

# **Helena and Lewis & Clark National Forests**

## **Forest Plan Assessment**

Chapter 7, Recreation Settings, Opportunities, Access, and Scenic  
Character

2015



## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Planning Rule Guidance .....	1
Scale .....	1
Existing Information .....	1
Best Available Science.....	2
Public Comments .....	2
Existing Condition .....	2
Sustainable Recreation .....	2
Recreation Settings .....	4
Recreation Niches .....	9
Recreation Opportunities .....	10
Recreation Access .....	14
Recreation Special Uses .....	19
Fostering Greater Connections between People and Nature.....	26
Trends.....	27
Trends in Recreation Use, User Preference, and Satisfaction .....	27
Trends in Recreation Activities .....	29
Trends in Recreation Settings and Scenic Character .....	29
Trends in Infrastructure Condition.....	30
Recreation Opportunities and Trends in the Broader Landscape .....	30
Information Needs.....	33
References .....	33

## Tables

Table 7.1 Helena and Lewis & Clark recreation-related budget allocation, 2007–2014.....	4
Table 7.2 ROS classes and definitions .....	6
Table 7.3 ROS acres and percent of total plan area in summer.....	7
Table 7.4 Percent of ROS class by geographic area in summer.....	7
Table 7.5 ROS acres and percent of total plan area in winter.....	8
Table 7.6 Percent of ROS class by geographic area in winter .....	8

Table 7.7 Developed recreation sites by type and geographic area .....	11
Table 7.8 Travel plans completed by geographic area .....	15
Table 7.9 Miles of trail by geographic area and type of trail .....	15
Table 7.10 Trail maintenance accomplishments .....	16
Table 7.11 Annual trail budget for fiscal years 2010-2014.....	17
Table 7.12 Miles of road by geographic area and by type of road access .....	18
Table 7.13 Road maintenance accomplishments.....	19
Table 7.14 Summary of recreation special uses permits administered by the HLC by geographic area .....	20
Table 7.15 Recreation residences within the plan area .....	20
Table 7.16 Organizational camps within the plan area.....	22
Table 7.17 Commercial resorts within the plan area .....	22
Table 7.18 Commercial ski area within the plan area .....	23
Table 7.19 Outfitter and guide permits by geographic area .....	23
Table 7.20 Main recreation activities visitors participate in .....	28
Table 7.21 MTFWP Wildlife management areas adjacent to the planning area .....	31

## Figures

Figure 7.1 ROS classes and percent of total plan area - summer.....	7
Figure 7.2 ROS classes and percent of total plan area in winter.....	8
Figure 7.3 Miles of trail by geographic area and trail type .....	16
Figure 7.4 Miles of groomed trails by geographic area.....	17
Figure 7.5 Acres open to over-snow motorized use by geographic area.....	18

# Recreation Settings, Opportunities, Access and Scenic Character

## Introduction

### *Planning Rule Guidance*

This assessment provides information on many aspects of recreation and focuses on those specifically referenced in the 2012 Planning Rule:

Sustainable Recreation - The set of recreation settings and opportunities on National Forest System lands that is ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable for present and future generations.

Recreation Setting - The social, managerial, and physical attributes of a place that, when combined, provide a distinct set of recreation opportunities. The Forest Service uses the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) to define recreation settings and categorize them into classes.

- *Scenic Character* - The combination of the physical, biological, and cultural images that gives an area its scenic identity and contributes to its sense of place. Scenic character provides a frame of reference from which to determine scenic attractiveness and to measure scenic integrity.
- *Recreation Opportunity Spectrum* - A Forest Service process used to define recreation settings and categorize them into classes or subgroups.

Recreation Niches - Forestwide guidance for recreation settings and opportunities.

Recreation Opportunity - A specific recreation activity in a particular recreation setting pursued to enjoy the desired recreation experiences and other benefits that accrue. Recreation opportunities include nonmotorized, motorized, developed, and dispersed recreation on land, water, and in the air.

Recreation Access - The systems of roads and trails on which people travel to access certain recreation settings and opportunities.

Recreation Special Uses and Outfitter/Guides - Recreation opportunities that are provided via permit by private individuals and businesses.

### *Scale*

Recreation information is presented at two geographic scales: forestwide and by geographic area (GA). The forestwide scale provides information on relevant Forest Service process and policy and overall direction for recreation. Recreation information by geographic area is more detailed and allows a reader interested in a specific area to find more area-specific information.

## Existing Information

Much of recreation data used for this assessment comes from the Forest Service infrastructure database which is called INFRA. This database is a collection of web-based data entry forms, reporting tools, and mapping tools (geographic information system [GIS]) that enable forests to manage and report accurate information about their inventory of constructed features and land units. Use of GIS allows the Forest Service to visualize, analyze, interpret, and understand data to reveal relationships and patterns.

Visitor use and satisfaction data was assessed using information from the Forest Services' National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) project (USDA Forest Service 2007, USDA Forest Service 2008). This data was used to assess the current use as well as to explore future trends of recreation throughout the plan area.

### *Best Available Science*

The HLC NFs used the best available data and science relevant to the plan area and management to inform the evaluation of conditions, trends and risks to sustainability for recreation and trails where available. In particular, criteria applied to all data, studies, and reports supporting this assessment included: (1) quality data was used, and (2) the studies and reports used accepted and standardized scientific methodology and are replicable. In compiling this assessment of the conditions and trends of the HLC NF's resources, goods, and services provided to the public, many major sources of information were reviewed and information incorporated. References included in this assessment reflect the most relevant documents, given the scope and scale of the assessment and determined to be Best Available Scientific Information.

### *Public Comments*

A number of public comments were received during the initiation of the assessment and were gathered during open houses and through postal and email submittals during the summer of 2014. The majority of the comments received from the public focused on travel management concerns. Specifically, these comments focused on the amounts and locations of motorized and nonmotorized uses and the desire for more access (primarily motorized) to National Forest lands. The public also highlighted concerns about closures of roads and trails either as a result of travel management or as result of past fire management (i.e. backcountry and wilderness trails that are closed due to downed fire-killed trees). A few public comments described concern about the aging of forest visitors and accessibility (or inaccessibility) of the forest to those with limited capacity. Additionally, members of the public also expressed interest in maintaining, improving, and expanding airstrips for recreation aviation opportunities in locations across National Forest lands.

## Existing Condition

### *Sustainable Recreation*

Sustainable recreation is defined as the set of recreation settings and opportunities on the National Forest System that is ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable for present and future generations (36 CFR 219.19). To be sustainable means that the recreational settings and opportunities provided are compatible with other plan components that provide for ecological sustainability, foster healthy social relationships among recreationists and with the broader community, and are within the fiscal capability of the planning unit (Draft FSH 1909.12, chapter 20). Current conditions and trends will be discussed in each of the three spheres (ecological, social, and economic) of sustainable recreation.

### Ecological Considerations and Conditions

The health and resiliency of the Forest's natural resources are critical to the sustained delivery of their nature-based recreational settings and opportunities. From the majestic belt formations of the Rocky Mountain Range to the rolling pine forests of the Little Snowy Mountains, the landscapes of these forests are remote, rugged, and wild and many of them are viewed as "islands" of mountains within the surrounding prairie landscapes.

The plan area has been divided into ten geographic areas, each of which displays its own unique geology and vegetative cover types. Ecological diversity is essential to discussing the forests of these landscapes. Productive coniferous forests are broken by large open parks covered in grass and wildflowers. Populations of wildlife and fish species call this forest home; including thriving elk herds, big game animals such as deer, and moose; grizzly bears and wolverines, bald eagles and goshawks; and habitats for cutthroat and bull trout.

Without healthy resilient landscapes and habitats, many of the recreation opportunities that have historically been enjoyed would not be sustainable. The top ten reasons (USDA Forest Service 2007, USDA Forest Service 2008) people recreate within the plan area are hunting, viewing natural features, hiking/walking, nature center activities, visiting historic sites, motorized water activities, cross country skiing, downhill skiing, driving for pleasure, and snowmobiling. Obvious linkages exist between the types of activities being pursued and the presence and condition of the natural resources.

The history of exploration, settlement, and development of the area for mining, range allotments, and timber harvesting activities created a network of roads and trails which made recreational access to this remote and rugged country possible. This historic pattern of access has had a notable effect on when and how people use the Forest. Although areas of concentrated use are found along the main stream/river drainages and mountain ridge tops, much of the plan area's settings are relatively intact. Abundant and clean water, lush riparian areas, clean air, healthy forests, and diverse wildlife populations all contribute to sustaining the Forest's recreation settings and opportunities.

### Social Considerations and Conditions

The Helena and Lewis & Clark National Forests serves as a backdrop, workplace, and playground for the small rural communities of central Montana. Deeply rooted in the culture and traditions of both Native American and early Euro-Americans settlers, the Forest's recreation settings and opportunities are enhanced by the many visible and accessible remnants of the past. A network of historic trails and roads gives visitors a chance to follow in the footsteps of the Native Americans, the Lewis & Clark expedition, and miners in search of silver and gold. Historic cabins and lookouts continue to serve as overnight destinations for today's visitors.

This rich heritage, combined with the Forest's designated wilderness, wild rivers, incredible scenery, grizzly bear populations, and diverse game species, characterizes the area's sense of place and contributes to a way of life for inhabitants. Although national and international visitors do come to follow the National Historic Trails, visit the Interpretive Center, or hire outfitters to hunt in the wilderness, both the communities and the vast recreation settings of the Forest remain relatively undiscovered due to their rugged and remote nature. Most recreation opportunities continue to compliment and celebrate traditional western values of independence, exploration, and appreciation of the natural and cultural resources.

Forest visitation is primarily local and regional, with 60% coming from within 75 miles of the forest boundary. 81.3% of forest visitors are very satisfied with their recreation experience (USDA Forest Service 2007, USDA Forest Service 2008). Visitor safety, minimizing conflicts between uses, responding to the needs of existing and future visitors, creating connections between people and nature, promoting long-term physical and mental health, and instilling a culture of stewardship and appreciation are all important components of a satisfying recreation experience.

Two management tools, interpretation and education programs and law enforcement, are employed to protect the natural and cultural resources of the Forest. Although both management techniques influence visitor behavior, law enforcement is typically a reactive approach, while interpretation and education programs are designed to create an appreciation and understanding as a way to encourage voluntary compliance and deter behavior that would result in negative resource impacts. The Forest is making progress in reaching a broader audience and delivering information before, during, and after forest visitation through web site updates and linkages to state and other tourism sites.

### Economic Considerations and Conditions

Two aspects of economic sustainability are important. The first is how the Forest's recreation program contributes to local economies and the other is the fiscal sustainability of the Forest's recreation program. Although related and interdependent, the scales at which economic viability is assessed are different.

The Forests' recreation programs contribute to the economic sustainability of Central Montana's rural communities. Hunting is the primary reason visitors come to the Forest (USDA Forest Service 2007, USDA Forest Service 2008). Both jobs and revenue directly and indirectly result from visitors traveling to the Forest (see chapter 5, Social, Cultural, and Economic Conditions). The remoteness of the Forests' recreational settings encourages visitors to stop and buy groceries, gas, and other supplies to support their national forest visit and support their off-highway vehicle, stock, backpacking, boating, and biking experiences before entering the Forest. More direct jobs and revenue are associated with the Forests' outfitter- guide operations, downhill ski areas, and visitors to the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center (LCIC).

The fiscal sustainability of the HLC NFs recreation programs is partially dependent on congressionally appropriated budgets and regional allocations. Over the past decade, the Forests' budget to operate and manage recreation-related programs has declined. The three primary fund allocations associated with recreation include: CMFC (recreation facilities operations and maintenance, and construction/reconstruction of all facilities, including administrative buildings and the LCIC), CMTL (trails), and NFRW (all other recreation program management). During the past 8 years the combined plan area budget has ranged from a low of \$2,367,850 to a high of \$3,802,800 with an average of \$3,221,700 annually. Using the 8 year average the overall budget across both forests has gone down approximately 27%. The decline in the NFRW fund code across the planning zone has been 23%. Table 7.1 describes these changes.

