

# GALLATIN NATIONAL FOREST TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLAN

## Record of Decision

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## **I. Introduction**

Over the past 4 years the United States Forest Service has developed and analyzed seven (7) alternatives for managing public access and travel within the Gallatin National Forest, Montana. After careful consideration of the impacts of the alternatives disclosed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), dated October 2006, I have selected Alternative 7-Modified, with certain exceptions, as the Travel Management Plan for the Forest. My decision is fully described in detail within the accompanying document titled “Detailed Description of the Decision”. In summary, this alternative can be described as follows:

The total amount of public open system road would remain generally unchanged (approx. 740 miles), however there would be a shift of about 10% of this system from road currently only suitable for high clearance vehicles to road that would accommodate passenger cars. Currently about 315 miles of road are considered suitable for passenger cars, and under Alternative 7-M it would increase to 400 miles. This alternative also includes objectives to close and restore non-system and user-built roads.

ATV opportunities provided on trails would be reduced from 281 miles to 143 miles (about 50%) and motorcycle opportunities on trails would be reduced from 458 miles to 278 miles (about 40%). In general, the reduction in trail opportunity would be shifted to and managed for on administrative and backcountry roads. Currently, many trails (outside of Wilderness) are shared between motorized and non-motorized users.

The amount of area open to snowmobile use (outside of Wilderness) would decrease from about 84% of the Forest to about 55%. In contrast, the miles of marked and groomed trail would rise about 20% from the current situation.

Stock use would generally be allowed on and off-trail across the Forest although some seasonal and yearlong restrictions would be applied to specific trails. Alternative 7-M would not include the blanket spring restrictions proposed in Alternative 7 of the DEIS.

There would be some restrictions on mountain bikes on trails outside of Wilderness, primarily in the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area and on short routes leading into Wilderness. The trails in Hyalite Creek and the East Fork of Hyalite Creek would remain open to bicycles. Hiking and cross-country skiing would not be restricted.

Alternative 7-M includes Forest-wide and area-specific goals, objectives, standards and guidelines (programmatic direction) and would amend the Forest Plan to replace current direction relative to travel management. In addition to the proposed programmatic direction, travel management under Alternative 7-M would follow current direction applicable to the management of grizzly bear and lynx. At the time of this decision, the applicable direction for the grizzly bear is based on USFWS 1996 Biological Opinion (BO), Gallatin Forest Plan Amendment 19, the 2004 BO for the Forest Plan outside the recovery zone, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Conservation Strategy (ICST 2003:12-13). The applicable direction for the lynx is based on the Canada Lynx Conservation Agreement (2005).

Appendix C of the FEIS provides a general comparison of how Alternative 7-M differs from Alternative 7 of the DEIS.

## **II. Background**

The Gallatin National Forest's road and trail system was created over time; influenced by a number of factors including land ownership patterns, use of Forest resources, legislation, recreation demand and changes in public attitudes. Public recreation use of this system has grown significantly and the types of uses enjoyed are more varied than they were 20, 50 and 100 years ago. There was no grand plan that led to the development of roads and trails nor the types of uses we see on them today. It is a reflection of the needs and desires of our culture throughout the history of the Forest.

Much of the Forest, outside of what is currently Wilderness, was and is in a checkerboard ownership pattern with alternating sections of public and private land. These private inholdings originated as part of the construction grants that Congress made to the Northern Pacific Railway Company in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Other private inholdings exist due to patented mining claims and tracts acquired through the 1906 Forest Homestead Act.

From the mid-1880s to 1910, the prominent uses of the Forest and private inholdings were for timber harvest (railroad tie hacking), livestock grazing, and mineral extraction. Along with this came the need for road and trail access, particular in the more accessible portions of tributaries to the Gallatin and Yellowstone Rivers and in the Hebgen Lake Basin area. Automobiles were first permitted in Yellowstone National Park in 1915 and this led to additional recreation use along access routes to the Park. From about 1910 to 1930, dude ranches became common further adding to the development and use of the trail system. During the 1930s, the concepts of "wilderness" or "primitive" areas began to emerge. This led to the establishment of the Spanish Peaks, the Absaroka, and the Beartooth Primitive Areas. The post-WWII era saw increased demands for wood products and this coupled with advances in machinery led to pressure for more rapid development of road systems into undeveloped forested backcountry. Railroad land and other private inholdings were being harvested and this required road systems to be developed across the checkerboard National Forest lands. The cost-share road construction program began and continued into the 1980s. In the 1950s, grazing was declining and outfitter-guide operations for big game hunting began to expand. Horse travel in the backcountry grew accordingly. Development for timber harvest continued but public interest in the protection of other non-commodity resources and preservation of undeveloped land grew in the 1960s. This decade brought the passage of the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act, the Wilderness Act and the National Environmental Policy Act. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, timber harvest on the Gallatin National Forest became more and more controversial, while recreation use of the trail system continued to grow. The Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness was established in 1978 and the Lee Metcalf Wilderness was established in 1983, providing a permanent prohibition on mechanized use or development in these areas. Snowmobiling became popular, particularly in the West Yellowstone area, during the 1970s and use levels have grown to this day.

Up until the 1980s, public recreation use and travel on the Gallatin National Forest was not considered something that required much management control. It was not controversial and National Forest System lands and resources seemed capable of handling the variety of uses

enjoyed by the public, including off-route vehicle use. Since that time, increasing demand, new information on the potential effects to resources and diverse personal value sets have brought more attention and concern as to how the public uses the Forest. There has never been a comprehensive analysis or management plan for travel on the Gallatin National Forest. The Forest Service believes that the demand for recreation opportunities may now be reaching the point of exceeding the capability of the land to provide them. A Travel Management Plan is needed to effectively offer a variety of quality recreation opportunities consistent with achieving management goals and objectives for other resources.

### **III. Purpose and Need for Action**

#### **Need for a Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan**

In general, the road and trail system and recreation use on the Gallatin National Forest has evolved incrementally over many decades based on site-specific demands and capabilities. There has never been a comprehensive evaluation on whether it is the best way to provide for these demands in conjunction with other resource uses and land stewardship needs. Due to the trends in recreation use and travel on the Forest, the acquisition of new land into public ownership, and the many resource and environmental protection issues that have emerged, it is appropriate for the Gallatin National Forest to develop a travel management plan.

#### **Recreation and Travel Trends**

Use of Gallatin Forest roads and trails has changed substantially since the Forest Plan was signed in 1987. Hiking, fishing and wildlife viewing activities have increased substantially. Use of snowmobiles and ATVs has grown in popularity. The Forest is the destination for thousands of snowmobiling visitors, particularly near Cooke City and West Yellowstone. ATVs, while rare in 1987, have become common on many Forest roads and trails. Providing opportunities for mountain bike use was not considered 15 years ago, but has evolved into a popular sport today. Trail and backcountry skiing have also increased. Past incremental management changes that the Forest has made have been insufficient to address changes in the types of use and their effects on Forest resources and recreational opportunities and experiences.

#### **Montana/North Dakota Statewide OHV Decision**

In January 2001, the Regional Forester signed a decision that bans cross-country summer motorized travel. The decision amended all Montana National Forest Plans and *“established a new standard that restricts yearlong, wheeled vehicle motorized cross country travel where it is not already restricted.”* This is a major change in the way the Forest has been managed. Previously areas were open to motorized use, that is, vehicles were not restricted to roads or trails. The Regional Forester decision also directs each Forest to do site-specific planning that will result in the designation of roads and trails for their appropriate uses. The Gallatin National Forest must now enter that phase of site specific travel planning that will lead to a decision of designating the uses of all system roads and trails.

## **Land Acquisition**

Over the last ten years, the Gallatin National Forest has acquired more than 140,000 acres of land. Much of it has been heavily harvested and includes an estimated 700 miles of roads that were constructed at a low standard. Most of these roads have been open to the public, even while in private ownership. Low standard roads and high open road density can have detrimental impacts on soils, water quality, fish and wildlife habitat. Many of the trails on these acquired lands are also in disrepair. Travel planning is needed to determine the appropriate management for these routes and to identify excess routes that should be closed and rehabilitated.

## **Court Order on Montana Wilderness Study Areas**

In May of 2001, the U.S. District Court of Montana ruled on a lawsuit brought against the Forest Service by three environmental groups challenging the management of lands designated for further Wilderness study under the Montana Wilderness Study Act (MWSA) (CV-96-152-M-DWM). The court ruling directed the Forest Service to prepare an assessment of the current Wilderness character of these study areas in comparison to that which existed in 1977 when the Act was passed. The Gallatin National Forest contains the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area (HPBH WSA) that is located within the Gallatin Mountain Range. The Act did not preclude a continuation of the types of recreation activities that were occurring in 1977, including motorized use of the trails, but the court found that the Forest Service could not establish that the pre-existing Wilderness character was being maintained. The types of motorized/mechanized trail vehicles have changed since that time. Travel planning is needed to determine the types and location of uses that can be managed for within the HPBH WSA that would be consistent with the Montana Wilderness Study Act.

## **Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone**

The grizzly bear recovery zone encompasses 300,000 acres in the southern portion of the Gallatin Forest surrounding Yellowstone National Park. Current Forest Plan direction for the recovery zone is to maintain secure areas free of motorized access routes and open and total motorized access route density in the remainder of the recovery area at the 1995 level. Travel planning is needed to meet this direction and to evaluate whether changes in motorized routes are needed in grizzly bear habitat.

## **Cutthroat Trout Conservation Strategy and Agreements**

Westslope and Yellowstone cutthroat trout have a limited distribution on the Gallatin Forest. These are “sensitive species” for which statewide conservation strategies and agreements have been written. The strategies contain guidelines that are to be followed to assure that management activities will not degrade habitat in drainages containing westslope or Yellowstone cutthroat trout populations. Roads and trails, and associated construction, maintenance and use can produce sediment that enters streams, adversely affecting fish spawning habitat; roads and trails may also directly modify stream channels thereby degrading or fragmenting aquatic habitat. Travel planning is needed to assess and correct any unacceptable effects that public travel, or roads and trails may be having in drainages that contain populations of cutthroat trout.

## **Lynx Amendment**

The Canada lynx was listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act in March 2000. Lynx have been documented, historically and currently, throughout the Rocky Mountains of Montana. The effects to lynx has been identified as an issue as it relates to the existing transportation plan and proposed Travel Plan alternatives. The LCAS (Ruediger et al. 2000) developed standards and guidelines based on identified risk factors that may affect lynx productivity, mortality, and movement and dispersal. Lynx are specially adapted physically to survive in deep soft snow regions such as the higher elevations in the northern Rocky Mountains, where they utilize snowshoe hare as their primary prey. One risk factor suggests that outside of deep snow areas, generalist predators may exclude lynx through effective competition for food resources. There is a concern that compacted snow routes allow these other predators access up into areas that are normally the exclusive winter range of the lynx. Travel planning is needed to assess and correct any unacceptable effects groomed and marked snowmobile and ski routes (as well as areas open to snowmobiles) may have on lynx and lynx habitat. Directions for evaluating federal actions relative to lynx habitat are provided in the LCAS per the Conservation Agreement between the US Forest Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service USDI 2005.

## **National OHV Regulation**

Since the publication of the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan DEIS, the Forest Service promulgated new regulations governing OHV use throughout the National Forest System. These regulations mandate individual Forests to complete travel plan analysis within 4 years and designate the roads and trails where OHV use will be allowed [USDA Forest Service, 2005. Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motorized Use (36 CFR 212, 251, 261)].

## **Other Resources**

Other resources such as soils, riparian areas, designated Wilderness and big game winter range can also be sensitive to human travel within the Forest. A comprehensive evaluation through travel planning is needed to determine whether the various uses may be having unacceptable adverse effects on a variety of resources and whether adjustments in management should be made.

## **Need For Forest Plan Amendments**

There are numerous existing Gallatin Forest Plan standards and guidelines applicable to roads, trails and travel management that are proposed to be removed in lieu of direction that would be established in a Travel Management Plan. These standards and guidelines are listed in Appendix A of the FEIS and Chapter III of the document, "Detailed Description of the Alternatives." In general, the current Forest Plan direction is outdated, does not really provide limitations on management activities, is open to misinterpretation or could be in conflict with the concept of establishing TPA and route-by-route management direction. The specific reasons for amending each of these standards is outlined in Appendix A of the FEIS.

## **Purpose for a Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan**

The purpose for the proposed Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan is to:

1. Provide for public access and recreation travel on the Gallatin National Forest considering both the quantity and quality of opportunities provided.
2. Bring area, road and trail use into compliance with laws, regulations, and other higher-level management direction.
3. Establish objectives and/or restrictions to correct any unacceptable resource damage that is occurring due to the use of Forest roads, trails and areas open to cross-country travel.
4. Provide for public understanding of the types of use and season of use allowed for each road and trail.
5. Remove outdated, ineffective, and/or unclear existing Forest Plan standards and other direction applicable to road and trail management.
6. Identify administrative access routes to facilitate management of a variety of resources on the Gallatin National Forest.

## **IV. Proposed Action**

The U.S. Forest Service, Gallatin National Forest, proposed to adopt a management plan for public access and travel within the Gallatin National Forest in August of 2002 with the release of what was called the “Starting Benchmark”. The Starting Benchmark represented one option for managing travel. Based on early analysis of this alternative and the public comments received, six alternatives were developed as possible travel management plans. These were presented for public comment in the fall of 2003. Each alternative identified and established possible opportunities for public recreation use and access using the Forest’s road and trail system. For each road and trail, they specified the types of uses that would be allowed and managed for. Specified uses included passenger car pleasure driving, high clearance and off-road vehicle use, ATV use, motorcycle use, bicycling, horseback riding, snowmobiling, hiking, skiing and snowshoeing. The areas to be open to snowmobile use were also addressed. In addition, five of the alternatives established possible goals, objectives and standards that would provide guidance for future management activities related to public access and travel and would amend the Gallatin Forest Plan to remove a number of existing standards.

The alternatives varied in terms of the amount of use restrictions (particularly motorized use) in order to achieve a reasonable range that would sharply define the issues to consider and provide a basis for comparison. At the least restrictive end of the range was Alternative 1, which would allow travel as it was on the Forest’s 1999 Recreation Visitor Map. This alternative would allow off-route motorized travel where it wasn’t otherwise restricted in 1999. Alternative 6 was developed to represent the more restrictive end of the range. It largely restricted wheeled motorized vehicle use to the existing road system. Alternatives 2, 3, 4 and 5 fell within this range and were incrementally more restrictive on public travel. Alternative 4 closely represented the Starting Benchmark.

Prior to completing the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), a seventh alternative was developed, Alternative 7, which represented the Forest Service preferred alternative at the time. This alternative was included and studied in detail within the DEIS and was presented for public comment in February of 2005. Based on the comments received and additional analysis,

Alternative 7 became Alternative 7-Modified in the FEIS. Both Alternatives 7 and Alternative 7-Modified fell within the range of alternatives established by Alternatives 1 through 6.

Alternatives 3 and 7-M included an objective (Forest-wide Objective A-6) to consider proposals to authorize locations for landing/take-off of backcountry aircraft (airplanes and helicopters). Landing/take-off locations that are authorized would be constructed and maintained by site users. Proposals would be processed in accordance with regulations for occupancy and use of National Forest System lands. Use would be regulated by special use authorization. Future site-specific analysis under NEPA would be required before any sites are approved, constructed or permitted for landing and take-off.

Under Alternative 7-Modified, a proposed standard (Standard A-7) was included that would facilitate enforcement of unauthorized landings of recreational aircraft outside of designated landing strips by providing direction to implement a special order closure under 36 CFR 261.58 (y). This order would allow the Forest Service to enforce current FAA regulations that prohibit the landing of recreational aircraft (except at designated sites) on National Forest Lands.

For a more detailed description of the proposed action refer to Chapter 1 of the FEIS, pages 1-3 through 1-8.

In conjunction with the proposed actions described above the Forest developed a monitoring plan that, over time, will:

- Facilitate the gathering of information to periodically evaluate progress toward meeting the established goals and objectives of the Travel Management Plan and whether implementation is occurring as prescribed.
- Facilitate the gathering of information to periodically assess whether the actual effects of the Travel Management Plan are consistent with those predicted in this EIS, and if not, to help determine what, if anything, should be changed in the Travel Management Plan to correct any problems.

The monitoring plan is described in Appendix B of the FEIS.

## **V. Decision and Reasons for the Decision**

### **A. Decision Criteria**

In making my decision for a Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan I focused on the following criteria:

1. **Summer Recreation Opportunities.** The degree to which the alternative provides well-distributed opportunities for both OHV's and exclusive, quiet non-motorized uses of the Gallatin National Forest trail system outside of Wilderness.

- Does the alternative provide opportunities for half-day and evening ATV and/or motorcycle trail rides within a reasonable travel distance from area communities?

- Does the alternative provide opportunities for half-day and evening hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking in a non-motorized setting within a reasonable travel distance from area communities?
- Does the alternative provide opportunities for longer full-day or overnight ATV and/or motorcycle rides on the Forest trail system?
- Does the alternative provide opportunities for ATV and/or motorcycle rides to recreational destinations such as lakes, peaks, or vistas?
- Does the alternative provide opportunities for hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking in a non-motorized setting to recreational destinations such as lakes, peaks, or vistas?
- Does the alternative provide a forest-wide mix of motorized opportunities and quiet, exclusive non-motorized opportunities?

2. **Winter Recreation Opportunities.** The degree to which the alternative provides well-distributed opportunities for both snowmobiling and exclusive, quiet non-motorized cross-country skiing and snow-shoeing on the Gallatin National Forest.

- Does the alternative provide groomed and marked snowmobile opportunities for half-day and full-day rides in a variety of settings?
- Does the alternative provide groomed and marked cross-country ski and snowshoeing opportunities that accommodate all skill levels in quiet non-motorized settings? Are opportunities provided within a 30 mile drive of each area community?
- Does the alternative continue to provide adequate snowmobile opportunities in areas that have been historically popular for that use?
- Does the alternative provide a forest-wide mix of snowmobiling opportunities and cross-country skiing opportunities in a non-motorized setting?

3. **Resource Protection.** The degree to which the alternative is consistent with achieving desired conditions for other resources, particularly wildlife populations that are affected by human use?

- Is the alternative consistent with laws, regulations, policy, the Forest Plan, and other higher level direction applicable to managing other resources?
- Is the alternative consistent with existing or anticipated conservation strategies for grizzly bear, lynx, wolverine and/or other species?
- Do the predicted effects of the alternative fall within accepted parameters or identified thresholds of maintenance and protection that are supported by research or monitoring information?

4. **Implementation Capability and Enforceability.** The degree to which the alternative is logistically and financially feasible to implement and enforce given budget and staffing expectations for the next 10 to 15 year period.

## **B. Decision**

After careful consideration of the impacts of the alternatives disclosed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (October 2006), I have selected Alternative 7-Modified, with certain exceptions as described below, as the Travel Management Plan for the Gallatin National Forest. My decision is fully described in detail within the accompanying document titled “Detailed Description of the Decision” and the three maps that display how travel will be managed across the Forest.<sup>1</sup> In summary, my decision can be described as follows:

The total amount of public open system road will remain generally unchanged from the current situation (approx. 740 miles), however there will be a shift of about 10% of this system from road currently only suitable for high clearance vehicles to road that will accommodate passenger cars. Currently about 315 miles of road are considered suitable for passenger cars, and under Alternative 7-M it will increase to 400 miles. My decision also includes objectives to close and restore non-system and user-built roads.

ATV opportunities provided on trails will be reduced from 281 miles (current situation) to 143 miles (about 50%) and motorcycle opportunities on trails will be reduced from 458 miles to 278 miles (about 40%). In general, the reduction in trail opportunity will be shifted to and managed for on administrative and backcountry roads. Currently, many trails (outside of Wilderness) are shared between motorized and non-motorized users.

The amount of area open to snowmobile use (outside of Wilderness) will decrease from about 84% of the Forest currently to about 55%. In contrast, the miles of marked and groomed trail will rise about 20% from the current situation.<sup>2</sup>

Stock use will generally be allowed on and off-trail across the Forest although some seasonal and yearlong restrictions will be applied to specific trails. My decision will not include the blanket spring restrictions proposed in Alternative 7 of the DEIS.

There will be some restrictions on mountain bikes on trails outside of Wilderness, primarily in the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area, the Crazy Mountains and on short routes leading into Wilderness. The trails in Hyalite Creek and the East Fork of Hyalite Creek will remain open to bicycles.

Hiking and cross-country skiing will not be restricted.

My decision includes Forest-wide and area-specific goals, objectives, standards and guidelines (programmatic direction) and will amend the Forest Plan to remove current direction relative to

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<sup>1</sup>The Travel Plan Decision identifies the route corridors where various modes of travel are allowed or prohibited, and any seasonal restrictions that may apply. The specific location of a road or trail may not be exactly as shown on the maps. In addition, the route tables provided for each travel planning area depict whether a use would be prohibited (P), allowed (A), or emphasized (E). The distinction of whether a use is allowed or whether it would be an emphasis is not part of the decision documented in this ROD but is provided for information. In either case the use is permitted. If a use is identified as emphasized (E) on a road or trail it is an indication that the Forest Service believes that it is a good opportunity and will manage the route for that use. If the use is identified as allowed (A), the use is permitted but the Forest Service would not actively manage for it. One example would be the opportunity to ride a horse on the paved Hyalite road. The use is allowed but would not be managed for. The emphasized use for this road would be passenger car travel. Note that where wheeled motorized vehicle travel is permitted it is always identified as an emphasized use (E).

<sup>2</sup> Although the maps show both marked and groomed ski trails, the Travel Plan decision does not distinguish between the two.

travel management. In addition to the proposed programmatic direction, travel management under my decision will follow current direction applicable to the management of grizzly bear and lynx. At the time of this decision, the applicable direction for the grizzly bear is based on USFWS 1996 Biological Opinion (BO), Gallatin Forest Plan Amendment 19, the 2004 BO for the Forest Plan outside the recovery zone, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Conservation Strategy (ICST 2003:12-13). The applicable direction for the lynx is based on the Canada Lynx Conservation Agreement (2005).

Tables 1 and 2 provide a summary of the opportunities that would be provided Forest-wide under my decision.

**Table 1. Summary of Summer Opportunities by Miles – (all mileages are approximate).**

<b>Recreation Opportunity</b>	<b>Pleasure Driving</b>	<b>Backcountry Roads (4x4)</b>	<b>ATV</b>	<b>Motorcycle</b>	<b>Mountain Bike (Use Emphasized)</b>	<b>Mountain Bike (Use Allowed)</b>	<b>Pack and Saddle Stock (Use Emphasized)</b>	<b>Pack and Saddle Stock (Use Allowed)</b>	<b>Hiking (Use Emphasized)</b>
Miles of Road	402	337	411	17	554	1,357	-	-	-
Miles of Trail	-	-	143	278	769	397	1,747	347**	2,004*
Total Miles	402	337	554	295	1,323	1,754	1,747	347**	2,004
*Use for this activity is not prohibited on any trails; use is either emphasized or allowed. ** Use for this activity is prohibited on some trails.									

**Table 2. Summary of Winter Opportunities in Miles – (all mileages are approximate).**

<b>Recreation Opportunity</b>	<b>Pleasure Driving (Plowed Road)</b>	<b>Snowmobiling</b>	<b>Cross-country Skiing</b>
Miles of Plowed Road	169	-	-
Miles of Groomed Trail	-	346	57
Miles of Marked Trail	-	122	174
Total Miles	169	468	231

**Differences in My Decision from Alternative 7-Modified**

Although the FEIS for the Travel Management Plan is being distributed concurrently with this Record of Decision, the alternatives studied have been defined since about January of 2006. Since that time, I have re-evaluated the more difficult issues based on analysis and continued discussions with my staff. This re-evaluation has led me to different choices for the management of travel in certain areas from what was described for Alternative 7-M. These differences are described below.

## Time Share

A number of public comments were received suggesting that we consider the concept of alternating use periods to address social problems (i.e. “user conflict) between motorized and non-motorized users, and between bikers and stock users/hikers on popular trails. For example, a trail could be managed as open to motorcycles on alternating days, alternating weeks, or even by the time of day. I’ve decided to apply this concept to the following trails to help meet my objective of providing more non-motorized opportunities near Bozeman:

- The Bridger Foothills Trail #534 from the “M” parking lot to the junction with Corbly Gulch Trail #544.
- The Sypes Canyon Trail #531.
- The Truman Gulch Trail #535.
- The Middle Cottonwood Trail #586.
- The Corbly Gulch Trail #544.
- The Hyalite #427 and East Fork of Hyalite #434 Trails.
- The Storm Castle Trail #185.

For the Sypes Canyon Trail and the southern end of the Bridger Foothills Trail I will look at a schedule that restricts mountain bikes to certain periods (i.e. provide opportunities for foot and horse travel in absence of bikes). For the other trails I will look at a schedule that restricts motorcycles and mountain bikes to certain periods (i.e. provide opportunities for foot and horse travel in absence of mechanized vehicles). I intend to work with various users over the next year to develop the specific schedules.

## Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area

My decision differs from Alternative 7-M for travel planning areas that include portions of the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area (WSA). To meet the requirements of the Montana Wilderness Study Act (i.e. to maintain the pre-existing Wilderness character as it was in 1977) I have limited the proliferation of snowmobile use in the WSA by geographically reconfiguring the approximate acres used by snowmobiles pre-1977 to a configuration of similar acreage that better matches areas snowmobilers told me were most desirable to them today. My decision concentrates snowmobile use in less than 12 % of the WSA while preserving a large portion of it in remote winter settings with ample opportunities for solitude and challenge.

In Alternative 7-M, I had also identified a new trail connector between Bear Lake and the West Pine Creek drainage. This trail was proposed as open to mountain bikes. In my decision this route would be restricted to foot and horse travel only, again to maintain consistency with direction for management on the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area under the Montana Wilderness Study Act.

## Bear Canyon Travel Planning Area

In Alternative 7-M an objective (Objective 4-1a) was included to “identify and implement seasonal motorized use restrictions on area roads and trails that allow for wildlife security during

key migration periods.” In my decision I dropped this objective because the seasonal use restrictions have already been addressed through the decisions I made for each route within this Travel Planning Area.

### Big Sky Travel Planning Area

Objective 3-1 for Alternative 7-M reads as follows in the FEIS: “Transfer road and trail easements to the Big Sky community at such time that it becomes an incorporated city.” In my decision I modified this objective to remove the reference “at such time that it becomes an incorporated city.” This implied a criterion to be met prior to transferring the easements to the Big Sky community. I have no such criterion. My objective is simply to transfer these easements when the opportunity arises.

### Cherry Creek Travel Planning Area

In this Travel Planning Area, my decision prohibits motorcycles on the Cherry Creek Trail (#401), where such use would have been allowed under Alternative 7-M during the summer months. For the purposes of understanding the potential consequences of this change, my decision for this area parallels the route management of Alternatives 4, 5, and 6. It wasn't environmental effects however that led me to make this change. My reasons were social. Most trails in this Travel Planning Area lead into the Spanish Peaks Wilderness and therefore my decision designates them for non-mechanized uses. The Cherry Creek Trail is an exception in that it is a fairly long trail that stays out of designated Wilderness altogether. In my preferred alternative for the DEIS and again in the FEIS (Alternatives 7 and 7-M), I saw this as a motorcycle opportunity. However, after speaking with motorcyclists at open houses and in one-on-one meetings, I heard that this route had limited use. In contrast it had considerably more use with stock users and is a primary access route to additional trails that progress into the Wilderness. The trail system is also served by only one trailhead facility. By precluding motorcycle use of this trail, I create a more complete higher quality non-motorized experience for hikers and stock users in the Travel Planning Area. Managing this trail for non-motorized use is also compatible with the management of trails on the adjacent Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest.

### Deer Creeks Travel Planning Area

The Tomato Can Gulch Trail will be open to motorcycles from Cherry Creek to the junction of Boone Peak Trail #2. This was an ATV Trail in Alt. 7 and was mistakenly dropped as a motorcycle route for Alternative 7-M when I actually only wanted to remove the ATVs because it was too short and a dead end trail. Motorcycles have other connections.

The Iron Mountain road systems including Lower Wepler, Evergreen, Iron Mountain, Desolation Pt., etc. would be dual designated for ATVs. These are feeders to the Iron Mountain Road which was dual designated in Alternative 7-M. It only makes sense and there are no safety concerns.

The upper Derby Gulch road systems will be dual designated for the same reasons as above.

The connector route between Tie Cutter Gulch and the Derby Mountain Trail (NW quarter of Sec. 30) will be added as an ATV trail. This was a map oversight and it is intended to be the connection between two ATV loop systems.

#### East Boulder Travel Planning Area

From Moccasin Lake southwest to the Custer National Forest Divide the Dry Fork Trail #13 would be closed to motorcycles. This was a map error in Alternative 7-M. The Custer Forest wanted to keep their side closed to motorized use.

#### Hebgen Basin Travel Planning Area

In my decision I've adopted the snowmobile area closure in the Cougar/Duck Creek area (as shown for Alternatives 5 and 6) to protect wintering wildlife. This area closure includes lands recently purchased in the Duck Creek Land Acquisition.

