

Gold Crown
Fuels Reduction Project

Recreation and Trails Analysis
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Regulatory Framework

The regulations framework provides direction for the management and protection of individual resources. In part, this regulatory framework defines the methodology and scope of analysis (what needs to be analyzed and how) for individual resources. The applicable regulatory framework that provides direction for recreation management comes from the Forest Plan.

Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF) Forest Plan (August 1987)

The Forest Plan for the Idaho Panhandle National Forests identifies these forest wide goals for recreation:

1. Provide for the projected use of developed recreation areas and complete the development of new sites as budget allows.
2. Provide for a variety of dispersed recreation opportunities.

The project area is located within Forest Plan Management Areas 1, 4 and 9. These Management Area (MA) goals are more specific to the project area than the forest wide goals. The IPNF Forest Plan used the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) to evaluate the recreation potential within each MA. This ROS defines five types of recreational settings and opportunities ranging from primitive, when human disturbance is minimal, to rural, where roads and users are concentrated.

1. MA-1 goal is to "provide opportunities for dispersed recreation". Furthermore, the Forest Plan states to "manage primarily for roaded modified and roaded natural ROS classes". Gold Hill Trail #3 and Gold Hill ATV Trail #2 are included in MA-1

2. MA-4 goal is to "provide for opportunities for dispersed recreation consistent with wildlife habitat needs". The ROS standard for MA-4 is also roaded modified and roaded natural classes. Motorized use is generally restricted to designated routes.
3. MA-9 is to "meet visual quality objectives". Furthermore, the Forest Plan states to "manage for roaded natural or semi-primitive ROS classes" and to maintain existing improvements".

Existing Conditions

The Gold Hill area, with access on Contest Mtn. Road 2642 is a local favorite for hiking, hunting, driving for pleasure and gathering forest products such as firewood and huckleberries. Because it is close to town, most use is day use with some occasional camping. The main road is used by mixed traffic including cars, trucks, ATVs, mountain bikes and horseback riders.

Gold Hill Vista Trail #1, a short trail to a scenic overlook. A hardened barrier free trail with the trailhead located at a small turnout along Road 2642. Suitable for wheelchairs and strollers, this trail offers panoramic views of Lake Pend Oreille and the surrounding mountains.

Gold Hill ATV Trail #2 constructed in 1994 for cross-country skiers, the predominate use on the trail is ATV riders and mountain bike riders. The upper trailhead is located at the end of Road 2642 and the lower trailhead is located at a small turnout along Road 2642. Mountain bike riders use this as an extension of Gold Hill Trail #3 and ATV riders can loop back by using Road 2642. Use is moderate to high.

Gold Hill Trail #3, constructed in 1992 is one of the most popular trails on the district because it has easy access, is close to town, is in a natural forest setting, and offers panoramic views of Lake Pend Oreille. The trail receives very high use (1500+ visitors per year) in the peak summer months (June to September), high use in the shoulder season and moderate use in the winter months. Use is equally split between hikers and mountain bike riders, with occasional use by horseback riders. This trail also receives regular use in the winter season from hikers/snowshoers. The main trailhead located on Bottle Bay

Road is paved with parking for 10 vehicles and has a modern vault toilet. The upper trailhead is located on a turn out along Road 2642.

Design Criteria/Mitigation Measures

Gold Hill ATV Trail #2 and the Trailhead on Road 2642

- No ground based equipment (either harvesting or grapple-piling) within 75 feet on each side of the trail centerline to prevent ground disturbance and the appearance of other trails.
- Handwork and/or line-pulling would be allowed within the 75-foot buffer where equipment cannot reach the trees.
- If crossing the trail is necessary with equipment, locations would be designated on the ground and approved by the Sale Administrator and crossings would be limited in number to help reduce resource damage to the trail. These crossings would be rehabilitated immediately adjacent to the trail (scattered with slash, berms eliminated), and trail tread would be reconstructed to its original constructed width of 48" wide and no wider. All logging-created slash will be removed from the trail.
- Trees shall be directionally-felled away from the trail to minimize negative effects to the trail tread.
- Public safety would be a critical element of this project. The trail would be closed to the public during active logging operations adjacent to or affecting the trail. Due to the high use and popularity of this trail the length of the closure shall be kept to a minimum and the trail should be opened once logging operations have finished and the trail has been restored. A Forest Closure Order is needed to close or restrict use on the trail.
- Unit 11 includes sections of Trail #2. To avoid conflicts with trail users, no logging operations shall occur during the peak summer season (Fourth-of-July through Labor Day) within unit 11, unless otherwise authorized by the Sale Administrator.

- Stumps within the 75-foot buffer adjacent to the trail would be flush cut no higher than 6" from the ground.

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- If crossing the trail is necessary with equipment, locations would be designated on the ground and approved by the Sale Administrator and crossings would be limited in number to help reduce resource damage to the trail. These crossings would be rehabilitated immediately adjacent to the trail (scattered with slash, berms eliminated), and trail tread would be reconstructed to its original constructed width of 30", no wider. All logging-created slash will be removed from the trail.
- Trees shall be directionally-felled away from the trail to minimize negative effects to the trail tread.
- Public safety would be a critical element of this project. The trail would be closed to the public during active logging operations adjacent to or affecting the trail. Due to the high use and popularity of this trail the length of the closure shall be kept to a minimum and the trail should be opened once logging operations have finished and the trail has been restored. A Forest Closure Order is needed to close or restrict use on the trail. This closure would need to be well advertised and posted at the trailheads.
- Units 21, 25, 28 and 32 are located adjacent to or could affect sections of Trail #3. To avoid conflicts with trail users, no logging operations shall occur during the peak summer season (Fourth-of-July through Labor Day) within units 21, 25, 28 and 32, unless otherwise authorized by the Sale Administrator.