**Table 7.1 Helena and Lewis & Clark recreation-related budget allocation, 2007–2014**

Forest	Fund Allocation	Fiscal Year 2007	Fiscal Year 2008	Fiscal Year 2009	Fiscal Year 2010	Fiscal Year 2011	Fiscal Year 2012	Fiscal Year 2013	Fiscal Year 2014
Helena	CMFC	\$294,476	\$801,021	\$314,200	\$193,500	\$347,052	\$94,000	\$76,800	\$70,000
	CMTL	350,800	384,936	485,600	357,100	387,131	335,700	346,800	284,156
	NFRW	395,500	433,800	550,800	521,600	496,161	381,614	344,100	317,997
Lewis and Clark	CMFC	485,772	299,831	173,200	598,000	514,241	180,400	168,000	125,000
	CMTL	564,766	572,219	867,750	834,700	782,799	686,432	526,900	684,045
	NFRW	1,096,200	1,262,711	1,419,768	1,297,900	1,194,540	1,029,330	957,600	886,652
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$3,187,514</b>	<b>\$3,754,518</b>	<b>\$3,811,318</b>	<b>\$3,802,800</b>	<b>\$3,721,924</b>	<b>\$2,707,476</b>	<b>\$2,420,200</b>	<b>\$2,367,850</b>

Declining budgets, combined with increasing costs, creates an unsustainable trajectory. To help bridge the gap between increasing costs and declining budgets, the forests have pursued two sets of strategies: one relating to decreasing costs and one to increasing revenue. Cost savings have been achieved through workforce adjustments (i.e., eliminated, combined, and/or zoned positions), reduced infrastructure (utilizing the Recreation Facilities Analysis and other planning and prioritization efforts), and an increased volunteer workforce. Increased revenue has been achieved through grants and partnerships with local communities and partner groups.

Increasingly it has become important for the forests to have a steady revenue stream through the collection of fees at developed sites such as campgrounds and cabin rentals. These fees are used locally to aid the Forest Service in site maintenance costs and to make improvements when necessary. The ability to raise revenue with facilities fees is limited by the implementation of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act, which has seen criticism by no-fee advocates.

## *Recreation Settings*

Recreation settings are the social, managerial, and physical attributes of a place that, when combined, provide a distinct set of recreation opportunities. The Forest Service uses several different means to describe recreation settings. Among the most important are the descriptions of Scenic Character and the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum process. Additionally, Forest Recreation Niches were identified through the Recreation Facilities



Analysis process. These niches convey the unique qualities of the forest's recreation settings and opportunities when viewed within the larger context.

## Scenic Character

Scenery is important to visitors overall experience when visiting the Forest. Research has shown (Ryan 2005) that people prefer natural settings when visiting public lands. Statistics from the National Visitor Use Monitoring project show that the second highest activity visitors participate in nationally is viewing scenery, with 25 percent of visitors participating in this activity. This high percentage emphasizes the importance of maintaining natural appearing landscapes so the expectations of these visitors can be met by the Forests.

Scenic character is defined as a combination of the physical, biological, and cultural images that give an area its scenic identity and contribute to its sense of place. It provides a frame of reference from which to determine the scenic attractiveness of a landscape and to measure changes to the scenic integrity of the scenery described. Scenic character for the plan area was assessed by individual geographic areas and includes the encompassing view sheds of both National Forest System and nonforest lands. Ecoregion descriptions describe the biophysical aspects of the scenic character of the Forest landscape (Refer to chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems for more information.). These ecoregion descriptions served as the frame of reference for assessing scenic character and the scenery attributes within these landscapes.

The scenery management system is a systematic approach to inventory, analyze, and monitor the scenic resources. This system recognizes natural disturbance processes such as fire, insects, and disease, to be part of the natural landscape that is dynamic and also important in maintaining healthy, sustainable, and scenic landscapes. The primary components of the scenery management system are: scenic character, scenic attractiveness, landscape visibility, existing scenic integrity, and scenic classes. This system for managing scenery is used in the context of ecosystem management to determine the relative value, stability, resiliency and importance of scenery; assist in establishing overall resource objectives, and ensure high-quality scenery for future generations.

Currently both the Helena and the Lewis and Clark Forest Plans use the visual management system (VMS) to describe and determine the effects of management practices to scenery. The visual management system is no longer considered to be best available scientific information as it does not consider natural disturbance regimes or valued cultural attributes of Forest Service landscapes. VMS was replaced by the scenery management system (SMS) and all future planning for the scenery resource should use this new system.

## Existing Scenic Integrity

Existing scenic integrity objects are developed in coordination with the recreational setting, management direction, and the scenic class that were developed from the scenic inventory. Scenic integrity is defined as "a measure of the degree to which a landscape is visually perceived to be complete, when compared to the landscape character described for that area". The highest scenic integrity ratings are given to those landscapes which have little or no deviation from the character valued by constituents for its aesthetic appeal.

Landscape-level drivers that affect scenic integrity include human-caused visual disturbances such as timber harvesting, road construction, mining, utility corridors, recreation facilities, ski areas, and other special uses. Naturally-caused visual disturbances include wildfires, insect and disease outbreaks, and wind and ice storms. Population is expected to increase demand for energy and communication infrastructure, which could result in a loss of scenery on HLC NFs lands, impacting recreation experiences and sense of place.

There are areas across the forests that have low to moderate existing scenic integrity. Some of these lands include areas that show contrast in shape, form and texture with the surrounding natural appearing environment. These include past vegetation treatments, ski corridors, built utility corridors, and road corridors. Identification of these

areas with low scenic integrity should be analyzed for potential improvement, particularly in areas that have growth in population and in recreation use. Please see map 25 in appendix A, Existing Scenic Integrity.

Scenic character and existing scenic integrity were studied for each of the individual geographic areas within the plan area as a part of this assessment. Full landscape character descriptions and existing scenic integrity is described in appendix C.

### Recreation Opportunity Spectrum

The Forest Service uses the recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS) process to define recreation settings and categorize them into six distinct classes: primitive, semi-primitive nonmotorized, semi-primitive motorized, roaded natural, rural, and urban (36 CFR 219.19). Similar to land use classifications (e.g., residential, industrial, rural) used in city or county planning efforts, ROS classes serve as a zoning framework for planning and managing recreation settings and opportunities, both existing and desired, across National Forest System lands. Specific ROS classes convey: the physical setting, mode(s) of transportation, anticipated concentration of people, and levels of management and infrastructure. By identifying recreation settings, the Forests can ensure a sustainable set of recreation opportunities for future generations and visitors can select where they recreate based on what they want to do, what equipment they want to bring, and the type of experience they want. Please see maps 26 and 27 in appendix A for ROS maps.

All six of the ROS classes are found within the HLC NFs plan area. Table 7.2 defines these classes:

**Table 7.2 ROS classes and definitions**

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Class	Definition
<b>Primitive</b>	Describes large, remote, wild, and predominately unmodified landscapes. Areas with no motorized activity and little probability of seeing other people. Includes most wilderness areas.
<b>Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized</b>	Areas of the Forests managed for nonmotorized use. Uses include hiking and equestrian trails, mountain bikes and other non-motor mechanized equipment. Rustic facilities and opportunity for exploration, challenge, and self-reliance.
<b>Semi-Primitive Motorized</b>	Backcountry areas used primarily by motorized users on designated routes. Roads and trails designed for OHV's and high-clearance vehicles. Offers motorized opportunities for exploration, challenge, and self-reliance. Rustic facilities. Often provide portals into adjacent Primitive or Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized areas.
<b>Roaded Natural</b>	Often referred to as front country recreation areas. Accessed by open system roads that can accommodate sedan travel. Facilities are less rustic and more developed (campgrounds, trailheads, etc.). Often provide access points for adjacent Semi-Primitive Motorized, Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized, and Primitive settings.
<b>Rural</b>	Highly developed recreation sites and modified natural settings. Easily accessed by major highway. Located within populated areas where private land and other land holdings are nearby and obvious. Facilities are designed for user comfort and convenience.
<b>Urban</b>	Areas with highly developed recreation sites and extensively modified natural settings. Often located adjacent to or within cities or high population areas. Opportunities for solitude or silence are few.

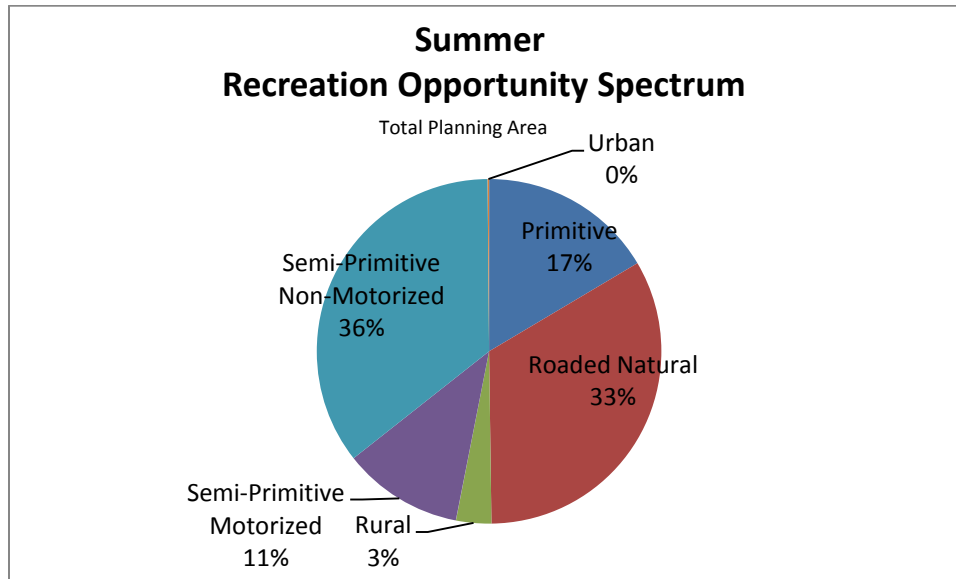
### Summer Recreation Opportunity Spectrum

The majority of the plan area lays within the semi-primitive nonmotorized ROS class (36%) with roaded natural a close second at 33%. Table 7.3 and Figure 7.1 show the acres and overall percentages. Additionally, Table 7.4 shows the percent of acres that fall within each ROS class within each geographic area.

**Table 7.3 ROS acres and percent of total plan area in summer**

ROS Class	Acres	Percent of Total Plan Area
Primitive	528,266	16%
Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized	1,139,473	36%
Semi-Primitive Motorized	361,540	11%
Roaded Natural	1,069,266	33%
Rural	106,078	3%
Urban	4,253	1%

**Figure 7.1 ROS classes and percent of total plan area - summer**



**Table 7.4 Percent of ROS class by geographic area in summer**

Geographic Area	Primitive	Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized	Semi-Primitive Motorized	Roaded Natural	Rural	Urban
Big Belts	7%	32%	10%	45%	6%	<1%
Castles	-	8%	26%	60%	6%	-
Crazies	-	47%	21%	28%	4%	-
Divide	-	26%	4%	64%	6%	<1%
Elkhorns	-	43%	13%	43%	1%	-
Highwoods	-	65%	18%	16%	1%	-
Little Belts	-	33%	20%	43%	4%	<1%
Rocky Mountain Range	53%	37%	3%	7%	<1%	-
Snowies	-	67%	3%	30%	-	-
Upper Blackfoot	24%	36%	9%	25%	6%	<1%

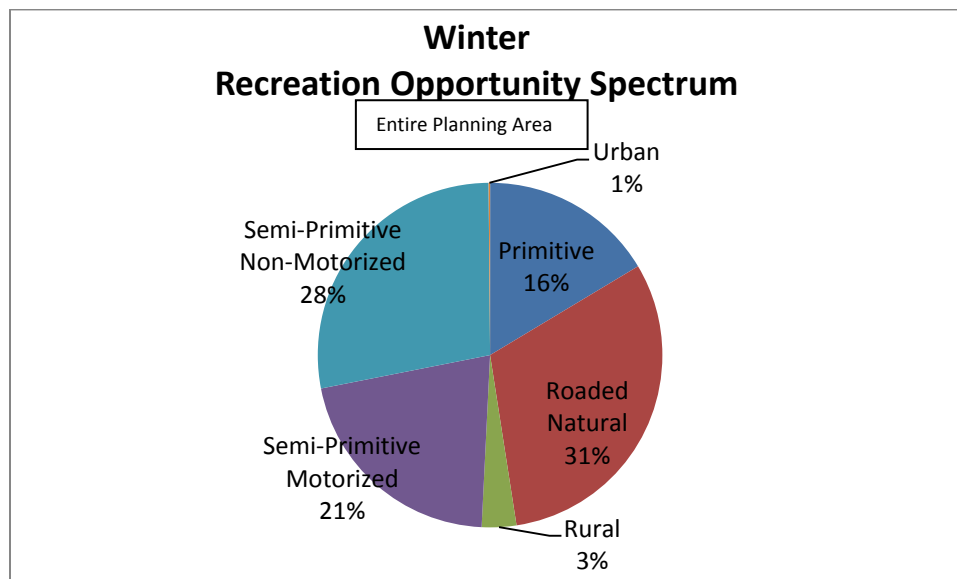
### Winter Recreation Opportunity Spectrum

The mix and distribution of the Forests' ROS settings and classes primarily change in three ROS categories when snow covers the landscape. While primitive, rural, and urban remain static, semi-primitive nonmotorized, semi-primitive motorized, and roaded natural settings shift. Semi-primitive nonmotorized ROS settings decrease by 8%, roaded natural ROS settings decrease by 2%, and semi-primitive motorized ROS settings increase by 10%. This accounts for the shift of primarily semi-primitive motorized settings to motorized settings in the winter. Several roads that are open in the spring/summer/fall are not maintained when snow covers the ground in the winter. There are other areas where snow enables snowmobiles to access lands that are completely inaccessible during other times of the year.