#### Hyalite Travel Planning Area

My decision will allow winter plowing of the Hyalite Road to the Blackmore day use area. To what extent plowing will be done will be dependent on funding. If enough funding is not raised to plow to the Blackmore area; then Plan B would be to plow to the Langohr Campground; and Plan C would be to plow to the lowest fishing access where it currently is plowed. During the winter, the Hyalite area will be managed primarily to provide for non-motorized recreation opportunities, however, after discussions with the snowmobile and ice climbing community, I have decided to designate a snowmobile trail to the Grotto Falls Trailhead and I've also included the short leg from this route to the Window Rock Cabin. Under Plan C above, both snowmobiles and non-motorized users would be allowed on the Hyalite Road to the Moser Creek Road (i.e. the point where the designated snowmobile route would begin). The main Hyalite Road would then be managed as a ski trail south of the Moser junction.

Re-analysis of the lynx analysis unit in this area allowed me to include in my decision the proposed designated cross-country ski trail connecting Moser Creek to Bozeman Creek.

#### Ibex Travel Planning Area

The Horse Creek Tie Trail (#269) between the Porcupine-Lowline Trail and the Cottonwood Trailhead was shown on the Alternative 7-M map as being prohibited to motorcycles and the route tables showed motorcycles as being allowed. This was a map error. Motorcycles will be allowed on this route in my decision from June 16 to September 4 annually.

#### Lionhead Travel Planning Area

Alternative 7-M would allow snowmobile use in a portion of the Lionhead recommended wilderness area. In my decision I have chosen to prohibit it because I believe that if we found through the Gallatin Forest Plan, that the highest and best use of this area is wilderness then we should be managing travel consistent with that determination. Using this same logic I also believe that mountain bikes should be prohibited in the recommended wilderness. However we made a mistake in the alternatives we presented for public comment in that none of them would

have precluded mountain bikes on trails within this area. While we corrected this oversight by modifying Alternative 6 in the FEIS, I still don't believe that it would be appropriate to make a decision to prohibit mountain bikes without first providing a public comment opportunity. Instead, it is my intent to propose a modification to the Travel Plan to preclude this use, allow for public comment, and then make a decision within the next year or so.

### Mill Creek

The Alternative 7-M map shows that the Wicked Creek Road and Snowbank Road would be open to 4x4s. This was a map error and should only be shown as open to ATVs and motorcycles. It's corrected on the decision map.

### Shields Travel Planning Area

The Bitter Creek Road has been changed from a 4x4 route to an ATV/motorcycle trail. The ATV routes in the Bitter Creek area have been reconfigured somewhat to drop the high elevation routes close to the ridge to low elevation routes as a substitute. This reconfiguration also consolidates motorized travel routes from the Smith Creek area to the Lewis and Clark National Forest. I believe that this change will help deter potential violations of use restrictions on other routes near the ridge. In addition, this reconfiguration will provide consistency with the Lewis and Clark National Forest.

My decision drops the 4x4 route on the upper E. Fork of Smith Road within the Lodgepole drainage leaving it open to ATV and motorcycle travel. This is a route that has been closed but was proposed for 4x4 travel in Alts. 3 through 7-M. I have now precluded 4x4s on this road to maintain a popular ATV/motorcycle route that connects with similar routes on the Lewis and Clark National Forest. By prohibiting 4x4s a dual use (4x4s and ATVs/motorcycles) road situation is avoided.

The two ATV connectors to the Lewis and Clark National Forest from the East Fork Smith Creek Road system were mapped incorrectly on the Alternative 7-M map and have been adjusted on my decision map.

My decision provides a parallel motorcycle route next to the Sunlight trail that allows for a separation of motorcycle travel from stock use. The facilities already exist so I saw this as an opportunity to reduce potential conflict.

My decision designates a new route for section 6 into the private land in section 5. This is a route that provides an alternative egress for private landowners in case of emergency. Opening this route is dependant on the landowners forming a Road Users Association to cooperate with the Forest Service on management of the road.

### West Bridger South

My decision prohibits stock on Trails 511, 512 and 513 to the "M." I view these routes as being similar to urban park trails and therefore I believe they should be pedestrian only trails. Stock will still be able to use the Bridger Foothills Trail #534 to access the southern end of the Bridger Range.

## C. Reasons for the Decision

### General Rationale

In making my decision for a Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan there was a variety of reasons I had for making choices within specific travel planning areas and for specific routes. However, from a broad forest-wide perspective, I was guided by the following:

1. **Summer Recreation Opportunities.** In my decision, one of my objectives was to provide well-distributed opportunities for both OHV's and exclusive non-motorized uses of the Gallatin National Forest trail system outside of Wilderness. In reviewing public comments, particularly from those whom regularly recreate on the Forest, I heard that: (a) Motorized users desired half-day and evening ATV and/or motorcycle trail rides within a reasonable travel distance from area communities. (b) Non-motorized users also desired half-day and evening hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking opportunities in a non-motorized setting within a reasonable travel distance from area communities. Both user groups also desired opportunities for longer trips and for trips to recreational destinations such as lakes, peaks or vistas. Public comment has informed me that trails open to motorized use do not also provide the type of experience most non-motorized users are looking for. They also indicate that roads do not provide the experience most motorcyclists are looking for. Therefore, in my decision I attempted to provide a mix of non-motorized trail opportunities, motorized opportunities for beginner and intermediate skill levels (i.e. ATV and motorcycle opportunities on roads and some trails), and more challenging motorcycle opportunities on single track trails.

My decision does result in a reduction of motorized use opportunities over the current situation. This reduction is largely based on several studies that consistently show that participation in non-motorized activity exceeds that of motorized activity (see the FEIS, pages 3-420 through 3-428). The number of participants driving off-road by 2010 in the Rockies is projected to be 3,270,000 (FEIS, page 3-426). The number of participants biking, hiking and pursuing non-consumptive wildlife viewing activities projected for 2010 in the Rockies is 22,535,000 (id.). The number of days that recreationists are projected to spend hiking, biking or participating in non-consumptive wildlife viewing activities in the Rockies in 2010 is estimated at over 1,000,000,000 days (id.). The number of days people spend participating in non-consumptive wildlife viewing activities alone is projected to exceed 740,000,000 days by 2010 (id.). The number of days recreationists are projected to participate in off-road driving in 2010 in the Rockies is estimated at over 64,000,000 (id.). Of these activities, non-consumptive wildlife viewing activities are projected to have the fastest growth of all dispersed recreation activities studied in the Rockies; nearly 50% by 2020 (id.). These recreation use projections would indicate that the largest future demand for supply of recreation opportunities would be for activities that typically occur in non-motorized settings.

From the comments and discussions I've had throughout this process I know that many motorized users will strongly disagree with my decision. For some it's a matter of principle, but in terms of the motorized opportunity provided I believe that my decision responds well to current and projected uses. Broad forest-wide comparisons using total miles or acres available often don't give an accurate picture. My objectives to increase the amount of non-motorized setting and respond to other resource issues are largely accomplished by bringing motorized use

under greater management control rather than attempting to limit the amount of use. For example, the opportunities for pleasure driving and use of ATVs on managed routes actually increase over the current situation. Pleasure driving increases due to planned improvements of some of the existing road system. ATV opportunity increases by converting parts of the old road system to ATV trails. Significant improvements in the ATV trail system will be established in the roaded portion of the Gallatin Range, the Shields drainage in the Crazies, the South Plateau and Henrys Mountains, Cooke City, Buck Ridge, Deer Creeks, and in the Mill Creek area. The focus is on creating loops and connected routes to increase the total mileage of riding available within a given area. While my decision reduces the amount of single-track motorcycle routes by 40%, the bulk of this reduction is really a shift to routes shared with ATVs.

My decision also implements a time-share approach on several trails near Bozeman that will provide specified periods for hikers and stock users to use those trails at times where motorized use, and in some cases mountain bike use, is restricted.

Providing opportunities to reach destinations, such as lakes, peaks or vistas, was more difficult for motorized uses than it was for foot and horse use. Mostly this is because these destinations fall within designated Wilderness where mechanized use is prohibited. This is why, in my decision, I believed it was important to retain the summer motorized use opportunities in the Cooke City Travel Planning Area similar to what exists today, and to provide higher elevation motorcycle trail opportunities in the Bridger, Crazy (i.e. Rock Creek Lake) and Gallatin Mountain Ranges.

**2. Winter Recreation Opportunities.** Similar to summer uses I also had an objective to provide well-distributed opportunities for both snowmobiling and exclusive cross-country skiing and snow-shoeing in non-motorized settings. Again, public comments indicated that there was a need for both. Accessibility, terrain and snow conditions, in addition to resource issues, were greater factors in identifying winter use opportunities than was proximity to area communities.

For snowmobiling I wanted to maintain those opportunities that have been historically popular. I was sensitive to the importance of this activity by maintaining the current situation around the communities of West Yellowstone and Cooke City. I also tried to maintain opportunities for high-marking and other backcountry use in the southern Gallatin Mountain Range, the west slopes of the Crazy Mountains and the Fairy Lake Travel Planning Area. This is a shift from what I had included in my DEIS preferred alternative largely due to public comments informing me that I would be removing a unique and popular experience for the snowmobile community. The opportunity I've provided in my decision though is still more restrictive than it is currently due to other resource issues and my desire to provide opportunities for skiing and snowshoeing in non-motorized settings. Other issues influencing my decision included compliance with the Montana Wilderness Study Act, Forest Service policy on management of recommended wilderness areas, respect for the traditional values of the Crow Tribe in the Crazy Mountains, and protection of winter habitat for lynx and wolverine. Refer to Section D of this ROD for additional discussion on these issues.

For cross-country skiing it was my objective to increase the amount of opportunity provided closer to urban areas, especially around Bozeman. My decision still emphasizes family-oriented cross country skiing in the Hyalite drainage, but does provide a separate snowmobile route accessing the Grotto Falls Trailhead from the Moser Creek Road to accommodate ice climbers.

My decision will allow plowing of the main Hyalite Road to the Blackmore Day Use area and the area around the reservoir will be managed for cross country skiing. Public comments we received overwhelmingly supported the plowing of the Hyalite Road during the winter. My decision also emphasizes cross-country skiing on the east side of the Bridger Mountains from the Middle Fork of Brackett Creek south.

On the Livingston Ranger District my decision also creates some non-motorized winter opportunities on the west side of the Crazy Mountains (e.g. Sunlight Peak and South Fork Shields).

**3. Resource Protection.** A third objective I had was to bring existing and projected use levels to a point where they are consistent with achieving desired conditions for other resources. This included managing travel such that it is in compliance with laws, regulations, policy and other higher lever direction and insuring that anticipated effects fall within accepted parameters or identified thresholds of maintenance and protection that are supported by research or monitoring information. In general, this objective set the sideboards within which recreation opportunities (1 and 2 above) could be provided. In summary, travel opportunities were limited as follows:

- Within the Cabin Creek Recreation and Wildlife Management Area, ATV opportunities were limited to one designated route, the Oil Well Road, and motorcycle routes were limited to primary trails to be consistent with direction in the Lee Metcalf Wilderness Act applicable to this area.
- Within the recovery zone for the grizzly bear, summer motorized use was limited or reduced based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a Conservation Agreement (CA) with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) (ICST 2003:12-13) and more specifically, the need to maintain or reduce open motorized route density and increase the amount of secure habitat to support recovery.
- Within the Lionhead recommended wilderness, motorized use was limited because I believe managing for such uses runs contrary to Forest Service Region 1 guidance to manage for uses consistent with wilderness values.
- Within the Ibex and East Crazies Travel Planning Areas, motorized use was restricted to protect the integrity of areas that are of traditional value to the Crow Tribe. The “checkerboard” land ownership pattern and the easements across private land that only allow foot and horseback travel in the East Crazies are the other reason for this restriction.
- Mechanized use was restricted on some trails leading into Wilderness to discourage encroachment into Wilderness.
- Elsewhere, summer motorized use was reduced or precluded either permanently or seasonally for facility protection; to reduce potential sedimentation of streams containing cutthroat trout; to preserve quality fall big game hunting; to maintain key wildlife movement routes; and to address private land in-holder concerns.
- Snowmobiling was configured in certain areas (e.g. the upper Bridgers and Gallatin Mountain Ranges) to protect winter habitat for mountain goat and wolverine.

As evidenced by much of the effects analysis disclosed in Chapter 3 of the FEIS, there is an inverse relationship between the level of human use of the Forest and the condition of other resources. For example, as motorized use increases, wildlife habitat security decreases.

Conversely, the more restrictions one places on recreation use of the Forest, the better it is for wildlife and other resources. In general, adverse environmental impacts were a major factor for me in not choosing Alternative 1. Impacts on biodiversity, cultural resources, grizzly bear, lynx and wolverine were also environmental factors in my decision not to choose Alternatives 2 through 4. Beyond that my decision was largely based on providing an appropriate mix of recreation opportunities and maintaining consistency with laws and other higher level direction. Refer to Section D of this ROD for additional discussion on how the issues influenced my decision.

**4. Implementation Capability and Enforceability.** The fourth objective I had was to identify an alternative that was logistically and financially feasible to implement and enforce given budget and staffing expectations for the next 10 to 15 year period. Based on analysis within the FEIS (see Chapter 3, “Transportation System Implementability”) I found that, in terms of cost, my decision, as well as Alternatives 2 through 6, were reasonable to pursue. The projected costs of Alternative 1 would be dramatically higher, primarily due to the need to rebuild currently legal motorized trails to accommodate ATV travel.

For enforcement, I concluded from the analysis in Chapter 3 of the FEIS that Alternatives 4 through 7-M provided better motorized route configurations to improve the enforceability of restrictions whereas Alternatives 1 and 2 would be difficult. See the FEIS, pages 3-163 through 3-169 for a more detailed discussion.

I recognize that managing certain trails in the Bozeman area as time-share trails (see page 17) may be difficult to enforce. However it has worked elsewhere in the nation and it seems reasonable for me to try it here. I also expect users to help me in developing the schedules and in gaining compliance with them.

## **Rationale by Areas of Public Interest**

### **The Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area (HPBH WSA)**

My decision prohibits ATV use and reduces the area open to snowmobiles within the WSA. Motorcycles are allowed mid-July to September 5th on the more popular trails such as portions of the Gallatin Crest Trail, the Hyalite Trail, the East Fork of Hyalite Trail and the Buffalo Horn Pass Trail. Mountain biking will also be managed for, however it will be prohibited on several trails on the east side of the Gallatin Range. All routes will be available for hiking and stock use.

The principal legal direction for managing the HPBH WSA comes from the Montana Wilderness Study Act (S. 393). Section 3(a) of the Act states: “... *wilderness study areas designated by this Act shall, until Congress determines otherwise, be administered by the Secretary of Agriculture so as to maintain their presently existing wilderness character and potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System*” (FEIS, page 3-597). For this area my primary objective was to design a travel management scenario that was consistent with the direction of this Act. The Act requires the Forest Service to maintain the area’s wilderness character as it existed in 1977 and maintain the area’s potential for inclusion in the Wilderness System. The amount of motorized recreation opportunity provided in my decision is designed to be consistent with this mandate. My decision precludes ATV use because these vehicles were not used in

1977 and they require more than a single track trail to operate on. While mountain biking was not known to be an activity enjoyed in this area in 1977, it did not seem reasonable to preclude them when motorcycle use was allowed and their use requires similar tread widths. Agency policy on mountain bikes states they are appropriate wherever motorcycle use occurred historically, and on non-motorized trails as long as the total amount of mountain bike and motorcycle use maintains wilderness character as it existed in 1977 (See Schlenker's 9/2006 letter). Beyond compliance with the Act, I tried to provide well-distributed opportunities for motorcycles, snowmobiles and exclusive non-motorized uses in this area. The Gallatin Crest is unique on this Forest in that it provides high peaks and lake destinations, yet is not in designated Wilderness or otherwise restricted to non-motorized uses.

My decision will maintain a mix of summer motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities in the HPBH WSA. The configuration of open routes for motorcycles and mountain bikes was developed to provide a mix of motorcycling and mountain biking options, and to provide areas dedicated to hiking and horseback riding. Several key components of my decision include:

- The "Crest" trail will remain open to motorcycles from the north beginning in the Hyalite drainage – south to Windy Pass.
- Several other popular loops will remain open to motorcycles including Porcupine/Buffalo Horn loops, Storm Castle Creek Trail and Swan Creek Trails.
- Motorcycles will be restricted to a mid-July to early September season of use to protect facilities, and mitigate wildlife conflicts in the fall.
- Mountain bikes will be allowed on all routes open to motorcycles. Mountain bikes will also be allowed on two trails that were not open to motorcycles in 1977 (Blackmore/South Cottonwood and Big Creek). The Blackmore/South Cottonwood Trail has been very popular with mountain bikes since legal access was obtained in the South Cottonwood drainage in the early 1990's. The Big Creek Trail has become an established mountain biking route since the late 1980's. This trail provides a mountain bike route from the Paradise Valley to the mountain bike/ motorcycles routes in the upper portion of the HPBH WSA. Congress didn't expect that all uses would remain the same, nor that uses be "frozen" (Montana Wilderness Association v. United States Forest Service, CV 96-152-M-DWM, pages 12-13). Uses could be changed, moved, etc. through the normal travel planning process to accommodate social or resource concerns so long as we retained wilderness character circa 1977 (id.).
- The East Fork of Hyalite Creek Trail will remain open to motorcycles and mountain bikes however it is my intention to develop a "time-share" use scenario where these mechanized vehicles will alternate use with pedestrians during the peak summer season. I believe that time-share will provide a good means of resolving user conflict on this very popular trail. My objective is to work out the exact details of this system with the various user groups over the next year or two. In the Starting Benchmark, we had proposed to close the main Hyalite Trail (#427) and the East Fork of Hyalite Trail (#434) to mountain bikes due to concerns over the safety of other users. This raised a significant amount of concern with cyclists and heightened my awareness of the popularity of these two trails for that use.
- Mountain bikes will be prohibited on trails in the northeast corner of the study area where no historic motorcycle use occurred prior to 1977, in order to ensure that mechanized use does not expand to all trails within the HPBH WSA.

- A core of trails in the southern portion of the study area will be managed for non-motorized use only to provide discrete opportunities for hiking/horseback use and to improve grizzly secure area.
- ATVs will be prohibited on all routes within the HPBH WSA.

It was recognized in 1977 that use would grow and conditions within wilderness study areas would not remain static into the future. Use can be adjusted or modified to meet resource or recreation objectives as long as it did not diminish the integrity of the area. The Congressional record is clear that Congress did not intend for the Forest Service to exclude existing “ORV” use until they decided whether to add the study areas to the wilderness system. ORV use can however be adjusted through the normal travel planning process if it is determined to be inappropriate in a given area.

Use can be excluded, reduced, patterns of use changed, or use can be geographically limited in portions of the HPBH WSA while still maintaining an appropriate recreation opportunity. For recreation uses such as motorcycling and mountain biking I can continue to provide a high quality backcountry single track riding experience as long as it does not encourage single track riding proliferation across the entire Study Area.

Interim Directive FSM id-2320-2005-1 clearly states that ATV use is appropriate on jeep roads that were open to that sort of travel in 1977. There were no “jeep roads” or double track routes open to vehicles larger than 50” wide in the HPBH WSA in 1977, except for private roads accessing timber harvest on private land. Therefore my decision prohibits ATVs on all routes within the HPBH WSA.

All routes to be managed for motorcycles in my decision were open to motorcycles in 1977 (FEIS, page 3-566). The seasonal restrictions I’ve included are designed to protect wilderness character and trail facilities in this high elevation area, as well as to minimize motorized traffic in critical grizzly bear habitat during critical pre-den feeding periods in the fall.

The southern portion of the Gallatin Crest Trail will be managed for foot and stock travel only. This configuration along with foot and stock only on several other routes allows us to significantly improve grizzly bear secure area in the Gallatin 3 bear management sub-unit that has been identified in the Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy as 'in need of improvement' in terms of reducing open motorized route density. Additionally, the southern portion of this trail would have to be reconstructed to be passable to motorcycles – which would be in conflict with 2329 1(c.) in the interim directive.

In my decision approximately 88% of the area will be closed to snowmobiling. The open snowmobile areas include the historic Big Sky Trail – which will be managed as a designated route through a closed area. The open area where cross country snowmobiling is allowed runs from Windy Pass across the Crest through Rock Creek. This allows high quality “challenge” snowmobile opportunities but limits the acreage available to remain consistent with the acreage used in 1977. I also considered a designated route from Hyalite through a closed area, to a small open area in the East Fork of Hyalite (Heather/Emerald) but concluded that opening both this area and the Windy Pass/Rock Creek area would not maintain wilderness character as it existed in 1977. Cross country snowmobiling will also be prohibited in the historic use area of Buffalo Horn. This area closure in Buffalo Horn facilitates management of the State Gallatin Wildlife

Management Area sections, and reduces conflicts with wintering big game, thus improving natural integrity.

### **Inventoried Roadless Areas**

Approximately 520,000 acres of the Gallatin National Forest (outside of designated Wilderness, Wilderness Study Area, and recommended wilderness) are inventoried as “roadless.” These and other inventoried roadless lands across the nation have been the subject of recent debate and interim and proposed roadless rules. The proposed rules have focused on the question of whether it is appropriate to manage these lands for timber harvest and road construction. These are activities not proposed by the Travel Plan alternatives. In addition, the Gallatin Forest Plan (9/87) considered and did not recommend that these areas be designated as Wilderness. Therefore, the fact that an area is within the roadless inventory, did not in itself, influence my decision. Refer to Section D of this ROD for more discussion on this issue.

### **Recommended Wilderness**

There are two areas on the Gallatin National Forest that were recommended for wilderness designation in the Gallatin Forest Plan (9/87); the Lionhead recommended wilderness west of Hebgen Lake and the Republic recommended wilderness south of Cooke City. My decision will restrict travel to non-motorized uses because through the Forest Plan, we have recognized that wilderness is the highest and best use for these areas. Refer to Section D of this ROD for more discussion on this issue.

## **Rationale for Other Components of the Travel Management Plan**

### **Adoption of Forest-wide and Travel Management Area Direction**

In a Travel Management Plan it is important, not only to identify the opportunities and restrictions that are appropriate on different routes and areas of the Forest, but to also establish direction for future management action. This is done through the adoption of goals and objectives which will drive future programs and activities; and through adoption of standards and guidelines within which future site-specific actions must take place. The goals, objectives, standards and guidelines (i.e. programmatic direction) that are adopted as part of my decision are displayed in the document “Detailed Description of the Decision.” Fundamentally, my rationale for adopting this direction is that it is a means of identifying the priority resource values of the Gallatin National Forest and ensuring that future management action is consistent with maintaining and/or improving these resources. While the heart of the Travel Management Plan is the designations of use, the programmatic direction provides the strategic plan for action over the next 15 years or so. It establishes priority needs that leads to a proposed program of work and puts us in a better position to compete for funding to carry out that work. Programmatic direction, by itself, has no environmental effect since it does not mandate that ground-disturbing actions occur. Future proposals designed to achieve this direction would be subject to environmental analysis in accordance with NEPA.

In the Travel Plan, goals, objectives, standards and guidelines (i.e. programmatic direction) have been established at two scales; the Forest-wide scale which includes management direction that

would generally apply to the Forest as a whole, and the Travel Planning Area scale which includes direction unique to that area. See Figure 1 for an index of the 39 travel planning areas.

## 1. FOREST-WIDE DIRECTION

The Forest-wide direction I've adopted as part of the Travel Plan can be found in Chapter I of the "Detailed Description of the Decision". The following is my rationale for adopting the various goals, objectives, standards and guidelines.

Goal A simply states the overarching purpose for providing a variety of opportunities to recreate on the Gallatin National Forest (i.e. travel). Objective A-1 articulates how the Forest Service intends to meet that goal. The objective consists of 2 tables that show the targeted miles of opportunity to be provided for each mode of travel Forest-wide. These tables are an aggregate of the decisions I made on appropriate uses of each road and trail on the Forest. I included it because the Travel Plan is designed to be in place over a 15 year time-frame. It is meaningful from a monitoring perspective because, over the planning period, Forest managers may: (a) Feel compelled to consider modifying the Travel Plan due to new or unexpected effects. (b) Miss the mark on objectives to construct/reconstruct roads and trails for their designated uses due to budget, workload, etc. Objective A-1 with the mileage tables is a benchmark to monitor against to see how well we are doing in providing the targeted mix of opportunities. In other words it's a checkpoint to keep ourselves, or our successors, from making future site-specific decisions (or failing to do so) that inadvertently creep us away from the level of use we intended to provide.

Objective A-2 gives us direction for future management action to harden the designated 4x4 roads to prevent resource damage. This is similar to other programmatic direction that I've adopted. It is based on the principle that once the decisions were made on the appropriate uses to manage for on our road and trail system, we would then bring those facilities to a condition to adequately accommodate those uses in a manner that prevents resource damage.

Objectives A-3 and A-4 are designed to guide the maintenance of trails within designated Wilderness in a manner consistent with wilderness philosophy. Pristine zones are to be kept in a trail-less condition. Primitive zones are to include low development trails, and transition zones will contain trails that are more developed to accommodate higher volume of use. I found these objectives to be useful so as to maintain the different types of wilderness experiences in the future.

Objective A-6 and Standard A-7 were adopted to address potential future proposals for backcountry airstrips. The Gallatin National Forest currently has no aircraft landing sites nor have we had a program allowing for such use. The Montana Pilots Association met with us and submitted a letter early in the travel planning process asking us to consider opportunities for their members. As a result we had included a proposed objective with a list of potential landing sites in Alternative 3 of the DEIS. I did not adopt the objective in my preferred alternative (Alternative 7) at the time, but have decided to adopt a modified objective and standard in my decision. The objective (Objective A-6) does not identify potential sites and precludes consideration of such proposals in designated wilderness, the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area, recommended wilderness areas and within the Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone. The standard (Standard A-7) will prohibit public recreational aircraft landing/take-off except at designated and authorized sites. I chose to adopt this direction mainly because the

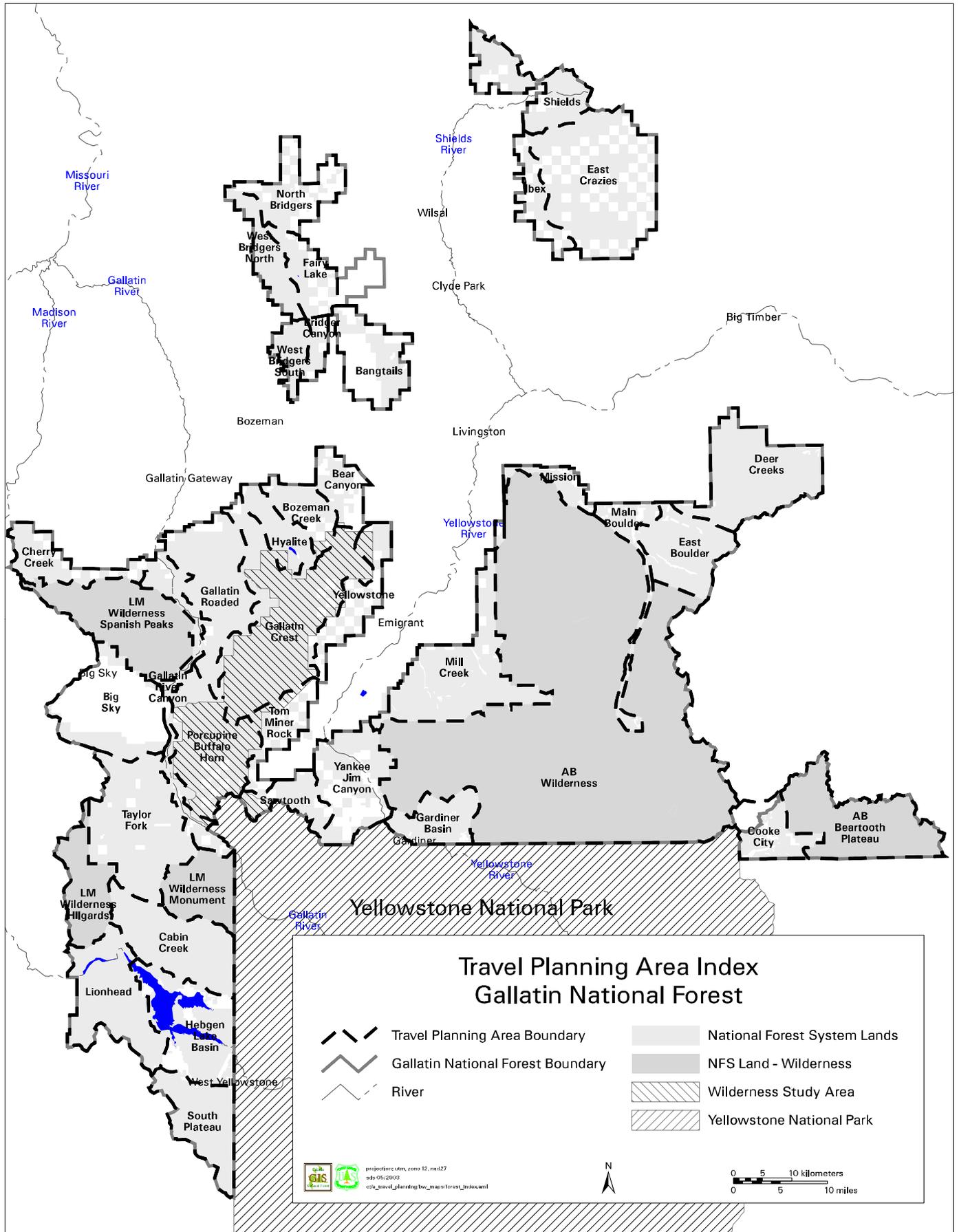


Figure 1. Gallatin National Forest Travel Planning Areas

analysis did not show me that there was good reason to preclude it throughout the entire 1.8 million acres of the Gallatin National Forest. In other words, this is a desired recreational pursuit and there may be places on the Forest that can provide opportunities without unacceptable impacts. My decision is not a final agency action to authorize backcountry landings or airstrip construction. It just means that we would be willing to entertain such proposals in the future subject to analysis in accordance with NEPA. Any authorized sites would be constructed and maintained by site users and the use would be regulated by special use permit.

Standard A-8 precludes wheeled motorized vehicle travel off of designated routes with certain exceptions. The off-route restriction is in keeping with the Montana/Dakota OHV decision (USDA, January 2001) and with the National OHV Regulations (USDA, 2005). This Montana/Dakota OHV Decision (page i) indicates that between 1990 and 1998 the number of registered ATVs and motorcycles increased 92% in the three-state area. The increased use has resulted in environmental effects on public resources in numerous areas, including roads and trails that have developed as the result of repeated use. Precluding off-route wheeled motorized travel is a necessity to effectively implement my Travel Plan decision. The exceptions were needed in this standard to clearly articulate that it is not the intent to prohibit off-route motorized travel for emergency operations or for the administration of a federal lease or permit. The standard also includes an exception that allows travel up to 300 feet off of a designated road or trail to access a dispersed campsite unless specifically restricted or unless such use would result in damage or unreasonable disturbance to land, wildlife or vegetative resources. Basically this allowance is needed to provide for access to the numerous dispersed camping sites that exist throughout the Forest. Once the district rangers have completed the site-specific designation, the 300 foot allowance will not apply to high use areas such as the west shoreline of Hebgen Lake, along the Gallatin River, the Taylor Fork Road, the Beaver Creek Road, the Hyalite Road, the Main Boulder Road, the Mill Creek Road, the Beartooth Highway (#212) and in Bear Canyon. In these areas dispersed campsites will be designated.

Standard A-9 defines the types of trail vehicles that are permitted on designated routes. This standard is needed to describe exactly what is meant by the terms ATV, motorcycle and snowmobile. This prevents a potential misinterpretation that larger or different types of vehicles can be used on these routes.

Standards A-10 and A-11 preclude wheeled vehicles on marked and groomed winter routes and snowmobiles from traveling on groomed cross-country ski trails. These standards ensure that winter trails are maintained in the condition for which they are intended.

Guideline A-12 allows the Forest Service to keep designated motorized routes closed to such use until the facilities (roads or trails) are brought up to applicable engineering design standards. This prevents a misunderstanding that all designated motorized routes are open to those uses as of the date of this decision. Route reconstruction will be necessary on a number of roads and trails before they are suitable for certain types of motorized travel.

Goal B, Objectives B-1 through B-3, and Guidelines B-4 through B-9 address my intent to provide and maintain reasonable, legal access to Gallatin National Forest lands to provide for human use and enjoyment and to protect and manage Forest resources and values. Objective B-3 includes a table identifying the locations where I don't believe that reasonable access exists. I've also reiterated the need for access through adopted objectives within each travel planning area.

While the Forest Service would have these objectives regardless of whether they're stated in the Travel Management Plan, including them as programmatic direction has the following benefits:

- It alerts the public, private landowners, and future managers where access is desired.
- It provides the foundation for pursuing access when the opportunity arises.
- It provides the background and analytical foundation for site-specific proposals to acquire access.

It also gives us direction to protect existing access rights and to cooperate with landowners to meet mutual transportation needs. It should be noted that adoption of this direction is not a final agency decision to pursue access in specific locations. Historically, we have obtained needed access in cooperation with the private landowners as opportunities arise.

Goal C and Objective C-1 allows for the construction of roads and trails to facilitate access for carrying out a variety of administrative and project activities subject to future decisions made on such proposals in accordance with NEPA. I've adopted this direction to make it clear that nothing in the Travel Plan is intended to preclude the construction, re-construction or opening of roads and trails when needed for such activities as law enforcement, timber harvest, reforestation, cultural treatments, prescribed fire, mineral development, wildlife and fish habitat improvement projects, livestock grazing, or private land access. It will be necessary however to effectively close these routes to public motorized use after completion of the activity unless they are otherwise designated for such use through the Travel Plan.

Goal D, Objectives D-1 through D-3, Standards D-4 through D-6, and Guideline D-7 give us direction to manage the road and trail system in a manner that protects and maintains water quality, wildlife habitat, fish habitat, and other resources. As indicated for a number of issues addressed in the FEIS, higher motorized route densities have increased adverse environmental effects. In addition, there are a number of acquired or user-built routes on the Forest that were not constructed to adequate design standards or have deteriorated to a point where adverse impacts are being incurred. Goal D and its associated direction provides the strategic direction for the planning period to close and rehabilitate excess roads and trails and to keep undesignated routes closed to motorized use. As I stated at the beginning of this section this type of direction establishes priority needs that leads to a proposed program of work and puts us in a better position to compete for funding to carry out that work. The ultimate goal is to eliminate unacceptable effects from the Forest's transportation system.

Goal E, Objectives E-1 through E-3, Standards E-4 through E-6, and Guideline E-7 provide management direction to attain a road and trail system that fully supports the protection of water quality, and habitat for fish, riparian dependent species and other aquatic organisms. In other words fully protect the beneficial uses of streams and lakes in compliance with the Clean Water Act. The intent is to have all streams supporting westslope and Yellowstone cutthroat trout or blue ribbon fisheries at 90% or greater and all other streams at 75% or greater of their inherent habitat capability or reference condition. Similar to Goal D and its associated direction, Goal E and associated objectives, standards and guidelines also provides strategic direction that supports future efforts to close and rehabilitate excess roads and trails. The standards and guidelines also place sideboards on any future proposals for road and trail construction, reconstruction or

maintenance to prevent unacceptable sedimentation and stream impairment, and to protect floodplains and wetlands.

Goal F and Objective F-1 gives us some general direction to provide for wildlife movement and genetic interaction between and within mountain ranges and connecting wildlands. The objective is not very specific in terms of how this is to be accomplished beyond the decisions I made in the Travel Plan for management of individual roads, trails and areas. However, I still thought that it was important to include this direction because it highlights a desired condition to be maintained and could influence future decisions for projects and activities proposed for these areas. The direction may also lead us to play a more cooperative role in facilitating wildlife movement on non-National Forest lands linking the various mountain ranges.

Goal G provides direction to manage human use of the Forest road and trail system in a way that allows for the recovery of threatened and endangered species and maintains species of special management designation and their habitats. To achieve this I've adopted one objective (Objective G-1) and two guidelines (Guidelines G-2 and G-3). There are currently three grizzly bear subunits on the Forest that have been identified as in need of improvement. Objective G-1 essentially prioritizes future proposals for road/trail closure and rehabilitation to these three subunits, thereby improving habitat security for the bear. Guideline G-2 directs us to avoid or mitigate for known occupied habitat for species of special management designation (e.g. sensitive species) in any future proposal for a motorized route. Protection of known nesting, denning, roosting or key foraging areas is the goal of this direction. Guideline G-3 simply reminds us that we can consider imposing temporary localized restrictions on travel to prevent conflicts with threatened and endangered species. For example, the Travel Plan does not preclude the Forest Service from restricting designated use(s) on a temporary basis to prevent conflicts between grizzly bears and humans.

In my preferred alternative for the DEIS, I had included several additional objectives, standards and guidelines for management of the grizzly bear and lynx. I did not adopt them in my decision. This is because management direction for these species is currently being addressed through separate planning processes covering areas much larger than just the Gallatin National Forest. Therefore I concluded that it was inappropriate to try to second-guess what that direction would be and include it as part of the Travel Plan. Until a decision is made on delisting the grizzly bear in the Yellowstone area, applicable direction for management of the bear is based on Forest Plan Amendment 19 and on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Conservation Agreement (CA) with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). See MOU, Conservation Strategy (ICST 2003:12-13). For lynx, the Gallatin Forest is obligated to meet current direction, whether in the LCAS or revised LCAS, until such time that the proposed Northern Rockies Lynx Amendment supercedes it. A Conservation Agreement between the Forest Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Agreement #00-MU-11015600-013) committed the Forest Service to use the LCAS when considering the effects of actions on lynx until the Forest Plans are amended (USDI 2005).

In addition to adopting programmatic direction for threatened and endangered species and other species of special management designation, I felt it was important to highlight other wildlife habitat goals within the scope of the Travel Plan decision. Goals H and I, along with their associated objectives and guidelines are designed to achieve that purpose. I've included an objective (Objective H-1) to relocate, reconstruct or take other appropriate action on system

roads and trails that are having adverse impacts on key habitats. The guidelines I've included emphasize providing high quality security habitat in areas important to wildlife reproduction and wintering areas. I've also adopted a guideline (Guideline I-2) directing us to be cognizant of Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks goals for achieving optimal ungulate survival rates on big game winter range. These guidelines don't yet target any specific actions but I've included them as considerations for opportunities that may be identified and activities that are proposed over the course of the next 15 years or so.

The last Forest-wide goal, standard and guidelines I've adopted (Goal J, Standard J-1 and Guidelines J-2 and J-3) are designed to help maintain the natural integrity of the Lee Metcalf and Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Areas. I've included this guidance to ensure that trail development and management is carried out within the identified limits of acceptable change (LAC). In other words, no system trails will be constructed within LAC pristine zones; trails within LAC primitive zones will be managed within trail classes 1 through 3; and within LAC transition zones system trails will be managed to trail class 2 or 3, with the exception of managing to trail class 4 for short sections where necessary to safely accommodate use.

In summary, I've adopted this Forest-wide programmatic direction because it is a means of identifying the priority resource values of the Gallatin National Forest and ensuring that future management action is consistent with maintaining and/or improving these resources. I identified no issues or concerns with this direction. Because I've combined this decision with decisions for the management of every road, trail and area open to snowmobiles, the programmatic direction will not lead to unknown consequences on travel opportunities.

## 2. TRAVEL PLANNING AREA DIRECTION

As stated in the introduction to this section, programmatic direction is provided at two scales, Forestwide and for each individual travel planning area (TPA). The delineation of travel planning areas, in part, is a means of organizing programmatic direction that is unique to specific areas of the Forest. I've discussed most of this direction in the following section, "Rationale by Travel Planning Area," however so as not to be redundant, I've addressed direction that applies to multiple TPAs below.

Each travel planning area includes 2 broad goal statements, one for summer and one for winter (Goals 1 and 2) that define the opportunities to be provided for within that area. Many areas provide opportunities for all types of use, but the intent of the goal statement is to highlight the emphasized uses. For some areas the emphasis may be on motorized use and other areas emphasize non-motorized uses. There are a few TPAs (such as on the west side of the Bridger Mountains) where there are no winter recreation goals. This is generally because they have insufficient snow to provide a good opportunity for snowmobiling or skiing. The goal statements each contain a companion objective such as the one below for summer recreation use:

**“OBJ. 1-1:** Achieve the summer recreation opportunities identified in GOAL 1 through the route-by-route management decisions made through this Travel Plan. Any future proposals to change the uses specified should be done in consideration of the targeted recreation setting to be provided [see the “Recreation Opportunity Spectrum” (ROS) map for summer uses (October 2006)] which is hereby incorporated by reference.”

The objectives serve two purposes: (a) They remove the debate over the amount of opportunity needed to achieve the overriding goal. (b) They provide a checkpoint to keep ourselves, or our successors, from making future site-specific decisions (or failing to do so) that inadvertently move us away from the targeted recreation setting.

In Alternatives 2 through 6, and in Alternative 7 of the DEIS (my preferred alternative at the time), I had included “miles of opportunity” tables similar to Forest-wide Objective A-1, as TPA Objective 1-1. My thought was that mileage tables are less open to interpretation. However, upon further consideration and discussion with my staff I decided not to include the tables because TPAs are simply too small of a geographic scale in which to get so specific.

Another goal I’ve included in several travel planning areas is one that targets a road and trail system that results in contributed sediment levels that maintains Yellowstone, or westslope cutthroat trout habitat at 90% of its potential habitat capability. In some cases this goal includes some companion objectives but in other areas the application of Forest-wide fisheries standards were considered sufficient. The purpose of including this Goal at the Travel Planning Area scale was to highlight those parts of the Forest where there are streams containing cutthroat trout, both of which are identified in Region 1 of the Forest Service as a “sensitive species.”

The last common goal I’ve included in several travel planning areas is one that targets a road and trail system that accommodates traffic consistent with protecting soil and watershed condition. Similar to the fisheries goal above, my intent is to draw attention to areas that contain sensitive or erosive soils. This goal is accompanied by a set of objectives, standards, or guidelines for roads and trails to emphasize the need for a good repair and maintenance program as well as informational signing asking motorized users seeking camp spots to avoid wet, muddy and shrubby areas.

During the period between the DEIS and the FEIS I made several adjustments to the final wording or the programmatic direction and considered additional objectives, standards, and guidelines that ultimately did not end up in the final Travel Management Plan. The adjustments to wording were done to improve clarity and make the direction less open to interpretation. The primary reasons I had for not adopting additional suggested direction was that it did not meet the definitions of an objective, standard or guideline or I thought it may have unintended consequences, such as committing us to actions that we may not be able to achieve. There were two principle differences between the direction I had proposed in Alternatives 2 through 7 of the DEIS and the direction I have included in my decision. The first is that my decision does not amend this direction into the Gallatin Forest Plan as was proposed in the DEIS. The reason I chose not to amend was because Agency thinking has evolved to the point that Forest Plans are strategic documents and they do not make final agency action decisions. This thinking culminated in the revision of the regulations for implementing the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) at 36 CFR 219 in January of 2005. The proposed Travel Management Plan does make final agency decisions (e.g. appropriate uses of roads and trails) and therefore would not be consistent with the principles of a revised Forest Plan. Therefore the Travel Management Plan is a stand-alone document. The second difference is that I reformatted the Forest-wide direction in my decision (and Alternative 7-M) from what was displayed for Alternatives 2 through 6, and Alternative 7 of the DEIS. Originally, the Forest-wide programmatic direction was separated into three categories; “Recreation and Public Use,” “Administrative Uses,” and “Road and Trail

Construction, Reconstruction and Maintenance.” The thought was that this would make the Travel Plan easier to use in implementation but in actuality it created confusion with my staff. In some cases the categories created a need for redundancy in establishing specific direction that applies similarly to more than one category. I also did not adopt some of the proposed direction applicable to grizzly bear and lynx because management direction for these species are addressed in other regulatory documents and memoranda and revised direction is being considered through proposed grizzly bear and lynx conservation strategy amendments.

### **Amendment of the Forest Plan to Remove Certain Standards Applicable to Travel Management**

Although I am not amending the programmatic direction of the Travel Plan into the Gallatin Forest Plan, one of my purposes was to remove outdated, ineffective, and problematic direction related to travel management from the current Forest Plan. The purpose and need sections of Chapter 1 of the Travel Plan EIS, and Appendix A describe the reasons for removing 119 existing standards. I found no adverse consequences to removing this direction and therefore it remains a part of my decision. Also see my conclusions about Issue #8 and my Finding of Non-significant Forest Plan Amendment later in this ROD.

### **Seasonal Restrictions**

Seasonal restrictions are a means to resolve resource issues without prohibiting specific types of travel altogether. It is also a way to temporally separate motorized and non-motorized uses on routes popular for both, thus improving the potential quality of recreation experiences for each. The general rationale for the seasonal restrictions I’ve included in my decision is displayed in the following tables.

Seasonal restrictions are a means to resolve resource issues without prohibiting specific types of travel altogether. It is also a way to temporally separate conflicting uses on popular routes, thus improving the potential quality of recreation experiences for various user groups. The general rationale for the seasonal restrictions I’ve included in my decision is displayed in the following tables.

The route tables included with each travel planning area section also identify any seasonal restrictions that may apply to various uses. The following tables provide the reasons for the variety of restricted periods for certain activities.

**Table 3. Seasonal restrictions to protect facilities (roads and trails) from damage during spring break up.**

Date Restricted	Activity Restricted *	Rationale
April 1– April 30	Wheeled vehicles, mountain bikes and stock on designated routes	Facility protection, erosion control (generally low elevation and/or south slopes)
April 1 – May 15	Wheeled vehicles, mountain bikes and stock on designated routes	Facility protection, erosion control (generally low elevation and/or south slopes)
April 1 – May 31	Wheeled vehicles, mountain bikes and stock on designated routes	Facility protection, erosion control (generally low elevation and/or south slopes)
April 1 - June 15	Wheeled vehicles, mountain bikes and stock on designated routes	Facility protection, erosion control (generally mid- elevation)
April 1 - June 30	Wheeled vehicles, mountain bikes and stock on designated routes	Facility protection, erosion control (generally mid- elevation)
April 1 – July 15	Wheeled vehicles, mountain bikes and stock on designated routes	Facility protection, erosion control (generally high elevation and/or north slopes)

\*Note – these restrictions apply to all routes for motorized use. The spring restrictions for stock and mountain bikes would be confined to a dozen specific routes.

**Table 4. Seasonal and Yearlong Restrictions for Winter Routes and Areas**

Date Restricted	Activity Restricted	Rationale
December 2 – March 31	Wheeled vehicles, vehicles wider than 50 inches including snow coaches and snow cats on groomed or marked snowmobile or ski trails.	Trail surface protection, user safety.
January 1 – March 31	Wheeled vehicles, vehicles wider than 50 inches including snow coaches and snow cats on groomed or marked snowmobile or ski trails	Trail surface protection, user safety.
October 15 – December 1	Snowmobiles in open areas	Wildlife security, moose habitat, erosion control and recreation conflict.
Yearlong	Snowmobiles	Wildlife security, big game winter range, and to provide skiing and snowshoeing opportunities in a non-motorized setting.

**Table 5. Seasonal Restrictions for Summer Motorized Routes**

Date Restricted	Activity Restricted	Rationale
September 5 – spring open date	Motorized wheeled vehicles on designated routes (roads or trails)	Grizzly bear foraging in WBP habitat, elk security, user conflicts during hunting seasons.
September 15 – spring open date	Motorized wheeled vehicles on designated routes (roads or trails)	Grizzly bear foraging in WBP habitat, elk security, user conflicts during hunting seasons.
October 15 – spring open dates	Motorized wheeled vehicles on designated routes (roads or trails)	Big game security, user conflicts during hunting seasons.
December 2 – spring open date	Motorized wheeled vehicles on designated routes (roads or trails)	Wildlife security, conversion to winter trails for XC ski or snowmobile.
January 1 – spring open date	Motorized wheeled vehicles on designated routes (roads or trails)	Wildlife security, conversion to winter trails for XC ski or snowmobile.
May 15, June 15 or July 15 – spring open date	Motorized wheeled vehicles on open roads or trails	Ungulate reproduction period.

**Table 6. Seasonal or Yearlong Restrictions for Summer Non-Motorized Trails**

Date Restricted	Activity Restricted	Rationale
Timing to be determined (time share routes)	Mountain Bikes	User safety/congestion.
December 2 – September 15	Pack and Saddle Stock	Resource protection/erosion and user safety/congestion.
Yearlong	Pack and Saddle Stock	Resource protection/erosion and user safety/congestion.
Yearlong	Mountain Bikes	User safety/congestion, Wilderness Study Area constraints, lack of easements that allows bikes.
December 2 – August 1	Pack and Saddle Stock – Area Restriction	Resource protection/erosion.
Yearlong	Overnight Camping with Pack Stock – Area Restriction	Resource protection/erosion.

**Time Shared Trails**

A number of public comments were received suggesting that we consider the concept of alternating use periods to address social problems (i.e. “user conflict) between motorized and non-motorized users, and between bikers and stock users/hikers on popular trails. For example, a trail could be managed as open to motorcycles on alternating days, alternating weeks, or even by

the time of day. I've decided to apply this concept to the following trails to help meet my objective of providing more non-motorized opportunities near Bozeman:

- The Bridger Foothills Trail #534 from the “M” parking lot to the junction with Corbly Gulch Trail #544.
- The Sypes Canyon Trail #531.
- The Truman Gulch Trail #535.
- The Middle Cottonwood Trail #586.
- The Corbly Gulch Trail #544.
- The Hyalite #427 and East Fork of Hyalite #434 Trails.
- The Storm Castle Trail #185.

For the Sypes Canyon Trail and the southern end of the Bridger Foothills Trail I will look at a schedule that restricts mountain bikes to certain periods (i.e. provide opportunities for foot and horse travel in absence of bikes). For the other trails I will look at a schedule that restricts motorcycles and mountain bikes to certain periods (i.e. provide opportunities for foot and horse travel in absence of mechanized vehicles). I intend to work with various users over the next year or so to develop the specific schedules.

### **Spring Restrictions on Stock and Mountain Bike Use**

My decision does not include blanket spring restrictions on stock use as proposed in other alternatives, including Alternative 7 of the DEIS. The reason for this proposal was to better protect trail facilities, reduce erosion and lower maintenance costs (DEIS Forest-wide Guideline A-11). In public comments stock users expressed opposition to blanket spring closures arguing that spring opportunities are very important to them and that many trails are either dry in the spring or they are so durable that spring use is not a problem. My staff and I have discussed this issue and I have concluded that blanket spring restrictions across the Forest was going too far in attempting to correct a problem that could otherwise be addressed through restrictions on specific routes or information and education. I also agree with stock users and mountain bikers in that wet muddy conditions provide a natural deterrent to those uses where they may not for motorcycles and ATVs. My decision includes spring stock use restrictions on approximately a dozen specific trails across the Forest (See Chapter 2 of the “Detailed Description of the Decision”).

## **Rationale by Travel Planning Area**

### **Absaroka-Beartooth Plateau Travel Planning Area**

This is a designated Wilderness Area and therefore there is no debate over whether trails should be managed for mechanized uses. It's prohibited by law. The primary goal for these areas is to maintain their primitive character. My decision does not include a yearlong area closure to stock use in the high plateau as proposed in Alternative 7 of the DEIS. The purpose of this closure was to prevent a proliferation of user-built trails and campsites that were impacting fragile alpine vegetation. In public comments stock users expressed opposition to this closure and I concluded that I should first try other means to mitigate impacts. In my decision the area closure to horses was modified to apply to overnight stock use. This will provide a natural limitation on the

distance stock users can travel into the areas of fragile vegetation. In addition, cross-country day use of stock would only be permitted from August 1<sup>st</sup> to December 2<sup>nd</sup>, thus precluding stock use during the time of year when fragile vegetation is most vulnerable (i.e. after snow melt). The Zimmer Trail #574, and the Lower Aero Trail #31 would be restricted to stock use. The trail facilities into these areas are not adequate to accommodate stock, and in the case of the Zimmer Trail, the facility simply disappears into a high elevation basin. Reconstructing these facilities to accommodate stock use would be expensive, and in my view, not in keeping with the wilderness opportunity I believe that this area should provide. I believe that the emphasis for this portion of the Wilderness should be on hiking and backpacking. A small area closure would be employed between Summerville and Castle Lakes to lesson impacts to alpine vegetation that were being accelerated by stock on a user-created trail. My decision will provide an opportunity for stock use in a way that will inhibit trail proliferation thus meeting my resource protections objectives for this area without resorting to an overall area closure.

### **Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Travel Planning Area**

This is also a designated Wilderness Area and again mechanized uses are prohibited by law. There was little difference between alternatives. In general, foot and horse travel are unrestricted.

My decision will prohibit horses on the Pine Creek Trail during the summer months to address concerns about user congestion, user conflicts, and user safety. The trail is very popular with the public and used by hiking groups. In some locations the trail is narrow making it difficult for hikers to move off the trail to allow stock to pass. My decision is different from what I proposed in Alternative 7 of the DEIS in that this trail would be opened to day use stock travel after September 15<sup>th</sup>. The public safety issue (i.e. conflicts between people and horses) is not as much a concern after Labor Day. Also, part of my rationale for restricting stock use is that the upper basins accessed by this trail have limited capability to handle stock overnight without undue resource damage. My decision precludes overnight stock camping in the Pine Creek area, but still provides opportunities to use the trail during the hunting season.

I've chosen to restrict spring stock use on the Thompson Lake Trail from April 1<sup>st</sup> to June 15<sup>th</sup> annually to address concerns about trail facilities. The trail holds snow longer in the spring and the turnpikes are susceptible to damage. The spring restriction allows additional time for the trail to harden before stock use occurs.

### **Bangtails Travel Planning Area**

The Bangtails area has an extensive old road system. This is an area conducive to summer OHV use, some backcountry road use and winter snowmobiling near Bozeman. In reviewing the analysis of potential effects to other resources, from a forest-wide perspective, I did not find convincing reasoning to change motorized opportunities in this area. I wanted to utilize portions of the existing road system with connectors to create loop opportunities for ATVs, motorcycles and mountain bikes in the summer. I believe that loop systems will alleviate some of the problems with off-route travel that can be created when motorized roads and trails come to dead ends. The concerns I had in the DEIS about road sedimentation and effects to Yellowstone cutthroat trout habitat in Willow Creek and Bangtail Creek have been addressed through a project that accomplished restoration and stabilization of approximately 25 miles of existing

excess road. Therefore I've dropped the standard I had included in DEIS preferred alternative that would have conditioned the construction of new motorcycle, ATV and mountain bike routes on first decommissioning 12 miles of old existing roads. I also did not adopt the objective to further restore and stabilize up to 30 miles of road since this will have been accomplished.

I've chosen not to open the Bishop Park road (#1760) to backcountry road use due to concerns over impacts to the potential Bangtail Botanical and Paleontological Special Interest Area (Bangtail SIA). The Bangtail SIA serves the primary functions of research on mountain meadow/subalpine ecosystems and research and excavation of important paleontological resources from the Tertiary period of North America. Vehicle use could lead to soil compaction and outright damage to native vegetation. That would threaten some of the studies that are decades old. Also the paleo sites need to be protected from damage from motorized use.

In response to public comments I have dropped the marked ski route and associated snowmobile area closure that was included in Alternative 7 of the DEIS, from the Skunk Creek Road (#974) to the Stone Creek Divide. This essentially takes the marked ski route off of the Bangtail Divide. Public comments indicated that this was not a good skiing opportunity and therefore it made little sense to keep it.

In addition to the programmatic direction addressed earlier in this ROD my decision includes an objective for this Travel Planning Area (Objective 2-2) to provide a parking facility to accommodate winter recreation somewhere along the first two or three miles of the Jackson Creek Road (#977). Increases in use of this area have led to a need for a better parking facility.

### **Bear Canyon Travel Planning Area**

In this area my decision emphasizes opportunities for ATV, motorcycle, snowmobile and mountain bike use. This was a difficult choice involving a great deal of discussion between me and my staff. Those that know this area are aware of the erosive soils and significant trail damage that has been caused by past 4 x 4 and OHV use. There is also concern from Bear Canyon residents about vehicle traffic to and from the trailhead as well as the noise created by motorized users at the trailhead/parking area. On the other hand this area has been popular for motorized recreation and is easily accessed from the Bozeman area. I also had to consider that my decision for the Bozeman Creek, West Bridger South, Bridger Canyon and the South Cottonwood portion of the Gallatin Crest Travel Planning Areas is to manage with more of an emphasis on non-motorized uses. This led me to want to continue providing for motorized recreation here and search for other means to resolve the resource concerns.

Correcting the soils and sedimentation problems in this area is complicated by the fact that the first approximately two miles of the Bear Loop Trail #440 is located on a Gallatin County road right-of-way through State Trust land and Gallatin National Forest land. This trail/road has many structural issues and is contributing to a Montana Department of Environmental Quality 303d violation. A solution to this problem requires cooperation between the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Gallatin County and the Forest Service. There are also private landowner concerns over noise from motorized trail vehicles departing from the Bear Canyon Trailhead. Although not tied to the Travel Plan, there is an effort underway to find a mutually satisfactory solution to these problems. The Bear Canyon Task Force was formed which is comprised of recreation user groups, local residents, and the

responsible agencies. The immediate solution is a proposal to relocate this portion of the trail out of the road right-of-way to the east side of Bear Creek, thus avoiding existing landslide areas and the stream itself. For the long-term, the Task Force is still working on solutions to address problems on the existing road right-of-way. The Gallatin Forest Travel Plan helps facilitate the trail relocation work by determining the uses to be accommodated on the trail system.

My decision also includes several measures to resolve the soils and trail damage problems. First, I've included Standard 3-2 which states that the Bear Loop Trail (#440) and the Bear Lakes Trail (#53 and #508) within the Bear Canyon Creek drainage will not be opened to summer motorized, mountain bike, and horse use until the trail is brought up to a condition that accommodates those uses and alleviates sedimentation/water quality concerns.

Additionally, all trails within the Bear Canyon drainage are not to be opened for the summer season until the trail system is of a condition that prevents unacceptable erosion and watershed damage (Standard 3-3). To accomplish this, designated trails will be restricted to these uses until after July 15<sup>th</sup> annually when trails should be more durable. Lastly, due to sensitive soils in this area, Standard 3-4 prohibits wheeled motorized vehicle travel off of designated routes within this travel planning area (i.e. the 300 foot off-route allowance to access a campsite provided in Forest-wide Standard A-8 shall not apply).

Regarding the concerns of Bear Canyon residents about traffic and noise on the way to and at the trailhead I want to improve user behavior through information and education rather than closing it to summer motorized uses. My decision does however restrict snowmobiling on the first two miles of the Bear Loop Trail (#440) in favor of a marked cross-country ski trail. Public comments indicated to me that there was a higher demand for skiing than for snowmobiling from this trailhead. In my decision, snowmobilers will access this TPA from the Goose Creek Road.

My decision restricts snowmobiles on the Trail Creek Trail (#437) to provide a ski opportunity to the cabin and adds two new connector routes for non-motorized use to provide loop opportunities off of Chestnut Mountain and into West Pine Creek.

Different from my preferred alternative in the DEIS, I've connected the marked ski/snowmobile trail from Bear Lakes to the Trail Creek cabin to complete a loop. I've also corrected an oversight in my DEIS preferred alternative to show the trail along Bear/Goose divide inside the 440 loop as a route managed for public non-motorized travel.

Another goal I have for this area is to provide for wildlife movement between the Gallatin Mountain Range and the Bridger-Bangtail Mountain Ranges. To accomplish this my decision prohibits motorized use on the Chestnut Mountain Trail (#458) and I've adopted an objective (Objective 4-2) to move this trail and a portion of the Bear Loop Trail (#440) off of the ridge.

I've adopted two objectives (Objectives 1-2 and 1-3) for new routes. The first objective is to provide foot and horse routes connecting the Bear Canyon area to the North Fork of Trail Creek connecting Chestnut Mountain to Trail Creek. Making these connections allows for longer hikes and rides and creates loop opportunities returning to separate trailheads from where travel begins.

### **Big Sky Travel Planning Area**

In this Travel Planning Area my decision will, for the most part, continue current management. One of the major differences is that I've added an ATV/motorcycle connector route between the Yellowmule Trails along the Forest boundary in Secs. 28, 29, and 30, T7S, R3E. This will provide loop opportunities with the Buck Ridge Trail thus encouraging users to stay on the designated routes. This travel planning area does have sedimentation problems however it is mostly coming from private land and cannot be corrected through the Travel Plan. There is also concern about wildlife movement, particularly in the fall. In response, my decision restricts OHV use from September 15<sup>th</sup> to June 15<sup>th</sup> annually on the Yellowmule Trails and loop connectors. In general, I believe that providing continued summer motorized recreation opportunities here is important since my decision is more restrictive on these uses to the south due to grizzly bear habitat concerns. Muddy Basin and the Inspiration Divide Trail (#8) will be closed to motorized use due to past experience with resource damage.

My decision will allow snowmobile use from December to June annually. I had considered closing the area from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Yellowmule Trail into McAtee Basin due to the potential for Wilderness trespass. However, I've determined that this has not been a significant problem in the past and therefore closure was not warranted.

In addition to the programmatic direction discussed earlier in this ROD I've adopted a goal and objective (Goal 3 and Objective 3-1) to transfer road and trail easements to the Big Sky community. This is an objective I have because these trails pass through private land in an urban setting are not conducive to management consistent with Forest Service philosophy.

### **Bozeman Creek Travel Planning Area**

In this Travel Planning Area my decision will emphasize non-motorized uses, both summer and winter. Managing for non-motorized uses here is consistent with one of my overall objectives to provide day-hiking, biking and skiing opportunities in a non-motorized setting close to Forest communities (i.e. Bozeman). The area is currently popular for non-motorized uses and I wanted to increase the quality of experiences and maintain public safety. My decision includes an objective (Objective 1-2) to provide non-motorized trail links into the Hyalite drainage and to the Bozeman urban trail system for foot and mountain bike use. There is also an objective to provide a mountain bike connector route (Objective 1-3) across City of Bozeman land in Sec. 5, T4S, R7E. For winter my decision includes objectives (Objectives 2-2 and 2-3) to provide loop trails for day-use skiing and connector routes into the Hyalite drainage.

### **Bridger Canyon Travel Planning Area**

In this Travel Planning Area my decision will emphasize summer mountain biking on old roads and winter cross-country skiing on the South Fork of Brackett Creek Road (#631). My decision includes an objective (Objective 1-2) to acquire public access at the southern end of the Travel Planning Area for a trailhead and trail to facilitate a bicycle loop route connecting with the Stone Creek Trail. This area has not historically been managed for motorized uses due to difficult access and concerns about conflicts with the Bridger Bowl Ski Area. I saw no reason to change this in the Travel Plan. Even if we are successful in acquiring public access my objective is still to provide for non-motorized recreation experiences in this area.

Part of my rationale for including a snowmobile area closure is that it is needed as mitigation for the Bridger Bowl Ski Area expansion, which I approved in January 2005 (Bridger Bowl Ski Area Master Plan Record of Decision, January 2005). To maintain winter habitat for lynx and wolverine there is a need to limit the amount of over-snow compaction in this area (FEIS, pages 3-393 and 3-618 through 3-629).

### **Cabin Creek Travel Planning Area**

This Travel Planning Area includes a large portion of the Cabin Creek Recreation and Wildlife Management Area (CCRWMA) which was established through the Lee Metcalf Wilderness Act (P.L. 98-140). The area also provides some of the best habitat on the Forest for the threatened grizzly bear and other wildlife. My assessment of Lee Metcalf Wilderness Act direction is that, while it recognizes historical motor bike and snowmobile use, ATVs are not recognized. Therefore ATVs will only be permissible from the end of the Tepee Creek Road to the Cabin Creek Divide which is outside the CCRWMA, on the Red Cub Trail (#205) Seg. 1, from the trailhead in Beaver Creek to CCRWMA boundary and on the Oil Well Road to Pika Point where historic jeep use is documented. Also, in order to improve secure habitat for the grizzly bear I've reduced the amount of motorcycle opportunities to several select trails. These trails are somewhat different than what I had identified in my DEIS preferred alternative (Alternative 7) due to discussions we had with motorcyclists indicating that they preferred a different configuration than what I had proposed. Of principal importance to them was to retain a north-south motorcycle route from the Hebgen Basin (i.e. Highway 287) to at least one trailhead on national forest lands south of Bozeman. Since providing high quality secure habitat for grizzly bears was a criterion for my decision, accommodating motorcyclists' preferences required me to disallow motorcycle use on some of the routes I had included in Alternative 7. In addition, I wanted to provide opportunities in this area for stock use, mountain biking and hiking in a non-motorized setting. Therefore the Minnie Wapiti Trail #203 (from Potamogeton Trailhead to its junction with Trail #206) and the Red Cub Trail #205 (from Trail 210 to the Cabin Creek Recreation Wildlife Management Area boundary) were dropped from my decision as motorcycle routes. In exchange the Red Canyon Trail (i.e. Red Cub Trail #205; Seg. 3) and the Kirkwood Trail #210 were added. I've added the Kirkwood Trail because in dropping the Minnie Wapiti Trail a motorcycle loop opportunity was lost. The Kirkwood Trail creates an alternative opportunity for a shorter loop ride. The overall re-configuration of motorcycle routes will result in about a 4% increase in secure habitat over existing conditions.

One change from Alternative 7, my preferred alternative in the DEIS, is that I've extended the fall use period for ATVs from October 15<sup>th</sup> to December 2<sup>nd</sup> to facilitate access during the general hunting season. I've also adjusted the fall use period for all designated motorcycle routes to October 15<sup>th</sup> in order to have consistent closure dates and to provide a longer season of use. The more restrictive dates that I had included in Alternative 7 were in error. There were no unacceptable resource impacts that necessitated the earlier closure dates on motorized use. I have also changed the spring/summer date in which designated routes would be open to motorized use to July 15<sup>th</sup>, again to provide consistency among all trails within this Travel Planning Area. I chose July 15<sup>th</sup> rather than June 15<sup>th</sup> to ensure that facilities were dry and hardened such that trail rutting and erosion would be kept to a minimum. In addition, I wanted to protect early summer elk and grizzly bear habitat.

In the winter my decision will leave the area open to snowmobiles including the marked Big Sky Snowmobile Trail. Snowmobiling is a historic use here and is also specifically allowed for under the Lee Metcalf Wilderness Act, as noted above. This is not an area conducive to emphasizing cross-country skiing opportunities and I don't believe that the amount of snowmobile use the area receives is causing an unacceptable level of disturbance to wildlife.

### **Cherry Creek Travel Planning Area**

The majority of trails in this Travel Planning Area provide access into the Lee Metcalf Wilderness. I've prohibited motorized use in favor of emphasizing opportunities for stock travel. In my DEIS preferred alternative (Alternative 7), and Alternative 7-M of the FEIS, I had retained a motorcycle opportunity on the Cherry Creek Trail (#401) from June 15<sup>th</sup> to September 15<sup>th</sup> since this route was longer and does not lead directly into the Wilderness. After further consideration and discussion with my staff, I decided to prohibit motorcycle use on this route. First, motorcyclists indicated to me that this was not a highly desirable opportunity. Second, access to this travel planning area is limited to one trailhead. Most other trails begin off of the main Cherry Creek route. By prohibiting motorcycle use on this Trail I've provided a complete non-motorized opportunity for stock users. Managing this trail for non-motorized use is also compatible with the management of trails on the adjacent Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest and BLM lands.

In my decision, mountain bikes are allowed on the Cherry Creek Trail (#401) and Placer Creek-Sweden Creek Loop Trail (#405 and 406) but are prohibited on other routes, again to prevent Wilderness trespass. The area is also restricted to snowmobiles to protect big game winter range and prevent trespass onto private land and into the Wilderness. My decision does include a marked cross-country ski trail along the Spanish Creek Road (#982) and the South Fork of Spanish Creek Trail (#407) to the Wilderness boundary (Objective 2-1 and Travel Plan Map – Winter). This road and trail provides a good ski opportunity accessible from a plowed county road.

In the rationale I had included with my preferred alternative of the DEIS (Alternative 7), I had indicated that horse use had been causing damage to some trails in the Cherry Creek Travel Planning Area. Since that time we have relocated the trails out of problem areas and therefore I no longer believe that a spring restriction on stock is needed.

A large part of public land in the western portion of this Travel Planning Area is difficult and time-consuming to access from the Spanish Creek Trailhead. Therefore I've adopted an objective in my decision (Objective 1-2) to acquire additional public access to Cowboys Heaven and the western portion of this Travel Planning Area.

### **Cooke City Travel Planning Area**

My decision for the Cooke City area emphasizes regulated motorized/mountain bike use north of Highway 212 and non-motorized use to the south. My decision here was difficult. The area provides an opportunity to accommodate motorized use where the surrounding areas (designated Wilderness and Yellowstone National Park) cannot. Evidence of historic mining activity is evident. More recently, summer and winter motorized use has become popular and is very important to the residents and economy of Cooke City. On the other hand, the area provides

outstanding habitat for the grizzly bear (a threatened species) and is receiving a high-level of use by bears, particularly during the fall. There are also stream sedimentation concerns which, in conjunction with the importance of the bear habitat could support further restrictions on motorized use.

Since the release of the DEIS, public comment, particularly from the residents of Cooke City, indicated to me that they were not in favor of the summer motorized loops, rather they preferred to retain motorized access to popular destinations. Therefore, my decision more closely parallels the motorized travel opportunities that are being provided today. More specifically, in comparison to my preferred alternative in the DEIS (Alternative 7), my decision:

- Leaves the Goose Lake (#3230) and Lake Abundance Roads (#3219) open to all motorized travel to the Wilderness Boundary.
- Drops the proposed Huckleberry and Tredanic loop connectors for ATVs.
- Drops the proposed seasonal restrictions (fall) on Goose Lake Road #3230, Sheep Mountain Road, and Scotch Bonnet Road #3229. This does not preclude me from implementing a temporary fall seasonal closure in years of high bear activity.

For winter uses my decision will continue emphasizing snowmobile use north of the highway. Opportunities for snowmobiling to the north are highly desirable and it is also important to the Cooke City economy during the winter. I found no compelling resource reasons to modify current use. South of the highway I've included a small snowmobile area restriction in the Republic Mountain area to maintain the primitive character of the recommended wilderness. This area restriction differs from what I had included in Alternative 7 (my DEIS preferred alternative), in that snowmobiles would no longer be restricted east of the Irma Mine. Again, comments indicated that there was little need for this restriction simply to provide for a non-motorized skiing opportunity. A restriction west of the Irma Mine is sufficient to protect the primitive character of the recommended wilderness.

While there are resource concerns in this area, I concluded that the social and economic values associated with the current recreation opportunities were of greater importance. From a motorized recreation perspective, the Cooke City Travel Planning Area is an island surrounded by designated Wilderness and Yellowstone National Park; areas where mechanized use is prohibited. The public has become accustomed to the summer motorized and snowmobile opportunities that this area provides. The community has come to depend on it for their economic well-being. In addition, the Cooke City Travel Planning Area is one of those few areas on the Gallatin National Forest where we can provide for destination rides. This area is at high elevation with open hillsides and ridges that provide spectacular mountain views.

To mitigate for other resource impacts other old, non-designated routes will be closed and stabilized to eliminate erosion, sedimentation and keep motorized travel from going off-route. Part of my rationale for continuing to manage for wheeled motorized travel on routes north of the highway is the improvements being made to existing roads through the New World Mine reclamation effort. These will reduce the sedimentation that has been occurring off of these facilities. In addition, the elimination of off-route travel will result in an improvement to grizzly bear habitat security over the current situation. In my decision I've adopted a goal (Goal 3) to provide habitat for Yellowstone cutthroat trout in Soda Butte Creek and Goose Creek, and provide for beneficial uses in all other stream courses. In addition I've adopted two objectives

(Objectives 3-1 and 3-2) to effectively close and stabilize all non-designated motorized routes and to implement a maintenance program on the Goose Lake Road, Sheep Mountain Road and Kersey Lake Road to eliminate erosion and sedimentation.

Lastly, as discussed on page 28 of this ROD, the 300 foot off-route allowance to access a campsite provided in Forest-wide Standard A-8 shall not apply to Gallatin National Forest lands along the Beartooth Highway (#212).

### **Deer Creeks Travel Planning Area**

Most of the routes within the Deer Creeks TPA were burned over during the Derby Fire of 2006. This changed the conditions of this area from what the analysis of effects disclosed in the Final Travel Plan EIS were based and therefore the information available to me in making my decision for travel management in this area. The Forest Service Handbook for implementing NEPA at FSH 1909.15(18) provides guidance for the review and consideration of new information or changed circumstances after decisions have been made. It is too soon after the fire to assess how the impacts from this fire may necessitate changes in how travel is managed within this area. Early indications are that there should be little need for change in the designated uses I've established for the Deer Creeks TPA, however there likely will be needs for road and trail restoration work. The recommendations of the Burned Area Emergency Response Team has already led to the obliteration of several small spur roads.

Considering that forest ecosystems are dynamic, where natural events can change conditions at any time, and given the commitments I've made to the public to reach a Travel Plan decision this fall, I determined that the best approach is for me to sign this Record of Decision as planned and then follow up with a review of the changed conditions in accordance with section 18 of the Forest Service Handbook for implementing NEPA (id.).

Recognizing that the impacts from the Derby Fire could lead to changes in travel management, my current decision for this Travel Planning Area emphasizes providing a variety of both motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities in the summer. From a Forest-wide perspective I found this area to have good capability for ATV and motorcycle use. It is also about the only Travel Planning Area near Big Timber where these uses are not precluded for other reasons. From public comments I also heard that it was important to provide single track trail for motorcycle use and non-motorized trail for stock and hiking. I believe that my decision provides a good balance of opportunities and enhances the overall quality of experiences for a variety of users.

From a resource perspective Lower Deer Creek does provide habitat for Yellowstone cutthroat trout and there are concerns about sedimentation from trails. Therefore my decision includes a standard (Standard 3-1) that will restrict summer motorized use on the Deer Creeks and Placer Gulch Trails until the facilities are brought to a standard that does not degrade trout habitat.

The Deer Creeks Travel Planning Area does not have the snow conditions that are conducive to winter recreation activities. My decision does not restrict use but there is also no goal to manage for it.

In addition, I have restricted motorized use on the southern end of the Lower Deer Creek trail (above Deer Creek Cabin) as a result of concerns raised in the fisheries analysis about the impacts of that use to the numerous tributaries in this stretch of trail. In addition, I heard through numerous public comments that it was important that some portions of the Deer Creeks be non-motorized since they are a unique ecosystem on the Gallatin. As such, I have restricted motorized use on the adjacent section of the Lodgepole Trail, and the very upper end of the Derby Mountain Trail (which field reviews showed had no historic motorized use) to provide this area for non-motorized users. In addition, the Custer National Forest is proposing to manage the adjacent Meyers Creek area as non-motorized, and asked us to ensure that routes adjacent to the Custer were managed consistently across forests (Avey 8/02/06).

Lastly, I've identified the Cherry Creek drainage as one that currently does not have adequate perfected public access to the National Forest. Therefore, I have adopted an objective (Objective 1-2) to acquire additional public access into this drainage.

### **East Boulder Travel Planning Area**

Most of this Travel Planning Area is remote and requires a significant amount of travel time just to get into the heart of it. My decision uses the road network to the south to provide backcountry, ATV and motorcycle opportunities accessed from the Custer National Forest. The trail system is to be managed for motorcycle, mountain bike and stock use in the summer. There will be opportunities for long loop rides into the Deer Creeks Travel Planning Area and into the Custer National Forest. Some primitive mining exploration roads will be managed as system trails for ATV and motorcycle use. In the winter the goal will be to provide for dispersed snowmobile use. In Alternative 7 (my DEIS preferred alternative ) I had included a snowmobile area restriction to the south of Picket Pin Road #140 to provide a more definable boundary and reduce the potential for Wilderness trespass. I have dropped this restriction in my decision because a snowmobile closure would be hard to enforce in this remote location and Wilderness intrusion is not currently a serious problem.

My rationale for managing this area for mixed uses with minor investment is that: (a) Generally motorized users indicated interest in opportunities within this area where non-motorized users did not. (b) Because it is remote it is not likely to receive heavy use. (c) I did not identify any significant resource concerns that would necessitate further restrictions.

My decision differs from Alternative 7 of the DEIS as follows:

- The Graham Creek Trail #117 to is open to motorcycles. This trail connects Main Boulder to the end of Pickett Pin Road #140.
- The Dry Fork Road is open to 4x4s. This route heads east from the East Boulder Road to the Dry Fork Trail #13.
- The Dry Fork Trail #13 to Moccasin Lake is open to ATVs.
- The Dry Fork route for snowmobiles should be displayed in the matrix as an A, not and E.
- The snowmobile area restriction is dropped (between Pickett Pin road and the Wilderness boundary). This was initially proposed when the Big Timber District was considering building a snowmobile trail up from Lewis Gulch.

With the exception of the Dry Fork Road, these changes were made in response to public comments, field reviews and a review of the analysis. I found I was able to accommodate those requests with no additional impacts. The Dry Fork Road was never intended to be restricted to 4x4s, but showed that way in Alternative 7 due to a mapping error.

### **East Crazies Travel Planning Area**

My decision for the East Crazies Travel Planning Area was based on attempting to provide for a variety of uses and experiences within the mountain range as a whole. The area is in checkerboard ownership and easements across private land on the east side limit opportunities to foot and horse travel only. On the west side there are more options but there are still private land issues and the high peaks area of the Crazies holds significant cultural value to the Crow Tribe that must be respected. On the other hand, from a Forest-wide perspective, I believe there is a shortage of destination opportunities for motorized users (such as peaks, ridges or lakes) and the Crazy Mountain Range has these characteristics. On balance, I decided to provide a trail opportunity for motorcycles and mountain bikes on the Rock Creek North Trail #270 and an ATV/motorcycle/mountain bike opportunity on the Cottonwood Lake Trail (#197). The remainder of the Travel Planning Area will emphasize summer non-motorized uses.

My decision is different than what I had proposed in my DEIS preferred alternative (Alternative 7). I have chosen to close the Smeller Lake Trail #220 to motorcycles, close the Trespass Trail #268 to motorized use, and stop motorcycle/ATV traffic at the end of the Cottonwood Road (Also see the discussion for the Ibx Travel Planning Area). I removed the motorcycle opportunity to Smeller Lake in response to Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks recommendations. Smeller Lake is an important mountain goat hunting area and they've received feedback from the public that they want a high quality non-motorized hunting experience.

For snowmobiling, I attempted to provide some suitable terrain where easements allow and where the cultural integrity of the high peaks area will not be threatened.

I've identified needs for access to public land on the east side of the Crazy Mountains and therefore my decision includes an objective (Objective 1-2) to acquire public roaded access to National Forest land in Sweetgrass Creek and Swamp Creek and acquire public trail access in other portions of the Travel Planning Area.

### **Fairy Lake Travel Planning Area**

My decision for this Travel Planning Area emphasizes providing a variety of uses during the summer and a combination of groomed snowmobile trails to the north of the Middle Fork of Brackett Creek and marked cross-country ski trails on the South Fork of Brackett Creek Road. Fairy Lake itself is accessible by road open to passenger cars and attracts a large number of families. For the summer, my choice was largely based on historic use and the opportunity that old logging roads provide to create a long ATV/motorcycle opportunity extending from the North Fork of Brackett Creek Road (#6607) to the South Fork of Flathead Creek Road (#6981). Public comments also made me aware of the need for single-track, challenging motorcycle opportunities. My decision provides a motorcycle opportunity on the Ross Peak Trail (#525) and Honeymoon Trail (#551) with a connector route to the Fairy Lake Trail (#500). The Ross Peak Trail then connects in with a series of trails on the west side of the Bridger Mountains that are

also to be managed as single track routes open to motorcycles. The combination provides for a variety of short and long loop opportunities accessible from Fairy Lake Campground and a number of other trailheads. Mountain bike use is also an emphasis on the ATV and motorcycle route system. Non-motorized hiking opportunities will be provided on the Bridger Foothills Trail (#534) and the Shafthouse Trail (#540). These trails are also accessible from the Fairy Lake Campground.

For the winter my decision was influenced by the identified need to provide both snowmobile and ski opportunities, but to separate the two uses. Public comments indicated that the South Fork and Middle Fork of Brackett Creek had superior terrain and snow conditions for skiing so my decision provides a marked ski trail and prohibits snowmobiles in this area. Groomed snowmobile routes are provided from the North Fork of Brackett Creek Road to the South Fork of Flathead Creek Road. In my DEIS preferred alternative (Alternative 7) I had included a snowmobile restriction in the higher elevations to the west of these trails due to the potential effects to wolverine and mountain goat winter range. In my decision I have reconfigured it to allow for some high-marking opportunities and transport of skiers to popular areas while providing for wolverine and mountain goats. From a Forest-wide perspective, I found that there would be a shortage of these opportunities under Alternative 7 and this area was identified in comments as very popular.

My route-by-route decisions for this area include a few new ATV/motorcycle and snowmobile opportunities. Since there are currently no roads or trails to accommodate these uses I've adopted an objective (Objective 1-2) to provide a system of 1 to 3 designated ATV and/or motorcycle routes and an objective (Objective 2-2) to provide a system of 2 to 4 snowmobile loop trails and a connector route to the Flathead Pass area.

### **Gallatin Crest Travel Planning Area**

My decision for this Travel Planning Area was largely influenced by the fact that it falls within the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area and management must maintain the pre-existing wilderness character as it was in 1977 (see the discussion on page 24 of this ROD). Therefore my decision will preclude ATV use but provides for motorcycle use on some trails including the Gallatin Crest Trail (#96) north of Windy Pass. In addition to remaining consistent with the Montana Wilderness Study Act, I tried to provide well-distributed opportunities for motorcycles, and exclusive non-motorized uses in this area. The Gallatin Crest is unique on this Forest in that it provides high peaks and lake destinations, yet is not in designated Wilderness or otherwise restricted to non-motorized uses. My selected configuration of the motorcycle routes was also designed to provide and maintain good secure habitat for the grizzly bear.

While mountain biking was not known to be an activity enjoyed in this area in 1977, it did not seem reasonable to preclude them when motorcycle use was allowed and their use requires similar tread widths. Agency policy on mountain bikes states they are appropriate wherever motorcycle use occurred historically, and on non-motorized trails as long as the total amount of mountain bike and motorcycle use maintains wilderness character as it existed in 1977 (See Schlenker's 9/2006 letter).

My decision includes seasonal restrictions on motorcycles from September 5<sup>th</sup> to July 15<sup>th</sup> annually. The fall restriction is designed to provide secure habitat for the grizzly bear at a time

when they are foraging in white-bark pine habitat. The spring restriction, to July 15<sup>th</sup>, is needed because there is still snow covering portions of many of these trails until that time. An earlier opening date could lead to motorcyclists leaving the designated trail to avoid snow banks, thus causing damage to surrounding vegetation.

The Starting Benchmark proposed prohibiting mountain bikes on the Hyalite #427 and East Fork of Hyalite #434 Trails. These trails receive a high level of use and there has been concern about public safety, user conflict and congestion. In response to the Benchmark release in 2002 we received a large number of comments indicating the importance of these routes to the biking community and that an outright prohibition was excessive. In my decision I decided to look to information and education and time share (e.g. alternating days) to resolve the safety concerns. Please refer to my discussion of time-shared trails on page 17 of this ROD.

My decision does include mountain bike restrictions on Big Creek area side trails to the South Fork of Eight Mile Creek, including trails #146, #159, #181, #190, #196, #225, #240 and #241. I included these restrictions primarily in response to the need to maintain the pre-existing wilderness character of the Study Area similar to what it was in 1977. I accomplished this by concentrating mountain bike use to well-established motorcycle routes, while providing large areas where mountain bike is prohibited. Mountain bikes are allowed on the Big Creek Trail (#180) to provide a route from the Paradise Valley to the mountain bike routes in the upper Rock Creek and Gallatin Crest areas.

One key change from my DEIS preferred alternative is that I've provided an opportunity for cross-country snowmobiling. The open area where snowmobiling is allowed runs from Windy Pass across the Crest through Rock Creek. This allows high quality "challenge" snowmobile opportunities but limits the acreage available to remain consistent with the Montana Wilderness Study Act. As I indicated in my discussion for the HPBH WSA earlier in this ROD I considered a designated route from Hyalite through a closed area, to a small open area in the East Fork of Hyalite (Heather/Emerald) but concluded that opening both this area and the Windy Pass/Rock Creek area would not maintain wilderness character as it existed in 1977. I also limited the amount of acreage open to snowmobiling to maintain secure wolverine winter range and reproductive denning habitat.

There is currently limited access to public lands within the Gallatin Mountain Range from the Yellowstone Valley. Therefore, I've included an objective (Objective 1-2) to highlight the need for up to 4 additional routes of access to this Travel Planning Area.

In addition, since this is a Wilderness Study Area, I believed it was important to include a goal and objective (Goal 4 and Objective 4-1) to manage the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area to sustain the recreation setting and existing Wilderness characteristics as they were in 1977 and to preserve the area for future consideration as Wilderness. While I've concluded that my travel management decision is consistent with Montana Wilderness Study Act, I believe that it is important to ensure that evolving use patterns don't negatively affect the natural integrity of this area.

For additional discussion, please refer to my rationale for the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area on page 24 and my conclusions on the issue of the Wilderness Study Area beginning on page 108 of this ROD.

## **Gallatin River Canyon Travel Planning Area**

This Travel Planning Area consists of the Highway 191 corridor through the Gallatin National Forest. Forest roads and trails that begin in this area are addressed in adjacent travel planning areas. There was no real difference between alternatives and there was no reason that I saw to change current management. In addition to the programmatic direction I discussed earlier in this ROD, I have adopted a guideline in this Travel Planning Area to designate the go-down access routes to the Gallatin River and cliff areas and improve the condition of facilities to prevent the pioneering of user-built parking areas and discourage increased access into peregrine falcon nesting habitat. Lastly, as discussed on page 28 of this ROD, the 300 foot off-route allowance to access a campsite provided in Forest-wide Standard A-8 shall not apply to Gallatin National Forest lands along Highway #191.

## **Gallatin Roaded Travel Planning Area**

My decision for this Travel Planning Area emphasizes motorized uses. This area has been heavily harvested for timber production on both public and private land and there is an extensive network of logging roads that can be used for motorized opportunities. Managing for motorized use in this area helps meet one of my decision criterion to provide for half-day and evening ATV and/or motorcycle trail rides within a reasonable travel distance of Bozeman. The Gallatin Roaded area does not contain special habitats or other unique resource concerns that lead me to believe that heavy restrictions are warranted. For these fundamental reasons my decision is to emphasize motorized use in this area.

As discussed earlier in this ROD, I've included the goals and associated programmatic direction to provide habitat for cutthroat trout and to protect soil and watershed conditions in this Travel Planning Area. Somewhat different from other travel planning areas where I've adopted this direction, this area is in need of improvement. Therefore, the four objectives I have adopted (Objective 3-1, 3-2, 3-3 and 4-1) are tailored to improving westslope cutthroat trout in the West Fork of Wilson Creek and to eliminate erosion and measurable sediment from roads in Wilson Creek, West Fork of Wilson Creek, Shenango Creek and Line Creek. I've also adopted a standard (Standard 3-4) that prohibits the construction or reconstruction of new roads and trails in the West Fork of Wilson Creek drainage until Objective 3-1 is achieved. Lastly, I've adopted an objective (Objective 4-2), as I did in the Bangtails Travel Planning Area, to provide interpretive/educational signing along motorized routes and in affected areas, asking motorized users seeking camp spots to stay out of wet, muddy and shrubby areas, and to keep vehicles (and campsites) a minimum distance (e.g. 50 feet) from lakes, ponds, rivers and streams.

## **Gardiner Basin Travel Planning Area**

This area receives a moderate level of recreation use, primarily by locals, and is popular for big game hunting, driving for pleasure, dispersed camping, firewood gathering, day hiking, cross country skiing, and snowmobiling. The area has been roaded to accommodate past mining and timber harvest activity. My decision changes little from the existing situation. I found no compelling reason to change existing travel patterns in this area. Passenger car and 4x4 travel is allowed on the existing open road system. Motorized use is precluded from area trails to prevent wilderness trespass and maintain habitat for the threatened grizzly bear. One minor difference is that I have changed the seasonal road closures on the lower Eagle Creek and Bear Creek roads to

January 2nd through May 15th to provide an opportunity for Christmas tree cutting and early season cross country ski opportunities.

### **Hebgen Basin Travel Planning Area**

This travel planning area lies adjacent to Yellowstone National Park and surrounds Hebgen Lake and the community of West Yellowstone. West Yellowstone is dependent on tourism and this area is used heavily by summer and winter visitors. The area was extensively roaded for past timber harvest but much of this road system has been closed and restored over the past decade. There is no summer single-track trail system. My decision for this area will continue to provide for high levels of summer and winter recreation use emphasizing pleasure driving, ATV and snowmobile use. My rationale for this choice is based on the high level of human use this area currently receives, its existing developed character, the flat terrain/stable soils, and the importance of summer and winter motorized recreation to the economy of West Yellowstone.

The area is within the recovery zone for the threatened grizzly bear and the high open road density is not optimal for bear habitat security. Invasive weed spread along motorized routes is also of concern. While these problems could be improved through increased restrictions on summer motorized use I do not find that to be an acceptable option at this time. To balance motorized use opportunities with grizzly bear habitat needs, restrictions in summer motorized use have been included in adjacent travel planning areas of higher-quality bear habitat rather than in this area. I also believe that the Forest Service must accept that ongoing treatment of weeds will be necessary in areas of high human use. One change that I made, from what was in my DEIS preferred alternative (Alternative 7), for the summer is a prohibition on motorized use on Road 2530, which is located on the Horse Butte peninsula. This route does not provide access to Hebgen Lake and closing it will result in some improvement to grizzly bear secure habitat. The remaining open road system provides more than adequate access to the public lands on the Horse Butte Peninsula.

My decision will not allow motorized travel 300 feet off designated routes for camping around the west shore of Hebgen Lake. Instead, the District Ranger will specifically identify the go-down access routes to the lake and rivers that will remain open. The term “go-down” defines the designated route where travel is allowed to reach a dispersed recreation site.

In the winter there is concern that snowmobiling on Horse Butte could disrupt nesting bald eagles. There is currently a small snowmobile area closure which I am retaining in my decision. I did not increase the size of this closure, as discussed for Alternatives 5 and 6 in the FEIS effects analysis for bald eagles, due to the high level of use this area receives and increasing current bald eagle population trends. Additional snowmobile closures were included on the Madison River and Madison Arm of Hebgen Lake to protect winter habitat for elk, moose, trumpeter swans, and bald eagles. I’ve adjusted the snowmobile restriction boundary on the north side of the Madison Arm from the road to the bluffs such that snowmobilers can look out over the Arm. I also extended the restricted area around the Arm from Highway 191 to the Yellowstone National Park boundary. This was always my intent, it was just mapped incorrectly for the DEIS. In my decision I also retained the existing North Hebgen Winter Range snowmobile closure. These actions will help protect some of the most important wintering areas for wildlife in this travel planning area while maintaining abundant opportunities for snowmobile use. In my decision I have added a marked/groomed cross-country ski trail that runs from the Highway 191 trucker

pull-out just north of the Hebgen Lake Ranger Station to the Baker's Hole Campground between Highway 191 and Yellowstone National Park. I included this trail based on public comment suggesting this opportunity and I found no resource reasons not to provide it. Similar to my decision for the Rendezvous Ski Trails, I've included a small snowmobile area closure here, between Highway 191 and the Yellowstone National Park boundary, to provide a non-motorized setting around this ski trail.

One change from Alternative 7, my preferred alternative in the DEIS, is that I've adopted the snowmobile area closure in the Cougar/Duck Creek area (as shown for Alternatives 5 and 6) to protect wintering wildlife. This area closure includes lands recently purchased in the Duck Creek Land Acquisition.

Lastly, I've adopted a goal (Goal 3) to provide secure bald eagle nesting habitat around Hebgen Lake. While we have identified no specific needs for change to meet this goal, I believe that it is important to highlight the importance of this area for bald eagles.

### **Hyalite Travel Planning Area**

This Travel Planning Area is very popular for a variety of recreation users in the summer. In my decision I wanted to continue to provide for both motorized and non-motorized uses and improve the quality of experiences for both. I want to maintain high standard roads for passenger car travel and access but I also want to maintain some low standard roads to provide opportunities for 4 x 4 travel. Overall, I tried to maximize the amount of open road to help minimize the propagation of illegal road/trail pioneering. The demand in this planning area exists for a variety of road standards. If this demand isn't met, history shows us that people will pioneer new routes. My decision includes 2 ATV/motorcycle loops within this Travel Planning Area and single track motorcycle opportunities can be accessed from the Hyalite and East Fork of Hyalite Trailheads. Mountain biking is also emphasized on the existing road network with connections to the adjacent Bozeman Creek Travel Planning Area. Exclusive non-motorized opportunities are provided on the Blackmore Trail (#423), History Rock Trail (#424), Crescent Lake Trail (#213), Westshore Trail (#431), and Bozeman Divide Trail (#171).

As I discussed earlier in this ROD I've decided to manage the Hyalite Trail #427 and the East Fork of Hyalite Trail #434 in the summer as "time shared" trails to address social problems (i.e. "user conflict") between motorized and non-motorized users, and between bikers and stock users/hikers. I intend to work with various users over the next year or so to develop the specific schedules.

For the winter my decision emphasizes providing front country, cross-country skiing. There is a growing demand for these opportunities on the Gallatin National Forest, especially in close proximity to Bozeman. Snowmobiling will mostly be prohibited in favor of maintaining non-motorized experiences although I have provided a means to access ice climbing areas in the upper end of the Hyalite drainage via a designated snowmobile route beginning at Moser Creek. Public comments have made me aware of the fact that this is a world class ice climbing opportunity and it is much too far to ski in. Some of the ski trails will be groomed on an occasional basis.

Beginning with the Benchmark we have proposed to plow the Hyalite Road to provide better, safer access for winter recreation. My decision allows for the road to be plowed, but only to the Blackmore Picnic Area. My preferred alternative in the DEIS was to plow all the way to Chisholm Campground. I chose not to do this due to high cost, deep snow, and limited parking at the Campground. While I believe that plowing to Blackmore is feasible there is the possibility that funds won't be sufficient to carry it out. Therefore, Plan B will be to plow to the Langohr/Moser area. A parking area will be provided at the Moser junction providing access to the designated snowmobile trail and open area. Another parking area will be provided at Langohr Campground for access to designated ski routes. Plan C will be to plow to the lower fishing access where both skiers and snowmobilers will park. Under Plan C, both snowmobiles and non-motorized users would be allowed on the Hyalite Road to the Moser Creek Road (i.e. the point where the designated snowmobile route would begin). The main Hyalite Road would then be managed as a ski trail south of the Moser junction. In addition, since Hyalite Creek is part of the municipal water supply for Bozeman, I've adopted a standard (Standard 2-5) that prohibits the use of sand or salt (NaCl) on the Hyalite Road.

Other features of my decision include:

- (1) I've elected not to pursue a parallel trail opposite Hyalite Creek from the main Hyalite road. Analysis showed me that establishing such a route could result in unacceptable impacts to water quality and riparian habitat. I do however want to continue to look at the option of widening the road to create an extra lane to provide for safer maintain bike travel through the lower part of the Canyon. I've adopted an objective (Objective 1-3) to pursue this idea.
- (2) I've chosen not to manage the Langohr backcountry road along the Langohr/Cottonwood divide (between Langohr Road and the Langohr Toole Road) for 4x4 travel in order to maintain the ridge-line corridor for wildlife movement.
- (3) My decision will close the Hyalite road to motorized use in the spring (from March 30 – May 15). Since the road is to be plowed, closure in the spring will provide an opportunity for biking and roller-blading on a paved road without motorized traffic. Closure is also needed since plowing makes it more susceptible to damage during the spring break-up period.

I've adopted several other objectives to carry out the features of my decision for the Hyalite Travel Planning Area (Objectives 1-2, 2-2, and 2-3). These objectives provide the impetus to connect trails to provide mountain bike and cross-country ski loops, and to link Hyalite trails to those in the Bozeman Creek and South Cottonwood Creek drainages.

Lastly, as discussed on page 28 of this ROD, the 300 foot off-route allowance to access a campsite provided in Forest-wide Standard A-8 shall not apply to Gallatin National Forest lands along the Hyalite Road.

### **Ibex Travel Planning Area**

My decision for the Ibex Travel Planning Area was largely based on attempting to provide for a variety of uses and experiences within the mountain range as a whole. A large part of the Crazy Mountains is in checkerboard ownership and easements across private land on the east side limit opportunities to foot and horse travel only. My decision is different from what I had proposed in

my DEIS preferred alternative (Alternative 7). In that alternative I would have provided an opportunity for ATV/motorcycles on the Trespass Trail (#268) to the south end of private land in section 25, and on the Ibex Trail (#271). I've closed the Trespass Trail #268 to summer motorized use and terminated ATV/motorcycle traffic at the end of the Road on Cottonwood Trail (#197) out of respect for traditional Crow Tribal practices. Through consultation with the Crow Tribe it was indicated that some areas are more important than others and that the high elevation areas within this Travel Planning Area are the most sacred. Motorized use may adversely affect traditional practices in the summer. My decision does designate the Shields-Lowline route for motorcycles. To accommodate this use however, we must first negotiate an easement for portions of this trail that pass through private land. We will also be looking for ways to re-route this trail to get more of it on national forest land. My objective is to provide a north-south motorcycle route on the west side of the Crazy Mountains. A seasonal motorized use restriction will be implemented on this trail from September 5<sup>th</sup> through June 15<sup>th</sup>.

In the winter my decision maintains current use patterns except that I've chosen to establish a snowmobile area closure north of Ibex Cabin, around Porcupine Cabin to the Deep Creek area. This is to provide a high elevation non-motorized opportunity on the west side of the Crazy Mountains, and because it will be difficult if not impossible to keep snowmobiles on a designated route through checkerboarded private lands given the open terrain in the Lowline Trail area. In addition, snow quality on the Porcupine-Lowline Trail is marginal. The snowmobile closure immediately adjacent to the Ibex Cabin was dropped to allow snowmobilers to access the Cottonwood-Trespass snowmobile trails from the cabin. This change provides for a more enforceable snowmobile area configuration. In addition, plowed road access to the Porcupine Cabin will be continued.

To provide the motorcycle opportunity on the Porcupine-Lowline Trail and also to gain better access to National Forest lands in this Travel Planning area my decision includes two objectives. Objective 1-2 targets securing easements through private land on roads and trails designated for public use. Objective 1-3 targets acquiring additional public access to National Forest land between Porcupine cabin and the Middle Fork Rock Creek.

### **Lee Metcalf Monument Travel Planning Area**

This is a designated Wilderness Area and therefore there is no debate over whether trails should be managed for mechanized uses. It's prohibited by law and therefore the trail system is managed for foot and horse use. This area does not provide good cross-country ski or snowshoe opportunities and therefore there are no winter recreation goals.

There are concerns here over non-system user-built stock trails that have become established. Many of these are not designed to standard and are becoming wide, braided, and/or erosive. Therefore I have included objectives in my decision (Objectives 1-2 and 3-1) to attain trail conditions that are non-erosive and visually acceptable. Objective 1-2 targets a readily identifiable system of trails that the public will not confuse with non-system trails. Objective 1-3 targets closure or restoration of non-system trails to non-erosive single path trails.

Public and administrative access into the Monument Mountain area of this travel planning area is currently provided from trails in Sage, Tepee and Bacon Rind drainages. As a result, I have

decided not to pursue a proposal to acquire an easement across private land and Yellowstone National Park at this time and therefore my decision will abandon Monument Trail (#52).

### **Lee Metcalf Spanish Peaks Travel Planning Area**

This is also designated Wilderness and therefore there was little difference between alternatives. My decision continues the current foot and stock opportunities that exist today. This area provides limited cross-country ski and snowshoe opportunities and therefore there are no goals to manage this area for winter recreation.

Trails will be open to stock use with the exception of the Lava Lake Trail (#77) which will be restricted to stock until September 15<sup>th</sup> of each year. This trail is narrow, making it difficult for hikers to move safely off the trail to allow stock to pass. In other words, similar to the Pine Creek Lake Trail in the Absaroka Beartooth, I chose to preclude horses during the summer due to concerns about congestion, user conflicts and user safety. My decision is different from what I proposed in Alternative 7 of the DEIS in that this trail would be opened to day use stock travel after September 15<sup>th</sup>. The public safety issue (i.e. conflicts between people and horses) is not as much a concern after Labor Day. Also, part of my rationale for restricting stock use is that the lake basin accessed by this trail does not have the capability to adequately handle stock overnight. The trail is very popular with the public and used by hiking groups. My decision precludes overnight stock camping in the Lava Lake area, but still provides opportunities to use the trail during the hunting season.

### **Lee Metcalf - Taylor Hilgard Travel Planning Area**

Similar to the other units of the Lee Metcalf Wilderness there was little difference between alternatives. My decision continues the current foot and stock opportunities that exist today. As with other Wilderness areas this area does not provide good cross-country ski or snowshoe opportunities and therefore there are no winter recreation goals.

We did receive comment that the West Fork of Beaver Creek Trail should be closed to stock due to the unsuitability of portions of the trail to accommodate this use. I chose not to close it at this time because of recent investments we've made to re-engineer the trail to address this concern. The success of this work and the long-term suitability of the trail to be managed for stock may need to be re-evaluated in the future.

### **Lionhead Travel Planning Area**

The eastern portion of this Travel Planning Area is extensively roaded. In my decision I wanted to balance opportunities for motorized use, non-motorized use, and the need to improve grizzly bear habitat in this area. I attempted to provide and improve ATV/motorcycle opportunities using this road system, existing trails and new connectors to create loops. My decision will however restrict summer motorized use on the trails in the Watkins Creek, Sheep Creek, and Mile Creek drainages. The reasons for these restrictions are to manage this area more consistently with the Forest Plan recommendation that this become wilderness; to increase the amount of secure habitat provided for the grizzly bear; and to provide for wildlife movement across the Henry's Lake Mountain Range to and from the southwest and to and from the Madison Mountain Range.

Goal 4, which I've adopted in my decision, also emphasizes providing for wildlife migration and movement.

My decision proposes to add a new non-motorized trail parallel to the Ski Hill Trail #114 (Objective 1-2) to meet national direction that the Continental Divide Trail (in total) be managed as a non-motorized route.

My decision will not allow motorized travel 300 feet off designated routes for camping along the Beaver Creek Road. Instead, the District Ranger will specifically identify the go-down access routes to the Creek that will remain open. The term "go-down" defines the designated route where travel is allowed to reach a dispersed recreation site. In other words, the 300 foot off-route allowance to access a campsite provided in Forest-wide Standard A-8 shall not apply to the Beaver Creek Road.

The eastside of the Lionhead Travel Planning Area provides some of the best backcountry snowmobiling on the Gallatin National Forest. My decision continues to provide for that use in this part of the area. Alternative 7-M would also allow snowmobile use in a portion of the Lionhead recommended wilderness area. In my decision I have chosen to prohibit it because I found through the Gallatin Forest Plan, that the highest and best use of this area is wilderness then we should be managing travel consistent with that determination. I have also restricted snowmobiling in this area to protect big game winter range (See FEIS, pages 41 and 42). Snowmobiling will also be precluded in the Trapper Creek area in favor of protecting important moose winter range (id.).

In Alternative 7, my DEIS preferred alternative, I had included a snowmobile closure north of Earthquake Lake to minimize conflicts with users of the Refuge Point Ski/Snowshoe Trail and placed a non-motorized emphasis on winter recreation in this area. In my decision I dropped the closure area west of Beaver Creek and north of Highway 287 because this area is not conducive to snowmobiling anyway and therefore I saw no need to impose a restriction. I've also decided to provide an open snowmobile route that would run downstream to the Crazy House. This route will accommodate desired fishing access to the Madison River (public comment) while not affecting skiing opportunities in the Refuge Point area.

Using the same logic for the recommended wilderness area that I had for snowmobiling, I also believe that mountain bikes should be prohibited on area trails. However we made a mistake in the alternatives we presented for public comment in that none of them would have precluded mountain bikes. While we corrected this oversight by modifying Alternative 6 in the FEIS, I still don't believe that it would be appropriate to make a decision to prohibit mountain bikes without first providing a public comment opportunity. Instead, it is my intent to propose a modification to the Travel Plan to preclude this use in the Lionhead recommended wilderness area, allow for public comment, and then make a decision within the next year or so.

### **Main Boulder Travel Planning Area**

This Travel Planning Area is a narrow roaded corridor into the heart of the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness and serves as a portal into the Wilderness. In terms of travel management the Main Boulder Road is the primary feature and it is open year-round. This road is under Park and Sweet Grass County jurisdiction, and we recognize this jurisdiction to the road's terminus at

Million Dollar Basin. I found no reason to significantly change the uses currently enjoyed within this area.

My decision will not allow motorized travel 300 feet off designated routes for camping along the Main Boulder River as provided for in most other travel planning areas under Forest-wide Standard A-8. Instead, the District Ranger will specifically identify the go-down access routes to the river that will remain open.

I've adopted an objective (Objective 1-2) to cooperate with the County to provide a route for high clearance vehicles that connects the end of the improved road at Box Canyon to the Independence area. This route is a good place to meet the demands for 4x4 recreation. I have also identified a need to gain road access to the National Forest boundary and across checkerboard private inholdings in the Burris Flat area which I've adopted as Objective 1-3.

### **Mill Creek Travel Planning Area**

Similar to Hyalite, this Travel Planning Area is very popular for a variety of recreation users in the summer. In my decision I wanted to continue to provide for both motorized and non-motorized uses and improve the quality of experiences for both. In the summer, a variety of opportunities for 4 x4 and ATV travel will be provided utilizing the existing road system including the addition of a connector in the Wicked/Snowbank area that will provide an ATV/motorcycle loop. I will continue to preclude motorized use on Road #1764 in the Counts Creek drainage to minimize potential sedimentation impacts to cutthroat trout. Trails will be restricted to non-motorized uses since most of them are a relatively short distance to the Wilderness and thus would only invite trespass. Mountain biking will be an emphasis on the road system to the west of Passage Creek including the Wicked/Snowbank ATV/motorcycle loop. One change from my DEIS preferred alternative (Alternative 7) is that my decision now prohibits motorized use on Trail #65, Emigrant Gulch, due to unauthorized user created routes near the Wilderness boundary. I have precluded motorized use on the Passage Falls Trail (#558) and the Wallace Pass Trail (#58) to the Wilderness boundary because of congestion, safety, and water quality concerns. This Trail is very popular with hikers, including church camp groups, and is immediately adjacent to Passage Creek.

Trails will be open to stock use with the exception of the Pine Creek Trail (#47) which will be restricted to stock until September 15<sup>th</sup> of each year. This trail is narrow, making it difficult for hikers to move safely off the trail to allow stock to pass. In other words, similar to the Lava Lake Trail in the Spanish Peaks area, I chose to preclude horses during the summer due to concerns about congestion, user conflicts and user safety. My decision is different from what I proposed in Alternative 7 of the DEIS in that this trail would be opened to day use stock travel after September 15<sup>th</sup>. The public safety issue (i.e. conflicts between people and horses) is not as much a concern after Labor Day. Also, part of my rationale for restricting stock use is that the upper basins accessed by this trail do not have the capability to handle stock overnight. The trail is very popular with the public and used by hiking groups. My decision precludes overnight stock camping in the Pine Creek area, but still provides opportunities to use the trail during the hunting season.

My decision will leave open much of the area that is currently open to snowmobiling. A groomed snowmobile trail will be provided on the upper Mill Creek road system. The southwest

corner of this Travel Planning Area will continue to have an area closure to protect important big game winter range. In response to some comments received I've expanded this closure to the Emigrant Peak Road (Road #3272 and Trail #65) to protect the integrity of the backcountry ski opportunities this area is targeted to provide. It's also steep terrain and there is limited snowmobile use there currently. There is a closure in the Wicked/Snowbank area to provide a non-motorized experience around a groomed cross-country ski trail system. My decision also adds an area closure in the Pine Creek area to provide non-motorized winter recreation opportunities.

In the Benchmark we had proposed a new non-motorized trail running from George Lake to Mill Creek. I have chosen not to include it in my decision due to the potential cost of constructing such a trail and concerns I have about private land trespass below. I have however adopted an objective (Objective 1-3) to provide additional road access to the Forest between Pine Creek and Mill Creek. Adequate public access does not currently exist in this area.

My decision will not allow motorized travel 300 feet off designated routes for camping along Mill Creek. Instead, the District Ranger will specifically identify the go-down access routes to that will remain open. The term "go-down" defines the designated route where motorized travel is allowed to reach a dispersed recreation site.

My route-by-route decision for this area includes a new ATV/motorcycle connector route from Emigrant Creek to Arrastra Creek. Since there are currently no roads or trails to provide the connecting routes I've adopted an objective (Objective 1-2) to provide a system of 1 or 2 designated ATV and/or motorcycle routes. I've also included an objective (Objective 1-3) to highlight the need for acquiring access across patented mining claims and other private lands in the Chico Peak area.

### **Mission Creek Travel Planning Area**

The Mission Creek Travel Planning Area basically provides a few end-of-road facilities (trailheads) that provide access to trails leading into the Wilderness. There was not a lot of difference between alternatives. Motorized use is not an emphasis. Area trails are used primarily by horseback riders and hikers. My DEIS preferred alternative would have closed Road #649 to public motorized use (contingent on County approval) and moved the existing Mission Creek trailhead facility out to Bruffie Road. The rationale for this was to provide a more visible trailhead facility that would reduce illegal activities and improve law enforcement safety. In my decision I've chosen not to move this facility because it had little public support. There are concerns over conflicts between the private landowners and the public and some thought that moving the trailhead facility would negatively affect the hiking experience. Moving the facility would require a 2 mile hike along a road to reach the current trailhead.

I have also dropped the West Boulder to Mission Creek portion of the snowmobile area restriction at the north end of this Travel Planning Area because this area is not generally suitable for snowmobiling anyway. I didn't see a need to impose a restriction where use is not occurring.

In addition to the programmatic direction I discussed earlier in this ROD my decision includes additional objectives (Objectives 1-2 and 3-1) to restore and rehabilitate non-system trails. This area has seen a proliferation of stock routes that are adding to the sedimentation of area streams.

The ultimate goal (Goal 3) is to provide habitat for Yellowstone cutthroat trout in the Mill Fork of Mission Creek and Tie Creek.

### **North Bridgers Travel Planning Area**

This Travel Planning Area is in checkerboard ownership and public access is difficult. It is one of the least used areas for recreation on the Gallatin National Forest. Therefore there was little difference between alternatives. My decision maintains the existing trail system for foot and horse traffic but it will not be managed for summer motorized uses due to the checkerboard ownership and relatively low demand for recreation opportunities in this area. The area is restricted to snowmobiles during big game hunting season (October 15<sup>th</sup> to December 1<sup>st</sup>) to provide for habitat security during migration. My decision extends the seasonal restriction on motor vehicle use of some roads in the Flathead Pass area to a period from September 15<sup>th</sup> to June 15<sup>th</sup> to better provide for fall wildlife migration and coordinate road closure dates.

Due to the difficulty of public access to the National Forest in this area (i.e. checkerboard ownership) I've included an objective in my decision (Objective 1-2) to acquire legal trail access across private parcels to provide longer horseback riding opportunities. I've also included a goal and objective (Goal 3 and Objective 3-1) to acquire administrative access to all National Forest parcels in this Travel Planning Area. Access would be acquired as opportunities become available.

Lastly, since this Travel Planning Area lies at the north end of the Bridger Mountain Range I've included a goal (Goal 5) to provide for wildlife movement to and from the Big Belt Mountain Range. No specific actions are needed at the present time but if ownership patterns change and/or the Forest Service acquires additional access in this area, I felt it was important to highlight the value of this area as a wildlife migration corridor.

### **Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Travel Planning Area**

My decision for this Travel Planning Area was largely influenced by the fact that it falls within the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area and management must maintain the pre-existing wilderness character as it was in 1977 (see the General Rationale section). Therefore my decision prohibits ATV use within the Wilderness Study Area but provides for motorcycle use on some trails. It will allow for ATV access on the Hidden Lakes Trail because it is outside the study area and it provides one of the few trail opportunities for ATV access to a high mountain lake destination. My selected configuration of the motorcycle routes was designed to provide and maintain secure habitat for the grizzly bear. I have included seasonal restrictions on motorcycles from September 5<sup>th</sup> to July 15<sup>th</sup> annually. The fall restriction is designed to provide secure habitat for the grizzly bear at a time when they are foraging in white-bark pine habitat. The spring restriction, to July 15<sup>th</sup>, is needed because there is still snow covering portions of many of these trails until that time. An earlier opening date could lead to motorcyclists leaving the designated trail to avoid snow banks, thus causing damage to surrounding vegetation. My decision also prohibits motorcycle use on the Rock Creek South Trail (#178) to improve secure habitat for the grizzly bear yearlong.

In the winter the historic Big Sky Trail will be managed as a designated route through a closed area. Cross country snowmobiling will be prohibited in the historic use area of Buffalo Horn.

This closure facilitates management of the State Gallatin Wildlife Management Area sections, and reduces conflicts with wintering big game, thus improving natural integrity. This Travel Planning Area also contains important habitat for wolverine and elk that I believe warrant winter restrictions on snowmobiles. The open area where cross country snowmobiling is allowed runs from Windy Pass across the Crest through Rock Creek. This allows high quality “challenge” snowmobile opportunities but limits the acreage available to remain consistent with the acreage used in 1977.

In addition to the programmatic direction I discussed earlier in this ROD I believed it was important to include a goal and objective (Goal 4 and Objective 4-1) to manage the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area to sustain the recreation setting and existing Wilderness characteristics as they were in 1977 and to preserve the area for future consideration as Wilderness. While I’ve concluded that my travel management decision is consistent with Montana Wilderness Study Act, I believe that it is important to ensure that evolving use patterns don’t negatively affect the natural integrity, or apparent naturalness of this area.

For additional discussion, please refer to my rationale for the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area on page 25 and my conclusions on the issue of the Wilderness Study Area beginning on page 108 of this ROD.

### **Sawtooth Travel Planning Area**

My decision for this Travel Planning Area will change little from the current situation. It contains two trails; the Mill Creek Trail (#106) and the Sawtooth Trail (#297). Because of access issues these routes have historically received only minor amounts of foot and horse travel. The area provides outstanding secure habitat for the grizzly bear and other wildlife. I believe that it should continue to be managed with an emphasis on its wildlife habitat values. In my DEIS preferred alternative (Alternative 7) I would have abandoned the Sawtooth Trail and would not have included a new Sawtooth connector trail as proposed in the Benchmark. My concern was that I did not want to encourage higher levels of human use in this area. However, after further discussion with my staff, I decided to retain the Sawtooth Trail #297 and the new connector across State land as a non-motorized route. What we’ve discovered is that the public has been pioneering a trail into the area anyway, but this route is steep and could create sediment problems. By adding a new connector route as a system trail we can develop and maintain a means of access that will not result in resource problems.

### **Shields Travel Planning Area**

The Shields Travel Planning Area is conducive to providing motorized use opportunities. It has an extensive road system that could be used to provide ATV and motorcycle loop opportunities. In developing my decision I decided that I wanted to provide a balance of opportunities (motorized and non-motorized) on the west side of the Crazy Mountain Range as a whole. One consideration was the watershed restoration efforts that occurred in the Shields area in the mid-1990’s. The Forest Service spent over \$100,000 obliterating and restoring old logging roads to improve water quality. I wanted to maintain our initial investment in watershed restoration. For the Shields in the summer, I chose to emphasize motorized use in the Smith Creek area and non-motorized use in the Upper Shields drainage in cooperation with the Lewis and Clark National

Forest. I decided to provide a system of motorized loops in the Smith Creek area based on existing use and input from local publics. The Upper Shields area is managed primarily as a non-motorized opportunity to protect the watershed restoration investments, and maintain quality non-motorized hiking, biking and hunting opportunities. My decision also includes some fall seasonal closures to restrict hunting season use of the motorized routes when they are soft and wet, prone to damage, and could result in impacts to fisheries. Mountain bike opportunities will be provided on the ATV loops as well as other non-loop routes. Lastly, my decision includes a new summer non-motorized route that will provide a means of access into the South Fork of the American Fork drainage. I've also included this in my decision as Objective 1-2. This drainage is currently not accessible from the east side and this route will serve as one means to resolve that problem.

In the winter I wanted to balance opportunities for snowmobiles and skiers. The northern and eastern portions of the area will provide for a significant amount of traditional snowmobile use. The Sunlight Creek/South Fork Shields area will be restricted to snowmobiles in favor of providing a segregated, cross-country skiing opportunity in a non-motorized setting.

Changes in my decision from what was in my preferred alternative in the DEIS (Alternative 7) are as follows:

- A project road (E ½ of sec. 6, T6N R10E, to private land) was changed to a 4x4 and mountain bike route. My decision designates this route through section 6 into the private land in section 5. This route provides an alternative egress for private landowners in case of emergency. Opening this route is dependant on the landowners forming a Road Users Association to cooperate with the Forest Service on management of the road.
- The East Fork-Bitter Creek ATV connector was dropped. An ATV route will be constructed parallel to the East Fork Smith Creek road and into section 6 up to the ATV parking lot. My decision to drop this new connector was based on water quality concerns in the East Fork of Smith Creek and Smith Creek, and because the local landowners did not support the connector route due to concerns for elk habitat.
- An ATV connector was added from the end of the East Fork Smith Creek road to the new route on the Lewis and Clark National Forest with some minor road additions (see map). This connector maintains a traditional use route for accessing the Forest Lake area on the Lewis and Clark National Forest, and is part of a larger loop route.
- Changes made to ATV routes result in a corresponding change for mountain bikes.

In addition to the programmatic direction I discussed earlier in this ROD my decision includes an objective (Objective 1-3) to restore and designate old roads for motorized opportunities and mountain bike use. This objective provides us with the direction to bring the area facilities that are designated for motorized and mountain bike use in the Travel Plan to a standard that will accommodate those uses without unacceptable impacts to soil, vegetation or water quality.

Lastly, since this Travel Planning Area lies at the north end of the Crazy Mountain Range I've included a goal (Goal 5) to provide for wildlife movement from the Shields area to and from the Castle and Little Belt Mountains. No specific actions are needed at the present time but if the situation changes in the future, I felt it was important to highlight the value of this area as a wildlife migration corridor.

## **South Plateau Travel Planning Area**

This travel planning area borders Yellowstone National Park and lies to the south of the community of West Yellowstone. West Yellowstone is dependent on tourism and this area is used heavily by summer and winter visitors. It has been extensively roaded for past timber harvest but much of this system has been closed and restored over the past decade. My decision for this area will continue to provide for high levels of summer and winter recreation use emphasizing pleasure driving, ATV and snowmobile use. My rationale for this choice is based on the high level of human use this area currently receives, it's existing roaded and timber harvested character, stable soils, and the importance of summer and winter motorized recreation to the economy of West Yellowstone.

The area is within the recovery zone for the threatened grizzly bear and the high open road density is not optimal for bear habitat security. Invasive weed spread along motorized routes is also of concern. While these problems could be improved through increased restrictions on summer motorized use I do not find that to be an acceptable option at this time. To balance motorized use opportunities with grizzly bear habitat needs, restrictions in summer motorized use have been included in nearby Travel Planning Areas rather than in this area. I also believe that the Forest Service must accept that ongoing treatment of weeds will be necessary in areas of high human use.

South Plateau is one of few places on the Gallatin National Forest where my decision will allow ATVs to use the passenger car road system. This decision allows forest users to access ATV routes directly from town. Also, adding a few ATV loops to the Plateau system on administrative roads will provide more opportunity and disperse use. ATV use is already occurring and I believe that the relatively lower level of passenger vehicle use of these roads makes it acceptable for dual designation with appropriate signing and education.

My decision will relocate the Continental Divide Scenic Trail (Objective 1-2) to separate it from the motorized trail. The segment of this trail from Reas Pass to the Cream Creek Divide will not allow mountain bikes (i.e. mountain bikers will use the ATV route). However, the section from Cream Creek Divide to Targhee Pass will be managed for hiking, mountain biking and stock use. This new route is proposed to meet the national direction that the Continental Divide Trail be managed as a non-motorized route emphasizing foot and stock travel.

Some commenters indicated a desire for mountain biking opportunities on non-motorized routes that will be close to and accessible from West Yellowstone. In response my decision will restrict summer motorized use and stock use on the Rendezvous ski trail system to provide a non-motorized, exclusive mountain biking opportunity.

In the winter, my decision emphasizes groomed snowmobiling opportunities throughout most of the area, and groomed cross-country skiing opportunities on the Rendezvous ski trail system. I've added a groomed snowmobile loop to the Plateau system on administrative roads to provide more opportunity and disperse use. My decision will also move the access route from town (Objective 2-2) from Iris Street to Electric Street such that it will no longer cross the ski route from town to the Rendezvous system. The existing snowmobile closure around the Rendezvous Ski Area was retained to prevent conflicts between these uses. A small snowmobile closure was

added around Black Sand Spring to protect important moose winter range and bald eagle habitat. The road to Black Sands Spring (#1716) will be a designated route open to snowmobiles.

In addition to the other programmatic direction I've included in my decision, I've also adopted an objective (Objective 1-3) to provide an alternative ATV route south of Highway 287, in the Buttermilk Creek area, that alleviates the safety concerns I have with people riding in the highway right-of-way.

### **Taylor Fork Travel Planning Area**

This Travel Planning Area provides some of the most important habitat for grizzly bears, big game, and other wildlife on the Forest. Over the past decade we have put forth significant effort to consolidate and acquire private in-holdings, in part, to maintain the wildlife habitat values that this area provides. This area was identified as having high grizzly bear mortality due to conflicts with humans that could be due, in part, to the area's accessibility. For these reasons in general, my decision is more restrictive on summer motorized use than what was proposed in the Starting Benchmark. On the other hand, I recognize that there has been some popular historic motorized use of this area and believe it is appropriate to continue to provide for it in this Travel Plan. My decision will allow ATVs on the Oil Well Road Trail (#68) to Pika Point but not further south into the Cabin Creek Recreation and Wildlife Management Area (CCRWMA). This road was in existence prior to 1983 and used by jeeps when the Lee Metcalf Wilderness Act was passed. Motorcycle use will be permitted on mainline routes within the Taylor Fork Travel Planning Area, including a connector route from the Oil Well Road Trail to trails within the CCRWMA. Overall my selection of motorcycle and ATV routes was based on an objective to increase the amount of secure habitat for the grizzly bear, to emphasize opportunities for non-motorized uses on the trail system, and to minimize the potential for motorized encroachment into designated Wilderness. Mountain biking will be permissible and managed for on trails that also do not access Wilderness.

In the winter much of this Travel Planning Area will remain closed to snowmobile use to provide secure habitat on important winter range for elk and moose. Snowmobiling will be permissible south of the Taylor Fork Road from just to the east of the Oil Well Road Trail west to the Eldridge Trail. The Big Sky Snowmobile Trail will continue to be open and groomed but re-routed on the lower three miles by using the east end of Trail 68; about 1.5 miles of new trail construction just west of Trail 71; and the lower 1.5 miles of Trail 71 to the Sage Creek Trailhead. This trail re-route avoids sensitive moose winter range in the lower Wapiti drainage. The winter access point will be moved from the Wapiti Trailhead to the Sage Creek Trailhead to resolve concerns over snowmobiles traveling on plowed roads. Cross-country skiing is permissible but not a management emphasis for the Taylor Fork Travel Planning Area.

Changes in my decision from what was in my preferred alternative in the DEIS (Alternative 7) are as follows:

- The Minnie Wapiti Trail #203 from the Wapiti Trail to Pika Point was changed to a motorcycle route. Trail #74 was then changed to a non-motorized route. I made this change because it made more sense to me to keep all motorized use on the same route.
- The winter range snowmobile closure was reconfigured in lower Wapiti Creek and the Cache/Lightning drainages. Because the Wapiti Road #2522 will no longer be designated

as a snowmobile route, I replaced it with a designated snowmobile route from Sage Creek to the Wapiti Cabin. I did this to protect the most important elk and moose winter range while allowing snowmobile use in the Eldridge Creek area which contains lower quality habitat. See Alt. 7-M winter map.

- The Deadhorse Road was made a motorcycle route (open July 15 to December 1) to provide a continuous route between the Cabin Creek Travel Planning Area and the Gallatin Crest Travel Planning Area.
- Trail #6 becomes a non-motorized route between the junction of Trail #30 and the junction of Trail #223. I made this change because Trail #30 will be managed for motorcycle use and parallel trails are not needed in this area.
- The map was corrected to show Trails 63& 8 as open to motorcycles to Lizard Lake.
- My decision will not allow motorized travel 300 feet off designated routes for camping along the Taylor Fork Road. Instead, the District Ranger will specifically identify the go-down access routes to the creek that will remain open. The term “go-down” defines the designated route where motorized travel is allowed to reach a dispersed recreation site.

Lastly, I’ve included a goal and objective (Goal 4 and Objective 4-1) to highlight the need for administrative access into this area to administer permitted grazing in Wapiti Creek.

### **Tom Miner-Rock Travel Planning Area**

This Travel Planning Area contains a significant amount of private land and has been moderately roaded. There are only 3 trails, none of which have been open to summer motorized uses. There is little difference between alternatives except that consideration was being given to managing the Donahue Trail (#183) for motorcycle use in Alternative 3 and restricting snowmobile use on specific roads in Alternatives 5, 6 and 7.

For the summer, my decision will continue to allow vehicle travel on existing open roads and will continue to restrict summer motorized use on area trails. The area has a higher open road density than is desirable within the Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone (FEIS, page 3-259), but I found little opportunity to improve this situation given the amount of interspersed private land. My decision does include however a goal (Goal 3) and two associated objectives (Objective 3-1 and 3-2) to effectively close to public use the Soldier Creek/Twin Peaks road system and work with the private landowner to reduce open road density in Divide Creek.

In the winter snowmobile use will be restricted north of the South Rock Creek Road. In addition, the road itself, which is currently a groomed snowmobile trail, will no longer be groomed, but will be open to snowmobiling to allow access into the Rock Creek drainage.

One change I have made in my decision that was different from Alternative 7 (my DEIS preferred alternative) was to change the date in which roads would be closed annually in the Tom Miner Basin to January 1st. This will provide an opportunity for local residents to access areas providing early skiing and for Christmas tree cutting.

## **West Bridger North Travel Planning Area**

This Travel Planning Area does not currently receive much recreation use however it does provide opportunities for motorcycle, mountain bike, and horseback riding as well as hiking. My decision provides a short ATV loop opportunity on the Johnson Canyon road system with a new connector route, and motorcycle access up the Limestone Trail (#544) (also known as Corbly Gulch) onto the Bridger Foothills Trail (Objective 1-2). The Bridger Foothills Trail then connects into routes further south and over the ridge into the eastside of the Bridger Mountain Range. Mountain bike use will also be emphasized on the motorcycle routes. With the exception of the Johnson Canyon ATV loop, the Travel Planning Area north of Corbly Gulch will emphasize non-motorized uses. My decision includes a new connector route from the North Cottonwood Trail #545 to the Johnson Canyon system for foot and horse travel (Objective 1-3). The rationale for my decision in this area was to provide for a mix of motorized (ATV/motorcycle) opportunities and hiking, biking and stock use opportunities in a non-motorized setting.

Although not included in the “Detailed Description of the Decision”, I’ve decided to add an objective to the programmatic direction for this area (Obj. 1-4) to rehabilitate the Corbly Trail access within the county right-of-way on private land and restore the National Forest System route to a single track trail designed to accommodate motorcycles, mountain bikes and foot/stock travel.

My decision differs slightly from what I had included in my preferred alternative with the DEIS (Alternative 7) in that Trail #528 will be opened to ATVs to the top of the Felix road system and existing roads would be used between Johnson Canyon and Felix for ATVs and motorcycles (See map). This will provide additional ATV opportunity in an area that can accommodate that use.

There are no winter recreation goals for this Travel Planning Area however I did add a snowmobile area restriction near the ridge to protect winter wolverine and mountain goat habitat. This restriction balances my decision in the Fairy Lake Travel Planning Area to open a portion of the higher country for high-marking and to provide a means of transport for skiing.

## **West Bridger South Travel Planning Area**

This Travel Planning Area is very close to Bozeman and receives a significant amount of use from hikers, runners, and mountain bikers. My decision will place more emphasis on these uses by restricting motorized use, segregating non-motorized uses to some degree, and educating users to provide for public safety on high use routes (i.e. Sypes Canyon and M Trails). In comparison to the Starting Benchmark, my decision allows motorcycle use on the Middle Cottonwood Trail to provide another means of access to the Bridger Foothills Trail north. My rationale was that I felt that motorcycle opportunities were deficient on the west side of the Bridgers as a whole when considering my decision for the West Bridger North Travel Planning Area. Opening the Middle Cottonwood Trail increases motorcycle access points (trailheads) from 2 to 3, which in my view, better balances motorized and non-motorized uses throughout the west side of the Bridgers. There were no significant resource issues influencing my choices for this area. It was based on improving the quality and distribution of recreation opportunities as well as promoting public safety. One difference from my DEIS preferred alternative (Alternative

7) is that stock will be allowed on the Bridger Ridge Trail #513 north of the “M”. Public comments indicated that conflicts between hikers and horse users were not a significant problem and therefore closing this trail to stock was unwarranted.

As I discussed earlier in this ROD I’ve decided to manage the trails in this area during the summer as “time shared” trails to address social problems (i.e. “user conflict”) between motorized and non-motorized users, and between bikers and stock users/hikers. I intend to work with various users over the next year or so to develop the specific schedules. Please refer to my discussion of time-shared trails on page 37 of this ROD.

There are no winter recreation goals for this Travel Planning Area however I dropped the snowmobile area closure except for the “M” and Sypes trail connector. The area is not conducive to snowmobile use and therefore I saw little need to impose an area restriction.

In addition to the programmatic direction I’ve discussed earlier in this ROD I’ve adopted three objectives for this Travel Planning Area to help in implementing my route management decisions and improve the overall recreation experiences provided in this very popular area. My first objective (Objective 1-2) is to provide a mountain bike route connector from the “M” Trail to Sypes Canyon. My second objective (Objective 1-3) is to coordinate with Gallatin County and the City of Bozeman on “Main Street to Mountains” trails projects to provide connectors to National Forest system trails. My third objective (Objective 1-4) is to promote quality recreational experiences and provide for user safety on high use trails (Sypes Canyon and “M” Trails) through user education.

### **Yankee Jim Travel Planning Area**

This Travel Planning Area includes a significant amount of private land and access is limited. Except for the Sphinx Creek Trail, there are no opportunities for summer or winter motorized use except for vehicle travel on County Roads. The area is within the Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone and contains good habitat for a variety of wildlife. Because of this my overall goal for travel management in this area is to provide reasonable public access to the National Forest but not encourage increased recreation use. My decision will limit travel to non-motorized uses and provide a few mountain bike opportunities including a new bike loop near Cutler Lake.

There is currently limited access to public lands in the upper Mulherin Creek drainage of this Travel Planning Area. Therefore, I’ve included an objective (Objective 1-2) to highlight the need for access into this area. Consistent with my route decision I’ve also included an objective (Objective 1-3) to provide a hiking and biking route to Aldrich Lake.

### **Yellowstone Travel Planning Area**

This Travel Planning Area also includes a significant amount of private land and access is also limited from the Yellowstone Valley. Motorized travel will continue to be allowed on the West Pine Creek road system to the north and the Big Creek and Dry Creek roads to the south. The Dry Creek Road will be open to 4x4 vehicles beyond the existing vehicle restriction gate in section 17 through the private land in section 19. All motorized vehicle travel will be restricted at the gate in section 17 from Sept. 5 to June 15 annually to maintain a quality hunting opportunity near Livingston. My decision includes no summer motorized trail opportunities due

to lack of access and concerns over impacts to private land. Mountain biking opportunities are limited to the West Pine and Dry Creek North areas of the TPA. In the winter, snowmobiles will be prohibited to protect big game winter range. See the rationale section for Issue #2, Elk and Mule Deer, later in this ROD.

There is currently limited access to public lands within the Gallatin Mountain Range from the Yellowstone Valley. Therefore, I've included an objective (Objective 1-2) to highlight the need for up to 4 additional routes of access to this Travel Planning Area.

In addition, since portions of this TPA is in a Wilderness Study Area, I believed it was important to include a goal and objective (Goal 4 and Objective 4-1) to manage the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area to sustain the recreation setting and existing Wilderness characteristics as they were in 1977 and to preserve the area for future consideration as Wilderness. While I've concluded that my travel management decision is consistent with Montana Wilderness Study Act, I believe that it is important to ensure that evolving use patterns don't negatively affect the natural integrity of this area.

For additional discussion, please refer to my rationale for the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area on page 25 and my conclusions on the issue of the Wilderness Study Area beginning on page 108 of this ROD.

## **D. Consideration of the Issues**

Scoping is an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues related to a proposed action [40 CFR 1501.7]. Based on comments received during the three comment periods for this proposal and the environmental analysis disclosed in the EIS, I found 23 issues to be significant to my decision. My conclusions about each of these issues are discussed below.

**1. Bald Eagle.** In relation to the management of travel on the Gallatin National Forest, bald eagles are of issue only around the 8 nesting territories near Hebgen Lake. Eagles are most sensitive to human activities during the nest building, egg laying, and incubation periods, which normally runs from February 1 to May 30 (FEIS, page 3-2). Because of this the key consideration in my decision was the effects of winter snowmobile use around the Horse Butte, Ridge, and Narrows nesting territories. I was able to conclude that winter recreation use around the remaining 5 territories and summer use around all 8 territories, under any alternative, would not result in any serious adverse effects.

The Greater Yellowstone Bald Eagle Management Plan (GYBEMP) uses nest site management zones as one strategy to facilitate conservation of bald eagles (FEIS, page 3-2). Zone I is the area within 400 meters (1/4 mile) of a nest where birds on the nest are likely to be especially sensitive to disturbance. Zone II is within 800 meters (1/2 mile) of the active nest and all alternate nests, and is typically heavily used for foraging and perching. The GYBEMP recommends that light human activity levels not be exceeded during the nesting season, with moderate use allowable during the rest of the year. Zone III is most of the home range used by eagles during the nesting season, generally within 4 km (2.5 miles) of the nest, and contains

important foraging areas while providing management buffers for zones I and II. The GYBEMP recommends that moderate human activity levels not be exceeded.

### Horse Butte Nest Site

Under all alternatives the Horse Butte snowmobile trail system would continue to be groomed and they all include a 75 acre closure area around the Horse Butte nest site (Zone 1). Alternatives 5 and 6 would also restrict snowmobiles to the designated trail on Horse Butte and along the Madison Arm of Hebgen Lake. The intent of this restriction was to make snowmobile travel more predictable thereby resulting in less disturbance to foraging and perching eagles in Zones II and III. Open water can be found on the Madison Arm of Hebgen Lake during the early nesting season, and the Horse Butte eagles have been documented to use this area heavily for perching and foraging at this time of the year. However, violations of the Zone 1 closure area during the nesting season have been documented in the past and I believe that they are likely to continue in the future. I believe that this would also be the situation with an area closure on Horse Butte and therefore I did not adopt it in my decision. Because snowmobile use off the groomed trail is well-established and the open terrain encourages this type of use, it is likely that violations of this restriction will occur despite efforts to enforce it. I don't believe that this restriction would lead to a meaningful decrease in disturbance to eagles.

My decision does include a snowmobile closure along the Madison Arm of Hebgen Lake and the Madison River from the break at the bluff to the water's edge. Although not as extensive as the closure proposed in Alternatives 5 and 6, it will provide greater area for the Horse Butte pair to forage in without disturbance from snowmobiles relative to Alternative 2 (current condition).

None of the alternatives would fully meet the GYBEMP guidelines, however Alternatives 5 and 6 would come closer to meeting the intent. Alternatives 5 and 6 would also meet the recommendations of J.T. Stangl, a former Hebgen Lake Ranger District Wildlife Biologist. Stangl provided management recommendations for all the bald eagle territories known to exist on Hebgen and Earthquake Lake as of the year 2000 (FEIS, page 3-3). Because of the popularity of snowmobiling in the Horse Butte area and the importance of snowmobiling in general to the economy of West Yellowstone, along with my assessment that bald eagles on Hebgen and Earthquake Lake as a whole would continue exhibiting productivity trends consistent with recovery goals under my decision (FEIS, page 3-11), I was unwilling to impose a prohibition on snowmobiling in the Horse Butte area for a possible improvement in bald eagle nesting success.

### The Ridge Nest Site

Under my decision, and Alternatives 1 through 4, impacts to nesting bald eagles in this territory from snowmobile use would be similar to those described for the Horse Butte territory. An important exception is that this nest will have no area closure for Zone I. Snowmobile use off the groomed trail regularly occurs through much of Zone I around both territories through late March, and this will likely continue. Under Alternatives 5 and 6 there would be no groomed trail within Zone I of the Ridge nest and elimination of off-trail snowmobile use could reduce disturbance to the Ridge territory. Again however, because of the popularity of snowmobiling in the Horse Butte area and the importance of snowmobiling in general to the economy of West Yellowstone, I was unwilling to impose a prohibition on snowmobiling for some possible improvement in bald eagle nesting success. Because snowmobile use off the groomed trail is

well-established and the open terrain encourages this type of use, I don't believe that attempts to limit snowmobiling to designated routes would be effective nor lead to a meaningful decrease in disturbance to eagles.

### The Narrows Nest Site

This territory has been highly productive despite heavy snowmobile use in close proximity to the nest (FEIS, page 3-4). The Narrows birds appear to be highly tolerant of snowmobile use and I concluded that any of the alternatives would have minimal effects on them. This nest site was not a factor in my decision.

In summary, Bald eagle populations in the United States have increased over the past several decades. All recovery criteria have been met, and the species was proposed for de-listing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1999 (although this has not yet occurred) (FEIS, page 3-3). The Gallatin Forest Plan specifies that "*management of the Forest will provide for the recovery of the bald eagle*" (USDA Forest Service 1987:II-4). All alternatives would be consistent with this goal, reflecting the fact that bald eagle productivity in the Hebgen and Earthquake Lakes area has increased considerably since the first nest was monitored by the Forest Service in 1977 (FEIS, page 3-11). No Travel Plan alternative would have more negative effects on bald eagles than the current management of summer and winter travel. For these reasons this issue was not a significant factor in my choice between alternatives.

**2. Big Game (Ungulates).** It is difficult for me to summarize how the effects of the alternatives to big game influenced my decision because there are many facets to this issue and various species are affected in different ways by human travel. In general, I believe that big game populations have reached or exceeded MFWP goals on the Gallatin National Forest with the level and types of human travel that have been, and are currently occurring on Forest (FEIS, pages 3-24 through 3-59; Alternative 2). The Gallatin Forest provides a large amount of high quality elk habitat, and elk populations are currently above objectives set by MFWP in most areas of the Forest (FEIS, page 3-16). Mule deer utilize similar habitat to elk and are also very common. Moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goat are less common but populations are largely unaffected by summer travel. No big game species found on the Forest has been identified as threatened, endangered or sensitive. Therefore, since Alternatives 3 through 7-M include more control measures on human travel than exist today, I could assume that any of these alternatives, as well as Alternative 2, would not result in unacceptable impacts to big game populations. While I believe big game populations are currently fine, I was not comfortable with Alternative 1. Alternative 1 would allow off-route summer motorized use which could have adverse effects on big game over time through increased volume and distribution of those uses.

I was able to eliminate white-tailed deer and antelope as a significant concern because there is very little habitat for these species on the Gallatin National Forest (FEIS, page 3-17). I was also able to eliminate bison as an issue because they are managed under the Interagency Bison Management Plan which is minimally influenced by travel on the National Forest (FEIS, page 3-17). This left the potential effects to elk, mule deer, moose, bighorn sheep and mountain goats as considerations in my decision. My findings on each of these are described below:

## Elk and Mule Deer

The Gallatin Forest Plan identifies elk as a management indicator species or a species whose habitat is most likely to be affected by Forest management activities (FEIS, page 3-16). In travel planning I found the issue to be primarily associated with summer motorized uses. Many studies have shown that motorized access influences elk habitat use (FEIS, page 3-18). Elk have been repeatedly shown to avoid habitat adjacent to open roads. Motorized trails are likely to have similar effects. Management of motorized travel on the Forest could also affect the vulnerability of elk to hunting. However the Gallatin Forest provides a large amount of high quality elk habitat, and elk populations are currently above objectives set by Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks in most areas of the Forest. The six elk management units on the Forest are also currently achieving bull/cow ratio goals (FEIS, page 3-20). One exception is the Upper Gallatin herd that summers in the Gallatin Range, mostly in Yellowstone, and migrates to winter ranges in the Yellowstone River Drainage and the Madison Valley (FEIS, page 3-16). I believe that my decision to maintain lower motorized route densities in the southern Gallatin Range, primarily for grizzly bear habitat security, will also adequately provide adequate security for elk in this area. Alternatives 3 through 7-M overall, increase the amount of secure elk habitat (FEIS, pages 3-24 through 3-34) and are consistent with Montana Statewide Elk Management Plan. Therefore, summer habitat for elk was not a significant factor in my choice between alternatives. Mule deer are similar to elk in their habitat needs so I concluded that the summer habitat provided under Alternatives 3 through 7-M was adequate for this big game species also.

My decision was influenced in a few specific areas to protect important big game winter range. For example part of the rationale for a portion of the snowmobile area restrictions I've included in the Porcupine-Buffalo Horn and the Taylor Fork Travel Planning Areas was to protect elk/moose winter range. Snowmobile restrictions in the Cougar/Duck Creek area of the Hebgen Basin Travel Planning Area is designed, in part, to protect moose winter range. I believe it is important to prevent disturbance on important winter range during a time of year when big game are energetically stressed.

## Moose, Bighorn Sheep, Mountain Goat

Moose are found in many areas across the Forest, but are generally more selective in the habitats they utilize than deer or elk. Willow-lined riparian areas, aspen stands, subalpine fir forests, and moist high-elevation meadows are some key habitats for moose, with willows and forests with subalpine fir understories of particular importance during winter due to the browse that they provide (FEIS, page 3-20 and 3-21). Moose are not of concern with summer recreation travel; winter is the critical time.

Bighorn sheep are one of the least common big game species on the Forest. Although they are native to southwest Montana and were probably abundant prior to European settlement, they are now much more restricted in distribution and fewer in number primarily as a result of over-harvest in the late 1800s and early 1900s, as well as competition with domestic livestock and the diseases they transmit (Legg 1999:5). Mountain goats on the Gallatin National Forest are descended from animals transplanted by the State of Montana during the mid-twentieth century. They have increased their distribution into most areas of suitable habitat and are now found in all of the mountain ranges on the Forest (FEIS, page 3-17). Because bighorn sheep and mountain

goats typically are found in high elevation areas with low motorized route density during the summer months, again summer travel was not of issue.

Winter is the time of year when energy expenditure invariably exceeds intake, due to increased metabolic demands and energetic costs of locomotion, coupled with decreased forage quality and availability. Under such conditions, ungulates typically lose a substantial percentage of their body weight. Severe weight loss leads to increased risk of mortality through starvation and predation, and lower production and survival of calves the following spring. Humans can exacerbate these impacts through winter travel. Disturbance can cause animals to run through deep snow, which is very energetically demanding (FEIS, page 3-20). Animals that do not flee often exhibit an increased heart rate, which may result in elevated energy expenditures. Lastly, animals may be displaced from important wintering areas to lower-quality habitats, thus reducing their chances of survival and successful reproduction.

There were two primary winter travel variables affecting big game animals that I considered in making my decision. They were the density of designated winter routes within winter range, and the amount of winter range relatively free of human disturbance available to each species.

Table 3.2.6 of the FEIS displays the density (mi/sq mi) of groomed and designated snowmobile, cross-country ski, and snowshoe routes within elk, moose, bighorn sheep, and mountain goat winter range by hunting district, by alternative. This table showed me that there was very little variation in terms of marked and groomed routes by alternative. I also found, in reviewing the big game section of the FEIS that established travel routes can have much less effect on big game animals because there is a higher degree of predictability than there is with off-route travel. In other words, big game animals tend to habituate to human travel on these routes and therefore don't react as strongly or expend as much energy.

Table 3.2.7 of the FEIS displays the percentages of elk, moose, bighorn sheep and mountain goat winter range closed to snowmobiles off designated routes, by alternative. What this table showed me was that Alternatives 3 through 7-M substantially increase the amount of secure winter habitat for big game species over the current situation (Alternatives 1 and 2). While there are some differences among these alternatives I found them all to be acceptable options in maintaining big game winter habitat.

The disclosure of predicted impacts on big game in Chapter 3 of the FEIS basically shows that the more restrictive one gets on human travel within the Gallatin National Forest, the better it is for big game. As I stated earlier, I believe that big game populations on the Gallatin National Forest as a whole are healthy and therefore found any of Alternatives 2 through 7-M to be acceptable as they relate to this issue.

**3. Biological Diversity and Ecological Sustainability.** This issue was addressed in the FEIS based on concerns that use of roads and trails could hinder wildlife movement in key areas of the Forest, and travel routes may have detrimental effects to rare habitats such as willow, aspen, cottonwood, and whitebark pine. . Based on the discussion beginning on page 3-65 of the FEIS I concluded that the impacts of the Travel Plan alternatives were somewhat minor compared to the impacts that Interstate 90, other highways and private land development have had. The analysis also indicates that the amount of rare habitats affected by travel routes was very small, an estimated 60 acres out of over 10,000 acres of rare habitats across the Forest (FEIS, page 3-

33-81). Still, I certainly did not want to adopt a Travel Management Plan that would further hinder wildlife movement or isolate populations of some species into metapopulations. As is the case with many wildlife issues, movement seems to be adversely affected by high motorized route densities. This cause-effect relationship, has led me to favor the alternatives that reduce motorized route density from the current situation in identified corridors between mountain ranges (Alternatives 4 through 7-M) versus those alternatives that result in higher or the same motorized route density as exists today (Alternatives 1 through 3). My decision also includes the following provisions to provide for wildlife movement:

- In the Bear Canyon TPA it restricts motorized use on the Chestnut Mountain Trail (#458) and it includes an objective to move this and a portion of the Bear Loop Trail (#440) off of the ridge. Many species of wildlife tend to move along ridgelines and Bear Canyon is an important area to facilitate movement between the Bridger and Gallatin Mountain Ranges.
- In the Lionhead TPA, my decision reduces motorized road density from 0.54 mi/sq mi (current condition/Alternative 2) to 0.46 mi/sq mi, the lowest of any alternative (FEIS, page 3-76).
- In the North Bridgers TPA, my decision would not increase motorized route density from the current situation (0.85 mi/sq mi), which is the same as for any of Alternatives 2 through 7-M (FEIS, page 3-74). In this area, my ability to reduce motorized route density was limited by private land and routes not under Forest Service jurisdiction.
- In addition, direction for corridors becomes Forest-wide direction for other known or suspected corridors and others that may be discovered in the future (Goal F and Objective F-1).
- My decision also includes programmatic direction (i.e. goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines) that will serve to maintain and improve biodiversity on the Gallatin National Forest as future management activities are undertaken. Refer to the FEIS, pages 3-88 to 3-91 for a discussion regarding the benefits of this direction.

**4. Cultural Resources.** This issue concerns the potential effects that travel management under the seven alternatives may have on the scientific, traditional, cultural and intrinsic values of archeological, cultural and historical sites on the Gallatin National Forest. In addition, there was concern that motorized use in high-elevation areas of the Crazy Mountains (i.e., portions of the Ibex and East Crazies Travel Planning Areas (TPAs)) could have an adverse effect to certain areas of traditional importance to the Crow Tribe. New or significant increases in motorized use would affect their ability to conduct traditional practices in these high elevation zones of the Crazy Mountains.

My first consideration relative to the potential effects of public travel on cultural resources was direct damage to sites. The Gallatin National Forest has inventoried over 900 archeological sites to date. Potential damage could come from vehicle use or route construction/re-construction directly on top of a site, or could be caused by vandalism or illegal collecting of artifacts. Based on the discussion of this issue in Chapter 3 of the FEIS, I've concluded that Alternatives 2 through 7-M all have an equal level of risk for archeological site damage. Alternative 1 would increase the risk of damage since off-route OHV use would be allowed. Cross-country motorized travel could lead to direct damage of sites, either inadvertently or deliberately. This became another reason that I did not find Alternative 1 to be an acceptable option for a travel

management plan. While there has been some damage of sites from existing travel patterns, studies (FEIS, page 3-97) have shown that there is a significant difference between high public use areas that includes motorized use and adverse effects to archaeological sites versus those off-trail areas with less public use and intact archaeological sites. As such, keeping “use” on existing travel systems and not pioneering new trails into archaeological site complexes previously in remote, off-trail locations became a design criteria in the development of Alternatives 2 through 7-M. Thus, current use patterns, as reflected by Alternative 2, do not seem to be a significant problem. I also believe that any concerns over the potential for route construction or reconstruction to damage bisected sites can be alleviated through survey and relocation of the route as needed to avoid cultural resource sites. Appropriate mitigation can be considered and incorporated at such time in the future when such projects are proposed.

My second consideration was to create a travel management scenario for the high-elevation areas of the Crazy Mountains that would maintain or improve the setting of areas deemed to hold strong traditional importance to the Crow Tribe. During the travel planning process we held numerous meetings with the Crow Cultural Committee and Traditional practitioners. Based on these meetings I concluded that new or increased motorized access, both winter and summer, into high elevation areas of the Crazy Mountains would cause potential conflict with traditions amongst the Crow people. These cultural values affected my decision for the configuration of motorized and non-motorized routes, as well as the area open to snowmobiles, on for the west slopes of the Crazy Mountains (Ibex and East Crazy Travel Planning Areas). While some, including the Crow Tribe, would prefer that OHV and snowmobile use be precluded entirely in these travel planning areas, my objective was to provide opportunities for both motorized use, and also hiking, horseback riding, and skiing in a non-motorized setting. I believe that my decision strikes a good balance between my recreation objectives and the protection of the cultural values of the Crow people.

The existing management of travel in the high country of the Crazy Mountains, as well as Alternative 1, has been deemed unacceptable by Crow practitioners. In the winter, improvements in snowmobiles allow users to reach areas that they were previously unable to get to, including the higher elevations of the Crazy Mountains. The remaining alternatives address this concern to varying degrees with Alternative 5 probably being the preferred option. This Alternative has some advantages in gaining compliance with restrictions (e.g. more readily identifiable boundaries), however it is also more restrictive on established snowmobile use than I was willing to accept. Alternative 7-M (my selected alternative), while not as desirable as Alternative 5, was developed through consultation with the Crow Tribe with the objective to maintain existing snowmobile use, and place restrictions on those places with little but evolving snowmobile use that would conflict with high value Crow cultural areas. Alternative 7-M balances protection of the core high-country with opportunities for snowmobiling.

In the summer, motorized access was restricted to those trails with historic use, primarily tied to private land motorized access. It is my decision that the public should maintain a north-south motorized connector route on the west side. Trespass Trail has served that purpose historically. However, the “Lowline trail” serves to meet that public desire without the conflict that the Trespass Trail presents in regard with Crow cultural concerns. My decision, Alternative 7-M, balances historic motorized use, private land access and protection for the core high-country Crow cultural values.

**5. Social/Economic Effects.** There were a number of public comments received indicating concerns that changes in the management of travel on the Gallatin National Forest could have significant effects on the area economy. We produced an expanded economic analysis after the DEIS was published to more thoroughly address these concerns. This analysis has been included in Chapter 3 of the FEIS. Based on this discussion I have concluded that none of the Travel Management Plan alternatives would result in any notable effects to the local economy and therefore this was not a factor in my decision. I based this conclusion on the following:

- The economic activities related to the motorized and non-motorized recreation visitation to the Gallatin National Forest account for less than 1% of the total employment and labor income of the three county area (FEIS, page 3-123).
- The alternatives for the Travel Plan differ in the areas open or closed to motorized use in the winter and miles of road and trail open or closed to motorized and non-motorized summer uses. None of the alternatives I considered would eliminate recreation opportunities. I have concluded that the variations between alternatives are not large enough or significant enough to cause economic change. There is little evidence to suggest that changes in road, trail, and area closures on various parts of the National Forest will cause recreationists to reduce their visitation or choose not to use the National Forest for that activity.
- Both local and non-local recreation visits are increasing for both motorized and non-motorized activities. The non-local visitor is responsible for more of the economic effects than the local visitor (FEIS, page 3-122). Due to the continued population growth it is likely that local and non-local visitation will increase to the Gallatin National Forest regardless of my Travel Plan decision and consequently economic growth in this sector will continue.
- None of the Travel Plan Alternatives, except Alternative 6, significantly change the management of snowmobiling around the communities of Cooke City and West Yellowstone. Therefore future variations in snowmobile use and the related economic effects in these two heavily used areas would likely be caused by factors outside of the Travel Plan decisions.

**6. Enforcement.** During the initial comment period on the proposed Gallatin National Forest Travel Plan, numerous comments were received regarding the agency's ability to enforce travel management restrictions. There is wide skepticism among some users about the ability to make travel management restrictions effective due to the perceived limited ability of the agency to enforce restrictions. As a result, some indicated that more restrictions on motorized use were needed to reduce these enforcement problems.

There has been an increasing trend in the number of incidents, warnings and violations issued for motor vehicle-related types of violations between 1998 and 2003 (FEIS, pages 3-156 to 3-159). This is primarily due to speeding snowmobiles on groomed routes in the West Yellowstone area, and inappropriate OHV use of trails after the Montana/Dakota OHV decision (January, 2001), violations of 36 CFR 261.55(d). In 2003, over 450 violations occurred in this category, compared to only 70 in 1998 (id.). While some of these violations could be in blatant disregard to rules and regulations, many may be a result of (a) having more officers on duty in 2003 than in 1998 and/or (b) confusion or ignorance of the rules and regulations. The current Travel Plan that governs use of roads and trails on the Gallatin National Forest is a confusing mix of regulations and special closures, a large number of seasonal restrictions and complex map legends and

displays. The map is very difficult for some readers to understand and interpret. This situation contributes to innocent violations of travel restrictions.

My approach to resolving this problem is focused more on taking actions to improve compliance with the Travel Plan, rather than on enforcement alone. This includes such things as providing better maps, better signing, use guides, improved information and education, and a route configuration that minimizes trespass. I believe that these measures will go a long way to reducing violations regardless of the travel plan alternative I selected. In addition, the regulation at 36 CFR 261 was recently changed to relieve the Agency of the posting/signing requirements in order to enforce travel regulations. Map notification is now the only requirement which will improve the ability for citations to be held up in court.

In reviewing the discussion of this issue in Chapter 3 of the FEIS, I have concluded that Alternatives 3 through 7-M all provide more enforceable travel management scenarios than does Alternative 1 or the current situation. There are differences in how well each alternative ranks against criteria, but overall there are only minor differences between these alternatives from an enforceability perspective. There are pros and cons to each. Alternative 5 has fewer dead-end summer motorized routes, but it provides worse spatial distribution of opportunities close to towns and has fewer reasonable motorized loops or opportunities that would fulfill motorized users' recreation desires (see the FEIS, Issue 16: Recreation for a more thorough discussion of recreation opportunities, by alternative). Forest law enforcement officials concluded that Alternative 6 would be the most enforceable alternative for summer uses. It would provide clear direction on permissible uses and limit the complexity of closures and restrictions. It would also limit open summer motorized routes to smaller geographical areas, minimizing the amount of country that would need to be patrolled. However, it does not provide a broad mix of opportunities close to towns or motorized loops or routes providing satisfying opportunities for motorized trail users. I believe that the lack of motorized loops and longer routes would likely lead motorized users to trespass into restricted areas seeking longer opportunities.

Winter uses are slightly different in their enforceability. All alternatives adopt an "open unless managed closed" scenario for snowmobiles. The number of acres closed to snowmobiles, either yearlong or seasonally, would be highest under Alternatives 5 and 6. These alternatives would likely create enforcement issues by substantially limiting the available legal snowmobile terrain over current condition. Under Alternatives 3 through 7-M, additional closures in areas currently being used by snowmobilers would likely lead to enforcement issues, at least in the short term until the new closures were accepted by the public. Alternatives 5 and 6 would have the greatest number of acres closed to snowmobiling that are probable trespass terrain.

In conclusion, the issue of "Enforcement" was not a significant factor in my choice between alternatives. I chose Alternative 7-M for other reasons. I believe that the actions I intend to take during implementation of the Travel Plan will be the most effective approach to gaining compliance with travel regulations. In addition, there are other solutions that can be executed where-ever problems may arise. We can concentrate law enforcement personnel in those areas, establish temporary use restrictions, or even propose modifications to the Travel Plan for a more permanent solution if necessary.

**7. Fisheries and Aquatic Life.** My decision determines the various modes of travel that are permissible on Gallatin National Forest roads and trails, and for some uses, the off-route area

that would be available. The issues of water quality and fisheries definitely contributed to my choice not to select Alternative 1, which would permit off-route wheeled motorized travel. As evidenced by the discussion of these issues in Chapter 3 of the FEIS, off-route motorized use would increase the proliferation of user-built trails which can remove vegetation, expose bare soil and lead to increased sediment run-off and erosion. Beyond that, in choosing between Alternatives 2 through 7-M, I determined that the actual use, or mode of travel (e.g., motorized versus non-motorized) is inconsequential to water quality and fisheries. Rather, it is the facility itself (i.e., road or trail) that has potential to impact aquatic habitat and biota (FEIS, page 3-181). With the exception of a few specific routes, I found that any of Alternatives 2 through 7-M were acceptable in terms of the uses allowed on roads and trails. In my decision I responded to water quality and fisheries concerns primarily by adopting goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines (programmatic direction) for future route construction, reconstruction, maintenance and decommissioning. I established use restrictions only on a few specific trails with high erosion potential where it would not be cost-effective to attempt to move or reconstruct the facility to accommodate those uses.

I believe that the programmatic direction I've included in my decision (Alternative 7-M) will improve and protect aquatic habitats and biota. For example, Forest-wide Standard E-4 of my decision will give fishless streams and those with less significant fisheries a level of protection that ensures non-impairment. Potential future actions in all watersheds would be evaluated with respect to impacts on habitat connectivity, disturbance regimes, and organism meta-populations, again with the intent that actions would not lead to aquatic impairment. Forest-wide Standard E-5 was modified in Alternative 7-M to include language precluding construction of roads and trails within floodplains of rivers and streams, or wetlands, except at stream crossings, so that impacts would be reduced to riparian areas as well as rivers, streams, and wetlands.

My decision also adopts goals, objectives, standards and guidelines at the travel planning area scale where water quality and fisheries are of concern.

In the Bear Canyon Travel Planning Area my decision includes a goal (Goal 3) and an associated objective (Obj 3-1) to provide habitat for Yellowstone cutthroat trout in Trail Creek and provide for beneficial uses in Bear Creek. I've also adopted three standards (Standards 3-2, 3-3, and 3-4) that, in the short-term would: (1) Preclude ATV, motorcycle, mountain bike and horse use on Trail #440 until the facility is upgraded to a condition that alleviates sedimentation and water quality impacts. (2) Preclude summer ATV, motorcycle, mountain bike and horse use in the Bear Canyon drainage until the facilities are upgraded to a condition that alleviates sedimentation and water quality impacts. (3) Prohibits any off-route wheeled motorized vehicle travel including the 300 foot allowance for dispersed camping.

In the Cooke City Travel Planning Area my decision includes a goal (Goal 3) and two associated objectives (Obj. 3-1 and 3-2) to provide habitat for Yellowstone cutthroat trout in Soda Butte Creek and Goose Creek, and provide for beneficial uses in all other stream courses. Objective 3-1 gives us direction to "effectively close and stabilize all non-designated motorized routes to eliminate erosion and sedimentation." Objective 3-2 gives us direction to "implement a maintenance program on the Goose Lake Road, Sheep Basin Road and Kersey Lake Road to eliminate erosion and sedimentation." While objectives do not mandate that action be taken in a given time-frame, they are meaningful for developing annual programs of work and competing for funding.

In the Deer Creeks Travel Planning Area, to reduce impacts to Yellowstone cutthroat trout, my decision would allow motorcycle use of Lower Deer Creek Trail #5 between the junction with Trail #156 and the Deer Creek cabin only after the facility has been sufficiently modified to not allow degradation of Yellowstone cutthroat trout habitat. ATV use would be restricted along Trail #5 between Trail #256 and Deer Creek cabin, and again would only be allowed after the facility is sufficiently modified to not allow degradation of Yellowstone cutthroat trout habitat. On Trail #5 south of the cabin, motorized use would be restricted because crossings sufficient to reduce impacts to Yellowstone cutthroat trout would be difficult to construct.

In the Gallatin Roaded Travel Planning Area I've adopted a goal (Goal 3), three associated objectives (Objs. 3-1, 3-2 and 3-3) and a Standard (3-4) to provide habitat for westslope cutthroat trout in the West Fork of Wilson Creek and provide for beneficial uses in all other streams. The objectives target an increase in trout habitat for the West Fork of Wilson Creek to 90% of its potential habitat capability and the decommissioning/stabilization of old logging roads throughout the area to reduce sedimentation. The adopted standard precludes new road or trail construction or reconstruction in the West Fork of Wilson Creek drainage until trout habitat reaches 90% of its inherent capability.

In the Mission Creek Travel Planning Area, I've adopted a goal (Goal 3) and objective (Obj. 3-1) to provide Yellowstone cutthroat trout habitat in the Mill Fork of Mission Creek and to effectively close and/or restore non-system trails to non-erosive single track trails.

In the Shields Travel Planning Area I've adopted a goal (Goal 3) and objective (Obj. 3-1) to provide habitat for Yellowstone cutthroat trout in upper Shields River and Smith Creek watersheds. The objective is to reduce contributed sediment from the road and trail system in the upper Shields and Smith Creek watersheds to achieve Yellowstone cutthroat trout habitat at 90% of its potential habitat capability.

In the Taylor Fork Travel Planning Area I've adopted a goal (Goal 4), and two associated objectives (Objs. 4-1, and 4-2) to provide habitat for westslope cutthroat trout in Cache Creek and Buck Creek and provide for beneficial uses in all streams of the upper Taylor Fork above Eldridge Creek. The objectives target achievement of westslope cutthroat trout habitat at 90% of its potential habitat capability, removal of the stream as a "Water Quality Limited Segment" and the decommissioning of 25 miles of undesignated road in Cache Creek and Dead Horse Creek drainages.

In the Cabin Creek, East Boulder, East Crazies, Fairy Lake, Gallatin Crest, Gardiner Basin, Hyalite, Ibex, Lionhead, Mill Creek, Sawtooth, South Plateau, Tom Miner/Rock, and Yellowstone Travel Planning Areas I've also included a fisheries goal, but found that no specific actions were needed beyond the forest-wide goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines described above. The reason I included these goals is to bring attention to streams that provide habitat for Yellowstone and westslope cutthroat trout (classified as sensitive species by the Northern Regional Forester).

In the Bangtails Travel Planning Area, my preferred alternative (Alternative 7) in the DEIS proposed a standard stipulating that no new route construction could occur within this TPA until sediment delivery standards were met by decommissioning 12 miles of existing roads (DEIS,

Detailed Description of the Preferred Alternative, page II-16). It also included an objective (id.) to restore or stabilize up to 30 miles of road to further reduce sediment delivery to streams containing Yellowstone cutthroat trout. This past fiscal year, the Gallatin National Forest received funding to complete the decommissioning work in the Bangtails and a Decision Notice and Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for it in May 2006 (Bangtail Road Decommissioning Project EA and Decision Notice, May 24, 2006). Therefore my decision for a Travel Management Plan no longer includes this objective and standard.

Alternatives 2 through 6 proposed a guideline (Guideline A-11) that would establish blanket (forest-wide) spring restrictions on horse and mountain bike use, in addition to motorized uses, as a means of protecting facilities from damage during the wet freeze/thaw period. In my preferred alternative at the time (Alternative 7 of the DEIS) I also included this provision. Research used in the analysis of the fisheries issue (FEIS, Page 3-181) indicates that horses can have a higher potential to disturb soils and increase erosion than other uses and that was most of the basis for my preference. During the comment period on the DEIS however, I and members of my staff had a chance to speak with a number of stock users and they convinced me that blanket restrictions were not necessary. Their long history and experience riding on the Forest led me to the conclusion that it was more appropriate to include any needed restrictions on specific trails and then rely on increased information and education to deter travel when other trails are soft and prone to damage. The good point they had was that, if trails are wet and soft, they are also undesirable to ride. Thus there is a natural deterrent to using these trails. Therefore in my decision I've identified about a dozen specific trails where horses and mountain bikes would be restricted in the spring. In dropping the blanket restrictions however, I questioned whether we should also drop blanket spring restrictions on motorized use. My conclusion was to keep these in place as they currently are. I'm not convinced that wet/muddy conditions would be as much of a deterrent to ATVs and motorcycles as they are to horses and mountain bikes. I also found that there were other wildlife related issues (e.g. elk calving, bear den emergence) associated with spring motorized use that warrant these use restrictions.

There is a distinction between travel route effects and the effects of various modes of travel. In most cases, the actual use, or mode of travel (motorized versus non-motorized) is inconsequential. Rather, it is the facility (road or trail) that has the potential to impact aquatic habitat and biota. Water and sediment can concentrate on roads and trails during spring snowmelt runoff or periods of intense rain and be delivered to streams. With sufficient drainage, water and sediment from upland segments of trails and roads can be diverted off trails or roads, filtered through forest vegetation, and not routed to streams (FEIS, page 3-182). As such, upland segments of roads and trails can generally be designed to mitigate sediment delivery concerns.

With the adoption of the programmatic direction, seasonal restrictions and other components of Alternative 7-M discussed above, and based on a review of the predicted environmental impacts to fisheries disclosed on pages 3-177 to 3-213 of the FEIS, I have concluded that my decision will lead to improved fisheries habitat conditions across the Forest. The Big Sky Travel Planning Area is the only one that will not meet Gallatin Forest sediment guidelines (FEIS, pages 3-180 and 3-205). As disclosed, this is a result of extensive private land development and not Forest travel.

## **8. Forest Plan Amendments to Remove Existing Standards related to Travel**

**Management.** My decision amends the Gallatin Forest Plan to remove included direction related to travel. Removing this direction will not directly result in ground disturbance or environmental effect. However, because a few of these standards limit management activity or require maintenance of specific conditions, there was some public concern that their removal from the Forest Plan would allow the Forest Service to pursue actions that would result in greater adverse environmental effect. The standards of concern were:

### Forest-wide standard 6.a.4 (USDA 1987:II-18)

This standard states, *“The 1982 Elk Logging Study Annual Report contains procedures for analyzing elk habitat security as it is affected by timber harvest and road construction activities. An ‘elk effective cover’ analysis based on this report will be conducted for timber sales and effective cover ratings of at least 70 percent will be maintained during general hunting season.”*

The purpose of this standard was to maintain or improve elk habitat in conjunction with decisions for timber sales. The habitat effectiveness rating (HEI) used 2 variables to measure the quality of elk habitat, cover/forage ratio and open road density. Shortly after the Forest Plan was signed it was discovered that the cover variable was not scientifically supportable or logical. Therefore open road density became the only variable as long as cover remained above 40%. An HEI value of 70 percent equates to open road density of about 0.75 miles per square mile (FEIS, page 3-217). This standard has been problematic since the Forest Plan was signed. A more detailed discussion of these problems and the background can be found in the FEIS, pages 1-11, 1-12, 3-217 through 3-221, A-1 and A-2 and also Appendix G of the Darroch-Eagle Creek Timber Sale Environmental Assessment (1/2004). Among the problems are:

- 1) The cover curve associated with the habitat effectiveness model was found to actually compel more timber harvest than would be realistic or desired in a given area.
- 2) There was disagreement over the analysis area on which to calculate the habitat effectiveness index (HEI) and how to include highways, city streets, switch-backed and closely parallel roads, and roads on private land.
- 3) Application of this standard only during the general hunting season largely defeated the security benefits for elk.
- 4) In many areas, the existing (or baseline) HEI was already below 70% and it often was not possible or desirable to close enough motorized routes to meet the standard. Seven times so far, this has led to the standard being amended or proposed for amendment site-specifically in conjunction with timber sales.

My decision replaces this standard with specific decisions concerning motorized use in the Travel Management Plan. It also includes a new Travel Plan standard that restricts any increase in public motorized routes beyond those identified in the Travel Plan (see Forest-wide Standard M-8 in the “Detailed Description of the Decision”). Table 3.8.1 of the FEIS displays the habitat effectiveness ratings that result from Alternative 7-M, my selected alternative. This table shows that HEI will actually improve over existing conditions in a number of TPAs across the Forest. In building a travel management plan that balances the needs of wildlife with opportunities for motorized recreation and access I believe that this is as good as it can be. I also have concluded that habitat for elk and other big game is and will remain more than adequate on the Gallatin National Forest (see my discussion of the Big Game issue earlier in this section). Lastly, I want to point out that amending this standard out of the Forest Plan does not mean that the 1982 Elk

Logging Study or calculation of HEI will no longer be used. It will remain an appropriate tool for analyzing the effects of proposed timber sales and road construction activities.

### Forest Plan Management Area Standards for the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (Forest Plan, Chapter III)

Within the management area (MA) direction of the Forest Plan, my decision removes standards that direct recreation use to be managed to meet certain “Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)” classes. ROS is an indicator of the recreation setting provided and is affected by the presence or lack of roads and motorized trails. There are two principle reasons for this amendment. First, the Forest Plan management areas are not place-based; they are scattered throughout the Forest and there may be a number of different Management Areas within a given drainage. Managing for different ROS classes within the same general area is not practical or desirable. Second, changes in public recreation demand have led to a need to consider changes in the current recreation settings being provided.

Public comments included concern that removing these standards would allow managers to add motorized routes without considering the effects they might have on the broader recreation setting. To address this concern initially my proposal was to replace ROS standards with objectives for “miles of opportunity” within each travel planning area (TPA) (See Objectives 1-1(a) for Alternatives 2 through 6 under each travel planning area in Chapter II of the “Detailed Description of Alternatives”). This would have established a targeted amount of opportunity by TPA for motorized and non-motorized travel which, at the time, I felt would have been less open to interpretation than ROS. Since release of the DEIS however, many in my staff convinced me that establishing a targeted level of opportunity using “miles” was much too specific at the travel planning area scale. Therefore, in my decision I’ve included the mileage table forest-wide (Objective A-1), and included different objectives by TPA, Objective 1-1(b) for summer, and 2-1(b) for winter, that direct consideration of the targeted recreation setting (i.e. the ROS map) for any future proposals to change the uses specified.

The FEIS (page 3-222) indicates including a standard that zones the Forest to provide and maintain certain recreation settings (ROS) could make potential future changes in travel management more difficult. While I’m not anticipating changes in the foreseeable future, my decision moots this concern by including it as an “objective” rather than a “standard”. An objective identifies a targeted condition that we wish to maintain or achieve whereas a standard is a binding limitation on management activity. In other words a ROS standard could be problematic if there was an identified need for additional motorized use restrictions. As an objective it becomes a consideration in evaluating the trade-offs.

### Forest Plan Management Area 11, Habitat Effectiveness Standard

Management Area 11 of the Forest Plan contains a standard to: *“Implement road use restrictions to achieve an elk habitat effectiveness level of at least 60% or a specified elk hunter opportunity objective.”* There is a need to remove this standard for the same reasons as discussed for the forest-wide standard to maintain elk effective cover ratings of 70% (Forest Plan standard 6.a.4, USDA 1987: II-18). Note that this Management Area Standard has always been moot because the Forest-wide standard was more restrictive.

## Other Forest Plan Direction

One reason for removing other existing Forest Plan direction relative to travel management is that it was not well written. Goals, objectives, standards and guidelines (see the definitions in the Glossary) were used interchangeably. Many of the “standards” in the current Forest Plan reflect a belief of Forest managers during the 1980s that once the Forest Plan EIS was completed, NEPA requirements were met for all subsequent management activity covered by the Plan. In other words, it was believed that the Forest Plan would be the one and only decision level. It was later established that there was a need for a second decision level, subject to NEPA, for making decisions for final agency actions. A “standard” should be an expression of a binding limitation on future actions that may be proposed. Many of the current standards I’m removing are not written as “binding limitations” rather they are written as decisions designed to permit categories of activity. These standards are now inappropriate and should be removed as Forest Plan direction.

Other standards are being removed because they are outdated and do not provide any meaningful direction. The current Gallatin Forest Plan was the first one prepared on this Forest under the National Forest Management Act (NFMA). At that time, Forest managers believed it was important to inform the public of existing policies even though they did not set specific objectives to be achieved or standards that would establish sideboards on management action.

For example, Forest-wide standard 16.h. (USDA 1987:II-28) pertaining to eligible Wild and Scenic River segments states that *“motorized travel on land or water may be permitted, prohibited or restricted. Controls will usually be similar to surrounding lands and waters.”* It is apparent that this standard provides no direction at all. Any action would be consistent with this standard and therefore it is unnecessary.

