along the Highland Road to access fishing, hiking, sightseeing opportunities within and adjacent to the project area. Approximately 80 service days are authorized by this use.

There is a special use authorization for an archery range in Thompson Park (see discussion in Thompson Park section).

RECREATION OPPORTUNITY SPECTRUM (ROS)

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) provides a framework for defining the types of outdoor recreation opportunities the public might desire, and identifies that portion of the spectrum that any given area might be able to provide. Recreation Opportunity Settings are the combination of physical, biological, social, and managerial conditions that give the value to a place. The Forest Service strives to provide and maintain a range of settings from roaded natural through primitive to meet the expectations and desires of visitors. ROS classifications help determine acceptable development for specific sites and areas. A combination of the following factors determines the ROS class for an area: remoteness (including distance from roads and settlements), degree of naturalness (level of human modification to the landscape), social setting (number of encounters with other people within a typical day), and managerial setting (degree of visitor controls).

ROS is divided into two opportunity categories: summer and winter. The project area has three different ROS classes: semi-primitive motorized, roaded natural, and rural. The boundary for each class is the same for summer and winter with the exception of roaded natural areas. The summer boundary for roaded natural extends into the Roosevelt Drive residential area. Forest Service Manual Direction (2330.3) describes each of the ROS classes found within the project area (**Table 3.77**).

Table 3.77

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Class	Level of Site Modification
Semi-primitive (Motorized and non-motorized)	Little site modification. Rustic or rudimentary improvements designed primarily for protection of the site rather than the comfort of the users. Use of synthetic materials avoided. Minimum controls are subtle. Little obvious regimentation. Spacing informal and extended to minimize contacts between users. Motorized access provided or permitted. Primary access over primitive roads. Interpretive services informal.
Roaded natural	Site modification moderate. Facilities about equal for protection of natural site and comfort of users. Contemporary/rustic design of improvements is usually based on use of native materials. Inconspicuous vehicular traffic controls usually provided. Roads may be hard surfaced and trails formalized. Development density about 3 family units per acre. Primary access may be over high standard roads. Interpretive services informal, but generally direct.
Rural	Site heavily modified. Some facilities designed strictly for comfort and convenience of users. Luxury facilities not provided. Facility design may incorporate synthetic materials. Extensive use of artificial surfacing of roads and trails. Vehicular traffic control usually obvious. Primary access usually over paved roads. Development density 3-5 family units per acre. Plant materials usually native. Interpretive services often formal or structured.

Semi-primitive Motorized (SPM)

The boundary for summer and winter is the same with approximately 5,165 acres within the area. Most of the area is located within the Basin Creek Roadless Area, but extends to the east side of the Basin Creek Reservoirs. The primary attraction within this classification is the Basin Creek Roadless Area. The dominant features of the Roadless Area are the Continental Divide and rugged terrain that provide areas of remoteness not found in the rest of the project area. The primary activity within this ROS is motorized use on the Bear Gulch Trail #108. Due to the rugged terrain there is little dispersed recreation.

Roaded Natural (RN)

Currently there are approximately 7,629 acres identified for the summer and 7,040 acres for the winter. Roaded Natural areas are located primarily on the east side of the project area extending just west of the Basin Creek Reservoirs and the portion of Thompson Park that is in the project area. There is no dominant natural feature within this classification. This area includes the residential areas of Herman Gulch, Roosevelt Drive, and portions of Thompson Park. The primary activity within this ROS is dispersed recreation primarily during the fall big game hunting season. There is moderate recreation use on the routes within Thompson Park.

Rural (R)

Currently there are approximately 1,525 acres identified for the summer and 2,116 acres for the winter. Rural areas are located on the north end of the project area at the Forest boundary in Herman Gulch and north end of Roosevelt Drive. The rural classification of these areas is associated with private residences in the Roosevelt Drive area and recreation residences located in Herman Gulch. It also includes a small portion of Thompson Park. There is no dominant natural feature within this classification and no recreation use as this classification consists of residential homes.

FOREST PLAN DIRECTION

Forest Plans provide Forest-wide goals, objectives and standards, for subunits of the forest called Management Areas (MA's). The following paragraphs highlight MA standards for recreation that are relevant to the proposed action discussed in this assessment.

Management Area A3 – Standard – Recreation: Provide for a CDNST with emphasis on foot travel, provide for horse use, and in addition, continuation of motorized use where presently permitted and considered appropriate by the applicable land management agency.

Management Area C3 – Standard – Recreation: Use Hunting Recreation Objectives to establish vehicle use restrictions.

Management Area D2 – Standard – Recreation: Control motorized vehicle use in accordance with the hunter opportunity objectives to prevent damage to the forage resource and to enhance the useability of the area by wildlife. Establish these controls through the Forest Travel Plan.

Management Area E1 – Standard – Recreation: Allow construction of trails. Maintain existing trails and facilities that provide access to adjacent areas. As trails are made useable by timber related activities, provide for new termini facilities.

Management Area J3 – Standard – Recreation: Manage for primitive or semiprimitive nonmotorized ROS class.

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS TO RECREATION

INTRODUCTION

The primary recreational use of the Basin Creek Project area is associated with dispersed recreation. Dispersed uses include hunting during the big game archery and rifle season, hiking, mountain bike and horseback riding, off-road vehicle (OHV) use on primitive (unclassified) roads and trails, snowmobiling, firewood gathering, and driving for pleasure. Impacts on big game hunting are discussed in this chapter under the Elk Security and Elk Hunter Opportunity issue and in the Wildlife section. The opportunity for these activities would not change significantly by implementation of any of the action alternatives since public access is not increased under any of the alternatives. Opportunities for wood gathering would be provided for a limited time in the harvest units along temporary roads constructed under the action alternatives. The effects of the alternatives on the visual appearance of the area are discussed in the Visual Resources section.

ALTERNATIVE 1 (NO ACTION)

This alternative would not implement any harvest activity in the Basin Creek and Blacktail Watershed.

Direct and Indirect Effects

Under the No Action Alternative fire potential would increase from accumulations of surface fuels (See Fire / Fuels analysis). If a fire were to start in the Herman Gulch or Roosevelt Drive area and move northward it would increase the risk of burning the recreation residences located in Herman Gulch. Likewise, a fire could increase the risk of burning the recreation residence in Basin Creek. No other special uses would be directly affected by this alternative. The archery range permit is located on the east side of Montana Highway 2, which could act as a firebreak depending on the type and intensity of a fire. In the event a fire was to jump the highway, it could impact the facilities at the archery range. It is unlikely a fire would directly affect trails and trail use in the project area, however visual effects from a fire could have a negative effect on users traveling through a burn area.

Over time, fire potential would increase from accumulations of surface fuels (See Fire / Fuels effects analysis). If a fire were to start in the Basin Creek Reservoir area and move south and eastward it would pose a threat to the Thompson Park Recreation Area, destroying facilities that would be built in the next two years, if the Natural Resource Damage Program grant proposal is approved. A fire in the Thompson Park area would increase the risk of hazard trees, depending on the size and intensity, along the trail causing increased safety concerns and maintenance costs.

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classifications would not change with the No Action alternative.

This alternative would be in compliance with Forest Plan direction for recreation standards for all management areas. Recreation standards for visual management are discussed in the Scenery Management section.

Cumulative Effects

Alternative 1 would not harvest any timber. Under this alternative there would be a potential threat to recreation facilities in Thompson Park over time from the increased risk of crown and surface fires over time and the lack of fuel breaks outside Thompson Park (see Fire and Fuels analysis). The past and foreseeable harvest areas in Thompson Park may break up fuel continuity to protect recreation facilities. The Lime Kiln Timber Sale was proposed, but never implemented. If this sale were to be reviewed again it may break up fuel continuity to protect recreation sites within the Park depending on where treatment units were located.

Recreation residence permittees in the Basin Creek and Herman Gulch are required to remove hazard trees as part of their special use authorization; however, there would still be a risk to the cabins if fires were to start in areas adjacent to the recreation residences.

ALTERNATIVE 2

This alternative proposes to remove timber from the urban interface boundary on the north and east boundary of the project area. The purpose is to reduce the threat to life and property from wildfire by removing hazardous fuels in high and moderate risk stands adjacent to private land. Approximately 8 miles of temporary road would be constructed and then obliterated following the sale.

Direct and Indirect Effects

This alternative would not affect any developed site, dispersed site or system trail. During the harvest period dispersed recreation activities such as hunting and trail use within and adjacent to Thompson Park would not be available, but would return after the harvest period. This alternative would treat approximately 39 acres within Thompson Park. Proposed treatments in the Park would not affect recreation activities or facilities.

Removal of timber in this alternative would provide fire protection to the recreation residences located in Herman Gulch and Basin Creek by removing infested and dead trees adjacent to the residences.

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is currently identified as **Roaded Natural** and **Rural**. Characteristics of Roaded Natural include moderate site modifications and inconspicuous vehicular traffic controls. The Rural setting is characterized by high site modifications. Under this alternative there would be no change to the ROS classifications.

This alternative would be in compliance with Forest Plan direction for recreation standards for all management areas. Recreation standards for visual management are discussed in the Scenery Management section.

Cumulative Effects

Alternative 2 would propose to remove timber west of Thompson Park. The removal of hazardous fuel from the area and past Thompson Park Hazard Tree Removals and foreseeable salvage in Thompson Park would decrease the chance of fire in the area and would provide additional protection to recreation sites in Thompson Park (See Fire and Fuels analysis). The Lime Kiln Timber Sale was proposed, but never

implemented. If this Sale were to be reviewed again, it may break up fuel continuity to protect recreation sites within the Park depending on where treatment units were located. Logging on private land in the Roosevelt Drive area would provide additional protection to Thompson Park.

Recreation residences would have additional protection when combined with the proposed harvest and requirement that hazard trees be removed under their special use authorization.