**Table 7.5 ROS acres and percent of total plan area in winter**

ROS Class	Acres	Percent of Total Plan Area
Primitive	526,396	16%
Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized	897,427	28%
Semi-Primitive Motorized	677,663	21%
Roaded Natural	999,329	31%
Rural	103,787	3%
Urban	4,252	<1%

**Figure 7.2 ROS classes and percent of total plan area in winter**



**Table 7.6 Percent of ROS class by geographic area in winter**

Geographic Area	Primitive	Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized	Semi-Primitive Motorized	Roaded Natural	Rural	Urban
Big Belts	6%	22%	25%	41%	6%	<1%
Castles	-	<1%	39%	55%	6%	-
Crazies	-	25%	48%	23%	4%	-
Divide	-	12%	23%	59%	6%	<1%
Elkhorns	-	37%	26%	36%	1%	-
Highwoods	-	64%	21%	14%	1%	-

Geographic Area	Primitive	Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized	Semi-Primitive Motorized	Roaded Natural	Rural	Urban
Little Belts	-	26%	27%	43%	4%	<1%
Rocky Mountain Range	53%	36%	6%	5%	<1%	-
Snowies	-	59%	13%	28%	-	-
Upper Blackfoot	24%	22%	23%	25%	6%	<1%

Existing ROS classes/settings for both summer and winter have been mapped for the Forests and are displayed in appendix A. ROS classes were mapped using the 2007 national protocols which utilized terrain buffering. This model used travel plan information for the Forests, including travel area restrictions on those areas that are not completely covered by a travel plan.

### Recreation Niches

Recreation niches are useful in conveying how the Forests fit into the larger context and for determining unique recreation opportunities across a landscape. In 2010, the Helena and Lewis and Clark National Forests combined their recreation, wilderness, and trails program management. Since the Helena and Lewis and Clark Forest have a combined recreation program it is advisable to develop a combined niche for to determine a combined unique program and for the initiation and implementation of the revised forest plan.

Prior to 2010, the Forests’ settings, special places, and recreation opportunities were described in niche statements developed through the Forest Service recreation facilities analysis (RFA) process. The niche product is useful in conveying how the Forests fit into the bigger context, in this case, the state of Montana. Although not all of the recreation opportunities and settings are described, those that give the unit its identity, value, and uniqueness are captured. These niches begin to describe some of the distinctive roles and contributions the Forests have when viewed within a larger context.

#### Helena National Forest Niche

The Helena National Forest has four niche settings, which represent broad geographic areas that provide a contiguous backdrop for particular opportunities and activities. These include: reachable and remote, connections, wild, and passages.

*The accessible landscape of the Helena National Forest enriches the lifestyles of local residents with abundant wildlife, history, scenery and trails in a million acre “backyard” surrounding Montana’s capital city. Just as Meriwether Lewis, while traveling along the Missouri River first saw the “gates of the [Rocky] Mountains,” adventurers of all ages can still experience the forest’s western landscapes. The Scapegoat/Bob Marshall Wilderness, Gates of the Mountains river corridor and Mann Gulch fire area attract national visitors. Historic ruins and diverse ecosystems provide opportunities for cultural and natural history interpretation and outdoor education. A well-defined transportation system supports a balance of motorized and non-motorized recreation including: hiking, biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, OHV-riding and snowmobiling. (USDA Forest Service 2006a)*

#### Lewis & Clark National Forest Niche

The Lewis and Clark National Forest has three niche settings, which represent broad geographic areas and diversity of ecosystems that provide the settings for recreation opportunities on the Forest. These include: portals, the front, and island ranges.

*The Lewis and Clark National Forest offers a wide diversity of settings, from the rugged Rocky Mountain Front to the rolling open island mountain ranges and the prairies of its eastern edge.*

*Prehistoric, historic and cultural resources are valuable treasures and reminders of the past that are still accessible and honored through multiple partnerships. Outstanding scenery, abundant wildlife, and opportunities for solitude allow visitors to “get away from it all”. Forest Service history is proudly retained, through restoration of selected historic facilities and continued use and expertise with traditional tools and pack stock. (USDA Forest Service 2006b)*

## **Recreation Opportunities**

A recreation opportunity is an opportunity to participate in a specific recreation activity in a particular recreation setting to enjoy desired recreation experiences and other benefits that accrue. Recreation opportunities include nonmotorized, motorized, developed, and dispersed recreation on land, water, and in the air (36 CFR 219.19). The HLC NFs manage for a set of outdoor recreation opportunities that are consistent with the Forests’ recreation niches (identified above) and ROS classifications. These opportunities may be provided by the Forest Service directly, or under a special use permit. See map 28 in appendix A, Recreation Sites.

### **Developed Recreation Opportunities**

Developed recreation opportunities are located throughout the plan area but are primarily concentrated in the roaded natural and rural ROS settings. Developed recreation opportunities are located at specific locations or “sites” and have infrastructure or features that have been designed for health and safety and to facilitate visitor comfort. The types of features and infrastructure often offered at developed sites are developed roads and parking areas, toilets, tables, fire rings, water systems, interpretive signs, fee stations, etc. Depending upon the location and the type of opportunity offered, these developed sites may or may not have fees associated with them. See map 28 in appendix A, Recreation Sites.

The most common developed site types within the plan area are campgrounds, picnic areas, trailheads, cabin and lookout rentals, ski areas (both Nordic and alpine), interpretation sites, fishing sites, and boating sites. Most of the developed recreation sites are located along main roads and travel ways. Water based recreation sites are located adjacent to the lakes or rivers on which the activities take place.

The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center is also considered a developed recreation opportunity within the plan area and is located outside of the National Forest boundary in the community of Great Falls, Montana. All of these developed sites are Forest Service operated and maintained. There are no facilities operated by concessionaire within the plan area.

One of the most unique developed recreation opportunities offered within the plan area is the rental of a cabin or lookout. Currently, there are 17 cabins/lookouts available to rent within the plan area. These cabins range from being more rustic to those that have more modern conveniences. A number of these properties are also listed on the National Register for Historic Places.

While there is a wide variety of developed recreation opportunities offered across the plan area, aging of these sites is the most pressing concern. This issue is influenced by the decline in appropriated dollars and the ability of collected fees to take care of annual and deferred maintenance needs. Tools such as the recreation facilities analysis have helped with the prioritization of sites and maintenance needs; however, depreciation of sites often exceeds the ability to take care of needs. Even so, visitor satisfaction rates within the plan area remain relatively high. (USDA Forest Service 2007, USDA Forest Service 2008)

An additional concern is the need for facilities that are designed and maintained to be fully accessible. As the population ages, there continues to be a need to design facilities that accommodate wheelchairs, walkers, and help those with site and hearing impairments. Typically though, sites that are designed to be fully accessible help everyone by accommodating a wide variety of abilities. Facilities within the plan area are in marginal compliance with accessibility standards.

Table 7.7 displays the existing developed recreation site types currently managed by the Helena and Lewis & Clark National Forests. These recreation opportunities are arranged by geographic area to show their distribution and location within the plan area.

**Table 7.7 Developed recreation sites by type and geographic area**

Site Type	Big Belts	Castles	Crazies	Divide	Elkhorns	Highwoods	Little Belts	Rocky Mountain Range	Snowies	Upper Blackfoot	Outside of GA	TOTAL
Boating Site	3	-	-		-	-	-	2	1	-	-	6
Campground	4	2	1	4	-	1	18	12	1	2	-	45
Group Campground	1	-	-	2	-	-	1	-	1	1	-	6
Horse Campground	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4	-	1	-	6
Picnic Site	3	-	-	2	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	8
Group Picnic Site	2	-	-	2	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	6
Fishing Site	1	-	-		-	-	1	-	-	-	-	2
Interpretive Center	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Interpretive Site	5	-	-	3	-	-	4	-	-	1	2	15
Observation Site	1	-	-	1	-	-		1	-	-	-	3
Cabin/Lookout	4	-	-	2	2	-	6	2	1	1	-	18
Ski Area Alpine	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	2
Ski Area Nordic	1	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	3
Snow Park (snowmobile)	1	-	-	3	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	7
Trailhead	22	-	-	8	12	1	9	13	2	17	-	84
Scenic Byway Interpretation	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>215</b>

## Dispersed Recreation Opportunities

Dispersed recreation includes the full suite of recreation opportunities that take place *outside* of developed recreation sites. Dispersed recreation activities generally do not have fees associated with them and little or no facilities such as toilets, tables, or garbage collection are associated with dispersed recreation sites. Common dispersed recreation activities within the plan area include, but are not limited to, camping, hunting, fishing, hiking, off highway vehicle use, rock climbing, mountain biking, wildlife viewing, photography, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, dog sledding, visiting historic sites, viewing scenery, driving for pleasure, and exploring the Forest. The majority of forest visitors come to the plan area to engage in dispersed recreation activities. Once on the Forest, over 57 percent of visitors participate in some type of dispersed recreation (USDA Forest Service 2007, USDA Forest Service 2008). The majority of these dispersed recreation use occurs in dispersed camping sites, rather than in developed facilities.

Even though dispersed recreation activities happen across all ROS classes, most of the specific dispersed recreation sites (such as campsites) are typically concentrated in the Forests' roaded natural and semi-primitive ROS settings. Most of these dispersed sites have been established over time by reoccurring recreational use and tend to be located in areas with desirable characteristics, particularly those with easy access from forest system roads, relatively flat topography, and close proximity to water. District personnel have observed that the general dispersed campers are often seeking a more secluded camping experience without the fees, rules, and regulations typically associated with developed sites, and many of these dispersed sites hold an important value for families and friends that traditionally return year after year for activities such as hunting, camping, hiking and OHV riding.

### *Dispersed Camping*

Dispersed camping is heaviest during the summer holidays (Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and Labor Day weekends) and during bow and general rifle hunting seasons. During these busy times, seclusion is *not* the objective of the users and the dispersed campers often set up camps very close together. Health, safety, sanitation and crowding issues are much more prevalent during these time periods. This more intense dispersed camping has resulted in large site footprints and impacts to the natural resources. For both types of dispersed camping users (general and intense) there are places within the plan area where minor site improvements have been made to protect the riparian areas and to reduce the useable area within dispersed sites – such as hardening sites with gravel to clearly identify parking locations for vehicles and installing fencing. Some of the most heavily-used dispersed camping areas have also installed toilets, tables, and fire rings to protect the natural resources of the area.

Hunter camps are linked very closely to the hunting regulations posted by Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. Areas with special tags receive far fewer hunter camps than those areas that have open seasons. Therefore, geographic areas such as the Little Belts and the Big Belts have a higher percentage and density of dispersed hunter camps than geographic areas such as the Elkhorns and the Highwoods that have special tag drawings and receive fewer hunters by comparison.

Another issue associated with dispersed recreation, is the unauthorized creation by the public of new campsites, trails, and/or facilities within the general forest area. This has become especially prevalent in those geographic areas such as the Divide and Little Belt Mountains where private land subdivisions and home sites are situated adjacent to the Forest Service boundaries. In these areas, people tend to create their own private system of trails and structures which take off from or can be easily accessed from their property.

In 2009, USFS Region 1 began developing a standardized protocol for inventorying and monitoring resource conditions of dispersed recreation, especially concentration on dispersed camping sites. Since 2010, a majority of the dispersed recreation sites across the plan area have been inventoried and entered in to the INFRA database. Inventorying these sites is the first step toward identifying resource concerns and prioritizing management actions to ensure sustainable opportunities.



### *Dispersed Day Use Activities*

Common dispersed day use recreation throughout the plan area includes hunting, driving for pleasure, viewing natural features, photography, bird watching, target shooting, fishing, cross-country skiing, dog sledding, and snowshoeing. These activities can happen with individual visitors or with groups of people and tend to occur primarily on the weekends over the course of the year.

