



**File Code:** 2720

**Date:** January 28, 2008

Dear Interested Party,

The Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest is seeking public comment regarding 144 recreation residences currently authorized by twenty-year term special use permits.

### **Background**

Recreation residences are cabins and associated facilities on National Forest System lands that are privately owned and maintained and that operate under the authority of special use permits. The recreation residence program was started by the Forest Service in the early 1900s as a way to encourage public use of the National Forests. In Montana, the recreation residence program was established in 1906 with the first tract being surveyed in 1915. The last recreation residence tract was established in 1959. Nationally, no new recreation residence tracts have been established since the early 1960's. Currently, policy is for no additional tracts to be established. Nationally, there are currently over 15,000 recreation residences.

Recreation residences are a valid use of National Forest System lands and an important component of the overall National Forest recreation program. It is Forest Service policy to continue recreation residence use and to work in partnership with holders of these permits to maximize the recreational benefits of these residences (Forest Service Manual 2347.1).

Recreation residences are located on all of the Districts on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, in the following areas (see attached map):

- Dillon Ranger District (5 permits in the Birch Creek and Elkhorn Hot Springs areas)
- Wise River Ranger District (9 permits in the Grouse, Boulder and Mono Creek areas)
- Wisdom Ranger District (Twin Lakes) - 1 permit
- Butte Ranger District (18 permits in the Nez Perce, Sawmill Gulch, Silver Bow and Suburban Butte areas)
- Madison Ranger District (5 permits in the Mill Creek and Potosi areas)
- Jefferson Ranger District (12 permits in the Halfway Creek, Little Boulder River and Toll Mountain areas)
- Pintler Ranger District (93 permits in the Echo Lake, Georgetown Lake, Moose Lake, Spring Hill, Stewart Gulch, Warm Springs, Upper Willow and Princeton Villa areas)

Most existing permits will expire December 31, 2008. Prior to the issuance of new 20-year term permits, each lot and its associated improvements must be in compliance with the terms and conditions of its respective current permit. Most of the lots and associated improvements on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest have already been inspected for compliance. Holders have been notified if elements are out of compliance along with actions necessary to bring those



elements into compliance. If deficiencies exist, 20-year permits will not be issued; holders may request an annual permit to allow time to correct those deficiencies.

In addition, the Forest will be conducting Consistency Reviews to determine and ensure that all lots and tracts are consistent, or can be made to be consistent with the Beaverhead and Deerlodge National Forest Plans and all other applicable laws and rules. Actions will be identified by this Consistency Review as well as by public comments to bring recreation residences into compliance.

As required by the permits, an Operation and Maintenance Plan will be developed that will become part of each permit. It will incorporate any actions identified during the Consistency Reviews or public input process, and address any issues that need emphasis or clarification. The Operation and Maintenance Plans will also emphasize the requirement that the Permit Holders receive approval from the District Ranger before they undertake any alterations to their lots and its environs, their facilities or the exteriors of any of their buildings. This allows the Forest Service to ensure that those proposed actions are consistent with the Forest Plan and all applicable laws, guidelines, orders and policies.

### **Purpose and Need**

There is a need for action on existing Recreation Residence Special Use Permits (SUP) on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest that are set to expire on December 31, 2008.

In meeting this need, the proposed action should achieve the following purposes:

- Only permit holders in full compliance with terms and conditions of their current permits will be authorized new term permits (FSH 2709.11, Sec 41.23(a)(3)).
- Provide reasonable opportunity for current non-compliant permit holders to gain compliance with the current terms and conditions of their permit (36 CFR 251.60).
- Within tracts, minimize impacts to existing resources such as threatened and endangered species or habitat, hydrology, soil, vegetation, cultural resources, etc. (FSH 2709.11, Sec. 41.23(a)(1)).

### **Proposed Action**

This proposal is to authorize and issue 20-year special use permits for the continued use of existing recreation residences, with their associated facilities. Only improvements that are authorized by the current permits would be authorized by the new permits. This action is not proposing any new tracts, facilities or alterations of existing facilities. Reissuance of new recreation resident permits would become active on January 1, 2009 and would be valid for a new term of twenty years. The analysis may also determine that a shorter term will be authorized or that the lot will be converted to an alternative use.

### **Environmental Review Process**

A preliminary review suggests that this project falls within a category of action listed in the Forest Service Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook 1909.15, Section 31.2 (15) that

may be excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. That category is described as:

“Issuance of a new special use authorization for a new term to replace an existing or expired special use authorization when the only changes are administrative, there are no changes to the authorized facilities or increases in the scope or intensity of authorized activities, and the applicant or holder is in full compliance with the terms and conditions of the special use authorization.”

People who are interested in or affected by this proposal are invited to send us comments. To be most useful, your comments should focus on specific issues and identify which tract or area your comments are addressing and include concerns you believe should be considered before a decision on the reissuance is reached. Comments received will become part of the public record and may be made available to others upon request.

Comments must be received by March 7, 2008 and should be addressed to:

**Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest**  
**Attn: Patty Bates**  
**420 Barrett Street**  
**Dillon, MT 59725**

Comments may be submitted electronically by going to: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/b-d/projects>

You can also contact Forest Recreation Staff Officer Patty Bates at (406) 683-3979, or e-mail [pbates@fs.fed.us](mailto:pbates@fs.fed.us)

Thank you for your interest and participation.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Bruce Ramsey*  
BRUCE RAMSEY  
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure