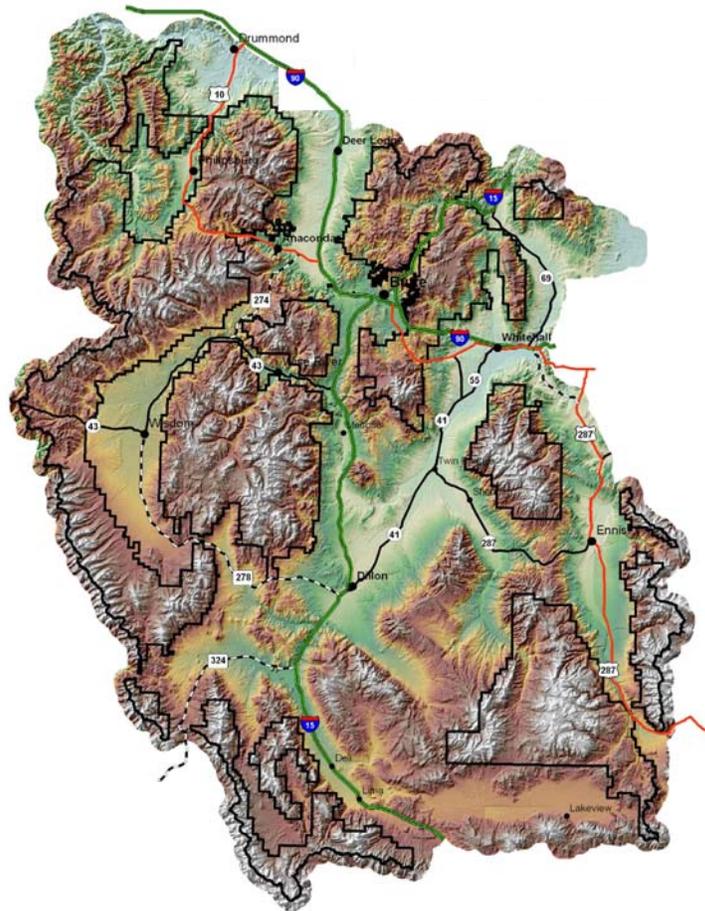


	
<p>United States Department of Agriculture</p>	<p>Record of Decision</p>
<p>Forest Service</p>	<p>For the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Revised Land and Resource Management Plan</p>
<p>Beaverhead- Deerlodge National Forest</p>	
<p>January 2009</p>	
	<p>Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest</p>



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BEAVERHEAD-DEERLODGE LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN
RECORD OF DECISION

Record of Decision for the
Final Environmental Impact Statement
and
Revised Land and Resource Management Plan
(Revised Forest Plan)

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest

Located in:	Beaverhead, Deer Lodge, Gallatin, Granite, Jefferson, Madison, Powell, and Silver Bow Counties in Montana
Responsible Agency:	USDA Forest Service Northern Region Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest
Responsible Official	Tom Tidwell, Northern Region, Regional Forester
Recommending Official:	Bruce Ramsey, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, Forest Supervisor

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Preface

The document you are about to read is called a Record of Decision. It describes my decision to select modified Alternative 6 as the revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Revised Forest Plan) for the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest

The Record of Decision has two purposes: First, it is a legal document detailing a formal decision from a government agency; and second, and equally important, it explains the “why” of the decision. Although this decision is mine, it has not been made alone. I would like to introduce this Decision by thanking those who have made the development of a Revised Forest Plan possible:

- A dedicated and hard-working interdisciplinary planning team
- Tribal, state, and local governments—both elected officials and agency staff
- Deeply committed and passionate citizens with diverse values and views.

More than 44,000 letters were received during the development of the Revised Forest Plan. These comments truly helped guide the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (BDNF) staff as they developed the Revised Forest Plan.

For the past several years, BDNF personnel have worked with tribal governments, members of the public, elected officials, and other agencies to produce the Revised Forest Plan. I am pleased to make my decision based upon solid relationships that have evolved through coordination and cooperation to ensure sustainable conditions for the human and ecological environments on the BDNF.

Creating a Revised Forest Plan is difficult. Creating one supported by most members of the public is even more difficult. Forest management and the plan revision process is complex. There are myriad Federal laws, executive orders and policies that govern national forest management. The American people, for whom these forests are managed, often have divergent views and values when it comes to what they want the BDNF to provide, to look like, and how they want it to be managed. The Revised Forest Plan helps to meet the Forest Service mission: “To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.”

The Revised Forest Plan evolved from alternatives formed from the best available science and the work of a dedicated interdisciplinary team of Forest Service employees. I expect most people will see their perspectives and desires reflected in the Revised Plan. On the other hand, the Plan may not offer everything they wanted to see. I believe the combination of recreational opportunities, vegetation management options, resource protection, and social and economic benefits in this Plan strike a balance in achieving the elusive goal of maximizing net public benefit.

I would also like to applaud the Forest Supervisors and their staffs who have served on the BDNF during the years of revision for the extraordinary efforts they have made to foster public participation in the revision process. There were four separate opportunities for the public to review and comment on planning documents:

- publication and review of the Analysis of Management Situation (AMS) (60 day comment period) (92 letters of comments received)
- publication and review of the Proposed Action (90 day comment period) (818 comments received)
- publication and review of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Plan (120 days, 11,188 comments received)
- publication and review of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Plan (75 days, 32,536 comments received)

It is not required and, in fact, highly unusual, to offer a comment period for a FEIS and Plan. However, because of intense public interest in the DEIS and the time that elapsed between DEIS and FEIS, it was important to provide an additional comment period.

Forest staff also made it clear good ideas were always welcome, and accepted more than 300 comment letters after the formal timeframe for commenting on the DEIS.

In addition to providing specified document review opportunities, the Forest conducted a Social Assessment (Russell and Mundy 2002) addressing the values and lifestyles, custom and culture of people who use, live around, and care about the BDNF. That assessment was updated to analyze any changes in key factors during the intervening years (Russell 2006). The social assessments and analyses provided information about how citizens wanted to be approached and involved during the planning process. One key message was that people did not consider structured open houses or similar public forums to be especially valuable. They wanted instead for the Forest Service to come to the meetings of established groups, to provide information and listen to citizen feedback in that setting. Forest staff honored that preference, and responded to invitations to more than 160 informational meetings during a six-year period.

Collaboration is a powerful approach to public involvement because it assists with the difficult task of evaluating trade-offs and seeking solutions that provide for a mix of benefits. Several citizen-led collaborative efforts played a role in dialogue about the BDNF Revised Forest Plan. Those efforts were noteworthy because they brought together parties whose interests traditionally conflicted or competed. Not everyone was at the table when agreements were forged. For that reason, collaborative recommendations were taken into account along with the recommendations of stakeholders with differing points of view.

Yet another approach to public engagement is for a government body other than the Forest Service to seek and be granted cooperating agency status. Beaverhead and Madison Counties were cooperating agencies in the BDNF plan revision process. They invested heavily, bringing specialized expertise to the table as input to the interdisciplinary process. I appreciate the commitment and the expertise provided.

Based on comments received during the final comment period, a number of changes were made between the Revised Draft Forest Plan and the Revised Forest Plan. I believe these changes make the Revised Forest Plan stronger by providing clarity and increasing the protection for species while at the same time, making implementation of this Plan easier to achieve.

Additional modifications have been made in response to these comments both to the FEIS and the Revised Forest Plan.

- Recommended wilderness areas were modified based on public comment.
- Some plan direction has been modified and some has been added. Forest vegetation objectives have been modified to better address the current and future disturbance processes. Additional standards have been added to provide increased protections to for specific species habitat needs.

Our work does not end with the approval of this Plan. Now the important work of implementing begins through the identification, analysis and implementation of projects that move us toward the Desired Conditions in the Revised Forest Plan. We will also prepare annual monitoring reports and engage in a 5-year cycle of comprehensive evaluation review and reporting. Intergovernmental coordination and public involvement will continue. New information and emerging issues will continue to be gathered, evaluated, and incorporated.

Plan desired conditions will also carry forward into detailed travel management planning. The travel planning process will analyze and designate a system of motorized roads and trails to serve public and administrative access needs.

Finally, planning for specific projects will incorporate the benefits of large-scale analysis and the opportunities for stewardship contracting. While decisions on scale of analysis and means of implementing projects will need to be made on a case by case basis, I recognize the value of those approaches, and intend to emphasize their use where appropriate.

I am committed to working in partnership with all of those within the landscape and with interested individuals. With our combined efforts in implementing, monitoring, reviewing, developing new information, and adapting, we can truly integrate the management of forest resources.

I thank you again for your support, participation, and patience throughout this process. I invite your continued partnership in helping implement the Revised Forest Plan.

Tom Tidwell

Regional Forester, Northern Region USDA Forest Service

Introduction

About this Document

The Record of Decision (ROD) is organized by section:

- **Preface and Introduction** set the stage, provide an overview of the document and describe the setting of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest.
- **Plan Decisions and Rationale** summarizes key Plan decisions that represent the major changes from earlier Plans and those of greatest interest to the public who commented formally during the revision process.
- **Alternatives** gives a brief overview of alternatives analyzed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), and outlines key differences between the preferred alternative in the FEIS and the Revised Forest Plan.
- **Coordination and Public Involvement** describes the diverse and extensive opportunities provided for the public to be informed and involved and to influence the development of the Revised Forest Plan.
- **Compatibility with the Goals of Tribes and Other Governments and Findings Related to Laws and Other Requirements** describes how the Revised Forest Plan takes into account the plans of other government entities and how the plan complies with key laws, regulations, policies and agreements.
- **Implementation** describes the relationship between forest planning, intermediate scale assessment, and project level planning.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation** describes the monitoring and evaluation process as well as the process for amending the forest plan and adaptive management.
- **Administrative Review** describes the process for filing an appeal.
- **Appendixes** add detail where needed to support statements in the main document.

Forest Setting

The Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (BDNF) is unique for its nationally renowned trout streams, large elk populations, and un-crowded backcountry recreation. It contributes to species diversity, the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, public open space, recreation, tourism, commodity production, and to local economic opportunities.

This largest of the national forests in Montana covers 3.35 million acres, and lies in eight Southwest Montana counties (Granite, Powell, Jefferson, Deer Lodge, Silver Bow, Madison, Gallatin and Beaverhead). The forest provides timber, minerals, and grazing lands. It also offers breath-taking scenery for a wide variety of recreational pursuits.

Straddling the Continental Divide, the BDNF provides the headwaters for rivers flowing through both the western and central United States. These streams are valued for abundant fish habitat and recreational opportunities. They are also important to local communities and agricultural enterprises.

There is a continental climate and four distinct seasons. About half of Montana's native plant species are present. The BDNF also supports diverse wildlife and is recognized for large populations of big game, especially elk.

Complex geology contributes to the scenery, recreational opportunities, and local economies. Mineral extraction has attracted people since prehistoric times and continues today.

The rich cultural history of southwestern Montana is inextricably tied to resources. Historic features are common, from aboriginal flint collection sites to European settlements, which created the area's mining and ranching heritage. Forest resources support present day lifestyles and traditions, such as hunting and fishing, camping, ranching, firewood cutting and more.

The BDNF offers a wide variety of recreation activities. Day hikes in non-motorized settings, picnicking, and off highway vehicle (OHV) trails are available within a 30-minute drive of regional population centers including Butte, Anaconda, Deerlodge, Philipsburg, Boulder, Ennis, Whitehall, Helena, and Dillon. Hunting includes a mix of walk-in and OHV activities. In the winter, people downhill and cross-country ski as well as snowmobile when snow conditions are favorable. There are opportunities for backpacking and stock use in Wilderness and other primitive areas. Backcountry travel routes in other areas provide off-highway vehicle and bicycle riding opportunities. The high country offers more than 240 mountain lakes in a variety of settings.

Recreation opportunities are also available through private business operations including skiing and snowmobiling, recreation resorts, outfitters and guides. Partnerships and agreements with local recreation groups provide groomed cross-country skiing and snowmobile trails. Recreation opportunities forestwide, are enhanced by roads, trails, picnic and campgrounds, trailheads, and interpretive sites.

Unique qualities are preserved and ecosystem integrity is a management focus providing settings for activities, which will enrich communities into the future.

Plan Decisions and Rationale

The Nature of Forest Plan Decisions

This Forest Plan Revision was begun and completed under the 1982 planning regulations. A forest plan establishes key decisions for the long-term management of a national forest. The 1982 planning regulations establish the following decisions required in forest plans:

1. Forestwide multiple-use goals and objectives including projections of goods and services that may be produced.
2. Forestwide management requirements (standards).
3. Management area direction and prescriptions, including management practices.
4. Suitability for timber and grazing.
5. Monitoring and evaluation requirements.
6. Recommendation to Congress of areas eligible for wilderness designation and rivers eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System as required (16 USC 1271-1287), (36 CFR 297) and (47 FR 39454).

The Forest Service planning process entails several levels of decision-making. Land management plans represent decisions that are strategic in nature. Subsequent decisions will be designed to be consistent with strategic decisions made in the forest plan.

Decisions in the Revised Forest Plan

Overview

In this Record of Decision, I am approving the Final Revised Land Management Plan for the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. This decision provides management direction for activities on the BDNF for the next 10 to 15 years. The Revised Forest Plan is a modified version of Alternative 6 which was identified as the preferred alternative in the FEIS distributed for public comment in February of 2008. Modifications of Alternative 6 respond to comments received on the FEIS and the Revised Draft Forest Plan.

Net Public Benefit

According to regulation, "...plans shall provide for multiple use and sustained yield of goods and services from the National Forest System in a way that maximizes long term net public benefits in an environmentally sound manner."

I chose Modified Alternative 6 because, in my judgment, it maximizes the net benefit to the public by:

- Maintaining or enhancing biological diversity and the long-term health of the Forest
- Contributing to economic and social needs of people, cultures, and communities
- Providing sustainable and predictable levels of products and services

- Providing the best mix of benefits to address the needs for change identified in the FEIS and
- Emphasizing adaptive management over the long term
- Providing consistent direction at the forest level to assist managers in making project decisions at a local level.
- Setting the stage for expanded use of stewardship contracting, effective and safe response to unplanned wildland fire, restoration treatments on roads and streams, fuel reduction efforts in the urban interface, and responsible management of rangelands.

My choice also considered how the Revised Forest Plan responded to public comments, internal management concerns and national direction and policy. My decision incorporates by reference the management direction in the Revised Forest Plan, the analysis of effects disclosed in the FEIS and additions to the FEIS (herein after referred to as FEIS), and the planning record in its entirety. This decision applies only to National Forest System land on the BDNF.

Inventoried Roadless Areas

At this time, there is conflicting court direction on how to manage roadless areas on National Forests. Regardless of the final outcome of that controversy, roadless areas on the BDNF will be managed in accordance with applicable rule, law and policy.

The Forest Plan revises many aspects of land management direction on the BDNF. The process of revision has been long and the people of Montana are anxious to move forward on implementing a Forest Plan that better reflects the science of today and the conditions on the ground. The BDNF faces serious forest health challenges from insect and disease. Local communities have concerns about increasing fire risk. The emphasis on aquatic resource health afforded in the Revised Forest Plan are better implemented now, than years from now. For these and many other reasons, I believe it is important to move forward on finalizing the Forest Plan as a whole. However, until the uncertainty regarding the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR) is resolved, I cannot move forward with Forest Plan direction in roadless areas potentially affected by this conflict. Therefore, until a resolution is reached, I am deferring the final decision on whether to allow or not allow consideration of road construction or reconstruction and the decision whether to allow or not allow consideration of timber harvest to meet resource objectives in 2001 RACR Inventoried Roadless Areas. Roads subject to statute, treaty, valid existing rights or other legal duty of the United States, as well as incidental and administrative timber harvest activities, are still allowed. The remaining management direction applicable to these areas in the revised forest plan is part of my decision at this time.

Revision Topics

Early in the plan revision process, a set of topics was developed to identify the need for changing the two separate Forest Plans approved in 1986 and 1987 for the Beaverhead and Deerlodge National Forests before the two Forests were administratively combined. The list of topics was reviewed and validated at each step in the plan revision process.

Revision topics represent a systematic framework for discussing the Revised Forest Plan. In addition, the Revised Forest Plan carries forward other management direction not identified as needing change or that needed only minor changes to achieve the multiple-use balance sought in this decision.

Revision Topic #1: Vegetation

Need for Change: Vegetation is a key component of sustainable terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. The 1986-1987 Plans set vegetation objectives that focused primarily on timber production rather than on healthy ecosystems. Those Plans did not recognize or address important natural disturbance processes as part of the ecosystem. The incorporation of broader ecological principles, including the role of fire as a disturbance process, was identified as a need for change in plan revision.

Major Public Issues: Public comments generally agree that vegetation objectives and standards should emphasize healthy forests. On the other hand, opinions differ widely on the definition of forest health and the means for improving health. In the Revised Forest Plan, terms such as “functioning,” and “sustainable” were used to describe desired ecosystem attributes rather than the term “healthy.” The Plan sets desired conditions for vegetation with objectives intended to improve the sustainability of ecosystem function, taking into consideration data from studies of historic conditions.

A number of people expressed concern that the Forest Plan did not explicitly consider the extent or importance of current insect and disease infestations on the BDNF or the urgency of management needed to address those infestations. The Revised Forest Plan, as a strategic document with a 10-15 year timeframe, provides a framework for providing flexibility to address changing environmental conditions. Insect outbreaks, drought, fire, and other disturbance processes are expected to occur during the plan period; however, no one knows precisely when or where they will occur. For that reason, the Revised Forest Plan is designed to foster diverse, resilient ecosystems that can respond to environmental disturbance, as well as specific protections designed to sustain important habitat components.

Those who commented also asked why objectives for vegetation management projections were subject to budgetary limitations. People were concerned the Revised Forest Plan would not provide for increasing active vegetation management if budgets, alternative funding sources, or increased efficiencies were to generate additional capacity. The public, in particular the timber industry, raised concerns when the first generation of forest plans appeared to over-promise timber outputs because they were based on budgets that turned out to be unrealistic. In response to these concerns a reasonable budget projection for the plan period was used to develop alternatives. Experience indicates it is in the Public’s best interest to provide reasonable expectations in plan projections.

It is important to note objectives in the BDNF Plan are not a limiting factor on future management. We recognize the need for more vegetation management and restoration than is currently projected based on budgets and will use stewardship contracting whenever appropriate to expand our capacity to accomplish restoration. If resources expand, the Revised Forest Plan would allow for vegetation treatment to expand provided

treatments contributed to Forest Plan goals and could be achieved within relevant standards.

Some interested parties also asked why the Plan did not incorporate approaches they suggested to improve integration and increase efficiency. In particular, they recommended all projects be implemented through stewardship contracting; and integrated projects be analyzed and decisions made at the landscape scale (tens of thousands of acres). The Revised Forest Plan as a strategic document does not deal with the details of project implementation. Stewardship contracting is a valuable tool for implementing projects that achieve Forest Plan goals, and its use will be a priority wherever appropriate. Likewise, large-scale project analysis can be an effective approach to project integration.

Many people asked how noxious weeds would be managed on the BDNF. The Revised Forest Plan carries forward the direction from the BDNF Noxious Weed Control Record of Decision (2002). Prevention of new infestations and suppression of existing populations of noxious weeds will continue under this direction.

The issue of climate change was also raised in public comment. In particular, there was concern that a warmer and drier climate would expand the spread of insects and disease, and the incidence of large wildland fires. A more aggressive strategy for vegetation management was proposed to address the implications of climate change for values at risk, and to accelerate the process of carbon sequestration on the BDNF.

The Forest Service nationally and the Northern Region in particular are actively engaged in assessing the implications of climate change for national forest management. The science, while it can project certain trends over large scales, includes a great deal of uncertainty at the local level. The BDNF monitoring plan includes measures for assessing the effects of climate change. It also incorporates the Region's Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, which has a specific climate change component. BDNF staff will engage in agency-wide and Regional efforts, working with the scientific community, to synthesize scientific understanding relevant to our geographic setting. Adjustments to the Revised Forest Plan will be considered if warranted. (See Appendix A for more detailed information about current approaches to this issue.)

Forest Plan Decisions and Rationale: Forest Plan goals, objectives, and standards for vegetation are designed to maintain or restore the integrity, resiliency, and sustainability of ecosystems. Goals and objectives for the composition, structure, and function of vegetation on the BDNF were guided by information about historic range of variability (HRV) and by our understanding of disturbance ecology and ongoing and anticipated disturbance which may occur in the next decade and a half within the Forest. While future environmental conditions may well differ from those of the past, our understanding of ecological processes and the characteristics of resilient ecosystems are enhanced by the study of historic patterns, helping us to determine courses of management actions to develop more resilient forests in the face of various levels of disturbance.

The planning process identified the need to maintain or improve resilient forest conditions through diversity of age, size class, and species. Especially in the large size classes of dry forest communities and some lodgepole pine communities, vegetation has

become uncharacteristically dense, and by reducing forest density, resiliency will increase. This objective has been added to the Revised Forest Plan.

The Revised Forest Plan includes objectives to increase smaller size classes and earlier seral stage ecosystem components for both Douglas-fir and lodgepole pine and to increase the aspen component. The objectives to increase the small size class (20,000 acres in the Douglas-fir and 74,000 acres in the lodgepole pine components) would be achieved by regenerating and/or salvaging forests that are dead or dying, where needed to reduce the risk of wildfire, or where needed to meet the objectives on suitable timber lands. The aspen component would be favored on about 67,000 acres in areas where lodgepole pine is regenerated. Aspen provides important habitat for many wildlife species and has decreased in distribution.

The Revised Forest Plan also includes objectives to promote regeneration of whitebark pine on approximately 45,000 acres, largely through the use of fire. In the absence of fire, other conifer species tend to replace whitebark pine, which is an important food source for bears and other, wildlife species.

The restoration of vegetation composition, structure, and function as described above is expected to enhance the resiliency and sustainability of ecosystems and thereby expand options for managing the BDNF in response to environmental stressors including climate change.

Revision Topic #2: Wildlife

Need for Change: A review of the 1986 and 1987 Plans indicated the need to continue providing habitat to support sustainable populations of native and desired non-native vertebrate species. The need to consolidate management direction was also identified, as there are notable differences in wildlife management indicator species, objectives, and standards between the two existing Plans. Finally, recent science calls for updating desired conditions and objectives to manage ecosystems for sustainable and diverse wildlife populations rather than dealing primarily with the needs of individual species.

Major Public Issues: Public comments on wildlife habitat called for improving wildlife habitat security, connectivity, and linkage by limiting motorized vehicle access. Some security needs are year-long, while others are tied to a specific season. Some habitats are important for security during the winter, others during the hunting season, and yet others during the reproductive season.

Some suggested wildlife habitat security would best be addressed by establishing a Forestwide open motorized route density objective of 1.5 miles per square mile. The Revised Forest Plan, though it does not have a Forestwide open motorized route objective, does establish those objectives on a landscape-by-landscape basis for the summer season and on a hunting unit basis for the hunting season. In each landscape, the objective is based on criteria such as wildlife habitat security or a non-motorized recreation emphasis. The Revised Forest Plan is the first of several steps in determining a final road and trail system for the BDNF. The Plan provides a broad, strategic look at the transportation system. Additional site specific travel planning will be necessary to comply with the travel planning rule. The Revised Forest Plan route density objectives do not set a lower limit on route density.

Forest Plan Decisions and Rationale: The Revised Forest Plan addresses the issue of habitat security, connectivity, and linkage with a variety of year-round and seasonal management areas for motorized and non-motorized use. Table 1 displays the percent of BDNF acres in each of motorized and non-motorized access management categories. This table is included under the Revision Topic #4, Recreation.

Current plans apply objectives for open motorized route density only to open roads. The Revised Forest Plan sets objectives for open motorized route density for specific geographic landscapes. Those objectives generally provide more habitat security than the 1986 and 1987 Plans because they apply both to motorized trails and roads. In addition, route density objectives are applied during the hunting seasons at the hunting unit scale. This approach allows the Forest Service and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to closely coordinate big game harvest objectives with maintenance of secure habitat.

Summer motorized route density objectives by landscape in the Revised Forest Plan range from 0 to 2.0 miles per square mile, with a median of 1.6. Open motorized route density objectives for the hunting season by hunting unit in the Revised Forest Plan ranged from 0 to 1.8 miles per square mile, with a median route density of 0.9 mile per square mile. The Revised Forest Plan also updates the definition of secure habitat and employs best available science to assess the response of elk and other big game to the threat of motorized disturbance, allowing for more proactive management based on new information.

Cover and forage for animals is provided by a mosaic of species and age classes of native trees, shrubs, grasses, and forbs. Vegetation goals, objectives, and standards provide the basis for maintaining or restoring ecological communities of sufficient resiliency to provide for the viability of wildlife species that occur on, or make use of forested types on the BDNF. Revised Plan goals, objectives and standards provide for greater habitat diversity and a more sustainable ecosystem as we look toward the future.

In addition, because of comments received with respect to meeting the viability requirements of the regulations we have added additional goals, objectives, and standards in the Revised Forest Plan to address habitat needs for specific species. The Biological Evaluation was also revised based on these modifications to Alternative 6.

Since the FEIS was released in February of 2008, an analysis of the snag ecosystem component has been completed for the east-side Forests in the Northern Region, including the BDNF. Evaluation of this new information resulted in a modified snag standard.

Because the public is concerned about management of old growth and the impact of insect mortality on old growth, I have decided to take a more conservative approach to managing old growth by modifying the old growth standard. Removing hazardous fuels within old growth stands is allowed if conducted in a manner that retains at least the “minimum criteria” for age and number of large trees and for basal area required in Green et al. 2007. The intent with any treatment in old growth is to improve the likelihood old growth is retained on the landscape.

Vegetation structure provides the basis for maintaining or restoring forested ecological communities of sufficient diversity to provide for the viability of most wildlife species

that occur on, or make use of forested types on the BDNF. Revised Forest Plan goals, objectives and standards provide for greater habitat diversity and a more sustainable ecosystem as we look toward the future.

Revision Topic #3: Aquatic Resources

Need for Change: New information and increased awareness of physical watershed condition and aquatic organisms indicated a need to strengthen forest plan direction to conserve and restore aquatic resources.

Separate Beaverhead and Deerlodge Forest Plans approved in 1986-1987 and subsequent amendments to incorporate the Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFISH) resulted in three separately developed sets of plan direction for aquatic resource management. State and federal designations under the Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act also triggered the need to evaluate management of the amount, type, location and timing of a variety of uses affecting aquatic ecosystems. Specific direction is needed to restore watersheds and to manage for properly functioning systems and aquatic populations.

Major Public Issues:

Clean water and healthy recreational fisheries are high priorities for people who care about the BDNF.

Public comments also raised the issue of recent studies evaluating the impact of livestock trampling on fish spawning beds (redds). The Revised Forest Plan emphasizes aquatic resource restoration and the conservation of native trout fisheries. Recent studies have indicated within-stream trampling by grazing animals directly affects redds to a higher degree than was previously estimated.

Some who commented expressed concern regarding the potential impact of trampling on fish redds. The implications for fish populations are being evaluated by the Forest Service in coordination with the MT Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks; the US Fish and Wildlife Service; conservation organizations; and livestock industry representatives. Mitigation measures to address the impact of redd trampling will be incorporated into allotment management plans and annual operating instructions where appropriate. Mitigation might include fencing to exclude animals from certain reaches of stream, altering the grazing season, changing the management of riparian pastures, or reducing animal numbers.

In general, public comment throughout the development of the Revised Forest Plan has been positive about the approach to aquatic resource management.

Forest Plan Decisions and Rationale: The Revised Forest Plan places a strong emphasis on aquatic resources. The BDNF includes the headwaters for both the Columbia and Missouri River Basins and provides habitat for the federally listed bull trout and two Forest Service sensitive species—fluvial arctic grayling and westslope cutthroat trout. Many other plant and animal species rely on aquatic habitats on national forest land. For these reasons the following management direction is adopted.

INFISH direction is incorporated into the Revised Forest Plan for all watersheds on the BDNF. Although originally developed for the Interior Columbia River Basin west of the Continental Divide, the principles of aquatic ecosystem protection and restoration are

equally appropriate for application to the Upper Missouri River watershed east of the Divide. INFISH was evaluated for local applicability before incorporation into the Plan. Some standards were modified for clarity; others were dropped because they did not apply under local conditions.

The Revised Forest Plan identifies 15 restoration watersheds and 56 fish conservation key watersheds.

Objectives and standards emphasize coordination with USFWS, federal, state, and local agencies. An objective to prioritize bull trout restoration activities, with consideration given to population status and health of bull trout core areas, has been added to the Revised Forest Plan.

The 2008 Fisheries Biological Assessment and Evaluation for the Revised Forest Plan identified federally listed, candidate, proposed, and Forest Service sensitive species, and determined the Revised Forest Plan provides for management of fish and wildlife habitat to maintain viable populations of existing native and desired non-native species. This determination is based on goals, objectives, and standards in the Revised Forest Plan and on the requirement for future site-specific environmental analyses of all proposed actions under the National Environmental Policy Act. Species specific conservation strategies and agreements are integrated and incorporated into the Revised Forest Plan, making it a starting point for all future project proposals.

Revision Topic # 4: Recreation and Travel Management

Need for Change: Motorized recreation, particularly the use of ATV's and over-snow vehicles, has increased substantially since the 1986 and 1987 Plans were approved. Advancing technology has also expanded use into new terrain. For much of the BDNF, this use has evolved over time with little management intervention. The unmanaged expansion of motorized use has resulted in resource damage, wildlife impacts, and competition and conflict between user groups.

Current Plans do not provide adequate direction concerning the management of recreation opportunities on the BDNF. Clear and specific direction is needed to manage recreation settings and travel patterns in order to provide a balanced and diverse range of opportunities across the Forest.

The 2001 Off-Highway Vehicle Plan Amendment for Montana, North Dakota, and portions of South Dakota Tri-State OHV Decision (2001) also highlighted the need for change. The Tri-State OHV Decision closed national forest land to motorized travel off of identified routes. There is a need to identify an unambiguous system of roads and trails for vehicle access while addressing resource concerns.

Major Public Issues: People have indicated a desire to know what to expect in terms of recreation settings, opportunities, and restrictions, for specific geographical areas during each season of use. The public has asked us to clearly identify areas where they can enjoy quiet recreation, and on the other hand, areas where they can enjoy a motorized experience. Public comments generally supported designation of summer motorized travel routes and the elimination of travel off of designated routes, although opinions vary greatly about the amount of motorized use to include. Many people also considered it

important to identify areas where snowmobiling was allowed and areas where visitors could expect to find a quiet, non-motorized winter setting.

In the past few years, travel management planning has become a more complicated process. In 2001, the Tri-State OHV Decision amended forest plans with new direction affecting motorized access. The 2005 Travel Management Rule prescribed a new process for making site-specific decisions to designate routes for motorized travel and closed undesignated areas and routes to motorized use. These separate planning processes have resulted in some confusion.

The Revised Forest Plan makes broad, strategic decisions that identify goals, objectives, standards, and suitable uses for large areas of land. Plan decisions incorporate considerations about physical and biological landscape characteristics, resource management access, access to private lands and minerals, access for permitted uses such as grazing, and public access for recreation use.

Forest Plan Decisions and Rationale: Recreation and travel management were the subjects of broad public debate throughout the plan revision process. Many people prize the BDNF as a place to recreate. The Revised Forest Plan provides a thoughtful, well-designed approach to encouraging recreational enjoyment of the BDNF.

Management area direction describing recreation settings will help Forest visitors to accurately anticipate the experience they will have when visiting a particular location. Recreation setting descriptions include type of access (e.g. motorized or non-motorized), level of recreational facility development, general level and concentration of visitor use, and other resource uses in the area. The spectrum of settings extends from Primitive (undeveloped, non-motorized) through Semi-primitive (minimally developed, non-motorized or motorized) to Roaded Natural (moderately developed, accessible by passenger vehicle).

The Revised Forest Plan specifically emphasizes motorized recreation in several management areas. Future site-specific travel planning in these areas will provide outstanding opportunities for the public to collaborate on creating “showcase” recreational sites. Key areas with a motorized emphasis include Pipestone, East Face, South Fleecer, Little Boulder, Little Boulder-Galena, Meadow Creek, and Butte North.

The Revised Forest Plan also identifies areas in which winter motorized recreation is featured, while summer use is non-motorized. These areas have watershed conditions that are more susceptible to impacts by wheeled vehicles than over-snow vehicles. Key areas with the combination of winter motorized/summer non-motorized recreation include parts of Mt. Jefferson and the West Big Hole.

A third broad category of opportunity is provided where access is non-motorized both summer and winter, providing for quiet recreation year-round and seasonal wildlife habitat values such as big game winter range. Examples include Anderson Mountain, Greenhorn Mountains, a part of Middle Mountain, and Basin.

A fourth category offers a wide mix of motorized and non-motorized semi-primitive backcountry experiences. Winter closures within these areas are generally intended to protect winter range for game animals. Summer closures provide habitat security for

wildlife or quiet recreation. Examples are found in the Antelope Basin, Lobo Mesa, Pintler Face, East Deerlodge, and Whitetail areas.

Finally, a non-motorized recreation setting is found in designated and recommended wilderness areas. Those areas allow foot travel and equestrian use, but not mountain biking. Recommended wilderness areas are listed under Revision Topic #8.

Decisions about the type and location of public recreation access are among the most difficult for land managers because of the delicate balance between competing public values and natural resource protection. Two examples of difficult decisions are found in the West Big Hole and on Mt. Jefferson. In both cases, the Revised Forest Plan allows snowmobiling in parts of these areas, primarily because that use plays an important role in local community economies. The Revised Forest Plan also manages parts of each area for quiet winter recreation and wildlife habitat.

The Revised Forest Plan is strategic in nature. Management Area direction establishes desired conditions, standards and allowable uses but does not make site specific decisions such as closing individual motorized routes in areas Recommended for Wilderness. The BDNF Forest Supervisor will issue a second ROD, based on the analysis in the Revised FEIS, making site-specific decisions based on the Revised Forest Plan. That decision will serve as the basis for administrative actions (Forest Supervisor closure orders), signing, and enforcement. In addition, that ROD will identify the mapped inventory of existing routes, validated by public review and comment, as a base for continuing implementation of the Tri-State OHV Amendment and as a starting point for subsequent travel management. The next stage of travel planning will include further analysis to designate routes for motorized travel under 36 CFR 212 and result in publication of Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUM) for the BDNF.

The Revised Forest Plan provides for the following mix of recreation access opportunities.

Table 1. Recreation Access Summary

	Summer	Winter
Motorized acres	1,863,165	2,043,372
Motorized percent of Forest	55%	60%
Non-motorized acres	1,516,855	1,336,628
Non-motorized percent of Forest	45%	40%

Under this Revised Forest Plan, new recreation resorts or residences will not be permitted, nor will permits be issued for unoccupied tracts or lots.

Revision Topic # 5: Fire Management

Need for Change: National interagency fire policies recognize the ecological role of fire in fire-dependent ecosystems, as well as the increasing risk of wildfire on firefighter and public safety, communities, and resource values such as threatened, endangered and sensitive species habitat, water quality, air quality, and soils.

The 1986 and 1987 Plans are inconsistent with current fire management policy. In particular, they do not provide the opportunity to manage unplanned fires for resource

benefit. Fire management direction that conforms to national policy would allow for a range of responses to wildland fire that take safety, community protection, cost containment, and resource management objectives into account.

Major Public Issues:

Public comments have raised concerns about the modest acreage of vegetation treatment projected in the Revised Forest Plan in comparison with the large acreage in insect infestations and the concern that dead and dying trees could fuel intense wildfires that pose substantial risk to communities and the wildland-urban interface. Those who commented would like the BDNF Plan to clearly identify the scale of that problem situation and to set fuel reduction objectives that reflect harvesting those acres.

The BDNF Plan sets a long-term strategic framework for managing vegetation, but does not focus on specific treatments or areas of treatment in the near term. All Forests have identified areas with the highest priority for treatment, applying three broad criteria: community protection, watershed restoration, and wildlife habitat improvement. Appendix D of the Revised Forest Plan “Schedule of Timber Sales and Related Activities” reflects those priorities. The acres of insect-killed trees referenced in comments on the Proposed Plan are clearly a community and watershed protection priority for the BDNF.

The public has expressed concerns about using prescribed fire or wildland fire use instead of mechanical treatment (harvesting) to reduce fuels and restore ecosystems. Those concerned would prefer trees with commercial value be removed in a way that captures the value. The Revised Forest Plan recognizes the role of mechanical treatment in reducing fuels and restoring sustainable ecosystems. The scale of the need is, however, greater than reasonable projections of capacity for planning and implementing mechanical methods on the ground. Mechanical means will be emphasized where needed to create conditions safe for treatment by fire and will often be used in areas adjacent to developments, where public safety and structures are at greatest risk. Harvest will primarily focus on trees that are dead and/or dying and present the highest risk to public safety or infrastructure. There was also concern that wildland fire management direction needed to be coordinated with other jurisdictions, in order to ensure local community and other agency objectives are integrated with those of the Forest Service when guidance is developed.

Forest Plan Decisions and Rationale: The Revised Forest Plan allows for the full range of suppression responses to unplanned fire to protect values at risk and to restore natural processes where appropriate. Prescribed fire is allowed forestwide, and may play a number of roles, including fuels reduction and the restoration of early seral stage vegetation such as aspen and shrublands/grasslands.

The Revised Forest Plan acknowledges the risks from wildfire to communities and lands adjoining the national forest, and establishes objectives to reduce risk. National Fire Policy changed between publication of the draft and final EIS. The new policy recommends a fire response for all wildfires based on risks, resources, and safety. Wildland fire use is one of the options available as a response to wildland fire. Because of state and local government concerns, a Revised Forest Plan standard requires coordination with appropriate agencies when wildland fire use plans are developed.

Revision Topic # 6: Livestock Grazing

Need for Change: There is a need to review and evaluate the calculation of areas suitable for livestock grazing in the 1986 and 1987 Plans. Permitted livestock grazing objectives need to be adaptive to updated resource requirements to protect and restore watersheds and fish habitat, and to reduce conflicts between grizzly bears and domestic livestock.

Major Public Issues: Livestock grazing outputs are of economic interest to the ranching industry, local governments, and local communities.

Preserving a viable ranching industry has also become a concern of several collaborative and environmental groups active in land use planning. Ranches are seen as an effective tool for preserving open space in the face of increasing pressure for development and subdivision.

Some grazing permit holders and county officials are concerned about the effect of wilderness recommendations on livestock grazing. The Revised Forest Plan does not place any new restrictions on ranchers with allotments in recommended wilderness areas.

Some people are also concerned that recent studies of the impacts of livestock trampling in fish spawning beds (redds) could result in reduced grazing. The implications of those studies are still being evaluated. Adjustments on allotments with habitat for sensitive fish species will be considered on a case by case basis. Options for mitigation include changes in the grazing season, pasture rotation, and fencing; reduction in numbers is generally seen as a last resort but could result in some cases.

Some commenters asked to see much stricter controls put on livestock grazing and would like to see livestock suitability analyzed at a site specific level before allowing grazing to continue. Livestock suitability is being addressed through Allotment Plans as is application of site-specific grazing standards. This is evidenced by reductions in permitted use over time.

Forest Plan Decisions and Rationale: The Revised Forest Plan identifies approximately 802,000 acres of the BDNF as suitable for livestock grazing, a reduction of 44,000 acres from the 1986 and 1987 plans. In the years since current Plans were approved, several allotments have been closed to livestock grazing. The Revised Forest Plan closes the Trail Creek Allotment, located in the Big Hole, and the Indian Noble C&H allotment, in the Tobacco Roots to livestock grazing because the limited amount of suitable range outside of riparian zones makes livestock management in compliance with riparian standards impractical. The reduction in suitable acreage reflects those adjustments and does not impact any permittees.

The Revised Forest Plan prescribes interim standards for livestock grazing until specific long-term objectives, prescriptions, or allowable use levels have been designed through individual allotment management plans and site-specific NEPA decisions. It also strengthens forestwide standards for grazing and riparian management.

The Revised Forest Plan also requires any sheep allotments in occupied grizzly bear habitat in the Gravelly landscape not be restocked with sheep if they become vacant. The requirement is intended to address the issue of grizzly bear predation on livestock and is

consistent with the Final Conservation Strategy for the Grizzly Bear in the Yellowstone Ecosystem.

Revision Topic # 7: Timber

Need for Change: Timber harvest levels and methods have changed substantially since the 1986 and 1987 Plans were developed. Threatened, endangered, and sensitive species habitat management, riparian and water quality standards, and national policy on clearcutting have contributed to those changes.

The 1986 and 1987 Plans projected timber harvest levels that did not take current or projected budgets into account. The timber industry objected when, over time, it was evident that Forest Plans agency-wide had projected unrealistic harvest levels, and failed to meet those projections when funding did not materialize.

There is a need under the planning regulations to identify lands unsuitable and suitable for timber production. Timber production is defined as, “The purposeful growing, tending, harvesting, and regeneration of regulated crops of trees to be cut into logs, bolts, or other round sections for industrial or consumer use.”

In addition to suitable timber lands, it is useful to identify lands where timber harvest may be used as a tool to meet other resource objectives such as restoring ecological structure and function, improving fish and wildlife habitat, or reducing forest fuels to mitigate the effects of wildfire on values at risk.

Major Public Issues:

There is considerable concern about the comparatively modest level of timber harvesting projected for the BDNF. Timber companies have made extensive comments with substantial analysis to support those comments. Some comments object to using budget as a limiting factor. Other comments call for expanding resources with the use of stewardship contracting and improving efficiency with landscape-scale environmental analysis. Yet other comments call for identifying the current large-scale insect infestation on the BDNF and urge the Forest to make it a priority in the Plan to harvest affected acres to improve forest health. Those issues are discussed in more detail above, under Revision Topics #1, Vegetation Management and #4, Fire Management.

Another concern has been raised about the distinction between lands suitable for timber production and lands available for timber harvest. Some people asked whether there is legal and regulatory support for harvesting on lands not suitable for timber production. On lands considered unsuitable for timber production, the regulations do allow timber harvest to meet other resource objectives.

Some parties generated alternative approaches to calculating lands suitable for timber production, and proposed that their version be adopted in the Revised Forest Plan. The BDNF Plan takes an approach to managing vegetation that focuses more on ecological restoration than timber production. Determination of suitable lands in the FEIS was based NFMA regulation CFR219.14 and CFR219.4(c). The Revised Forest Plan provides a strategy for managing forest composition, structure, and function toward desired conditions, with commercial wood fiber as a product of that management. The conditions that drive active management are not specific to lands suitable for production, and may

well occur more commonly on lands available for harvest to meet other objectives. For those reasons, the Plan did not place a great deal of emphasis on distinguishing one suitability type from the other.

Forest Plan Decisions and Rationale: The Revised Forest Plan identifies 284,000 acres as suitable for timber production, and establishes an allowable sale quantity (upper limit of volume harvested per decade from suitable acres alone) of 140 million board feet (MMBF) or an average of 14 MMBF per year. Harvest in any given year could exceed 14 MMBF as long as the decadal total is not exceeded.

The Revised Forest Plan identifies an additional 1.6 million acres as available for timber harvest for other resource objectives. Not all areas available for timber harvest may be accessible by roads. Road access is dependent upon the terrain and other management direction such as aquatic protections and motorized or non-motorized allocation. Of the 1.6 million acres, approximately 900,000 acres are inventoried as roadless. Products removed from the additional lands for other resource objectives may contribute to the timber sale program but are not subject to the decadal harvest limit. In making my decision I also considered responding to local community needs for jobs, the national need for wood fiber, providing biomass for alternative energy sources and treatment of fuel accumulations.

Even though outputs were constrained in this analysis by budgets, the BDNF has the capacity to respond to unanticipated budget increases with a higher level of timber harvest. As opportunities arise and new markets for smaller diameter material emerge, the Revised Forest Plan will allow management to respond. Opportunities to expand the program would be provided by treatments to restore ecosystem condition, reduce fuels, and salvage dead trees on lands outside the suitable base.

Revision Topic # 8: Recommended Wilderness

Need for Change: The planning regulations require evaluation of roadless areas for wilderness potential during forest plan revision (36 CFR 219.17). Public comments and review of previous landscape analysis also identified a need to make alternative wilderness recommendations.

Major Public Issues: Comments on wilderness recommendation tend toward one end of the spectrum or the other. Many people favor recommending all or most roadless areas for wilderness while others object to any additional wilderness on the BDNF. In addition to opinions at each end of the spectrum, however, some people have indicated greater support for or concern about wilderness recommendation for some areas than for others. Finally, several groups of diverse stakeholders have generated compromise recommendations taking into account the trade-offs between wilderness recommendations, high priority snowmobile and/or mountain bike areas, and areas with timber harvest potential.

Some local governments have expressed strong opposition to new wilderness within their counties. By regulation and policy, the wilderness evaluation process applies national criteria to individual roadless areas. A number of areas that rated highest under those criteria are located in counties that oppose more wilderness. Decisions to recommend

areas for the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) are often, as in this situation, a challenging balance between deeply held values on both sides of the issue.

The question of trade-offs between wilderness recommendations and non-wilderness opportunities were addressed by several citizen-led collaborative efforts. The results of those efforts represent a delicate and hard-won consensus among interests that are often at odds, and were taken seriously in developing the Revised Forest Plan. The Revised Forest Plan does not, however, adopt all wilderness recommendations from the collaborative efforts. I considered the wilderness recommendations, as well as our evaluation of wilderness potential applying national criteria for the presence of wilderness characteristics. Additional factors such as area and boundary manageability of the area as wilderness, and access implications for private land and permit holders influenced the final areas recommended for wilderness. Wilderness recommendations in the Revised Forest Plan emphasize areas where high wilderness characteristic ratings overlap with low levels of potential conflict.

Options for future management of Mt. Jefferson generated more public comments—on both sides of the issue—than any other area evaluated for wilderness potential in the plan revision process. The Revised Forest Plan recognizes the validity and importance of those comments by providing both for undisturbed wildlife habitat and quiet recreation opportunities in recommended wilderness, and for limited snowmobile access.

Another issue raised in public comment was the evaluation of areas identified by the 1977 Montana Wilderness Study Act as Wilderness Study Areas. The decision was made early in the plan revision process not to formally re-evaluate those areas for wilderness recommendation. The statute established a level of protection for wilderness characteristics without additional Forest Plan management direction, to maintain the option of future Congressional wilderness designation for those areas.

The proposal to exclude snowmobiling and mountain biking from recommended wilderness elicited strong opinions from both sides of the issue. In the view of many people, those uses do not affect wilderness characteristics or the potential for an area to be designated wilderness because they do not generally leave physical impacts on the land. In the view of other people, such uses do affect wilderness characteristics (such as opportunities for solitude) that are as important to an area's wilderness potential as the absence of physical developments and impacts.

The management of recommended wilderness is intended by national policy to protect wilderness potential and wilderness values (FSM 1923.03). The policy provides a certain amount of latitude to local managers when considering their local situations. An area is identified as recommended wilderness because it ranks high on physical and social characteristics such as integrity of the natural environment and scenery; opportunities for solitude, challenge, and primitive recreation; wildlife and ecological diversity, and unique ecological or cultural features.

Forest Plan Decisions and Rationale: Based on the direction in Forest Service Handbook 1909.12, Chapter 7 (WO Amendment 1909.12-92-1 effective 8/3/92), the Revised Forest Plan recommends 322,000 acres of roadless areas for addition to the NWPS. Table 2 describes individual area recommendations, the acres for each area, and

the reasons for making the recommendation. Table 3 lists the roadless areas not recommended for wilderness and reasons for the decision.

The Revised Forest Plan also excludes motorized uses and mountain biking from recommended wilderness. I reviewed all of the alternatives analyzed in the FEIS, some which allowed mechanized transport (mountain bikes) in recommended wilderness and some that did not. The Revised Forest Plan provides increased opportunities for mountain biking in non-motorized allocations. This decision strikes a balance by preserving the sense of remoteness and the opportunities for solitude in recommended wilderness while providing ample opportunities for mountain biking in quiet and non-motorized areas.

Wilderness is highly valued by many, and represents a multitude of deeply held values and beliefs. Yet, recommendation and potential Congressional designation of lands for wilderness will necessarily result in losses of opportunities for others such as snowmobilers and mountain bikers. The Revised Forest Plan provides a balance of opportunities in response to the broad range of public values.

Recommended additions to the Lee Metcalf and Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness areas would improve manageability of these designated areas without a major loss of existing recreational opportunities. The Cowboy Heaven area will connect the separate Bear Trap and Spanish Peaks Units of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness, providing consistent management across most of the northern Madison Range.