In general, it can be said that these dispersed activities have remained fairly consistent in the past 10 years with a couple of exceptions. Snow shoeing has seen a slight increase with more users noticed on weekends during the snow covered months. Recently, snow shoe trails were added to the Silvercrest Cross Country Ski area within the Little Belts Geographic Area to address this increased use. District personnel have also noted a slight increase in dog sledding activities. Additionally, there has been an increase in the number of hunters during archery season which has created a longer period of use at dispersed hunter camps but has also increased the amount of day use that is taking place across the plan area.

Areas of concentrated dispersed use have seen an increase in the amount and distribution of trash and resource damage to natural resources. Field personnel report that some of these negative effects appear to be increasing and should be addressed in future management direction.

### *Motorized and Nonmotorized Recreation*

Nonmotorized activities such as hiking/walking are popular on the Forest and have maintained some of the highest participation rates according to National Visitor Use Monitoring (USDA Forest Service 2007, USDA Forest Service 2008) data. The majority of acreage in the plan area (53%) provides for nonmotorized activities. Approximately 17% of the plan area is classified as primitive ROS and 36% is categorized in the semiprimitive nonmotorized ROS class. Nonmotorized recreation opportunities exist within all of the ROS settings and throughout the plan area.

Much of the remaining 47% of the planning is available for motorized recreation. These activities are generally associated with use or riding of a motorized vehicle such as a motorcycle, OHV, snowmobile or automobile. Motorized recreation opportunities are most available in the semiprimitive motorized ROS which accounts for approximately 11% of the plan area, roaded natural ROS at 33%, and rural ROS at 3%.

Travel Plans provide the guidance within the plan area for where motorized and nonmotorized recreation activities are allowed to take place. The Travel Plans that affect the plan area are described in more detail in the Recreation Access section below.

### **Aviation Recreation Opportunities**

Another recreation activity that receives considerable attention within the HLC NFs plan area and is growing in popularity is aviation recreation. Owners of small aircraft use backcountry air strips to access dispersed campgrounds or dispersed recreation areas for hunting, camping and other recreational purposes. Additionally, recreational use of remotely controlled aerial vehicles, such as drones, is becoming a growing recreation activity. Use of drone technologies brings with it new opportunities as well as new concerns that will need to be addressed in future recreation and land management.

The plan area currently has three air strips: one within the Little Belts Geographic Area at Russian Flats in the South Fork of Judith River, one in the Rocky Mountain Range Geographic Area in the Benchmark drainage, and one under special use permit in the Upper Blackfoot Geographic Area. The 2013 inspection conducted by the Forest Service at Russian Flats airstrip describes the facility as “in very good condition”. According to an inspection conducted by the Montana Department of Transportation, Aeronautics Division in 2014, the Benchmark airstrip is “in poor condition”. This is primarily due to the failing of the asphalt surfacing, which has a number of large cracks that allow weeds and debris to collect on the surface of the airfield.

Aviation partner groups are interested in working with the Forest Service to promote, maintain, and expand the recreation aviation opportunities within the plan area.

### **Compatibility Issues and User Conflict**

Increasing population growth and demand for recreation opportunities may lead to more crowding and conflict among forest users. Despite the many options currently available for recreation access on the Forest, there is a desire for more. Local groups have expressed interest in expanding nonmotorized recreation opportunities. At the same time there is an equal interest in providing additional opportunities for motorized access to the Forest. These competing interests can create conflict in resource planning and during the busier seasons such as summer and main rifle season for big game hunters.

Management of areas with concentrated dispersed recreation, such as Dry Fork Belt Creek and North Fork Elkhorns, has proven to be challenging. Human waste management, target shooting, OHVs riding off trails, and excessive soil and resource damage have created user and management conflicts, some of which are a growing concern at concentrated sites. The Forests will need to consider strategies that effectively minimize crowding or conflicts between competing uses while still preserving visitor experiences.

### ***Recreation Access***

Access to and through the Forests is facilitated year round, and in a number of ways. Visitors select their access based on their preferred setting, experience, and mode of transportation. Roads, motorized trails, nonmotorized trails, rivers, and airstrips penetrate the Forest for visitors to walk, bike, boat, ride, drive, or fly to their destination.

In many cases, the travel routes themselves are the destination and these are often recognized by unique designations, such as the Kings Hill Scenic Byway. This unique route located along Montana State Highway 89, enables visitors to experience the cultural and scenic settings of Belt Creek and the Little Belt Mountains. Special designations for travel corridors also includes National Historic trails such as the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, National Recreation trails, National Scenic Trails such as the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, and Wild and Scenic Rivers. The historic routes allow visitors the opportunity to trace the footsteps and voyages of past cultures, inhabitants, and explorers. Regardless of special designation, the majority of the transportation network affords visitors the opportunity to view diverse wildlife and spectacular scenery.

Forest access, through roads and trails, links local communities with forest settings and facilitates backyard recreation opportunities for residents. Some of this access within the plan area is provided by local public transportation as in the case of the trails on Mount Helena which is located as a bus stop location for the city bus. Additionally, adjacent forests provide road and trailhead access to the plan area. For example, the Lolo National Forest to the northwest and the Flathead National Forest on the north provide opportunities to access the Scapegoat and Bob Marshall Wilderness Areas. The Beaverhead Deerlodge National Forest to the southwest provides access to the Elkhorn and the Divide Geographic Areas and access to the Crazy Mountains Geographic Area is also provided by the Gallatin National Forest to the south.

### **Travel Plan Direction**

Travel plan direction is finalized and provided for on approximately 85% of the plan area. These plans provide direction to users as to which parts of the national forest can be accessed for motorized and nonmotorized recreation activities. The plans are site-specific and have undergone considerable public involvement and litigation. Travel plans have not been completed for areas within the Divide and the Upper Blackfoot Geographic Areas. These areas are currently undergoing study and it is anticipated that they will be complete by the time the forest plan revision is finalized.

Travel planning is considered to be a site specific analysis and will be conducted outside of the forest plan revision process. However, travel plans that are complete and in place do inform recreation access across the landscape. Table 7.8 summarizes the travel plans that have been completed (finalized and through litigation to date) and those that are still being analyzed.

**Table 7.8 Travel plans completed by geographic area**

Geographic Area	Name of Travel Plan	Decision Signed (ROD or DN)
Big Belts	North Belts	2005
	South Belts	2007
	Winter South Belts	1999
Castles	Little Belts, Castles, and Crazyies	2007
Crazyies	Little Belts, Castles, and Crazyies	2007
Divide	Divide Travel Plan	Analysis ongoing
	Soundwood	1998
	Clancy Unionville	2003
Elkhorns	Elkhorns Travel Plan	1995
Highwoods	Highwoods Access	1993
Little Belts	Little Belts, Castles, and Crazyies	2007
Rocky Mountain Range	Badger Two Medicine	2009
	Birch Creek South <sup>1</sup>	2007
Snowies	Big Snowies Access and Travel Management	2002
	Little Snowies Vegetative Management and Public Access	1993
Upper Blackfoot	Blackfoot Winter Travel Plan	2013
	Blackfoot Non-Winter Travel Plan	Analysis ongoing

<sup>1</sup> Birch Creek South Travel Plan codified by the National Defense Authorization Act of 2015 with the creation of the Conservation Management Unit.

## Trails

### *Motorized, Non-Motorized, and Wilderness Trails*

There are approximate 2,630 total miles of existing National Forest System trails within the plan area. Roughly 812 miles of this total allow motorized use. The largest percentage of the trail system within the plan area is nonmotorized trails outside of wilderness, with approximately 1,224 miles. Additionally, there are 594 miles of trail located within designated wilderness.

Table 7.9 and Figure 7.3 show the miles of trails broken out by geographic area within the plan area. Trails are further identified by motorized, nonmotorized/non-wilderness and wilderness trails.

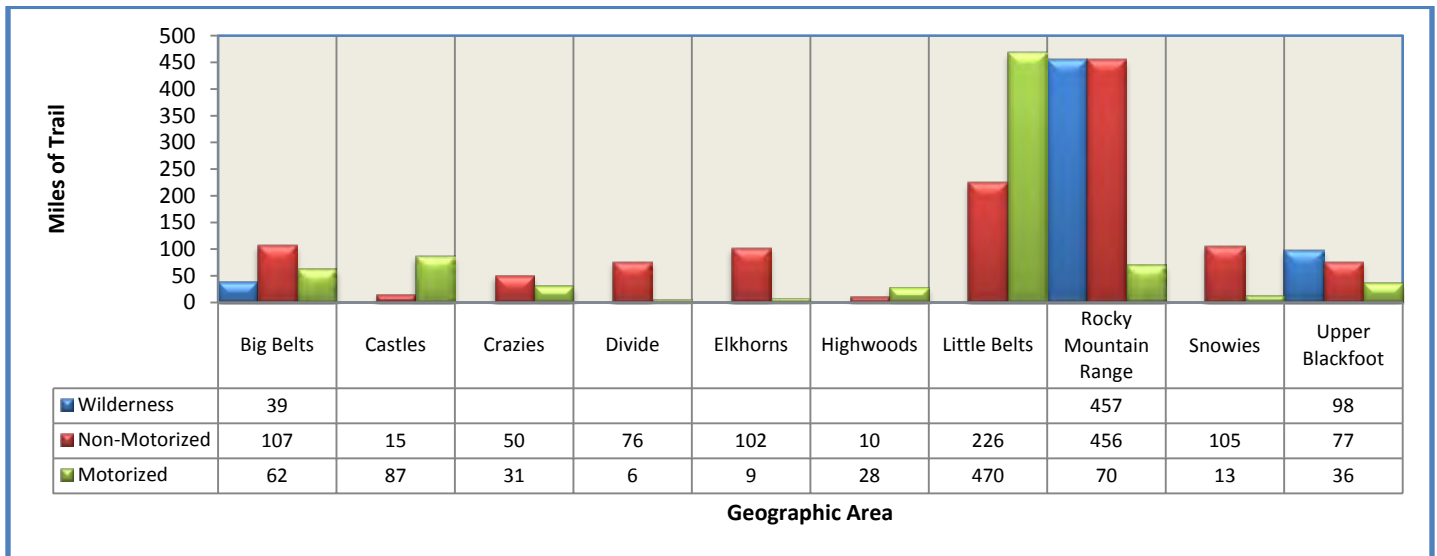
**Table 7.9 Miles of trail by geographic area and type of trail**

Geographic Area	Miles of Motorized Trail	Miles of Non-Motorized Non-Wilderness Trail	Miles of Wilderness Trail	Total Miles Trail <sup>1</sup>
Big Belts	62	107	39	208
Castles	87	15	0	102

Geographic Area	Miles of Motorized Trail	Miles of Non-Motorized Non-Wilderness Trail	Miles of Wilderness Trail	Total Miles Trail <sup>1</sup>
Crazies	31	50	0	81
Divide	6	76	0	82
Elkhorns	9	102	0	111
Highwoods	28	10	0	38
Little Belts	470	226	0	696
Rocky Mountain Range	70	456	457	983
Snowies	13	105	0	118
Upper Blackfoot	36	77	98	211
<b>Totals</b>	<b>812</b>	<b>1224</b>	<b>594</b>	<b>2,630</b>

<sup>1</sup> Miles are derived from INFRA and are approximate.

**Figure 7.3 Miles of trail by geographic area and trail type**



### Trail Maintenance and Budget

Over the past 5 years, the Helena and Lewis and Clark National Forests maintained an average of 844 miles of trails per year, and improved/reconstructed an average of 18 miles of trails per year. Trail maintenance and reconstruction are highly dependent on budgets and partnerships with outside groups. Table 7.10 shows trail maintenance accomplishments within the plan area in the past five years.

**Table 7.10 Trail maintenance accomplishments**

Year	Miles of Trail Maintained	Miles of Trail Improved	Total Miles Maintained or Improved <sup>1</sup>
2009	850	23	873
2010	850	23	873
2011	969	18	987
2012	925	17	942
2013	626	11	637

<sup>1</sup> Miles are derived from INFRA and are approximate.

Trail maintenance and improvement is directly tied to budget. When the trail maintenance budget declines there is a greater emphasis to rely on partner groups to help maintain the trail system. On average, the plan area received \$1.177 million dollars per year to maintain the trails across the Helena and Lewis & Clark National Forests. Table 7.11 shows the actual budget received to manage trails within the plan area for the past 5 years.

**Table 7.11 Annual trail budget for fiscal years 2010-2014**

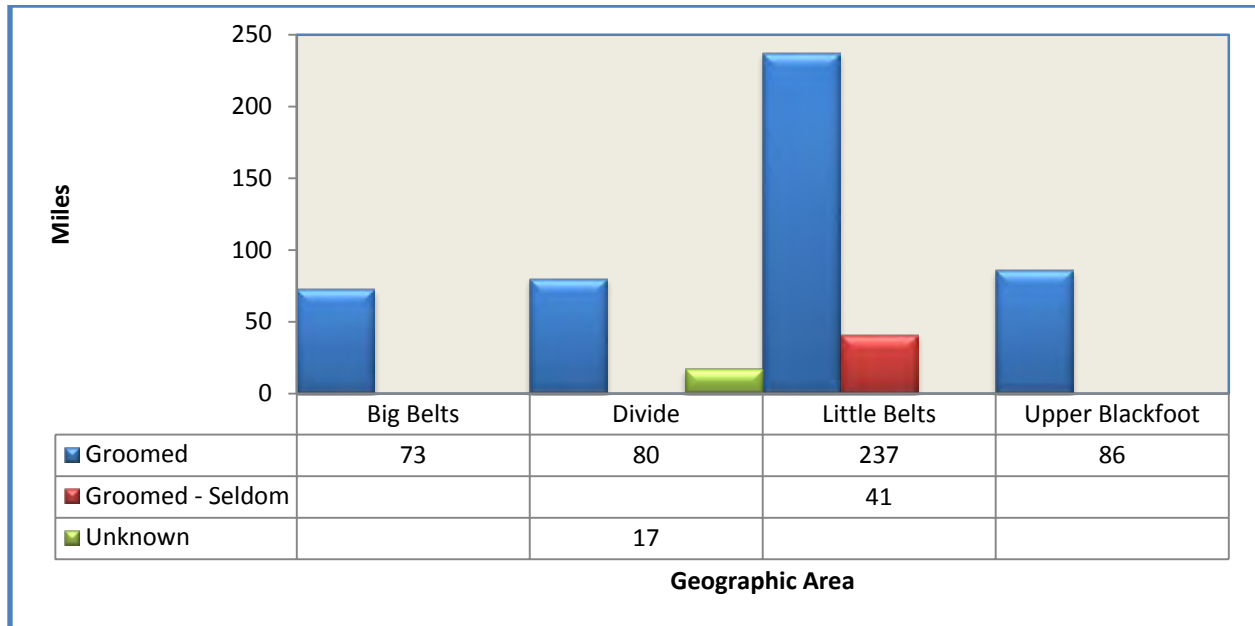
Type of Funding	Fiscal Year 2010	Fiscal Year 2011	Fiscal Year 2012	Fiscal Year 2013	Fiscal Year 2014
Operations and Maintenance	\$650	\$736	\$612	\$464	\$974
Capital Improvement	\$553	\$350	\$321	\$279	\$503
Continental Divide National Scenic Trail	\$0	\$123	\$61	\$124	\$41
Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail	\$20	\$20	\$20	\$17	\$17
Total	\$1,223	\$1,229	\$1,014	\$884	\$1,535

<sup>1</sup> Budget numbers presented in Thousands of Dollars.

### Groomed Trails and Over-Snow Motorized Areas

The plan area hosts approximately 534 miles of groomed snowmobile trails. These groomed trails on National Forest System lands are often only a small portion of a larger network of groomed trails that extend off of National Forest System lands onto state, county and private roads, and lands. These trails are often groomed by local snowmobile clubs through grants received from the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. Groomed trails are only found within the Big Belt, Divide, Little Belt, and Upper Blackfoot Geographic Areas. Figure 7.4 shows the number of miles of groomed trails and where they are located within the plan area.

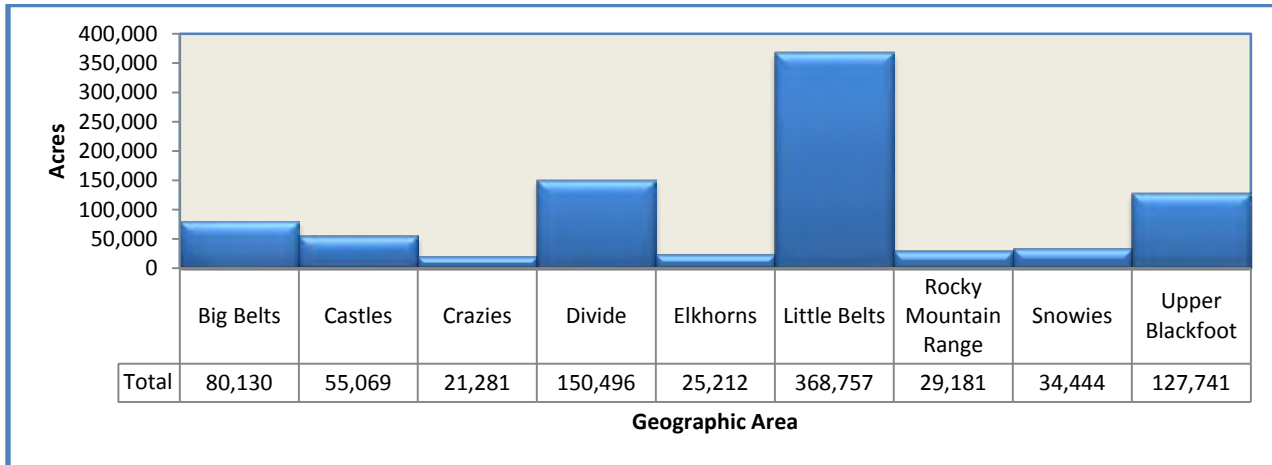
**Figure 7.4 Miles of groomed trails by geographic area**



Over-snow motorized use is very popular within the plan area. Once the ground is covered, groomed snowmobile trails take motorized users through the plan area and into areas where over-snow use is permitted. Due to resource

concerns, these over-snow areas are generally limited to specific areas within the geographic areas. Most of these are clearly shown on winter motor vehicle use maps. The plan area has approximately 892,310 acres open for over-snow motorized use during the winter season. Figure 7.5 shows the approximate acreages that are open for over-snow motorized uses within the plan area.

**Figure 7.5 Acres open to over-snow motorized use by geographic area**



### Road Access

Roads are the primary conduits that recreationists use to access the National Forest. Roads often provide direct access to recreational facilities, such as campground, trailheads, picnic areas, and interpretive sites. Sometimes the road itself becomes the recreational experience, such as when people drive roads simply for pleasure and/or for viewing scenery. As mentioned above, forest travel plans dictate which roads are open and for how long.

#### *Open Year Round, Open Seasonally, Closed Year Round*

There are approximately 3,650 miles of Forest Service system roads within the plan area. Approximately, 1,690 miles of these roads are kept open year round to provide access to the National Forest within the plan area. Additionally, roughly 855 miles of road are open seasonally to recreation users. Some roads are kept as Forest Service system roads for the purpose of future resource management but remain closed until some future date. There are approximately 1,105 miles of road that fit this category and are closed to recreation access year round.

Table 7.12 shows the number of miles of roads within the plan area. These roads are displayed by geographic area and by whether a road is open year round, open seasonally, or closed year round.

**Table 7.12 Miles of road by geographic area and by type of road access**

Geographic Area	Miles of Road Open Year Round	Miles of Road Open Seasonally	Miles of Road Closed Year Round	Total Miles of Road <sup>1</sup>
Big Belts	172	201	333	705
Castles	64	9	3	76
Crazyes	36	2	7	45
Divide	309	29	216	554
Elkhorns	75	96	116	286
Highwoods	11	0	1	12
Little Belts	504	351	166	1,020
Rocky Mountain Range	101	18	15	134
Snowies	44	7	34	85

Geographic Area	Miles of Road Open Year Round	Miles of Road Open Seasonally	Miles of Road Closed Year Round	Total Miles of Road <sup>1</sup>
Upper Blackfoot	244	135	193	571
Outside GA <sup>2</sup>	132	9	21	162
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,690</b>	<b>855</b>	<b>1,105</b>	<b>3,650</b>

<sup>1</sup> Miles of road are derived from INFRA and are approximate.

<sup>2</sup> Miles of road outside of GA boundaries that the Forest Service manages on private or other public lands.

### *Road Maintenance and Budget*

Maintenance on roads is conducted as necessary and as budgets allow. Road maintenance work often includes items such as blading the road surface, brushing the edges, and maintaining drainage structures. Guidance for maintenance is provided by the maintenance level assigned to each road. There are five different maintenance levels for roads and these are discussed in more detail in the Infrastructure Section.

Using the past 5 years average, the Helena and Lewis and Clark Forests maintained an average of 287 miles of roads per year, and improved/reconstructed an average of 208 miles of roads per year. As described above with trails, road maintenance is highly dependent on budgets. Table 7.13 shows road maintenance accomplishments within the plan area for the past five years. Maintenance accomplishments by maintenance level category and year can be found in Chapter 10 Infrastructure.

**Table 7.13 Road maintenance accomplishments**

Year	Miles of Road Maintained	Miles of Road Improved	Total Road Maintained or Improved <sup>1</sup>
2010	801	310	1,111
2011	457	275	732
2012	61	198	259
2013	30	159	189
2014	84	96	180

<sup>1</sup> Miles are derived from INFRA and are approximate.

As with trails, road maintenance and improvement is directly tied to budget. When the road maintenance budget declines the ability to provide adequate road maintenance diminishes. Detailed information regarding Forest System roads, including budget information, is located in the Infrastructure section.

### *Aviation*

There are three air strips located within the planning area. One is located along the South Fork of the Judith River at Russian Flats in the Little Belt Mountains GA. One is located in the Benchmark drainage within the Rocky Mountain Range GA. The third one is the Lincoln Airport near the Lincoln Ranger District in the Upper Blackfoot GA. Both the Russian Flats and Benchmark airstrips have facilities such as tables and outhouses that provide service for these users. Refer to the Chapter 10, Infrastructure.

### *Recreation Special Uses*

Recreation special use permits provide for occupancy and use of the national forest through issuance of permits. Permitted recreation uses provide specific recreational opportunities to the public and deliver economic benefits to rural economics. Examples of commercial enterprises requiring permits include ski resorts, outfitting and guiding service, resorts, and organizational camps. Noncommercial recreation uses are those that require special use specific groups, such as clubs, or are used by individuals and single families, such as recreation residences.

**Table 7.14 Summary of recreation special uses permits administered by the HLC by geographic area**

Geographic Area	Recreation Residences	Organizational Camps	Commercial Resorts	Commercial Ski Areas	Outfitter and Guides
Big Belts	-	-	-	-	4
Castles	1	-	-	-	2
Crazies	-	-	-	-	2
Divide	11	1	-	-	1
Elkhorns	-	-	-	-	1
Highwoods	3	-	-	-	-
Little Belts	57	1	-	1	24
Rocky Mountain Range	98	-	4	1	19
Snowies	-	-	-	-	-
Upper Blackfoot	1	-	-	-	7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>60</b>

### Recreation Residence Tracts

Recreation residences are located in designated tracts and neighborhoods or as individual cabins. There are a total of 170 recreation residences under 20-year special use permits within the plan area. The majority of the recreation residences were built and permitted between the 1920s through 1950 with a few built as late as the early 1960s. Although the permit is nontransferable, the cabin facility can be deeded/willed, handed down to the next generation, or sold. All new owners apply for a new term special use permit.

Many of the cabins have historical significance and before any modification, change or construction activity occurs, the cabin or facility must be evaluated for historical significance and State Historic Preservation Office concurrence.

There are 11 recreation residence tracts located in the Divide Geographic Area (GA); 98 in the Rocky Mountain GA; 59 in the Little Belts; 3 in the Highwood; and 1 in the Castles. Table 7.15 shows the location and geographic area of recreation residences under permit within the plan area. These recreation residences are permitted under 20 year permits and expire between 2028 and 2029 depending upon the area.

