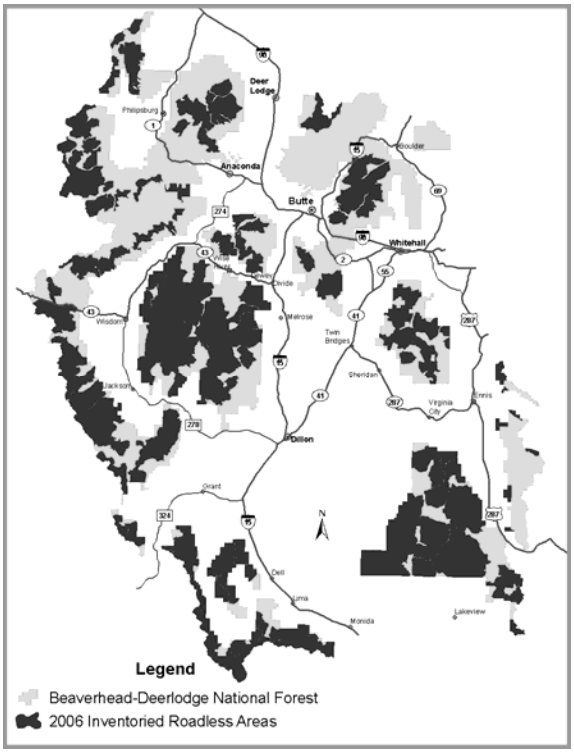
APPENDIX C

EVALUATION OF AREAS WITH WILDERNESS POTENTIAL

National Forest Planning Regulations (36 CFR 219.17(1), 1982) tell us that "roadless areas in the National Forest System shall be evaluated and considered for recommendation as potential wilderness areas during the forest planning process." Roadless or undeveloped areas with sufficient wilderness characteristics are recommended for congressional consideration for designation as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.12 Chapter 7, (Amendment 1909.12-92-1, 08/03/1992) provided the direction for the inventory and evaluation completed in this Appendix, which forms the basis for alternative wilderness recommendations in the FEIS. Only congressional action may designate wilderness. The revised forest plan makes only recommendations. The inventory and evaluation process is described below and individual evaluations follow.



Updating the Inventory of Areas with Wilderness Potential

Roadless areas on the BDNF were initially inventoried during the Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE I, 1977) and modified during RARE II (1983). They were first evaluated for potential wilderness in Appendix C of earlier Forest Plans (1986 for the Beaverhead and 1987 for the Deerlodge).The earlier Appendix C inventory is used as a starting point to identify areas with wilderness potential on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (BDNF)

Areas inventoried in 2006 and evaluated in this Appendix are referred to as "areas with wilderness potential." Headings and descriptions throughout the individual area evaluations apply the term "Inventoried Roadless Areas" or "IRAS". This terminology was commonly applied to roadless areas prior to the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR) and acceptable under the Forest Service Handbook used to inventory and evaluate areas for potential wilderness. Inventoried roadless areas now have a distinct status imparted to them by RACR and continued use of that term may be confusing to the public. The RACR contains specific prohibitions and exceptions on activities which could take place within the boundaries of these Inventoried Roadless Areas, road construction in particular. The RACR has been in and out of legal status during development of Appendix C. It is difficult to predict when or how the status

of the RACR will be resolved. The prohibitions in RACR do not apply to "*Areas with Wilderness Potential*" inventoried in 2006 unless they are ALSO mapped as IRAs. FSH direction developed since the RACR modifies terminology for roadless areas to distinguish between areas inventoried for evaluation of wilderness potential (FSH 1909.12, Chapter 70, 1/20/2007) and IRAs described in the Rule. This terminology is now being applied agency-wide. Tables and narratives throughout the remainder of this Appendix use the terms "Inventoried Roadless" and "IRA" where the current terminology is "areas with wilderness potential." **The reader is asked to be aware of the distinction, though each table has not been corrected for the final printed version.**

This apendix retains the roadless area numbering system assigned during the 1980s, however a few subunit numbers were changed for easier reference. Additional areas with wilderness potential are identified and have been assigned the appropriate number sequence.

There are three types of map inventory updates:

1 - Area Boundary Adjustments and Changes: Calculations of acres in the 2006 inventory were made with geographic information systems (GIS) technology which changed the 1986 and 1987 acres by digitizing old boundaries and reducing road buffers to fifty feet. Areas were added if they had been overlooked in earlier inventories, or roadless character was regained. Other areas were removed if they had been incorrectly included, or if activities such as road building, timber harvest, or mining changed their roadless character since the 1983 inventory. Private land inside the boundaries is excluded from the final acreage.

2 - Areas Added to the Inventory: The following areas have potential for wilderness and were added to earlier inventories..

3 - Areas Removed from the Inventory: An area without roads must have at least 5,000 acres or be contiguous to an existing congressionally designated wilderness area to be included in the inventory of potential wilderness areas. Two areas included in earlier inventories do not meet these criteria and were eliminated from the potential wilderness areas. They were evaluated for wilderness potential in case a high value ranking might lead to special consideration. Both areas rated below the minimum for recommendation.