Management of the Mt. Jefferson/Hellroaring area is influenced by past commitments. The Forest Service agreed to administer the area consistent with wilderness recommendations made by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in the 1990 Centennial Mountains Wilderness Suitability Study FEIS and Record of Decision. The addition of part of Mt. Jefferson to recommended wilderness adjacent to the BLM recommended wilderness area acknowledges the agreement. The Mt. Jefferson/Hellroaring decision provides access for snowmobilers on the Idaho side of Mt. Jefferson while providing greater protection for wolverine habitat and other wilderness values in Hellroaring Creek.

The combination of uses allowed on Mt. Jefferson under the Revised Forest Plan represents a management challenge, because the boundary between the motorized and non-motorized use areas does not follow an effective topographical barrier to illegal motorized entry. The success of this compromise decision relies heavily on voluntary compliance with recommended wilderness boundaries by over-snow vehicle users. The Monitoring Plan spells out monitoring protocols that address compliance with restrictions on motorized use in high elevation wildlife habitat, including Mt. Jefferson. If monitoring reveals that non-compliance is an issue, the decision to allow snowmobiling on Mt. Jefferson will be re-evaluated.

The Italian Peak, Electric Peak, Stony, and Quigg wilderness recommendations compliment recommended wilderness on adjacent national forests.

Recommended wilderness areas would be widely distributed across the Forest, with Mt. Jefferson in the southeast; Garfield Mountain and Italian Peak in the southwest; Stony, Quigg and the Anaconda-Pintler additions in the northwest; and Electric Peak and

Cowboy Heaven in the northeast. The Snowcrest, Table Mountain, Torrey Mountain and East Pioneer recommended wildernesses lie in the geographic center of the Forest.

The following tables are a highly summarized account of the evaluation of roadless areas, and some key reasons for recommending or not recommending them for wilderness. Appendix C to the FEIS describes the evaluation of wilderness potential in more detail.

Table 2. Roadless Areas (all or part) Recommended for Wildernesses

Name	Acres	Key reasons for recommending
Anaconda-Pintler Additions (3)	31,700	Increased manageability
Electric Peak*	5,500	Contributes to larger unit on Helena NF, wolverine habitat
Lee Metcalf Additions	15,600	Connects three existing units, under-represented ecological type, habitat for wide-ranging wildlife species,
Garfield Mountain	34,700	Under-represented ecological type, habitat for wide ranging species, size
Italian Peak	25,300	Size, outstanding features along the Continental Divide, contributes to adjacent Targhee NF unit
Mt. Jefferson	2,100	Contributes to adjacent, larger BLM unit, wolverine, Continental Divide
Quigg	8,500	Contributes to adjacent Slide Rock unit on the Lolo NF and Bitterroot NF
Snowcrest Mountain	92,000	Underrepresented ecological type, size, wide-ranging wildlife species
Stony Mountain	14,700	Contributes to adjacent Stony unit on the Bitterroot NF
Table Mountain	18,300	Underrepresented ecological type, near urban center
Torrey Mountain	73,400	Underrepresented plant communities, size, wide-ranging wildlife species habitat

* Final Electric Peak boundary will be determined through ground truthing which may result in minor changes to total acreages

Table 3. Roadless Areas (all or part) not Recommended for Wildernesses

Name	Acres	Reasons for not recommending
Electric Peak	5,800	Established snowmobile use
Mt Jefferson	2,400	Established snowmobile use
McAtee Basin	2,000	Snowmobile access.
West Big Hole	55,900	Established snowmobile use

Monitoring and Evaluation

Chapter 5, Monitoring and Evaluation, is closely tied to the objectives identified in Chapter 3 of the Revised Forest Plan. Chapter 5 lists nine focus areas that link key Forest Plan goals and objectives to the National Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and Northern Region Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. This integrated, multi-scale approach to monitoring recognizes the value of answering regional and national monitoring questions, as well as forest plan level questions for the BDNF.

Each focus area consists of questions, and one or more performance measures. The table addresses requirements from the 36 CFR 219.12(k) (4) of 1982, and includes:

- Actions, effects or resources to be measured, and the frequency of measurements;
- Expected precision and reliability of the monitoring process; and,
- Timeframes for evaluation and reporting.

This section of the Revised Plan is the key to adaptive management. It indicates whether we are achieving what was intended, and whether or not plan amendments are needed. Forest Plan monitoring on the BDNF is designed to be specific and feasible in order to focus on key items. Forest Plan monitoring is only one scale and category of monitoring activities on the BDNF; it will be coordinated and integrated with other monitoring efforts.

Decision Authority for the Revised Forest Plan

As Regional Forester for the Northern Region, I have the authority to make land management plan decisions as delegated by the Secretary of Agriculture and Chief of the Forest Service at 36 CFR 219.10 (c).

Decisions Documented Separately

In addition to Plan decisions documented in this Record of Decision under Regional Forester authority, the BDNF Forest Supervisor intends to base two subsequent decisions on analysis in the FEIS for the Revised Plan.

Travel Planning Decisions

The Revised Forest Plan is strategic in nature. Management Area direction establishes desired conditions, standards and allowable uses but does not make site specific decisions such as closing individual motorized routes in areas Recommended for Wilderness. The BDNF Forest Supervisor will issue a second ROD, based on the analysis in the Revised FEIS, making site-specific decisions based on the Revised Forest Plan. That decision will serve as the basis for administrative actions (Forest Supervisor closure orders), signing, and enforcement. In addition, that ROD will identify the mapped inventory of existing routes, validated by public review and comment, as a base for continuing implementation of the Tri-State OHV Amendment and as a starting point for subsequent travel management. The next stage of travel planning will include further analysis to designate routes for motorized travel under 36 CFR 212 and result in publication of Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUM) for the BDNF.

Oil and Gas Leasing

The FEIS for the Revised Forest Plan analyzes the subject of lands available for oil and gas leasing, including alternatives and effects. The decision to authorize leasing is not a strategic land management planning decision. For that reason, a separate ROD will be issued by the Forest Supervisor and the BLM State Director, documenting the leasing decision.

Alternatives

Alternative Development

Alternatives under consideration in the Draft and Final EIS were developed from the following sources:

- Monitoring and evaluation of current BDNF resources and implementation of the 1986 and 1987 plans.
- Review of Forest Service policy and direction
- An assessment of existing conditions, as disclosed in the Analysis of Management Situation (AMS) and reflecting subsequent public comments on the AMS
- Issues identified in coordination with Tribes and State and local governments.
- Issues identified during the public scoping process, discussion at public meetings, and comments received on the AMS, Proposed Action, DEIS and Draft Plan.
- Management concerns and opportunities identified by the interdisciplinary team.

The Proposed Action and four other alternatives were developed in detail, and their effects were studied and displayed in the DEIS. The DEIS was circulated for public comment.

In response to public comments and additional analysis, a sixth alternative was developed and its effects are disclosed in the FEIS. Alternative 6 was expanded with additional detail and published as the 2008 Revised Draft Plan.

An additional public comment opportunity was provided with publication of the FEIS and Revised Draft Plan. Comments on those products generated modifications described below and published with this Record of Decision as the Revised Forest Plan.

Alternatives Considered in Detail (FEIS pages 18-37)

Alternative 1 – No Action (current 1986 and 1987 plan direction)

General: The alternative of making no change to the current situation is required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and is intended to serve as a basis of comparison for the other alternatives. “No Action” for land management planning (FSH 1909.15) means that management allocations, activities, and management direction described in the existing 1986 and 1987 Forest Plans (as amended) would continue for 10-15 years.

Under Alternative 1, there would continue to be separate and inconsistent sets of Forest Plan direction for the Beaverhead and the Deerlodge sides of the Forest.

Vegetation and Aquatic Ecosystems: Alternative 1 focuses more on resource outputs than desired conditions and the restoration of aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. The concept of key watersheds is not applied.

Wildlife: This alternative applies a road density objective vs. road and trail density objective. Aspen restoration and conifer encroachment treatments are not addressed.

Recreation and Travel Management: Approximately 39% of the forest would be allocated to non-motorized recreation in the summer; 22% in the winter. Open roads and trails continue to be determined by visual parameters as defined in the Tri-State OHV Decision.

Fire Management: Unplanned fire managed for resource benefit would be available only in the designated Anaconda-Pintler and Lee Metcalf Wildernesses.

Livestock Grazing: Identifies 846,000 acres as suitable for grazing.

Timber: Defines 676,000 acres as suitable for timber production. Timber harvest is allowed to meet other resource objectives on 768,000 acres, subject to accessibility, management area prescriptions, and other direction in the existing Forest Plans.

Recommended Wilderness: In the existing Forest Plan, 174,000 acres are recommended for wilderness.

Alternative 2

General: Alternative 2 is the Proposed Action released for public review in August 2003. The alternative was designed around the need for change evident after monitoring, landscape analysis, and public comments on the Draft Analysis of the Management Situation published December 2002. The Proposed Action introduced large, place-based management areas designed to improve management of resources and which are readily identifiable by forest users.

Vegetation and Aquatic Ecosystems: Alternative 2 does not apply the concept of key watersheds.

Wildlife: This alternative requires a 50% wildlife habitat effectiveness cover by limiting open motorized road and trail densities to 1.5 miles per square mile. It includes an objective to retain 30% of forested land in security blocks of 250 acres or more. Aspen restoration and conifer encroachment treatments are allowed but not emphasized.

Recreation and Travel Management: Approximately 106 miles of roads and 136 miles of trails currently open to motorized travel would be restricted to motorized wheeled vehicles in the summer. Open roads and trails continue to be determined by visual parameters as defined in the Tri-State OHV Decision.

Fire Management: Approximately 2,251,000 acres are available for wildland fire use and prescribed fire is permitted forestwide.

Livestock Grazing: Identifies 846,000 acres as suitable for grazing.

Timber: Defines 346,000 acres as suitable for timber production. Timber harvest is allowed to meet other resource objectives on 1,085,000 acres, subject to accessibility, management area prescriptions, watershed protections and other direction in the Revised Forest Plan.

Recommended Wilderness: In Alternative 2, 195,000 acres are recommended for Wilderness, which includes a revised West Big Hole proposal and allows mechanized, but not motorized, use in areas recommended for wilderness designation.

Alternative 3

General: Alternative 3 responds to public comments requesting the Forest Service to allow natural processes to maintain ecosystems, minimize mechanical vegetation treatment, and conserve or restore aquatic health. The alternative meets concerns about the protection of roadless character by excluding summer motorized uses from all inventoried roadless areas.

Vegetation and Aquatic Ecosystems: Alternative 3 identifies the highest number of key watersheds (135).

Wildlife: This alternative applies an open motorized road and trail densities objective of one mile per square mile. Aspen restoration and conifer encroachment treatments are emphasized but to a lesser degree than Alternative 6 or modified Alternative 6. It retains more old growth than any alternative except for modified Alternative 6.

Recreation and Travel Management: Approximately 59% of the forest falls under non-motorized allocations in the summer and 45% in the winter. The Forest Plan Interim Road & Trail Map serves as the basis for defining legal routes until completion of site-specific travel planning.

Fire Management: Approximately 3,355,000 acres are available for wildland fire use and prescribed fire is permitted forestwide.

Livestock Grazing: Identifies 804,000 acres as suitable for grazing.

Timber: No acres have been identified as suitable for timber production. Timber harvest is allowed to meet other resource objectives on 1,259,000 acres, subject to accessibility, management area prescriptions, watershed protections and other direction in the Revised Forest Plan.

Recommended Wilderness: In Alternative 3, 706,000 acres are recommended for wilderness, which would be closed to motorized travel and mountain bikes.

Alternative 4

General: Alternative 4 responds to public comments that forest management should directly benefit local economies, and utilitarian traditions of families and communities through management emphasis on predictable sustained commodity outputs while allowing a variety of other uses.

Vegetation and Aquatic Ecosystems: Alternative 4 identifies fifty -seven key watersheds for fish conservation and no watersheds where restoration would be the emphasis.

Wildlife: This alternative applies an open motorized road and trail densities objective of 2.5 miles per square mile. Aspen restoration and conifer encroachment treatments are emphasized but to a lesser degree than Alternative 6 or modified Alternative 6. This

alternative includes a standard for retaining 10% of old growth for all dominance types across the forest.