**Table 7.15 Recreation residences within the plan area**

Geographic Area	Recreation Residence Tract Name	Number permitted	County	Permit Expires
Castles	Pasture Gulch	1	Meagher	2028
Divide	Moose Creek Villa	5	Lewis & Clark	2029
	Forest Heights	6	Lewis & Clark	2029
Highwoods	Highwood Creek	3	Chouteau	2028
Little Belts	Big Timber	4	Cascade	2028
	Dry Gulch	1	Cascade	2028
	Upper Logging Creek	2	Cascade	2028
	Wagner Gulch	4	Cascade	2028
	Wood Gulch	2	Cascade	2028
	Little Flower	1	Cascade	2028
	Graveyard	6	Cascade	2028
	Harley Creek	4	Cascade	2028



Geographic Area	Recreation Residence Tract Name	Number permitted	County	Permit Expires
	Griffin Coulee	4	Cascade	2028
	Power Coulee	6	Cascade	2028
	Ranger Station	2	Cascade	2028
	Hoover Creek	1	Cascade	2028
	Ruby Creek	1	Cascade	2028
	Middle Fork Judith	3	Judith Basin	2028
	South Fork Judith "Bricker Site"	1	Judith Basin	2028
	Placer Creek "Ayers Site"	1	Judith Basin	2028
	Tucken Gulch	1	Judith Basin	2028
	Park Summer Home	4	Meagher	2028
	Allen Gulch	2	Meagher	2028
	Deadman Creek	5	Meagher	2028
	Nugget Creek	1	Meagher	2028
	Short Creek	2	Meagher	2028
Rocky Mountain Range	Massey	7	Teton	2028
	Bliss	1	Teton	2028
	Hannan Gulch	7	Teton	2028
	Blacktail Creek	3	Teton	2028
	Mortimer Gulch	6	Teton	2028
	Heinen	1	Lewis & Clark	2028
	Norwegian Gulch	4	Lewis & Clark	2028
	Upper Home Gulch	5	Lewis & Clark	2028
	Middle Home Gulch	5	Lewis & Clark	2028
	Lower Home Gulch	6	Lewis & Clark	2028
	Bureau	5	Lewis & Clark	2028
	Golie	1	Lewis & Clark	2028
	Double Falls	23	Lewis & Clark	2028
	Lick Creek	3	Lewis & Clark	2028
	Glade Creek	7	Lewis & Clark	2028
	Aspen Creek	3	Lewis & Clark	2028
	Whitewater	4	Lewis & Clark	2028
	Green Timber Creek	1	Lewis & Clark	2028
Squirrel Creek	1	Lewis & Clark	2028	
Mule Creek	5	Lewis & Clark	2028	
Upper Blackfoot	Nevada Creek	1	Powell	Upon death of holder <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The permit terminates upon death of holder.

## Organizational Camps

There are two organizational camps currently operating within the plan area. Organizational camps provide opportunities for a variety of unique recreation activities primarily for children's camps and are provided for through the permit process. The permits authorize the use of National Forest System lands for maintaining and

operating organizational camps for uses including providing meals, sleeping accommodations, and recreation activities for members of youth organizations and other groups seeking recreation on National Forest System lands. Table 7.16 identifies these camps and the specific geographic area that they are located within.

**Table 7.16 Organizational camps within the plan area**

Geographic Area	Trail Name	County	Acres <sup>1</sup>	Permit Expires
Divide	Lions Sunshine Camp	Powell	3	2034
Little Belts	Camp Rotary	Cascade	6	2017

<sup>1</sup>Acres are approximate.

### *Lions Sunshine Camp*

The Lions Sunshine Camp operates under a special use permit on approximately 3 acres and is located in Powell County within the Divide GA. The camp is located off of the Little Black Foot Road, #227 of the Helena Ranger District. The use of the facilities has been under permit since September 1, 1943. The general purpose and use of the camp is to provide meals, sleeping accommodations, and recreation activities for members of youth organizations and other groups seeking recreation on National Forest System lands. Currently the camp consists of seven sleeping cabins, two restroom shower buildings, one administrative building, a shop facility, a recreation hall, a mess hall/kitchen, an outhouse, and a 1,200 foot access road. The camp generally sees around two thousand adult and children participants through the summer season (early June to September).

### *Camp Rotary*

Camp Rotary is authorized under an organizational camp special use permit on approximately 6 acres issued to the Rotary Club of Great Falls located on the Belt Creek Ranger District adjacent to US Highway 89 and Belt Creek. The camp was first permitted as a boy's camp in 1914 or 1917. The general purpose of the camp is to maintain and operate a camp providing meals, sleeping accommodations, and recreation opportunities for youth organizations and other groups. Over the last 40 years the camp has undergone several improvements involving replacing, updating, and removing facilities. Currently the camp consists of a main lodge (replacement of original lodge and new lodge constructed in 2012-13), a new bath house constructed in 2010, an outdoor open pavilion constructed in 2009, nine sleeping cabins, a septic system, a water system, a counselor's cabin, a wood/equipment shed, and other minor miscellaneous facilities. The camp generally sees approximately 800-1000 users per year, of these users 85% are children or disabled adults, with the remainder of mixed aged adults. The Rotary Club of Great Falls has a 10 year master development plan signed in 2007 which guides the improvement of authorized facilities at the camp.

### **Commercial Resorts**

There are four commercial resorts located within the plan area. All are located within the Rocky Mountain Range Geographic Area. These commercial resorts are permitted under a 20-year special use permit. Each resort also offers outfitting and guiding services which are under individual 10-year outfitter-guide permits. The resort and outfitter-guide permits are tied together by a common clause that will not allow the operations to be separated. Table 7.17 lists the resorts within the plan area and the services offered through the special use permit.

**Table 7.17 Commercial resorts within the plan area**

Geographic Area	Permit Name	Type of Permit	County	Services Offered	Permit Expires
Rocky Mountain Range	Seven Lazy P Guest Ranch	Resort	Teton	Cabin rental, guest food service, horse and corral rental	2034
	Sun Canyon Lodge	Resort	Lewis & Clark	Restaurant and bar, cabin rental, RV and tent camping, playground, horse and corral rental	2027

Geographic Area	Permit Name	Type of Permit	County	Services Offered	Permit Expires
	Ford Creek Guest Ranch	Resort	Lewis & Clark	Cabin rental, guest food service, horse and corral rental	2024
	Benchmark Wilderness Ranch	Resort	Lewis & Clark	Cabin rental, guest food service, horse and corral rental	2032

## Commercial Ski Areas

Permitted ski areas tend to concentrate users in a defined area of the National Forests. This concentration of forest visitors leads to a more vigilant adherence to health and safety standards. Currently, ski areas are subject to all other land management standards and guidelines, which in some cases, has created conflicts with these health and safety objectives. For example, because of how the forestwide management standards for wildlife trees is worded in the 1986 Lewis and Clark National Forest Plan, snags are managed for every acre of the National Forest including those acres under special use permit for ski areas. Managing for snag retention in these areas of highly concentrated people use is potentially dangerous and should be evaluated further during forest plan revision.

There are two downhill ski areas under permit within the plan area. One is located within the Rocky Mountain Range Geographic Area and the other is located within the Little Belts Geographic Area. Both are under long-term 40 year permits.

**Table 7.18 Commercial ski area within the plan area**

Geographic Area	Ski Area Name	Type of Permit	Acres <sup>1</sup>	Permit Expires
Rocky Mountain Range	Teton Pass Ski Resort	Downhill Ski Area	407	2030
Little Belts	Ski Lift, Inc./ Showdown Montana	Downhill Ski Area	600	2046

<sup>1</sup> Acers are approximate

## Outfitter and Guide Permits

There are 62 outfitter and guide special use permits under permit within the plan area. The majority of the recreation activities provided by these permits is commercial guiding for hunting (both archery and rifle) of big game and other wildlife species. Other activities provided through these permits includes guided horseback riding, wildlife viewing, rock climbing, educational trips, backpacking and progressive camps, and water-based camps and activities such as floating the Smith River.

**Table 7.19 Outfitter and guide permits by geographic area**

Geographical Area	Permit Name	Services Offered	Permit Expires
Big Belts	Hidden Hollow Hideaway Ranch	Big Game Archery/Rifle Hunting, Summer Horse Trips	2016
	Gates of the Mountain, Inc.	Use of Meriwether Picnic Site	2016
	Montana High Country Cattle Drive	Cattle Drive	2016
	Audie Anderson/Ramshorn Outfitters	Big Game Archery/Rifle Hunting	2016
Castles	Davis and June Volseth/Bonanza Creek Country	Summer Day Use Horse Trips	2020
	Ron Brunkhorst/Reach Your Peak	Day Use Rock Climbing	2019

<b>Geographical Area</b>	<b>Permit Name</b>	<b>Services Offered</b>	<b>Permit Expires</b>
Crazies	Mike Parsons/Crow Creek Outfitters	Spring Bear, Deer, Elk, Archery, Rifle, Winter Lion, Overnight camps.	2020
	Gilbert M. White/ McFarland White Ranch Inc.	Archery/Rifle Big Game	2020
Elkhorns	Jeff and Marie Hoeffner	Day Use Summer Horse Trips	2021
Little Belts and Castles	Richard Vetch/Shining Times Outfitting Inc.	Big Game Deer Elk Rifle Hunting, Overnight and Day Use	2020
Little Belts	John Hanson Outfitting	Day Use Stream Fishing.	2019
	Don DeGroft/Rawhide Guide Service	Spring-Fall Bear Hunting, Day Use	2019
	Paul Ritchey/Beaver Creek Outfitters	Big Game Archery/Rifle Hunting, Fishing, Horse Trail Rides, Overnight Camp	2019
	Rebecca Johnson/Camp Baker Outfitters	Big Game Rifle/Day Use	2019
	Gary Anderson/Deep Creek Outfitters	Big Game Archery/Rifle Hunting, Summer Horse Trips, Fishing	2019
	Susan Snyder/Homestead Ranch Outfitters	Summer Horse, Overnight, Fishing, Spring Bear, Archery/Rifle Deer and Elk	2019
	Peter Hollatz/Middle Fork Cattle Co.	Summer Day Use Horse, Archery/Rifle Deer and Elk	2019
	Howard Zehntner Outfitting	Big Game Rifle Hunting, Day Use	2019
	Joe Delaney/JD Ranch and Outfitters	Spring Bear, Day and Overnight Horse Trips, Fishing, Big Game Archery/Rifle	2019
	Pete Rodgers/Pig Eye Basin Outfitters	Spring Bear Hunting, Summer Horse Trips, Fishing, Upland Bird, Big game Archery/Rifle Hunting, Overnight Camp	2019
	Audie Anderson/Ramshorn Outfitters	Big Game Rifle, Overnight Camp	2019
	Robert Dupea Outfitting/Keyhole Cattle Co.	Big Game Rifle Day Use	2019
	Gary Stoker/Big Sky Expeditions	River Floating, Fishing, Overnight, Smith River	2018
	John Herzer/Blackfoot Outfitters	River Floating, Fishing, Overnight, Smith River	2018
	Todd France/ Blast and Cast	River Floating, Fishing, Overnight, Smith River	2018
	Randy Gayner/ Glacier Wilderness Guides	River Floating, Fishing, Overnight, Smith River	2018
	Eric Hess/ Missoula Fly Fishing	River Floating, Fishing, Overnight, Smith River	2018
	Mike Geary/ LC Expeditions	River Floating, Fishing, Overnight, Smith River	2018
	Joe Sowerby; MT Fly Fishing Connection	River Floating, Fishing, Overnight, Smith River	2018
	Brandon Boedecker/ PRO Outfitters	River Floating, Fishing, Overnight, Smith River	2018
Little Belts and	Wild Rockies Institute	Backpacking/Educational Trips	2019
	Tracy Weyer/Hidden Valley	Spring Bear, Deer, Elk, and Lion	2020

<b>Geographical Area</b>	<b>Permit Name</b>	<b>Services Offered</b>	<b>Permit Expires</b>
Snowies	Outfitters	Hunting, Overnight and Day Use	
Rocky Mountain Range	Rocky Heckman / Montana Safaris	Pack Trips / Fishing / Hunting	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	Adam Jordan / C-N Camp	Hiking	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	Allen Haas / A Lazy H Outfitters	Pack Trips / Fishing / Hunting	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	Elizabeth Barker / Ford Creek Guest Ranch <sup>2</sup>	Day use / Pack Trips / Fishing / Hunting	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	Adam Wallis / K Bar L Ranch	Day Rides / Fishing / Pack Trips / Hunting	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	Dusty Crary / Seven Lazy P Guest Ranch <sup>2</sup>	Day Rides / Fishing / Pack trips / Hunting	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	Richard Birdsell / Northern Rockies Outfitters	Day Rides / Fishing / Hunting	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	Nathan Birkeland / Nature Conservancy, Pine Butte Guest Ranch	Day Rides / Day Hikes	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	David Perry / Sierra Club	Hiking	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	Luke Coccoli / Boone and Crockett Club Foundation	Hiking	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	Natalie Dawson / University of Montana, Wilderness Institute	Hiking	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	Josh Carlbom / Sun Canyon Lodge Outfitting <sup>2</sup>	Day Rides / Pack Trips / Fishing / Hunting	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	David Morris / Wild Rockies Field Institute	Hiking	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	Nancy Brekke / Wilderness Alternative Schools, Wilderness Treatment Center.	Winter Ski and Snowshoe / Rehab	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	Robert Frisk / B&D Outfitters	Pack Trips / Fishing / Hunting	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	Josh Carlbom / Sun Canyon Outfitting LLC	Hunting	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	Yve Bardwell & Maggie Carr / Dropstone Outfitting	Hiking / Stock Supported Hiking	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	Ernie Barker / JJJ Guest Ranch	Day Rides / Pack trips / Fishing / Hunting	2015 <sup>1</sup>
Darwin Heckman / Benchmark Wilderness Ranch <sup>2</sup>	Day Rides / Pack trips / Fishing / Hunting	2015 <sup>1</sup>	
Upper Blackfoot	Brett Todd/K Lazy Three Outfitters	Spring Bear, Summer Roving Horseback tours, Fishing, Fall Hunting, Stock Use	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	Rob McDonough/McDonough Outfitters	Day Use Fall Hunting	2019
	Mike and Lori McCormick/Sunset Guest Ranch	Day Use Fall Hunting	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	Tag Rittle/Blacktail Ranch	Day Use Summer Horse Trips and Fall Hunting	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	Jake Ingram/Scapegoat Wilderness Outfitters	Fall Hunting, Stock Use	2015 <sup>1</sup>

Geographical Area	Permit Name	Services Offered	Permit Expires
	Wade Durham/ICR Outfitters	Spring Bear, Summer Roving Horseback Tours, Fishing, Fall Hunting, Stock Use	2015 <sup>1</sup>
	Neil Eustance/Eustance Pack and Tack	Spring Bear, Summer Roving Horseback Tours, Fishing, Fall Hunting, Stock Use	2015 <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Currently being re-issued.