- Stumps within the 75-foot buffer adjacent to the trail would be flush cut no higher than 6 " from the ground.

General Project Area

- Closure/warning signs should be posted both at the 2642 Road Entrance, as well as at trailheads for Trails #2 and #3, to deter use by public during active logging/hauling operations.

Effects Analysis - No Action Alternative

Recreation use in the project area would continue at existing levels. Over time as the population of the local area continues to grow, more and more people will seek out recreation opportunities close to home, such as the Gold Crown FRP area.

Gathering forest products, driving for pleasure, hiking, mountain bike riding, ATV/motorbike riding and hunting will continue to be the predominant recreational uses in the area.

Under the no-action alternative, management activities would not change from current levels and there would be no direct effects. The existing trail system would be maintained for use with no disruption resulting from any timber harvest or fuel treatments. Current access to trails would remain unchanged.

Concentrations of heavy fuels would remain. As a result there will be a higher risk of wildfire and therefore, a greater potential for recreation resources to be harmed (at least for 1-3 seasons) in the event of a landscape-altering wildfire event. Concentrations of heavy fuels along Gold Hill Trail #3 would continue to be areas of high risk of ignition from careless smokers, unauthorized motorbike use, or arsonist.

Effects Analysis – Proposed Action

Gold Hill Vista Trail #1

Not impacted by this project proposal. The trail is not in any harvest units. Warning signs at the bottom of Road 2642 would inform visitors about increased traffic including logging trucks.

Gold Hill ATV Trail #2

Lower sections of Trail #2 are located in Unit 11. Frequented by ATV riders, it is important to maintain the integrity of this trail (single track, motorized, forest setting) so ATV riders are not tempted to explore new routes off the trail by increased openings in the forest, or visible skid trails.

The proposed silvicultural treatment within Unit 11 is a light thinning, followed by grapple-piling of slash.

The immediate short-term impact of the project would be the appearance of a "logging operation" such as fresh cut stumps, limbs and tops, skidder or tractor tracks adjacent to or across the trail. Visitors may also be inconvenienced during the project if the work is done during the peak summer season and the trail is closed for a short period of time. However, design features, which include restricting harvesting during the period from Fourth-of-July through Labor Day, would lessen impacts. Long-term impacts would be reduced over time and the logging operation would have no significant visual impacts. After one to two seasons, raw stump surfaces would fade, ferns and other brush would grow up, and the harvest unit would have a more natural appearance.

Gold Hill Trail #3

The upper trailhead and sections of trail are located in or adjacent to Units 21, 25 and 32. Portions of the trail could also be affected by helicopter logging operations within unit 28. Gold Hill Trail #3 is a non-motorized trail, and it is very important to maintain the non-motorized integrity of this trail (single track hiking/biking trail, scenic vistas, lush forest setting, solitude, and quiet).

The proposed silvicultural treatment for Unit 21 is a light thinning. For Units 25 and 28, a dry-site regeneration treatment is planned, and within Unit 32 only hand treatment would be performed to clean up hazard trees and woody debris accumulations adjacent to the trail.

The immediate short-term impact of the project would be the appearance of a "logging operation" adjacent to the trail within unit 21, such as fresh cut stumps, limbs and tops, skidder or tractor tracks adjacent to or across the trail. Within units 25 and 32, fresh-cut stumps and some slash may also be visible from the trail system. Visitors may also be inconvenienced by the project if logging operations within units 21, 25, 28 and 32 are performed during the peak summer season, as that would result in the trail being closed for a short period of time. However, design features, which include restricting harvesting during the period from Fourth-of-July through Labor Day, would lessen impacts to trail users.

Long-term impacts would be reduced over time and the proposed action would have no significant visual impacts. After one to two seasons, raw stump surfaces would fade, ferns and other brush would grow up, and the harvest unit would have a more natural appearance. The project would also likely result in some benefits to trail users, including enhanced vistas (especially adjacent to Unit 25) and the lack of existing brush piles along the lower portion of the trail (within Unit 32.)

Dispersed Recreation

Dispersed recreational users of the existing open roads in the project area may be affected by this project, in the short-term. During active logging and hauling operations along the 2642 Road, increased traffic and short-term closures or restrictions (to ensure public safety) may inconvenience recreation users. However, such closures and restrictions will be minimized to avoid conflict.

Almost 2.2 miles of new roads would be constructed under the proposed action. Although these roads would be placed in storage following project implementation, these new roads would be available for dispersed, non-motorized recreation opportunities such as hunting, camping, hiking, gathering huckleberries and mountain bike riding. These roads would provide more non-motorized recreation opportunities and would potentially disperse visitors over a larger area, reducing impacts to other high-use areas.

The additional road maintenance proposed by the project (8.5 miles) would benefit dispersed, motorized recreational activities already using those open roads (the 2642 Road, 2642 C Road, etc.)

Compliance with the Forest Plan and Other Regulatory Direction

All alternatives comply with Forest Plan forest wide goals for recreation by providing use of both developed recreation areas and a variety of dispersed recreation opportunities. Each alternative also complies with specific MA goals because the ROS class would remain unchanged for each of the management areas.

Dispersed recreation opportunities would be provided for in MA-1 and the ROS class would remain roaded modified and roaded natural. In MA-4, opportunities for dispersed recreation would continue while meeting the needs for wildlife habitat. The ROS class would also remain roaded modified and roaded natural and motorized use would be restricted to designated routes. Within MA-9 areas, both alternatives would provide for "meeting visual quality objectives" (See Visual/Scenery Management Report). Furthermore, the ROS classes would remain roaded natural or semi-primitive to maintain existing improvements.