Recreation and Travel Management: Approximately 36% of the forest falls under non-motorized allocations in the summer and 15% in the winter. The Forest Plan Interim Road & Trail Map serves as the basis for defining legal routes until completion of site-specific travel planning.

Fire Management: Approximately 2,385,000 acres are available for wildland fire use and prescribed fire is permitted forestwide.

Livestock Grazing: Identifies 846,000 acres as suitable for grazing.

Timber: Defines 484,000 acres as suitable for timber production. Timber harvest is allowed to meet other resource objectives on 1,005,000 acres subject to accessibility, management area prescriptions, watershed protections and other direction in the Revised Forest Plan.

Recommended Wilderness: In Alternative 4, there are no acres recommended for wilderness.

Alternative 5

General: Alternative 5 is the Draft EIS preferred alternative. It was developed to balance the demand for diverse recreation opportunities, resource protection, and commodity outputs.

Vegetation and Aquatic Ecosystems: Alternative 5 identifies 57 key watersheds for fish conservation and 15 restoration watersheds. This alternative tends to focus on restoration opportunities for aquatics and vegetative health.

Wildlife: This alternative applies an open motorized road and trail densities standard to achieve both summer and hunting season objectives and would vary between 0 and 2 miles per square mile. Aspen restoration and conifer encroachment treatments are emphasized but to a lesser degree than Alternative 6 or modified Alternative 6. This alternative includes a standard for retaining 10% of old growth for all dominance types across the forest.

Recreation and Travel Management: Approximately 45% of the forest falls under non-motorized allocations in the summer and 37% in the winter.. The Forest Plan Interim Road & Trail Map serves as the basis for defining legal routes until completion of site-specific travel planning.

Fire Management: Approximately 2,841,000 acres are available for wildland fire use and prescribed fire is permitted forestwide.

Livestock Grazing: Identifies 810,000 acres as suitable for grazing.

Timber: Defines 216,000 acres as suitable for timber production. Timber harvest is allowed to meet other resource objectives on 1,197,000 acres subject to accessibility, management area prescriptions, watershed protections and other direction in the Revised Forest Plan.

Recommended Wilderness: In Alternative 5, 248,000 acres are recommended for wilderness which will be closed to motorized travel and mountain bikes.

Alternative 6 – FEIS Preferred Alternative

General: The interdisciplinary team developed Alternative 6 after review of almost 11,000 comment letters and discussions in over 160 meetings with 90 interested groups and individuals between 2002 and 2006. It reflects an attempt to balance the demand for diverse recreation opportunities, resource protection, and commodity outputs and to positively respond to many comments and corrections to the DEIS. Alternative 6 draws from the positive responses to the other five alternatives.

Vegetation and Aquatic Ecosystems: Alternative 6 identifies fifty-six key watersheds for fish conservation and 15 restoration watersheds. It focuses restoration opportunities on aquatics and vegetative health.

Wildlife: This alternative applies an open motorized road and trail densities standard to achieve both summer and hunting season objectives and would vary between 0 and 2 miles per square mile. It provides for the highest level (along with modified Alternative 6) of aspen restoration and conifer encroachment treatments. This alternative includes a standard for retaining 10% of old growth for all dominance types across the forest.

Recreation and Travel Management: Approximately 45% of the forest falls under non-motorized allocations in the summer and 39% in the winter.. The Forest Plan Interim Road & Trail Map serves as the basis for defining legal routes until completion of site-specific travel planning.

Fire Management: Management of unplanned ignitions (wildfire) and prescribed fire is permitted forestwide. Fire response applies to all wildfires based on risks, resources, and safety.

Livestock Grazing: Identifies 802,000 acres as suitable for grazing.

Timber: Defines 299,000 acres as suitable for timber production. Timber harvest is allowed to meet other resource objectives on 1,614,000 acres subject to accessibility, management area prescriptions, watershed protections and other direction in the Revised Forest Plan

Recommended Wilderness: In this alternative, 329,000 acres are recommended for wilderness closed to motorized travel and mountain bikes.

Modified Alternative 6 – selected in the Record of Decision and displayed in the Revised Forest Plan

General: The Revised Forest Plan was developed by modifying Alternative 6 after reviewing more than 32,000 comments on the FEIS and Revised Draft Plan. The Revised Plan responds to the issues that have generated substantial ongoing debate, and considers the contributions of several recent collaborative efforts. Like Alternative 6, the Revised Forest Plan strives to balance the demand for diverse recreation opportunities, resource protection, and commodity outputs to recognize the need for change, to positively respond to comments on the FEIS, and draws from the positive responses to all alternatives evaluated in the planning process.

Vegetation and Aquatic Ecosystems: Modified Alternative 6 identifies 56 key watersheds for fish conservation and 15 restoration watersheds. It focuses restoration opportunities on aquatics and vegetative health. In addition, it provides guidance on creating sustainable forests that will be more resilient in the face of uncertainties over changing climate.

Wildlife: This alternative applies an open motorized road and trail density standard to achieve both summer and hunting season objectives and would vary between 0 and 2 miles per square mile. It provides for the highest level (along with Alternative 6) of aspen restoration and conifer encroachment treatments. This alternative includes a standard for retaining minimum old growth characteristics in all old growth proposed for mechanical treatment with the objective of retaining existing old growth and old growth characteristics. In addition, some management direction has been modified or added to create wildlife habitats that provide species diversity in light of current disturbance trends and uncertain climate changes.

Recreation and Travel Management: Approximately 45% of the forest falls under non-motorized allocations in the summer and 40% in the winter. The Forest Plan Interim Road & Trail Map serves as the basis for defining legal routes until completion of site-specific travel planning.

Fire Management: This alternative permits management of unplanned ignitions (wildland fire) and prescribed fire forestwide. It applies fire response to all wildfires based on risks, resources, and safety. It requires wildland fire use plans be developed in coordination with the appropriate county, state, tribal, and other federal agencies.

Livestock Grazing: Identifies 802,000 acres as suitable for grazing.

Timber: Modified Alternative 6 defines 284,000 acres as suitable for timber production. It allows timber harvest to meet other resource objectives on 1,633,000 acres, subject to accessibility, management area prescriptions, watershed protections and other direction in the Revised Forest Plan.

Recommended Wilderness: Modified Alternative 6 adds Electric Peak (5,500 acres) to provide more consistency with the Helena National Forest Recommendations. The final boundary will be determined by ground truthing which may result in minor changes to the total acreage. It reduces minor acreages in several areas: Stony Mountain to exclude an inholding; Garfield Mountain to exclude a cow camp; and East Pioneers to exclude a mineralized area. The change results in 322,000 acres being recommended for wilderness.

Alternatives Considered but Not Studied in Detail

A number of alternatives and proposals, suggested by groups and individuals, were considered and eliminated from detailed study. Given the large area under consideration and the decisions required, there is a vast array of possibilities for combining alternative components. Some were not analyzed further because they closely resembled alternatives considered in detail; did not meet the need for change, or were not appropriate for a forest plan decision. Alternatives of this type and the reasons for eliminating them from detailed study are described in Chapter 2 of the FEIS (pages 30-37).

Public Involvement

Revision formally began with the publication in the Federal Register of a notice of intent (NOI) to revise the Beaverhead and Deerlodge plans under the 1982 Planning Regulations on May 3, 2002. Since then the interdisciplinary team (IDT) met, at least once, with 160 special interest groups, civic organizations, state, and county government groups and individuals. The team responded to requests for meetings with special interest groups representing a broad range of interests, including advocacy for wildlife, livestock grazing, agriculture, timber, motorized recreation, quiet recreation, hunting, and wilderness to name a few.

Following publication of the documents for each stage of the process, there were four public comment opportunities. The string of published documents began with a draft Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS) in 2002 which outlined the major topics that needed to be changed. A detailed Proposed Action in 2003 followed the AMS providing an outline of our initial vision for the revised plan.

Comments on those documents and another round of meetings led to the development of five alternatives presented for public review in the 2005 DEIS. It was accompanied by a draft plan which displayed the preferred alternative (Alternative 5) analyzed in the DEIS. Beaverhead and Madison Counties provided public hearing opportunities to encourage public input. They also, through a memorandum of understanding, hired a representative to serve as a member of the interdisciplinary team during the entire forest plan revision process.

The DEIS was available for comment for 120 days which ended October 31, 2005. The DEIS generated more than 11,000 letters and emails regarding management on the BDNF.

A standing offer to meet with interested groups was extended in the initial press release, subsequent newspaper articles, bulletins, and replies to inquiries were made until publication of the FEIS in January 2008. The Public Affairs Officer mailed bulletins to interested parties and posted updates on the web as the process unfolded.

In February 2008, the FEIS was published along with a revised Draft Plan based on Alternative 6. A comment period is not required for an FEIS but due to high public interest and the length of time since release of the DEIS, an additional comment opportunity was offered. Comments were taken initially for 45 days and extended another 30 days. All documents and maps have been posted on the web since 2002 and were made available at public libraries and forest offices in southwestern Montana and a few external communities where there are many people with strong interests in the BDNF.

In the final stage, the team relied on documents and a slide show briefing on the website in the interest of time and cost and ability to reach more people with information. The FEIS and revised draft plan generated more than 32,536 letters, phone calls, and emails. All letters were responded to and are available on the website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/b-d/forest-plan>

Compatibility with Goals of other Governments and Tribes (36 CFR 219.7(c))

I considered input from public agencies, Indian Tribes and elected officials in my decision.

Confederated Salish-Kootenai and Shoshone-Bannock, and Blackfoot Tribes

Members of the IDT consulted Tribal representatives during development of the BDNF Plan. The Forest Supervisor met with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai, Shoshone-Bannock tribes and corresponded with the Blackfoot and Nez Perce tribes in addition to regular annual tribal consultation. The FEIS and Revised Draft Forest Plan incorporate specific tribal comments as a result.

County, State and Other Federal Land Management Agencies

Forest Service planning regulations require consideration and consultation with other federal, state and local governments as well as tribal plans and policies. As part of the outreach effort, the team initiated a number of discussions with federal, state, local and tribal representatives.

A history of collaboration with federal, state, and local governments, and citizen stakeholders, began in the mid-1990s through landscape analysis. This long range planning effort looked at resource issues and social and economic needs across some of the eleven landscapes that comprise the BDNF. Residents, forest users, and other agencies came together to discuss desired conditions and opportunities for large parcels of the BDNF. Six of the eight landscape analyses involved other agencies and/or citizen stakeholders. The documents are available on CD at the Supervisor's Office in Dillon.

Counties

With initiation of the planning process in 2001, local government officials from the seven counties which include BDNF lands were invited to participate. Beaverhead and Madison Counties sought and received cooperator status through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which outlines the special expertise the counties could bring to the process. Invitations were also extended to Anaconda-Deerlodge, Butte-Silver Bow, Granite, Jefferson, and Powell. While none of the invitations resulted in formal cooperating agency status, information sharing and informal involvement continued.

Counties worked collaboratively with the Forest Service to develop Community Wildfire Protection Plans. Revised Forest Plan direction is compatible with these plans to reduce the risks of adverse effects of wildfire to communities. All other county plans were taken into consideration as the planning process developed.

State Agencies

Forest Service land management also affects programs managed by several State of Montana agencies. These include Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Environmental

Protection Agency-Region 8, Montana Office, the Department of Natural Resource Conservation, and the Montana Department of Transportation. We coordinated information with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and the State Environmental Protection Agency during all phases of the process. Those offices provided formal comments during the scoping and DEIS review periods. We also consulted the Montana State Department of Transportation as described in the Forest Roads Analysis Report.

Federal Agencies

Management of federal lands adjacent to the BDNF was considered during development of alternatives and consideration of cumulative effects. In the course of revision, the BLM completed a Resource Management Plan for the Dillon Field Office. The Butte Field Office is nearing the end of their planning process. The BLM is a cooperating agency for oil and gas leasing decisions on the Beaverhead Unit. Resource specialists for both agencies shared data and information. We discussed national scenic and historic trails, utility corridors, and other management concerns across boundaries with staff on the Targhee, Salmon, Lolo, Bitterroot, and Gallatin National Forests. Meetings also ensured we did not create management problems through revised forest plan direction.

The BDNF administers the upper end of Rock Creek, on the Lolo National Forest because of proximity. All data used in this revision includes that section. We manage the Elkhorn Mountains in cooperation with the Helena National Forest. Revision of management direction for the area will take place during revision of the Helena National Forest Plan. Findings Related by Laws, Regulations, and Policies

The Forest Service manages the BDNF in conformance with many laws, regulations, executive orders, and policies. The list provided here is not a complete list of all governing statutes that apply to the Forest Plan Revision, but it highlights the primary statutes guiding the preparation of this plan revision. In all cases the Revised Forest Plan is consistent with national law, policy, and direction.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

The Forest has compiled and generated an enormous amount of information relevant to the effects of each of the alternatives considered in the FEIS. I find the environmental analysis and public involvement process complies with each of the major elements of the requirements set forth by the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1508). These include 1) considering a broad range of reasonable alternatives; 2) disclosing cumulative effects; 3) using best scientific information; 4) consideration of long-term and short-term effects; and 5) disclosure of unavoidable adverse effects.

The decision here does not directly authorize any new ground disturbing activities or projects. Future ground disturbing activities and projects will be subject to additional site-specific environmental analysis that will tier to the FEIS and follow applicable environmental analysis, public involvement and administrative appeal procedures. Projects will be designed to be consistent with the Revised Forest Plan.

The Revised Forest Plan has adopted all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm. These means include provisions for providing those ecological

conditions needed to support biological diversity and standards and guidelines to mitigate adverse environmental effects that may result from implementing various management practices.

The Revised Forest Plan includes monitoring requirements and an adaptive management approach to assure needed adjustments are made over time.

Alternatives were developed based on the Purpose and Need, the primary issues, and public comments. A total of seven alternatives were considered in detail, including the No Action Alternative as required by NEPA. Other Alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed study. The range of alternatives is appropriate given the scope of the proposal, the public issues expressed, and the Purpose and Need for action.

Unavoidable adverse effects

The selected alternative does not represent an irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources. Any disturbance to resources cannot occur without further site-specific analyses, section 7a consultation required under ESA and decision documents.

Environmentally preferable alternative(s)

Regulations implementing NEPA require agencies to specify “the alternative or alternatives which are considered to be environmentally preferable” (40 CFR 1505.2(b)). The environmentally preferable alternative causes the least harm to the biological and physical environments and best protects, preserves, and enhances historical, cultural, and natural resources (36 CFR 220.3). Based on the description of the alternatives considered in detail in the FEIS and in this ROD, I have determined Modified Alternative 6, the selected alternative, best meets the goals of Section 101 of the NEPA, and is therefore the environmentally preferable alternative for this proposed federal action.

National Forest Management Act (NFMA)

When revision began at the end of 2001, the Agency’s 1982 planning regulations were in effect. Since then the Agency has contemplated several new planning rules. On April 21, 2008; new planning regulations were published in the *Federal Register*, (73 FR 21468). The 2008 planning rule allows completion of ongoing revisions under the 1982 rule. The NFMA implementing regulation specifies a number of requirements that guide Forest Service planning. The Revised Forest Plan complies with each of these management requirements, as explained in this ROD and accompanying FEIS and Appendices.

Endangered Species Act

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) creates an affirmative obligation “...that all federal departments and agencies shall seek to conserve endangered and threatened species” of fish, wildlife, and plants.

A Biological Assessment (BA) was prepared for the threatened gray wolf and submitted to the USFWS in May 2008. The BA concludes the effects of implementing the revised forest plan “may affect not likely to adversely affect”. The USFWS issued a Biological Opinion on the gray wolf on September 23, 2008 (USDI FWS 2008a). In the opinion, the USFWS concluded that the Revised Forest Plan would not likely jeopardize the

continued existence of gray wolf. The opinion also provides an incidental take statement which specifies the impact of any incidental taking of wolves. It also provides reasonable and prudent measures that are necessary to minimize the impacts of the take and sets forth terms and conditions which must be complied with in order to implement the reasonable and prudent measures.

The opinion identified seven terms and conditions, four of which are reporting requirements. These terms and conditions have been incorporated into Revised Forest Plan. These terms and conditions include:

1. To proactively decrease the risk of wolf depredation, encourage allotment permittees to use non-lethal deterrents such as fladry and/or electric night pens.
2. Include a clause in grazing permits that occur within the action area requiring the permittee to notify the Forest of any wolf depredation on livestock or conflicts between wolves and livestock, even if the conflict did not result in the loss of livestock, within 24 hours of discovery. The Forest shall work with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and Wildlife Control personnel to determine any follow-up action(s).
3. Include a clause in all grazing permits that occur within the action area requiring the Permittee to notify the Forest of any livestock losses, regardless of the cause, within 24 hours of discovery. Agency personnel and the Permittee would then jointly determine how to properly treat or dispose of livestock carcasses so as to eliminate any potential attractant for wolves.

A BA was prepared for the threatened bull trout and submitted to the USFWS in March 2008. The BA concludes the effects of implementing the Revised Forest Plan “may affect, likely to adversely affect” bull trout. This determination was made because adverse effects to bull trout may occur as a direct or indirect result, of actions authorized by the Plan. December 19, 2008 the USFWS issued a Biological Opinion with no terms and conditions identified. The Service concluded: “After reviewing the current status of bull trout, the environmental baseline for the action area, the effects of the proposed actions, and the cumulative effects, it is the Service's biological opinion that the actions as proposed, are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of bull trout and that its critical habitat will not be destroyed or adversely modified. This conclusion is based on the magnitude of the proposed action's effects on bull trout within Rock Creek and Upper Clark Fork core areas, and in turn, as those effects relate to the reproduction, distribution, and abundance of the species.” I have determined that the Revised Forest Plan complies with the Endangered Species Act.

National Historic Preservation Act

The Revised Forest Plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific activity. Projects undertaken in response to direction in this Revised Forest Plan will fully comply with the laws and regulations that ensure protection of heritage resources. The Revised Forest Plan contains direction for heritage resource management including direction to fully integrate heritage resource management with other management activities.

Several other laws apply to preservation of heritage resources on federal land. Since the Revised Forest Plan does not authorized ground-disturbing activities, consultation with the Montana State Historic Preservation Office under the National Historic Preservation Act is not required. Forest staff consulted with the Shoshone-Bannock, Confederated Salish-Kootenai, Blackfoot, and Nez Perce tribes during development of the Revised Forest Plan. I have determined the Revised Forest Plan complies with the National Historic Preservation Act and other statutes that pertain to the protection of heritage resources.

Invasive Species (Executive Order 13112)

The Revised Forest Plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific activity. Executive Order 13112 directs that federal agencies may not authorize any activities that would increase the spread of invasive species. The Revised Forest Plan includes direction to prevent, reduce, or eliminate infestations of non-native or noxious weed species.

Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898)

As required by the Executive Order, all federal actions will consider potentially disproportionate effects on minority or low-income communities. Potential impacts or changes to low-income or minority communities within the study area, due to the proposed action, must be considered. Where possible, measures should be taken to avoid negative impacts to these communities or mitigate adverse effects. As highlighted in the Social and Economic Environmental section of the FEIS, the risk of disproportionate effects on minority or low income populations was evaluated by looking at whether alternatives decrease employment or labor income as a whole, or in particular sectors of the economy. The selected alternative is estimated to add to employment and labor income in the area. There is no evidence the level of economic or environmental risk would be disproportionately placed on low income or minority populations in communities where employment opportunities and workers are located. The Agency considered all input from people or groups regardless of race, income status, or other social and economic characteristics.

Continued consultation and consideration of communities is required to complete project level analyses under the Revised Forest Plan. I have determined, from the analysis in the FEIS, the Revised Forest Plan complies with Executive Order 12898.

Prime Farmland, Rangeland, and Forest land

The Revised Forest Plan complies with the Secretary of Agriculture's Memorandum #1827, which requires conservation of prime farmland, rangeland, and forestland. The Revised Forest Plan directs management of the BDNF with sensitivity toward adjacent private and public land use. It includes guidance for cooperation with adjacent and surrounding landowners when conducting management activities. Guidance in the plan emphasizes coordination with other landowners to minimize management impacts.

Equal Employment Opportunity, Effects on Minorities, Women

The FEIS describes the effects of economic and social factors. The Revised Forest Plan will not have a disproportionate impact on any minority or low-income communities. I have determined the Revised Forest Plan will not differentially affect the civil rights of any citizens, especially women and minorities.

Wetlands and Floodplains (Executive Order 11988 and 11990)

The Revised Forest Plan contains direction to improve riparian areas and ensure compliance with state and federal water quality standards. The Revised Forest Plan describes desired future conditions, sets goals, and establishes Riparian Conservation Areas specifically to maintain or improve conditions in these areas.

Clean Air Act

The Revised Forest Plan is a programmatic action and as such does not authorize any site-specific activity. Some prescribed burning may occur under the Revised Forest Plan. According to analysis disclosed in the FEIS, “No management activities resulting in more than localized, temporary smoke or reduced visibility are anticipated under any alternatives. No substantial changes in existing air quality or long-term air quality impacts are expected as a result of implementation of the forest plan.” Potential impacts will be analyzed at the project level and will comply with the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group Operating Guide. The Revised Forest Plan protects air quality and complies with the rules, regulations and permit procedures of the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. Forestwide direction included in Chapter 3 of the Revised Forest Plan will ensure air quality complies with the Clean Air act and other state requirements. I have determined the Revised Forest Plan complies with the provisions of the Clean Air Act.

Clean Water Act

The objective of the Clean Water Act is to “. . . restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation’s waters.” One of the Act’s goals is to “. . . provide for the protection and propagation of fish, shellfish, and wildlife,” and provide for “. . . recreation in and on the water,” (33 U.S.C. 466 et seq., Title I, Section 101).

The Revised Forest Plan contains forestwide direction to ensure management activities maintain or improve aquatic conditions. Management direction, including best management practices, is designed to maintain or improve riparian area condition and function. The cumulative effect of this direction will ensure continued compliance with the Clean Water Act.

Migratory Bird Act and Executive Order 13189

The Revised Forest Plan is a programmatic action and as such does not authorize any site-specific activity. It includes direction to improve structure, composition, and pattern of vegetation cover. Potential impacts to habitat from proposed vegetation treatments will be analyzed at the site-specific project level. I have determined management and

monitoring activities comply with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Executive Order 13186.

Other Policies

The existing body of national direction for managing National Forests remains in effect. Standards included in the Revised Forest Plan provide direction specific to the BDNF. The revised plan provides direction contributing to the Forest Service Strategic Plan FY 2007-2012.

Implementation

The LRMP becomes effective 30 calendar days after the Notice of Availability of the Record of Decision and Final Environmental Impact Statement is published in the Federal Register (36 CFR 219.10 (c)(1), 1982 planning rule.)

Project Consistency and Transition to the Revised Forest Plan

The Revised Forest Plan direction will apply to all projects that have decisions made on or after the effective date of this Record of Decision. Because this was a revision of the 1986 and 1987 Plans, many aspects of the original Plans were not changed. However, there may be some previously approved and ongoing projects that are not consistent with the Revised Forest Plan. The effects of these ongoing actions were considered as a part of the baseline in developing the FEIS.

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires “. . . permits, contracts, and other instruments for use and occupancy of National Forest System lands be ‘consistent’ with the forest plan,” (15 U.S.C. 1604(i)). In the context of a revised plan, NFMA specifically conditions this requirement in three ways:

1. These documents be revised only when necessary;
2. These documents must be revised as soon as practicable;
3. Any revisions are subject to valid existing rights.

As the decision maker, I have the discretion, on a case-by-case basis, to modify pre-existing authorizations to bring them into compliance with the Revised Forest Plan standards and guidelines. I will use the statutory criteria of “as soon as practicable” and excepting “valid existing rights” in exercising that discretion. I have decided not to modify any existing timber sale contracts solely due to my decision to adopt this Revised Forest Plan. These contracts will be executed according to their terms, and the potential effects of these actions have been analyzed and disclosed appropriately under the NEPA. Existing timber contracts, in most cases, will be completed within three years. The BDNF will undertake, prior to on-the-ground implementation, analysis of existing vegetation management decisions currently not under contract to ensure they are consistent with the Revised Forest Plan. We will identify those actions, if any, that are inconsistent with the Revised Forest Plan and make appropriate adjustments as per NFMA Section 1604(i).