<sup>2</sup> Associated with a Commercial Resort Permit.

## *Fostering Greater Connections between People and Nature*

Connecting people to their environment has been one of the Forest Service’s main stated goals for managing the recreation program and public expectation for activities on National Forest lands. The following paragraphs outline the current efforts within the plan area to promote the Helena and Lewis and Clark National Forests and to help the public make greater, more meaningful, connections to the natural environments around them.

### Programming on the Helena National Forest

The Helena National Forest has led the Northern Region in implementation of multiple science and place-based educational opportunities and service learning projects, all of which meet the common core educational standards for the state of Montana. The Forest’s community outreach and conservation education programs take place on National Forest System lands, and depend on the partnerships of multiple other organizations, agencies, schools and volunteers. The Forest’s goals, objectives and priority work for its community outreach, interpretive, volunteer, and conservation education programs are outlined in its “2012-2015 Forest Community Outreach and Conservation Education Strategy.”

The unique partnership between the Helena National Forest and the Montana Discovery Foundation—a nonprofit organization that compliments the agency’s conservation education goals—has allowed the Forest to connect people to the outdoors through quality educational and recreational opportunities across the Forest for more than 15 years. Each year, the Helena National Forest, Montana Discovery Foundation, and many other partners reach about 7,500 people through more than 100 programs that are implemented by staff and volunteers. In 2013, the Montana Discovery Foundation reported over 4,500 volunteer hours to help implement the many community outreach/conservation education programs across the Forest.

Some of the sustainable programs that are made possible through the partnership with Montana Discovery Foundation and other partners include: Youth Forest Monitoring Program, A Forest for Every Classroom, Snow School, Outdoor Explorers Mentoring Program, The Force of Nature, monthly moonlight hikes, citizen science and monitoring projects, student-led vegetation inventory project(s), fishing days, historical/cultural themed programs, and other programs which are included in the larger Community Naturalist programs — such as International Migratory Bird Day, Celebrating Wildflowers, and Adopt-a-Species to list a few.

### Programming on the Lewis and Clark National Forest

Lewis and Clark National Forest outreach programs reach approximately 55,000 – 57,000 people each year. The Forest provides numerous programs throughout the year that range from prepared education presentations, exhibits and programs at the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, special events, participation in community events, summer camps, outreach to new airmen at Malmstrom Air Force Base, and participating in seasonal or one-time opportunities. Many of these programs are accomplished through working with partners. The range of these contacts includes youth, family, and adult-focused events; all with the goal of fulfilling the Forest’s education objectives and connecting people to their forest and recreational opportunities.

The largest portion of educational outreach provided on the Lewis and Clark National Forest originates at the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center which annually hosts approximately 47,000 visitors from around the world. Much of the Center's programming focuses on interpreting the cultural, historic, and natural science components of the Lewis and Clark Expedition; which crossed many National Forests. Each year the Center provides a conservation education program for approximately 850 Great Falls 7th graders titled "Field Investigations" on the Center's property and serves roughly the same number of 6th graders at a More Kids in the Woods winter ecology/snowshoe program at one of the Forest's campgrounds. These two programs combined reach approximately 1700 students each year.

The Lewis and Clark Forest staff also provides school programs throughout the year for kids from preschool to high school. These vary from year to year based on requests from the school, but have included winter ecology and interpretive snowshoe hikes, Smokey Bear presentations, judging entries at a state regional science fairs, hosting a table at the Great Falls Public School's annual STEAM (Science Technology, Engineering Arts and Math) event, mentoring an Enviro-thon Team, field trip experiences, classroom presentations, fire prevention/ecology and trail-based conservation programs, and providing job shadowing experiences for kids interested in natural resource careers.

Each summer the Forest serves an estimated 6,000 visitors who visit the Forest's booth in the Nature's Den building at the Montana State Fair. The booth typically provides information on current forest issues, fire prevention, travel plan rules, hands-on activities for the kids, and a venue for adults to ask questions they may have regarding recreation opportunities on the Forest. Other summer programs include responding to requests to provide programs for summer camps and participation in community events.

With the Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls, many airmen from across the country, often from urban backgrounds, are interested in recreation opportunities on the Lewis and Clark National Forest. The Forest provides approximately 25 briefings annually at the base's First Term Airmen Class and participates, as opportunity arises, at other special events on base each year. Over the course of the year, we are able to speak with an estimated 600 airmen.

The Lewis and Clark National Forest also actively participates in community events such as community celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, and celebrating the National Christmas Tree as it stopped in Great Falls on its way to Washington DC in 2008. The Forest has also been an active member of Get Fit Great Falls and participates in putting on the annual National Trails Day in June and leads the annual Winter Trails Day events in February. The Forest has also assisted with the Great Falls Kids Fishing Day, traditionally held in the spring. Additionally, the Lewis and Clark National Forest attends Sportsmen Shows, Earth Day celebrations, and special events at Cabela's in Billings.

## Trends

There are a number of conditions and trends that affect the quality of recreation across the plan area but all of these can be distilled into the following basic four categories: trends in recreation uses, trends in recreation activities, trends in recreation settings and scenic character, and trends in infrastructure.

### *Trends in Recreation Use, User Preference, and Satisfaction*

Recreation opportunities are affected by recreational trends and the mix of outdoor activities chosen by the public, which continuously evolve. National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) data provide information on visitor use and visitor satisfaction, which can create understanding about what types of activities people are interested in and the quality of their experiences. NVUM data provide the most relevant, reliable, and accurate data available on national forest visitation. NVUM data are collected using a random sampling method that yields statistically valid results at the national forest level. As a rule, NVUM results are unbiased. The sampling plan takes into account

both the spatial and seasonal spread of visitation patterns across the Forest. However, results for any single year or season may under or over-represent some groups of visitors.

The Helena and Lewis & Clark National Forests offer a full suite of outdoor recreation activities, in all seasons, for those who enjoy either motorized or nonmotorized pursuits on land, water, or in the air. The list of recreation activities is long, and includes cross-country and downhill skiing or snowboarding, snowmobiling, dog sledding, hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, mountain biking, camping, hunting, fishing, off-highway vehicle (OHV) driving or riding, picnicking, swimming, boating, paddle boarding, recreation aviation, wildlife watching, visiting historic sites or scenic areas, participating in interpretive programs or tours, resort use, and more. On average, the plan area receives 889,000 visitors a year (NVUM 2007/2008).

Visitors to the Forests come from near and far with 60% of visitors travelling from within a 75 mile radius to access the Forests. This radius includes all of the communities within and adjacent to the Forest and more distant communities such as Lewistown, Billings, Butte, and Missoula, Montana. Seventeen percent of the visitors travel from over 500 miles away. Twenty-five percent of the visitors to the plan area are from foreign countries with 19% of these visitors coming from Canada (NVUM 2007/2008).

Table 7.20 lists the 20 main recreation activities that visitors participated in within the plan area. Hunting, viewing natural features, hiking/walking, and nature center activities have consistently remained within the top five most popular activities.

**Table 7.20 Main recreation activities visitors participate in**

Rank	Helena and Lewis & Clark NVUM Round 2 Data <sup>1</sup> 889,000 Visitors	
	Activity	%
1	Hunting	19.6
2	Viewing Natural Features	12.1
3	Hiking / Walking	9.5
4	Some Other Activity	6.7
5	Nature Center Activities	6.0
6	Visiting Historic Sites	5.6
7	Motorized Water Activities	5.3
8	Cross-country Skiing	5.2
9	Downhill Skiing	4.6
10	Driving for Pleasure	4.1
11	Snowmobiling	3.2
12	Relaxation	3.1
13	Picnicking	3.0
14	Developed Camping	2.6
15	Fishing	1.9
16	Viewing Wildlife	1.6
17	Primitive Camping	1.3
18	Other Motorized Activity	1.2
19	Bicycling	0.9
20	Gathering Forest Products	0.7

<sup>1</sup>NVUM data from 2007/2008 surveys

Overall satisfaction with visitors has remained very high. Over 81% of visitors indicated that they were very satisfied with their visits (USDA Forest Service 2007, USDA Forest Service 2008). Visitors were generally



satisfied with the services, access, facilities, and sense of safety at developed sites, undeveloped areas, and in wilderness areas. Visitors did not feel that overcrowding was an issue.

### *Trends in Recreation Activities*

Since adoption of the 1986 plans, recreation activities within the plan area have changed, especially related to motorized recreation activities within the plan area. The use and availability of off-highway vehicles, coupled with the power and advanced technology of over-snow vehicles has provided visitors with greater ability to go places within the plan area than had previously been available to them. The Forest Service has been challenged with the development of travel plans that provide direction for these motorized activities, while balancing the needs of nonmotorized users within the plan area.

At the same time, there has been growth in the amount of dispersed camping across the plan area. Not only is there an increase in dispersed campers but the size and scale of the recreation vehicles used by campers has grown exponentially. This increase in size of recreation vehicles affects not only resource impacts to the dispersed camping sites, but also has had effects on the developed campgrounds. Campgrounds that were constructed in the 1970's and 1980's strain to accommodate recreation vehicles that are now much longer and, with slide outs, much wider than were originally conceived of and planned for.

There has been an increase in the amount and interest in mountain bike use across the planning area, particularly within the Upper Blackfoot and Rocky Mountain Range Geographic Areas. These bike users are concerned about keeping available trails open to them and adding additional trails. Trail use and interest has also increased along the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail. There is interest from the public to not only protect and enhance the existing trail but to expand the influence of the trail, connecting to recreation on a much larger scale.

As the American public ages, but at the same time remains active, there is an increased interest and need to provide adequate accommodations for many forms of recreation activities and infrastructure. Developed campgrounds that have been designed for universal accessibility, as well as improved and new innovations for assistive technology will become increasingly important as the population ages and will influence the recreation activities that visitor choose to participate in. (Sperazza, 2010).

National research on outdoor recreation trends by Ken Cordell has concluded that there has been considerable "growth in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in nature-based recreation. Between 2000 and 2009, the number of people who participated in nature-based recreation grew by 7.1% and the number of activity days grew by about 40%." (Cordell, 2012) The nature-based activity that has grown the most in the past ten years has been viewing and photographing nature. National projections show that there will continue to be growth in nature-based recreation out to the year 2060.

### **Emerging or Unique Recreation**

As described above, advances in technology have had the greatest impact on the recreation resource in the past 20 years. Whole industries have been created around the new technologies that have arisen. Visitors can now GPS their locations from their smart phones, reach home computers through the cloud network, find an OHV that is as comfortable to ride in as a car, and set up camp in recreational vehicles that are self-contained and include microwaves and big screen TV's. Paying active attention to these emerging trends in technology is challenging but will help resource managers ensure that recreation users continue to have ample opportunity to enjoy their national forests.

### *Trends in Recreation Settings and Scenic Character*

Obvious and dynamic changes have recently impacted the scenic quality of much of the plan area. Dead and dying trees caused by insect mortality have created whole mountain sides where red-needled trees dominate the

color and texture of the forested landscapes. Additionally, wildfire can have a notable impact on both the aesthetics of an area and the amount and distribution of recreation uses across the landscapes they affect.