ALTERNATIVE 3

This alternative would buffer the forest/private boundary the same as with Alternative 2 and treat moderate and high risk stands to crown and stands with a risk of future high intensity surface fire on the slope below Roosevelt Drive. It would remove timber north of the Highland Road from the private residences in Roosevelt Drive to the private land south of Basin Creek Reservoir. Approximately 17 miles of temporary road would be constructed and then obliterated following the sale.

Direct and Indirect Effects

This alternative would not affect any developed site, dispersed site or system trail. During the harvest period dispersed recreation activities such as hunting would not be available, but would return after the harvest period. This alternative would treat approximately 39 acres within Thompson Park. Treatments in the Park would not affect recreation activities or facilities.

Removal of timber in this alternative would provide additional fire protection to the recreation residences located in Herman Gulch and Basin Creek by removing infested and dead trees.

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is currently identified as **Roaded Natural (RN)** and **Rural (R)**. Characteristics of RN include moderate site modifications and inconspicuous vehicular traffic controls. The Rural setting is characterized by high site modifications. The only difference between summer and winter ROS classification is east of the Moose Creek Road (Highland Road #84). During the summer there is approximately 600 more acres of Roaded Natural. The winter ROS of these acres is classified as rural. There would be no change to the ROS classifications under this alternative.

This alternative would be in compliance with Forest Plan direction for recreation standards for all management areas. Recreation standards for visual management are discussed in the Scenery Management section.

Cumulative Effects

The effects of this alternative would be the same as Alternative 2.

ALTERNATIVE 4

This alternative would buffer the forest/private boundary the same as with Alternative 2, but would also include placement of fire suppression lines that would offer a safer environment for firefighters to initiate direct attack. This would be accomplished by thinning tree densities in areas that most contribute to crown fires and removing dead trees in areas that would contribute to future high intensity surface fires. Approximately 17 miles of temporary road would be constructed and then obliterated following the sale.

This alternative includes thinning in the Basin Creek Inventoried Roadless Area. Within the inventoried roadless area, treatment will be accomplished using helicopter yarding methods. Feller bunchers and other equipment will enter on maintenance trails. In the mature lodgepole pine stands, large diameter trees will be removed. Within the roadless area approximately 5 miles of trail, including the Bear Gulch Trail #108, would be used to access areas to be thinned.

Direct and Indirect Effects

Effects of this alternative are similar to Alternatives 2 and 3. Under this alternative approximately 170 acres would be treated in Thompson Park in the same area as with Alternatives 2 and 3. The additional acreage would not increase protection for the remainder of Thompson Park. Treatments in the Park would not affect recreation activities or facilities.

This alternative would directly affect the dispersed recreation site at the junction of Forest Service Roads #84 and #8520. This site receives heavy recreation use during the summer and fall by picnickers and campers (during the hunting season). The site is approximately 3 acres in size and contains mature lodgepole and pole size Douglas-fir. Mountain pine beetle has infested most of the lodgepole. Eliminating these hazard trees would decrease safety risks to the public. Depending on the location and size of the Douglas-fir units there could be visual impacts to the site from the harvest.

Under this alternative the Bear Gulch Trail #108 would be used to access areas to be thinned to reduce the risk of crown fires and future surface fires. During the harvest period the trail would be closed to the public. This would temporarily eliminate recreational trail access to the Highlands. Following the harvest normal use of the trail would return. Users of the trail would see effects of the harvest, but with the harvest of mature lodgepole along the trail future safety hazards, from mountain pine beetle infestations, would be eliminated.

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is currently identified as **Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM)**, **Roaded Natural (RN)** and **Rural (R)**. Characteristics of SPM include minimal site modifications. RN characteristics include moderate site modifications and inconspicuous vehicular traffic controls. The Rural classification is characterized by high site modifications. The only difference between summer and winter ROS classification is east of the Moose Creek Road (Highland Road #84). During the summer there is approximately 600 more acres of Roaded Natural. The winter ROS of these acres is classified as rural. There would be no change to any ROS classification under this alternative.

The proposed CDNST route from Lime Kiln to Highland Mine has been identified. The proposed route would be located on the west side of the continental divide from the Butte-Silver Bow aqueduct south to the Highland Mine and junction of FS roads #84 and #8520. The 300-foot buffer identified as a feature common to all alternatives would protect visual integrity for the foreground along the trail location. There may be an impact to the middle ground visuals depending on the final size and location of the unit. With the 300-foot buffer on the CDNST there would be no impacts to the proposed trail location from Highland Mine through Burton Park.

This alternative would be in compliance with Forest Plan direction for recreation standards for all management areas. Recreation standards for visual management are discussed in the Scenery Management section.

Cumulative Effect

The effects of this alternative would be the same as Alternative 3, however the increased acres proposed to be cut would provide additional protection to Thompson Park facilities.

ALTERNATIVE 5

This alternative is the same as Alternative 4, excluding the Inventoried Roadless Area.

Direct and Indirect Effects

The effects of this alternative would be the same as Alternative 4, excluding affects the Inventoried Roadless Area. Excluding the roadless area from this alternative would have no effect to the Bear Gulch Trail #108 and ROS classification of Semi-Primitive Motorized.

Cumulative Effects

The cumulative effects of this alternative would be the same as for Alternative 4.