Other use and occupancy agreements are substantially longer than timber contracts. For example, grazing permits are generally issued for a 10-year term. These permits can be cancelled in whole or in part or otherwise modified, at any time during the term, to conform with needed changes brought about by law, regulations, Executive Order, allotment management plans and subsequent forest plan amendment or revision. Changes in grazing permits may be made to achieve objectives identified in forest plans, or other decisions. Modifications to grazing permits can be made by a letter, issuance of a new term grazing permit, or use of a standard modification form. In the standard modification form, the authorizing officer may include, as terms and conditions of the grazing permit, those applicable standards and guidelines contained in the forest plan or decisions that

specify appropriate management requirements. Allotment management plans and annual operating instructions are incorporated as part of the term grazing permit.

It is my intention to bring term grazing permits into compliance with the revised plan as soon as practicable in a two-step process:

1. Upon approval of the revised plan, all grazing permits will be modified either with a standard modification form or in the annual operating instructions, as appropriate to include applicable direction, specifically any pertinent terms and conditions included in the Biological Opinions on Terrestrial Species.
2. When allotment management plan NEPA documentation is completed per the Rescission Act (Public Law 104-19, section 504; July 27, 1995) schedule, all other applicable revised plan direction will be incorporated into the term grazing permit or allotment management plan, which is a part of the permit.

I find that applying the revised plan standards and guidelines through this process will meet the “as soon as practicable” provision of NFMA.

Other classes of “use and occupancy” agreements will be reviewed to determine whether or when the BDNF Forest Supervisor should exercise discretion to bring them into compliance with the revised plan. Some decisions recently made but not yet implemented, will be reviewed, adjusted, and implemented to meet direction found in the revised plan. I expect the decision maker for such projects will review the decisions to determine if adjustments need to be made.

Key Considerations in Plan Implementation

By tiering to the FEIS (40 CFR 1502.20, 1508.28), we will make appropriate use of the programmatic FEIS to streamline and focus our environmental analysis for site-specific project decisions. At the site-specific level of analysis, we will not revisit landscape or Forestwide scale issues and effects because those effects have already been considered and disclosed in the FEIS. This has applicability to a wide range of findings that are appropriately done at the Forestwide level. Analysis and findings related to threatened or endangered species should be greatly simplified when projects are within the parameters of the Revised Forest Plan and the FEIS. Development of future site-specific projects and actions consistent with the Revised Forest Plan is a dynamic process that depends on many factors. The Revised Forest Plan contains information concerning proposed management techniques and projected outputs. The projected outputs shown in the FEIS and Revised Forest Plan are a forecast of what may occur over the lifetime of this plan. However, actual project development will depend on demand for products and uses, available funding, natural events such as fire or windstorm, and other factors. There is no certainty that the projected outputs will actually occur at the estimated levels.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring is designed to answer questions regarding implementation of the Revised Forest Plan. Monitoring and evaluation will focus on accomplishment of the desired conditions, goals, and objectives in the Revised Forest Plan and whether there is a need for change in the plan.

Evaluation reports will document progress toward accomplishment of goals and objectives, how effective the implementation has proven to be in accomplishing desired outcomes, and what we have learned along the way. This evaluation will allow a check and review of the validity of the assumptions upon which this decision is based.

Amending the Forest Plan and Adaptive Management

This revision of the forest plan is shaped by a central idea: how we manage the forest should adapt to changes in how we understand the ecological, social, and economic environments. The Revised Forest Plan is well structured for adaptive management because it does a good job of describing the desired conditions toward which we will strive as we implement the Revised Forest Plan. In fact, those desired conditions will be the very basis for the projects we will accomplish during the life of the plan.

In making the decision on the Revised Forest Plan, I am also deciding that this plan will be adaptive and subject to change as we monitor, learn, and gain new information. The revision process has incorporated much that has been learned since the 1986 and 1987 Plans. However, the Revised Forest Plan can still be improved as we learn more about ecosystem functions and processes. Neither is it cast in stone to be unquestioningly adhered to for the next 15 years. We will track progress toward reaching the desired conditions identified in the Revised Forest Plan, and modify or reformulate management actions in response to that progress.

If a particular management strategy, technique, or practice is applied, its results will be monitored to see if the desired effect is occurring, and if not, a modified or new strategy will be developed and implemented. That new strategy will also be subject to monitoring, evaluation, and, if needed, change.

Changes to the Revised Forest Plan will generally take the form of plan amendments or corrections and will follow the appropriate procedures specified in the National Forest Management Act and its implementing regulations.

Administrative Review Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to the provisions of 36 CFR 217.3. A written notice of appeal must be filed with the Chief of the Forest Service within 90 days of the date the legal notice of this decision appears in the Montana Standard newspaper.

Appeals must be sent to:

Regular Mail:

USDA Forest Service
 Attn: EMC Appeals
 Mailstop Code 1104
 1400 Independence Avenue, SW
 Washington, DC 20250-1104

Federal Express

USDA Forest Service
 Attn: EMC Appeals
 Yates Building., 3CEN
 201 14th Street, SW
 Washington, DC 20250
 Phone: (202) 205-0895

Appeals may be hand-delivered to the above address during regular business hours, 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM Monday through Friday, excluding holidays; or sent by fax to (202) 205-1012; or by email to appeals-chief@fs.fed.us.

A copy of the appeal must simultaneously be sent to the deciding officer:

Region One Regional Forester
 USDA Forest Service
 P.O Box 7669
 200 E. Broadway
 Missoula, MT, 59807

Any notice of appeal must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9 and include at a minimum:

- A statement that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR Part 217.
- The name, address, and telephone number of the appellant.
- Identification of the decision to which the objection is being made.
- Identification of the document in which the decision is contained, by title and subject, date of the decision, and name and title of the Deciding Officer.
- Identification of the specific portion of the decision to which objection is made.
- The reasons for appeal, including issue of fact, law, regulation, or policy, and if applicable, specifically how the decision violates law, regulation, or policy.
- Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision the appellant seeks.

Contacts

More information on the FEIS and Beaverhead-Deerlodge Revised Forest Plan can be obtained by contacting

Bruce Ramsey Forest Supervisor	Peri Suenram Budget and Resources Staff
Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest	Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest
420 Barrett St	420 Barrett St
Dillon, MT 59725	Dillon, MT 59725

Conclusion

For the past several years BDNF personnel have worked with members of the public, elected officials, and other agencies to produce this revised plan. I am pleased to make my decision based upon solid relationships that have evolved through coordination and cooperation to ensure sustainable conditions for the ecological and human environments on the BDNF.

The revised plan evolved from alternatives formed from the best available science and the work of a dedicated interdisciplinary team. However, science does not always provide definitive answers to complex resource management topics nor can any one field of science provide all the answers. Yet science can offer insight into the effects of management decisions and actions. In other words, good science can “clear the fog” and let us see which choice best lets us reach our goals.

The challenge that remains before all of us is to work together to implement the revised plan. I fully understand this particular goal can be difficult to achieve. At the same time, I am confident cooperation will unite us, because I believe the concern we all have for the forest is our common bond - that these lands remain productive and splendid – not only for the current generation, but also for future generations as well.



Thomas L. Tidwell

Regional Forester, Region One

1-14-09

Date

Appendix A: Climate Change

We received several comments on the FEIS suggesting that we need to consider the potential effects of climate change on the resources of the B-DNF. I agree.

Scientific understanding and public awareness of global climate change has increased dramatically in recent months. There is broad scientific consensus that increases in average global temperature is very likely if atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases continue to accumulate at current rates. How these potential global changes might translate to climatic changes on the B-D NF is much more uncertain.

The continuous forest planning process allows us to adjust our management plans as new, locally specific information with sufficient scientific confidence becomes available. The goals and objectives of the forest plan are consistent with maintaining the resilience and diversity of the forests, grasslands, and watersheds of the BDNF in the face of the potential effects of climate change. Over the next 10-15 years, projected changes in global and continental average temperatures are much less than for later this century. Projected changes in precipitation patterns over the next 10-15 years are even smaller, although of greater uncertainty. Moreover, the next 10 to 15 years is relatively short period in terms of global and regional climate trends, and may not differ from the range of variability experienced in recent decades.

The Forest Service is undertaking substantial efforts to better understand the potential effects of climate change on resource management, and the associated uncertainties at the scale of individual national forests. Ongoing national, regional and forest-specific monitoring and scientific research will continue to add to our understanding, and will help to inform evaluations of whether adjustments in management actions are needed to maintain the health, diversity, and productivity of the National Forests and Grasslands, including the BDNF.

I am confident the goals and objectives adopted with this Record of Decision will maintain or improve the health, diversity and productivity of the BDNF. Of course planning and management efforts need to continuously collect information on resource conditions and trends, including those that may be affected by long-term climatic trends. We will continue to monitor conditions and trends and will adjust forest plan direction when necessary.

Appendix B: Disposition of Highly Rated Areas Evaluated for Wilderness Potential

Area Evaluated for Wilderness Potential (Recommended Wilderness Name if different)	Acres in roadless area	Recommended Wilderness	Areas outside Recommended Wilderness		Key Factors in Decision
			Summer Non-motorized	Winter Non-motorized	
Big Horn Mountain	53,494	0%	71%	94%	Similar contributions as nearby Snowcrest
Black Butte	39,252	0%	68%	0%	Similar contributions as nearby Snowcrest
Cowboy Heaven	6,916	100%	0%	0%	Connects The Bear Trap and Spanish Peaks units, increases size and manageability, contributes underrepresented vegetation and wildlife habitat.
East Pioneer (Torrey Mountain)	149,203	48%	12%	17%	Size, recommended in previous plan, underrepresented ecological type and plant communities
Electric Peak	21,686	14%	78%	19%	Adjacent to larger unit, designated snowmobile route, wolverine, mt biking on the Helena
Flint Range/Dolus Lake	63,363	0%	74%	18%	Moderate rating on the brink of high, doesn't contribute new characteristics
Freezeout Mountain	98,747	0%	54%	24%	Similar contributions as nearby Snowcrest, 70% rates low
Garfield Mountain	48,935	70%	13%	15%	Underrepresented ecological type and plant communities, habitat for wide-ranging species along continental divide, size, remote
Highlands (Table Mountain)	21,055	86%	8%	8%	Contributes underrepresented plant communities and improves distribution on north end, near Butte.
Italian Peak	128,809	28%	28%	17%	Size, underrepresented ecological type and plant communities, habitat for wide-ranging species along continental divide, remote
Madison (Lee-Metcalf Wilderness Additions)	12,230	67%	28%	12%	Increases size and manageability of wilderness. Includes underrepresented ecological type and habitat for wide-ranging wildlife

Record of Decision Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest Revised Forest Plan

Area Evaluated for Wilderness Potential (Recommended Wilderness Name if different)	Acres in roadless area	Recommended Wilderness	Areas outside Recommended Wilderness		Key Factors in Decision
			Summer Non-motorized	Winter Non-motorized	
					species. Respects McAtee Basin commitment during Lee Metcalf designation.
Lost Creek	9,538	0%	100%	100%	Moderate rating, small size, not underrepresented but is near population centers
Middle Mountain Tobacco Roots	96,819	0%	43%	61%	Less than 1/2 rated high, boundaries difficult with mining claims and private lands.
Mt. Jefferson	4,448	47%	53%	1%	Adjacent to larger unit, refuge for wide ranging wildlife species along the continental divide (esp. wolverine), snowmobile constituency
North Big Hole (Anaconda Pinter Addition, Hellroaring Unit)	50,808	38%	48%	1%	Contributes to size & protection of AP Wilderness
Quigg	9,991	83%	1%	0%	Adjacent to larger unit, secure habitat enhances linkages west and north
Sheep Mountain	23,395	0%	74%	39%	Similar contributions as nearby Snowcrest
Storm Lake (Anaconda Pintler Addition, Storm Lake Unit)	8,631	68%	23%	1%	Contributes to size & protection of AP Wilderness, habitat for wide-ranging wildlife species
Snowcrest Mountains	97,985	94%	1%	5%	Size, underrepresented ecological type and plant communities, habitat known for wide-ranging species, remote
Stony Mountain	23,492	59%	36%	5%	Contributes to size and manageability of adjacent unit, enhances secure habitat linkages
Upper East Fork (Anaconda Pintler Addition, Upper East Fork Unit)	7,980	57%	31%	0%	Contributes to size & protection of AP Wilderness
West Big Hole	213,987	0%	61%	33%	Large snowmobiling constituency, secure high elevation winter habitat for mt goats and wolverine along the continental divide, opportunity for summer non-motorized challenges