The condition of vegetation, which is influenced by many drivers, impacts the way users recreate on the National Forests. Vegetation influences scenic quality and enjoyment as well as access and the feasibility of some recreation activities. These factors also have bearing on how the Forest Service manages recreation sites, facilities, and trails. Ecological processes that change vegetation therefore also influence recreation. For example, wildfires can directly displace forest users in the short term while they are burning. The changes to vegetation caused by fires can also change the scenic character and use of the area for long periods of time. The recent mountain pine beetle outbreak has resulted in elevated levels of dead trees in many areas (please refer to chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems for more information). These dead trees will fall to the ground over time. The presence of this material may impact how forest users recreate as well as how the Forest Service manages these areas.

## Climate Change

Climate change has the potential to affect a number of biophysical landscape attributes such as, but not limited to: vegetative composition and ecosystem habitat health and locations, water quantity, fish and wildlife habitats, snow quantity and length of stay, and seasons of use and patterns of recreation activities present and available across the landscapes. Recreation opportunities identified as potentially most vulnerable to climate change include water and snow-based activities and those activities where wildlife is an important part of the experience, such as hunting and bird watching. For more details see chapter 4, Carbon Stocks and Climate Change.

## *Trends in Infrastructure Condition*

The condition of infrastructure within the plan area is largely based on two factors: the current age of the infrastructure and the ability of the Forest Service to maintain the infrastructure effectively. Most of the developed recreation infrastructure within the plan area was designed and constructed in the 1970's and 1980's. A few sites did receive capital improvements in the late 1990's and early 2000's but have received little improvements since that time. Budget limitations and decline have had a direct impact on the ability to provide minimal upkeep on these facilities, leading to a gradual decline in facility maintenance and condition. Use of volunteers and partners has helped with these endeavors and will continue to be influential into the future.

Similar to developed recreation sites, conditions of trails have been affected by budget challenges. There continues to be an ever increasing struggle to maintain main-line trails into wilderness areas and other landscapes dominated by trail infrastructure. Developments of strong partner relationships have aided other areas in the maintenance of trails. Area horseman groups, motorized groups, snowmobile associations, and others have assisted the Forest Service in maintaining trail infrastructure. Maintaining these partnerships, as well as creating new ones, will continue to be an important component in the overall management of the recreation and trail programs of the future.

## *Recreation Opportunities and Trends in the Broader Landscape*

### State of Montana

#### *Montana State Parks*

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks provides the largest percentage of recreation opportunities outside of forest service lands, within the broader landscape. Montana State Parks reports more than 2 million visits, annually, and visitation has increased 29 % over the past 10-year trend (2005-2014). Eighty-eight percent of Montana residents over the age of 18 are active in outdoor recreation with 74 percent of Montana residents visiting public lands (i.e., national forests, national parks, and other federal/state agency-managed lands). For Montana, the statewide recreation priority needs were bike lanes, rifle/handgun ranges, off-road all-terrain vehicles (ATV) trails, and sledding/tubing areas.

Most of the plan area falls within Montana State Parks' North Central Region. This region receives the highest visitation of all the regions within the Montana State Parks system, with a visitation of 395,241 total visits in 2014. Within the North Central Region there are 9 parks and five of these are directly influenced by lands or recreation activities within the plan area. Those parks are Elkhorn, Giant Springs State Park, Sluice Boxes, Smith River, and Tower Rock. Giant Springs had the highest visitation in the North Central Region at 316,483 visits. From 2013 to 2014, Tower Rock State Park had the largest increase in visitation at 28%, although Tower Rock decreased in visitation by 24% the previous year. Smith River State Park also increased in visitation by 20% due to a 6-day river closure in July 2013. (MTFWP 2014)

The Smith River State Park and the management of river use along the Smith River corridor are of special emphasis and concern for both the Forest Service and the State of Montana. The Smith River State Park and River Corridor Recreation Management Plan of 2009 describes the Smith River as one of Montana's premier river recreation destinations. Its spectacular natural features and settings, outstanding fishing opportunities, and moderate degree of difficulty for floaters have all contributed to its popularity. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks manages the Smith River through strong partnerships with the people of Montana and their guests, landowners, outfitters, the United States Forest Service, county officials, and other people who have a passion for this resource and how it is managed. (Semler, Sperry 2009).

### Montana State Wildlife Management Areas

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MTFWP) wildlife management areas (WMAs) are managed with wildlife and wildlife habitat conservation as the foremost concern. WMAs protect important wildlife habitat that might otherwise disappear from the Montana landscape. They provide vital habitat for bear, bighorn sheep, birds, deer, elk, furbearers, moose, mountain goats, wolves, and an array of other game and nongame wildlife. Table 7.21 identifies those WMAs that lie adjacent to or within close proximity of the planning area.

**Table 7.21 MTFWP Wildlife management areas adjacent to the planning area**

Geographic Area	Montana State WMA	MTFWP Region	Acres <sup>1</sup>
Big Belts	Beartooth	Region 4	39,947
Divide	Canyon Creek	Region 3	2,210
Little Belts	Haymaker	Region 5	1,321
	Judith River	Region 4	5,135
	Smith River	Region 4	5,043
Rocky Mountain Range	Black Leaf	Region 4	10,397
	Ear Mountain	Region 4	3,047
	Sun River	Region 4	19,771

<sup>1</sup> All Acreages taken from Montana FWP MWA website database.

### Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) also provides recreation opportunities within the broader landscape. The mission of the BLM is to manage and conserve public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations under the mandate of multiple use and sustained yield. They are partners with the Forest Service and other land managers in the management and interpretation of parts of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trails as well as portions of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail. Additionally, the BLM manages acreage that lies adjacent to the Rocky Mountain Ranger District and are included in Public Law 113-291: National Defense Authorization Act of 2015, which includes language that establishes the Rocky Mountain Front Conservation Management Area. BLM lands adjacent to Forest Service lands will be a part of this Conservation Management Area and the BLM may have future influence on recreation activities that happen within these lands.

In addition to the newly created Conservation Management area, there are a number of BLM recreation areas either adjacent to or very near the planning area. These include the Ear Mountain, Blind Horse and Chute Mountain Outstanding Natural Areas located along the Rocky Mountain Range GA and the Holter Lake-Sleeping Giant Recreation Area adjacent to the Big Belts GA.

### National Park Service and Glacier National Park

To the north of the Rocky Mountain Range Geographic Area lies Glacier National Park. Known to Native Americans as the "Shining Mountains" and the "Backbone of the World", Glacier National Park preserves more than a million acres of forests, alpine meadows, lakes, rugged peaks and glacial-carved valleys in the Northern Rocky Mountains. This large park, managed by the National Park Service, received approximately 2,190,374 visitors in 2013. While there are no statistics to show the direct effect that these visitors had on National Forest lands within the plan area, developed recreation sites on the northern end of the Rocky Mountain Range Geographic Area do receive a large number of visitors which is undoubtedly influenced by the visitation to Glacier National Park.

### National Recreation Trends

A recent publication by Cordell (2012), in support of the 2010 Resource Planning Act (RPA) Assessment, describes the trends and outlooks for outdoor recreation in the United States. Some important trends especially relevant to recreation on public lands include:

- There is overall growth in outdoor recreation participation. Between 2000 and 2009, the total number of people who participated in one or more of 60 outdoor activities grew by 7.5 percent, and the total number of activity days of participation increased over 32 percent.
- There is substantial growth in both participants and annual days for five nature-based viewing and photography activities: viewing birds, other wildlife (besides birds), fish, wildflowers/trees and other vegetation, and natural scenery.
- Public lands continue to be highly important for the recreation opportunities they offer. In the West, recreation on public lands account for 69 percent of annual recreation days, slightly more than 60 percent of viewing and photographing nature activity, around three-fourths of backcountry activity, 57 percent of hunting, and 67 percent of cross-country skiing.
- Recreation resources will likely become less available as more people compete to use them.
- Trends towards more flexible work scheduling and telecommuting may well allow recreationists to allocate their leisure time more evenly across the seasons and through the week, thus facilitating less concentrated peak demands.
- Technological innovations will allow more people to find and get to places more easily and quickly, perhaps leading to over-use pressure not previously considered a threat.

Projected trends in outdoor recreation up to the year 2060 were also highlighted in the report. The five activities projected to grow fastest in number of participants are:

- developed skiing (68 to 147 percent increase)
- undeveloped skiing (55 to 106 percent increase)
- challenge activities (50 to 86 percent increase)
- equestrian activities (44 to 87 percent increase)
- motorized water activities (41 to 81 percent increase)

The activities with the lowest projected growth in participant numbers are:

- visiting primitive areas (33 to 65 percent increase)
- motorized off-road activities (29 to 56 percent increase)
- motorized snow activities (25 to 61 percent increase)
- hunting (8 to 23 percent), fishing (27 to 56 percent increase), and
- floating activities (30 to 62 percent increase)

## Information Needs

The following recreational information is needed:

- Roads and Trails INFRA needs to be updated to align with current Travel Planning Decisions.
- Trail Management Objectives need to be completed for all trails
- INFRA needs to be updated with existing groomed routes and winter trails, and over snow areas.
- The Recreation Special Uses spatial data need to be updated.

The HLC NFs also need to develop one forest recreation niche for the combined Helena and Lewis & Clark National Forest, use recreation facility analysis information to compare occupancy with capacity, and map dispersed recreation sites by level of impact.

## References

American Trails. Nationally Designated Trails: <[www.americantrails.org/ee/index.php/nationalrecreationtrails](http://www.americantrails.org/ee/index.php/nationalrecreationtrails)>

Cordell, H. Ken 2012. Outdoor recreation trends and futures: a technical document supporting the Forest Service 2010 RPA Assessment. Gen. Tech. Rep. SRS-150. Asheville, NC: U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Southern Research Station, 167 p.

Godbey, G. 2009. Outdoor recreation, health, and wellness: Understanding and enhancing the relationship. Discussion Paper RFF DP 09-21. Washington, DC. Resources for the Future. 42 p. Accessed on January 26, 2014. <http://www.rff.org/documents/RFF-DP-09-21.pdf>

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. Montana State Parks [2014]: <<http://stateparks.mt.gov/>>

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. Montana Wildlife Management Areas: <<http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/wma/default.html>>

Outdoor Recreation Participation Report 2012. Outdoor Foundation <<http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/pdf/ResearchParticipation2012.pdf>>

Ryan, Robert L. Social Science to Improve Fuels Management: A Synthesis of Research on Aesthetics and Fuels Management. Gen. Tech. Rep. NC-261. St. Paul, MN: USDA, Forest Service, North Central Research Station, 2005.

Semler, R; Sperry, C. 2009. The Smith River State Park and River Corridor Recreation Management Plan. Helena, Montana: Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. <<http://stateparks.mt.gov/about-us/parksData.html>>

Sperazza, L.J.; Banerjee, P. 2010. Boomers and seniors: The driving force behind leisure participation. Pg. 70-74 in Fisher, C. L. (ed.) Proceedings of the 2009 Northeastern Recreation Research Symposium. GTR-NRS-

P-66, U.S. Forest Service, Northern Research Station, Newtown Square, PA.  
<<http://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/pubs/gtr/gtr-nrs-p-66papers/11-sperazza-p-66.pdf>>

United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. Forest Service Manuals and Handbooks. USDA Forest Service Headquarters, Washington D.C. Available online at; <<http://www.fs.fed.us/im/directives/>>

United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. Travel Planning:< <https://ems-team.usda.gov/sites/fs-r1-lcnf-tvlpln/SitePages/Home.aspx>>

United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 1986a. Helena National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. Helena, MT.

United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 1986b. Lewis and Clark National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. Great Falls, MT.

United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 1992. Kings Hill Scenic Byway Master Plan, Lewis and Clark National Forest, Kings Hill Ranger District, Cascade and Meagher Counties. Unpublished document on file with USDA Forest Service, Lewis and Clark National Forest. 19 p.

United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 2006a. Recreation Site Facility Master Plan. Helena National Forest.

United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 2006b. Recreation Site Facility Master Plan. Lewis and Clark National Forest. USDA Forest Service.

United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 2007. National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM). Visitor Use Report, Helena National Forest. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service

United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 2008. National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM). Visitor Use Report, Lewis and Clark National Forest. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service

United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 2009. The 2009 Continental Divide National Scenic Trail Comprehensive Plan. Washington, D.C.: USDA Forest Service Chief's Office. 26 p.

United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 2012. INFRA Buildings User Guide, February 10, 2012

United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 2012. National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM).

United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management:  
<<http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/prog/recreation.html>>

United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. 1976. Continental Divide Trail Study Report. Washington, D.C.

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service: <<http://www.nps.gov/>>

Zarnoch, S., D. English, and S. Kocis. 2005. An Outdoor Recreation Use Model with Applications to Evaluating Survey Estimators. Asheville, NC: USDA Forest Service, Southern Research Station.