Beaver Lake Roadless Area 1-003B: The unit is 4,466 acres, with a wilderness capability score of 8.9 on a scale of 4 to 40 points. Unit 1-003B is an isolated parcel separated from the larger unit 1-003A by about two miles.

Dixon Mountain Roadless Area 1-019: This unit is 4,420 acres with a wilderness capability score of 13.1 on a scale of 4 to 40 points (low capability). The area is very small and cannot be combined with other areas with wilderness potential because the road at Little Water Canyon separates it from other areas with wilderness potential. Boundary adjustments would be necessary to remove incompatible uses and would further reduce the size of the area.

Changes in Acres of Areas Considered for Wilderness Potential between 1987 and 2007

Acre Updates to Map Categories	BDNF Acres only
1987 Total	1,850,475
Added	73,676
Dropped	-69,089
GIS Acreage Recalculated	-9,894
2007 Total	1,846,168

Updating the Evaluation of Areas for Potential Wilderness

This section contains the summary of the wilderness characteristics and process used to determine suitability of areas for wilderness. Criteria identified in Forest Service Handbook 1909.12, Chapter 7 (WO Amendment 1909.12-92-1 effective 8/3/92) and examples from other forests were used to develop the Process for Evaluation of Roadless Areas for Wilderness (Project File). This process was used by planners and ranger district staff to evaluate wilderness suitability.

Suitability

Suitability is determined from capability, availability, and need. Criteria for suitability ratings are: 1) suitability cannot be higher than capability, but may be higher than availability or need; 2) suitability is low if either capability or availability is rated low.

Capability

Capability is the degree to which an area contains the basic wilderness qualities. These include the integrity of the natural environment and scenery; opportunities for solitude, challenge, and primitive recreation; unique ecological or cultural features. Factors such as size, shape, relationship to external influences, and boundary location were examined to determine manageability.

In addition to a narrative assessment, a set of capability assessment criteria were developed to insure consistent capability ratings across the forest. These numeric ratings were mistakenly labeled in the DEIS Appendix C as “Wilderness Suitability”. The ratings are based on a scale of 4 to 40. For the FEIS these ratings were rounded to the nearest whole number, and grouped into high, moderate, and low capability: low if rated less than 19, moderate if rated 19 through 27, and high if more than 27.

Availability

Availability is conditioned by the value of and need for the wilderness resource compared to the value of and need for other resources. A brief description of uses, wildlife, water resources, livestock grazing, timber, minerals, oil and gas, heritage resources, land use authorizations, lands not in federal ownership, and disturbances is included in the availability section of each roadless inventory form.

Wilderness availability is rated high, moderate, or low for each area. A high rating means there are few or no obligations such as special use permitted dams, access roads, and others. A

moderate rating has more limiting obligations, and a low rating means the area has a need or limiting obligations which make it difficult to manage for wilderness.

Need

Need is evaluated based on the Region One Wilderness Needs Assessment (2003) and public comments on the Proposed Action (2003) Draft Forest Plan, and DEIS, (2005). The Region One Assessment evaluated potential contributions to the local and national distribution of wilderness and associated ecological and social values. The assessment found that wilderness is fairly well distributed near population centers in Montana.

Ecological values which are underrepresented in the NWPS include:

The Beaverhead Mountains Ecological Section which (grassland/shrubland, riparian shrublands, and aspen woodland communities),

Montana sensitive plants,

Wildlife refuge, particularly at low elevations, and

Protected habitat for native fish species.

Need is rated high, moderate, or low for each area. Areas with a high rating have both a broad base of public support and two or more ecological qualities identified in the Region One Assessment. A moderate rating means the area has a minimum of one ecological quality *or* a broad base of public support for recommendation. Areas with a low rating have only a single ecological contribution and no public support specific to that particular roadless area.

Effects of Alternatives on Areas with Wilderness Potential

Alternatives were built around activities which are likely to occur over the life of the plan. The interdisciplinary team relied on a number of assumptions about inventoried roadless areas. The primary assumption was the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR) would which prohibits road construction and timber harvest in IRAs with few exceptions, would prevail.

Managing for suitable timber lands was not a likely activity. See the FEIS, Alternatives Considered but not Analyzed in Detail. No action alternative includes suitable timber land in IRAs. Alternative 1 includes suitable timber lands in 10% of the IRAs. Timber harvest for other purposes is allowed within IRAs under very limited exception, RACR, 2001. Site specific analysis would have to examine effect on Wilderness characteristics and mitigate impacts therefore harvest wasn’t displayed in the disposition table below.

Lands with moderate oil and gas potential lie within a number of IRAs. These lands may be leased and could be developed under stipulations described in the Forest Plan, Appendix B. However, because RACR prohibits road construction, development potential is very low in IRAs inventoried prior to passage of RACR. Where alternatives prescribe Wilderness recommendations for the IRA there will be no effect. A Recommended Wilderness allocation includes a stipulation of “No Surface Occupancy.”