Another example is Forest-wide standard 12.b.5 (USDA 1987:II-27), which states, *“Rights-of-way across National Forest lands will be granted in situations involving a statutory right of access, subject to compliance with applicable rules and regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture.”* This statement is redundant to that established by law, regulation, and policy. There is no need for the Forest Plan to simply state that laws, rules and regulations will be followed.

The travel planning process has provided an opportunity to remove these unnecessary and redundant statements related to travel management from the Forest Plan.

Several Forest Plan standards I’m removing in this decision establish procedures to follow or specific publications to use in evaluating the effects of proposed actions. In implementing the Forest Plan it was learned that this type of direction is inappropriate because analysis processes change rapidly and often new, better information becomes available.

For example, Forest-wide standard 13.1 (USDA 1987: II-27), states, *“Analysis for transportation needs will be integrated into resource area analysis and will be completed prior to transportation project work.”* I’m amending this direction out of the Forest Plan because the “Resource Area Analysis” (RAA) process is no longer used. RAA was a process unique to the Gallatin National Forest used during the 1980s. It was developed in attempt to meet the requirements of NEPA for multiple projects within a given area. Subsequent appeals of

decisions made through this process however showed that it was not legally sufficient to meet some of the specific requirements of NEPA and therefore was discontinued. Today, transportation system proposals would be evaluated through an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

Another example is Forest-wide standard 6.a.2 (USDA 1987:II-17), that directs that the recommendations and guidelines found in the publication, “Coordinating Elk and Timber Management, Final Report of the Montana Cooperative Elk-Logging Study 1970-1985” will be used in evaluating and formulating prescriptions for timber sales and road development projects. While this report is still useful, when new information becomes available this publication may no longer be applicable in certain situations and therefore the Forest Plan should not direct that it be used. NEPA requires federal agencies to use accurate scientific analysis in evaluating impacts of proposed actions (40 CFR 1500.1). They must also consider and disclose research and other information that may or may not support the same conclusions. Removing this standard from the Forest Plan will allow Forest Service biologists to select and use the scientific publications that best predicts environmental effect.

It should be noted that many of the standards I’m removing are statements of good intention regarding protection of the environment. For example, there may be direction to manage the road and trail system such that it minimizes sediment delivery to area streams or such that it provides for good wildlife habitat. Amendment of the Plan to remove these standards is not because I disagree with these principles, it is simply because the wording of the direction is not consistent with what a standard should be. Again, a “standard” should be a binding limitation on management activity. It must be specific such that compliance can be precisely measured. As stated above new standards are being proposed as part of this Travel Plan.

For more detailed discussion of the reasons for my amendment decisions please refer to the FEIS, Chapter 1 (pages 1-11 through 1-14), Appendix A, and the discussion of this issue in Chapter 3 (pages 3-214 through 3-224).

**9. General Wildlife.** This issue was addressed in the FEIS to help me and other readers understand the potential effects of recreation travel on wildlife in general. Species of special interest were addressed as separate issues and my conclusions on these are addressed throughout this section. What I’ve been able to conclude from reviewing the General Wildlife section of the FEIS is that the more restrictive on human use of the Forest I would get with my Travel Plan decision, the better it would be for wildlife. However, I could not identify a specific threshold, or breakpoint, among the range of alternatives in which the prescribed level of recreation opportunity would become acceptable or unacceptable to me. Also, while the analysis seems to indicate that motorized uses would have greater adverse effects than non-motorized uses, there are few studies available that have addressed the potential effects of the latter. From the studies that are available it would seem that non-motorized use can also have adverse effects to wildlife.

There are three facets to this issue: A. The potential for direct wildlife mortality due to collisions with vehicles on Forest roads and trails. B. The direct loss of habitat due to the presence of road and trail prisms. C. The indirect loss of habitat through wildlife displacement from human activity associated with roads and trails. I found the first two facets of this issue to be non-significant. Direct mortality to wildlife from collision is an issue mostly with high speed roads such as federal highways (FEIS, page 3-226). Gallatin National Forest roads and trails are all

low speed routes and it is believed that there is very low vehicle-caused mortality on Forest Service roads and trails. The direct habitat lost (i.e. vegetation loss) due to the presences of road and trail prisms amounts to less than 1 % of the Forest and therefore this is a minor effect under all alternatives (FEIS, page 3-233). This is also an effect that relates to the actual footprint of roads and trails and does not vary based on the types of uses designated for those routes. That leaves wildlife displacement from human activity as the primary factor I considered relative to this issue in weighing the alternatives.

To address wildlife displacement, the analysis (FEIS, Chapter 3) used a 1 km buffer on each side of both motorized and non-motorized routes (FEIS, page 3-234). The percent of each travel planning area untouched by the 2 km footprint of these routes was then identified as “core” habitat for wildlife. What this analysis shows is that core habitat for the Gallatin Forest, including Wilderness acreage, ranges from 58-79% core (medium to medium-high) under all of the seven alternatives considering motorized routes only (FEIS, Fig. 3.9.7 and Table 3.9.3). Alternative 7-M would increase core over the existing condition (Alternatives 1 and 2), and Alternatives 5 and 6 generally have the highest percentage of core of any alternatives. With both motorized and non-motorized routes counted, the percentage of core is virtually the same across all alternatives. As with other issues, I found Alternative 1 to be unacceptable because it would allow for a proliferation of motorized use beyond what exists today. This unmanaged situation in my view could eventually lead to detrimental effects on wildlife populations as user built routes are created, further reducing the amount of core habitat over time. Beyond that I found no basis to conclude that 58% core (as shown in Table 3.9.3 for motorized routes under Alternative 1) was too low. Therefore the remaining alternatives, Alternatives 2 through 7-M (which maintains or increases the amount of core habitat) were acceptable to me as it specifically relates to this issue. I drew similar conclusions considering the values in Table 3.9.3 with wilderness acreage excluded.

Similar to my conclusions regarding big game earlier in this section, the General Wildlife analysis in Chapter 3 of the FEIS basically shows that the more restrictive one gets on human travel within the Gallatin National Forest, the better it is for wildlife. It’s important not to look at the effects of the travel plan alternatives on wildlife in a vacuum. Cumulatively, management actions unrelated to the Travel Plan over the last 20 years or so, such as our land acquisition program, road closures, and the grizzly bear food storage order, have improved wildlife habitat substantially. I see this trend continuing into the future. My decision adopts a number of goals, objectives, standards and guidelines that will be of benefit to a number of wildlife species as future management activities are undertaken. Refer to the FEIS, pages 3-245 through 3-249, for a discussion of these projected benefits. I believe that wildlife populations on the Gallatin National Forest as a whole are healthy and therefore found any of Alternatives 2 through 7-M for a travel management plan to be acceptable as they relate to this issue.

**10. Grizzly Bear.** The issue of travel management is important to the conservation of the grizzly bear, a species currently listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The grizzly bear is known to be sensitive to the effects of access management, especially as related to motorized use (FEIS, page 3-255). Grizzly bears tend to avoid areas used by motorized vehicles. This issue was influential in the development of alternatives for a travel management plan. To help meet the goal of grizzly bear recovery, the Gallatin National Forest is guided by Forest Plan Amendment 19 which captures the direction given by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in their 1995 Biological Opinion on the Forest Plan (FEIS, page 3-255). The crux of

Amendment 19 is that the Forest would manage human motorized access in the Recovery Zone (Primary Conservation Area, ICST 2003) to help meet the goal of grizzly bear recovery. Yellowstone Park access standards were to be adopted when they become available. In the interim, the Forest would manage bear subunits (unless allowed through consultation with the USFWS) for:

- A. No increase in open motorized access route density (OMARD) from the current level.
- B. No increase in total motorized access route density (TMARD) from the current level.
- C. No decrease in secure area from the current level.

In addition, applicable direction is based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a Conservation Agreement (CA) with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). See MOU, Conservation Strategy (ICST 2003:12-13). The Conservation Strategy for Grizzly Bear in the Yellowstone Ecosystem (ICST 2003) was developed by the Interagency Conservation Strategy Team and completed in March 2003. The three Regional Foresters managing Forests in the Greater Yellowstone Area, the three Directors of State Fish and Game agencies and Bureau of Land Management signed a Memorandum of Understanding (ICST 2003:12-13) to seek implementation of the Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy. The Conservation Strategy has recently gone through a NEPA analysis as an amendment to the Forest Plans of Greater Yellowstone area national forests (USDA Forest Service, April 2006). It replaces most, if not all, of their current Forest Plan direction for grizzly bears.

The above direction was used as criteria in developing Alternatives 3 through 7-M for a travel management plan. In other words, each of these alternatives was designed to be consistent with Amendment 19, and the MOU with the USFWS. Since the grizzly bear is protected under the Endangered Species Act I considered this to be a limitation on my decision space. To not do so would have rendered these alternatives un-selectable. Alternative 2 is also consistent with this direction, not so much by design, but because it locks in place current travel patterns and therefore does not increase motorized route density. Alternative 1 would allow off-route motorized travel and thus a proliferation of use that would not be consistent with either Amendment 19 or the MOU with the USFWS. For this reason in part, Alternative 1 is not an acceptable alternative to me.

Beyond that, my decision was based on projected impacts to the bear in three subunits designated as needing improvement: Henry's Lake #2, Gallatin #3 and Madison #2 (FEIS, page 3-256). These lie at least partially on the Gallatin National Forest.

The Gallatin #3 subunit falls in the southern Gallatin Mountain Range and currently has about 55% secure habitat. Secure habitat would increase to about 60% under Alternatives 2 and 3, 62% under Alternative 4, 72% under Alternative 5, 81% under Alternative 6, and 70% under Alternative 7-M (FEIS, pages 3-285 and 3-286). Alternatives 5, 6, and 7-M offer substantial improvement in the security of this subunit. Under Alternative 7-M, my selected alternative, the improvement is primarily due to the removal of motorized use from the southern part of the subunit and the reduction in motorized use on the east side of the Gallatin Crest. This creates two fairly large pieces of secure habitat. While Alternatives 5 and 6 were somewhat better, I was not willing to prohibit motorcycle use of Trail #120, because that route is part of a trail system that connects the Paradise Valley to Gallatin Canyon and provides the only motorized access from the east into the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area.

The Madison #2 subunit generally encompasses the Hebgen Lake Basin and currently has about 67% secure habitat (FEIS, pages 3-291 and 3-292). This would increase to about 72% under Alternatives 2 through 7-M (id.). There is little difference between alternatives in this area and I found that there was limited opportunity to increase secure habitat further. Grizzly bears face a higher risk of conflict with humans here than in many other subunits due to private dwellings and attractants. Given the inherent low habitat value, the attractants available, and mortality risk to bears, I believe that additional restrictions on travel (increase in secure habitat) would be of questionable benefit. The Hebgen Lake area is also a heavily used recreation area for both local residents and tourists. Maintaining roaded motorized recreation opportunities in this area was of high importance to me in making my decision.

Henry's Lake #2 subunit generally lies in the southern half the Henry's Lake Mountain Range and includes the southeast portion of the Lionhead Travel Planning Area. It currently has about 53% secure habitat (FEIS, pages 3-294 and 3-295). This improves to about 58-59% under Alternatives 2 through 4, to about 65% for Alternative 5, 68% for Alternative 6, and 63% for Alternative 7-M (id.). Similar to the Madison #2 subunit this is a heavily used area and maintaining motorized recreation opportunities was important to me in making my decision.

To summarize the rationale I had for my decision for travel management within the above 3 subunits I would say that my objective was to improve secure habitat as much as possible without taking away roads and trails that are important for vehicular access or popular for motorized use. In my judgment, Alternatives 2 through 4 did not go far enough in improving secure habitat, while Alternatives 5 and 6 were too restrictive on motorized recreation.

All other Grizzly Bear subunits on the Gallatin National Forest either remain the same that they are at the present time or have increased secure habitat under Alternatives 2 through 7-M (FEIS, pages 3-298 through 3-300). For these areas I found any of the alternatives, except for Alternative 1, to be acceptable in terms of the predicted effects to the grizzly bear. Again, Alternative 1 would allow off-route motorized travel and thus a proliferation of use that would not be consistent with either Amendment 19 or the MOU with the USFWS.

I also considered the impacts of non-motorized summer travel and winter uses in making my decision, but based on the analysis disclosed on pages 3-269 through 3-275 and 3-300 through 3-307 of the FEIS I concluded that these were not significant issues.

My decision also includes programmatic direction (goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines) that are designed to maintain and/or improve wildlife habitat in conjunction with future management activities. Two objectives in particular I believe will be of benefit to the grizzly bear over time. These are Forest-wide Objectives D-1 and D-2 of my decision (Objectives C-1 and C-2 of Alternatives 2 through 6). These objectives target the effective closure of roads and trails that are in excess to administrative, recreation and access needs. Other direction that I've included will also benefit the bear. Refer to pages 3-322 through 3-327 of the FEIS for discussion of this direction.

Alternatives 2 through 6, and Alternative 7 of the DEIS, proposed additional direction for grizzly bears that I chose not to include in my decision (Alternative 7-M). This direction includes proposed Objective F-2 and Standard F-3 and are described on pages I-16 and I-17 of the

“Detailed Description of Alternatives”. This direction was proposed in anticipation of what could emerge as direction from the proposed Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy Amendments to Yellowstone Area forest plans. I determined that this was inappropriate. If I were to adopt this direction in the Travel Plan, and the Amendment decision was different, then the Travel Management Plan may have to be changed. Even if I was to adopt this direction and the Amendment decision was identical, at best it would be redundant. Therefore, in the interim I have decided to follow Forest Plan Amendment 19 (1995) and the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Conservation Agreement with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. See MOU, Conservation Strategy (ICST 2003:12-13), the USFWS Biological Opinion on Access (1995).

My decision also includes an objective and standard that provides direction for the review of proposals for backcountry airstrips (Forest-wide Objective A-6 and Standard A-7). This is a variation of the objective that was included in Alternative 3 of both the Draft and Final EIS (Objective A-6). I’ve adopted and modified this direction to potentially provide an opportunity for backcountry landings while establishing where and under what conditions these will be considered. Different from Objective A-6 of Alternative 3, my decision precludes consideration of such proposals within the Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone.

In conclusion, I have found that any of Alternatives 2 through 7-M, all improve conditions for the grizzly bear over the current situation, but that Alternatives 5, 6 and 7-M are superior in providing increased habitat security. These alternatives take the strongest measures to limit motorized use and protect connectivity. In addition to the rationale I’ve discussed above, Alternatives 5 through 7-M would better provide for the protection and propagation of wildlife in the Cabin Creek Recreation and Wildlife Management Area compared to Alternatives 1-4. Alternatives 5 through 7-M would reduce disturbance, displacement, and mortality risk for grizzly bears by restricting ATV on all but small portions of Trails #68 and 203.

**11. Transportation System Implementability.** The Gallatin National Forest transportation system consists of over 2,100 miles of road and 2,800 miles of summer and winter trails. The transportation system provides recreation opportunities within the National Forest, provides access for forest management and protection, and provides access to private land inholdings. The analysis of this issue in the EIS addresses the predicted schedule, costs and physical changes necessary to implement each of the Travel Plan alternatives. In making my decision I wanted to be sure that my selected alternative was reasonable to implement. After all, it would make little sense to adopt a travel management plan that is too costly or that could not be accomplished in a reasonable time frame. Based on a review of this section in Chapter 3 of the EIS, I have determined that any of Alternatives 2 through 7-M are reasonable to implement. Alternative 1 would be disproportionately laborious and costly. For most issues this Alternative reflects the predicted effects that could be anticipated under a “no action” (no travel plan) scenario. A conscious decision to select Alternative 1 however reasons that all routes that were legally open to motorized uses prior to the imposition of the Montana/Dakota OHV decision (January 2001), will in fact be converted into ATV routes. Since many of the trails outside the Wilderness are open to motorized uses, most would have to be rebuilt to accommodate ATVs. Under “no action” these costs would not be incurred.

Alternatives 2 through 5 and 7-M (my selected alternative) would take between 4 to 6 years to rebuild and open routes to designated uses (FEIS, page 3-340). Alternatives 5 and 6 would take

less time and be less costly because they include fewer routes that would be opened to ATV use. For a 15 to 20-year Travel Plan, I believed that 4 to 6 years is a reasonable time frame for implementation and therefore all alternatives except for Alternative 1 were acceptable.

**12. Invasive Weeds.** Invasive weeds are plants that are either legally declared “noxious” weeds by the State of Montana, or other non-native plants that are aggressively spreading throughout the ecosystem. I am concerned about the spread of invasive weeds because they can alter the native plant species composition resulting in a decrease in habitat quality for wildlife and livestock, an increase in sediment levels of streams, and a decrease in aesthetic/recreational quality (FEIS, page 3-350). On the Gallatin Forest, the majority of mapped weeds are adjacent to motorized travel routes (FEIS, page 3-352). According to the Gallatin weed survey data as of 2002, 53 percent of the weed patches are within 100 feet of motorized Forest Service routes, and 65 percent when including state highways within the Gallatin Forest boundary, with only 3 percent on non-motorized routes (id.). Given that, I’m pleased that my decision (Alternative 7-M) ranks low in the amount of area impacted with motorized routes in areas with existing weeds among the range of alternatives (FEIS, Table 3.12.3). This table also shows that Alternative 7-M will result in the lowest amount of motorized route corridor (200 foot buffer) intersecting areas at high risk of leafy spurge. Leafy spurge is of concern because they have deep rhizomatous roots and are difficult to control (FEIS, page 3-355). There is also an abundance of high risk habitat to this species within the Gallatin National Forest and it is rated high-risk in 15 different types of plant communities (id.).

That being said I cannot claim that this issue was significant in my choice among the seven alternatives. While the analysis of this issue in Chapter 3 of the EIS provides evidence that the alternatives with lower mileage of motorized routes are better, I could not identify a clear break-point that would allow me to separate acceptable alternatives from unacceptable ones. Invasive weeds are a much greater problem than simply an issue over motorized use of the roads and trails on the Gallatin National Forest. In this larger context it would be disingenuous for me to say that the amount of motorized route in Alternatives 1 through 4 was unacceptable due to the risk of weed spread, whereas the amount of motorized route in Alternative 7-M was somehow okay. I’m also not willing to say that non-motorized types of travel don’t also pose some risk of weed spread. The bottom line is that controlling invasive weeds is an ongoing effort that requires cooperation of multiple agencies, organizations and private landowners. We will continue to do our part as I described in my recent Record of Decision for The Gallatin National Forest Noxious and Invasive Weed Treatment Project (June 2005).

**13. Lynx.** The Canada lynx was listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act in March 2000. Lynx have been documented, historically and currently, throughout the Rocky Mountains of Montana. Lynx are considered a potential and confirmed resident of occupied habitat on the Gallatin Forest. Lynx have been trapped here as recently as 1997 (FEIS, page 3-362). Trapping records beginning in 1978 indicate that approximately 20 individual lynx were legally trapped before Mt FWP’s change in trapping regulations in the winter of 2000-2001 to exclude the capture of lynx (id.). No incidental take of lynx has been reported since the closure.

In making my decision for the Travel Management Plan, I relied on the analysis of how the alternatives compared to conservation measures contained in the Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy (LCAS) (FEIS, pages 3-363 through 3-367). The LCAS is the primary basis for determining effects to lynx. There are no specific methodologies for determining

effects to lynx other than guidelines and standards identified in the LCAS (FEIS, page 3-363). A Conservation Agreement between the US Forest Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service committed the Forest Service to consider recommendations in the LCAS when determining the effects of actions on lynx. Primary concerns for travel management include open road density (ORD), landscape scale connectivity of lynx habitat, and the potential for competing predators to utilize packed snow routes for access into areas normally only accessible to lynx.

There are no recommended thresholds for lynx in the literature in terms of open road density (ORD); however, roads may pose a risk (illegal or non-target trapping, accidental vehicle death, or illegal shooting) to the reproduction and/or survival of lynx within a particular home range. The LCAS provides a programmatic guideline for Forest backcountry roads and trails relative to road density at 2 mi/sq mi. Table 3.13.5 of the FEIS demonstrates that none of the travel plan alternatives would result in an ORD of over 2 mi./sq. mi. for any lynx analysis unit (LAU). Forest-wide, Alts. 1 through 4 maintain ORD at 0.8 mi/sq mi; Alts. 5 and 7-M reduce it to 0.7 mi/sq mi; and Alt 6 drops it to 0.6 mi/sq mi. Also, in a recently published Federal Register (USDI 2003) that addressed potential threats to lynx, the US Fish and Wildlife Service concluded that the threat to lynx populations from high traffic volume on roads that bisect suitable lynx habitat is low. Therefore this parameter was not a factor in my decision.

Relative to the parameter of landscape scale connectivity, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USDI 2003) asserts that no information currently exists to determine the level at which traffic volume or roadway design may influence or create an impediment to lynx movement (FEIS, page 3-374). They addressed potential threats to lynx and concluded that the threat to lynx populations from high traffic volume on roads that bisect suitable lynx habitat and associated suburban developments is low. In addition, they concluded that there is low threat to the contiguous United States lynx population to maintain connectivity between habitats in Canada and the United States. They state their belief that all historic habitats, including boreal forest that exists in patches or is of marginal quality, is still available to dispersing lynx except for areas where development has encroached on the boreal forest or is isolated from source lynx populations. Generally speaking, lynx habitat and grass/shrubland or riparian habitat serving as interconnected blocks between lynx habitat would improve with the implementation of Alternatives 2 through 7-M, due to the restriction of travel to designated routes and subsequent reduction in road and trail density. Therefore this parameter was also not a factor in my choice among alternatives.

Predicted effects to lynx during the winter did influence my decision. Deep, low-density snow allows lynx to exploit higher elevation areas during winter that typically exclude competitors such as coyotes, bobcats, and mountain lions (FEIS, page 3-371). These potential competitors cannot compete under deep, low-density snow conditions because of the physical anatomy of the size of their body and feet. Availability of compacted snowmobile trails may provide other predators, especially coyotes, access to lynx habitat during annual periods of deep snow that facilitates competition for primary prey (snowshoe hare) predation opportunities or by directly killing lynx. The subsequent decrease in snowshoe hare numbers available to lynx may negatively affect lynx distribution and abundance. Despite current research, there continues to be no solid, consistent data on the role of competition between lynx and other species. Despite the activity that causes effects to lynx during the winter, they may cause lynx to expend energy beyond their caloric intake, decreasing natality and increasing mortality. The LCAS specifies that, on federal lands in lynx habitat, there should be no net increase in groomed or designated

over-the-snow routes and designated snowmobile play areas by LAU unless the designation serves to consolidate unregulated use and improves lynx habitat through a net reduction of compacted snow area.

Table 3.13.8 of the FEIS displays compliance by LAU with the LCAS. See Figure 3.13.1 of the FEIS for an index map of LAU's on the Gallatin National Forest. In terms of compacted snow area the table and associated discussion shows that Alternative 2 would not be consistent with the LCAS in the Bridger/Bangtails and East Gallatin LAU's. Alternative 3 would not be consistent with the LCAS in the Bridger/Bangtails, East Gallatin, Emigrant, Henry's Lake, N. Gallatin, S. Fork Madison, Upper Gallatin, West Crazies and West Gallatin LAU's. Alternative 4 would not be consistent with the LCAS in the Bridger/Bangtails, Emigrant, N. Gallatin, S. Fork Madison, West Crazies and West Gallatin LAUs. Alternative 6 would not meet the LCAS for the West Crazies LAU. Alternatives 1, 5, and 7-M remain consistent with the LCAS in terms of over-snow compaction. However, Alternative 1 may add direct, indirect and cumulative effects to the existing situation. Assuming human recreational activities increase in the future, this alternative has the most potential to affect lynx long term. There is no reasonable logistical way to deter an increase in snowmobile use without designating routes with area closures as proposed in Alternatives 2 through 7-M. Snowmobile and ski accessible areas would continue to increase where land topography, snow conditions, and increased technology make it feasible. Alternatives 5 and 7-M were my preferred alternatives for winter travel due, in part, to the fact that they would be consistent with the LCAS.

My decision includes a Forest-wide goal (Goal F) that will serve to highlight and potentially protect those areas considered important to lynx movement (i.e. corridors). Otherwise, there is no specific programmatic management direction for lynx. The Gallatin Forest is obligated to meet the current direction for lynx, whether in the LCAS or revised LCAS, until such time that the proposed Northern Rockies Lynx Amendment supercedes it. A Conservation Agreement between the Forest Service and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Agreement #00-MU-11015600-013) committed the Forest Service to use the LCAS when considering the effects of actions on lynx until the Forest Plans are amended (USDI 2005). Therefore I determined that it was not necessary to include programmatic direction for lynx in the Travel Plan.

**14. Migratory Birds.** Many bird species are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (16 USC 703-711). A January 2001 Executive Order requires agencies to ensure that environmental analyses evaluate the effects of federal actions and agency plans on migratory birds, with emphasis on species of concern. Over 200 species of migratory birds inhabit the Gallatin National Forest at some stage in their life cycle (Cherry 1993). Migratory birds are very diverse and include raptors, waterfowl, shore birds, game birds and songbirds. They are an extremely diverse group, and as such, occupy all types of habitat available on the Gallatin Forest, including lakes, streams, wetlands, riparian areas, grasslands, shrub lands, deciduous forest, coniferous forest, mixed forest, recently burned forest, alpine tundra, rock outcrops and sheer cliff walls. Human access and travel can affect migratory birds primarily through disturbance.

This issue was not a factor in my choice among alternatives except that it provides additional support for not allowing off-route summer motorized travel as would occur under Alternative 1. Travel management actions can have adverse effects on some species, while being neutral, or benefiting others (FEIS, page 3-397). Generally speaking, habitat alterations associated with road and trail corridors will typically benefit more generalist species, and have negative impacts

on habitat specialists (id.). As with other species, birds can be disturbed by noise and human presence within the Forest. However, birds are able to adapt and habituate more quickly to mechanical (or motorized) noise than to human presence (FEIS, page 3-404). Therefore, non-motorized use on and off trails may be a more severe disturbance factor for some birds than motorized travel restricted to designated routes. None of the alternatives restrict hiking or cross-country skiing, and there are limited restrictions on stock use. Therefore I was unable to conclude that any one alternative would be better than the others in terms of their potential effects to migratory birds. Alternative 1 is somewhat less desirable because it would allow proliferation of motorized use leading to additional user created roads and trails and easier access to areas that otherwise may not see much use. In Alternatives 2 through 7-M, motorized travel would be restricted to designated routes. Project roads and user-built routes would be closed to public motorized use. Road widths and levels of roadside treatment would not likely vary greatly between alternatives. Alternatives 2 through 7-M would also reduce the overall miles of road corridor from the existing condition. Road closures under these alternatives would result in vegetative regrowth, eventually reducing or eliminating habitat modification effects in some places across the Forest, whereas most existing road corridors would be expected to remain under Alternative 1.

Based on the analysis of this issue disclosed in Chapter 3 of the FEIS I recognize that human access and travel has adverse effects on many bird species. Travel management activities clearly can have adverse effects on migratory birds, and all alternatives have the potential for causing negative impacts to individual birds. However, there is no evidence that Gallatin Forest travel management activities alone have had adverse effects at the population level for any migratory bird species (FEIS, page 3-405). Alternatives 2 through 7-M all include proactive measures that would facilitate restoration and enhancement of bird habitat through elimination of unacceptable travel routes in key habitats, implementation of seasonal restrictions in some areas, and establishment of goals, objectives, standards and guidelines that would facilitate the protection, restoration and enhancement of important nesting areas (see the FEIS, pages 3-408 through 3-411 for a discussion of this programmatic direction). To further improve habitat for migratory birds would require restrictions on all types of human use of the Forest. Bird watching is one of the most often-cited activities participated in by recreationists on National Forest System lands (FEIS, page 3-408). The Travel Plan will facilitate access to bird watching opportunities.

**15. Noise.** An issue raised during comment periods was the impact that noise from off-highway vehicles (OHVs), snowmobiles and other motorized vehicles have on the quality of people's recreation experience. Noise from motorcycles, ATVs and snowmobiles in particular can detract from the natural setting some users have come to the Forest to enjoy.

Noise from OHV's and snowmobiles was a factor in my decision. Many people enjoy recreating on public land to escape the noise of modern civilization. The natural soundscape and tranquility is a condition that they seek as part of their recreational experience. Alternatives 4 through 7-M were designed to cluster motorized use areas, concentrating the total area potentially affected by noise from recreational vehicles. Alternative 1 would allow off-route summer motorized use and Alternative 2 would, in general, manage travel for summer motorized use as it is today. Alternative 3 also favors motorized use of the trail system. Earlier in this ROD I outlined my four principle decision criteria. My first two criteria were to: (a) provide well-distributed opportunities for both OHV's and exclusive non-motorized uses of the trail system outside of Wilderness and (b) to provide well-distributed opportunities for both snowmobiling and

exclusive, quiet non-motorized cross-country skiing and snow-shoeing. Alternatives 1 through 3 did not meet these criteria as well as Alternatives 4 through 7-M in my view.

Many comments from motorized users suggested that if non-motorized users were seeking solitude and tranquility, that they should use trails in Yellowstone National Park and designated Wilderness. They felt that it was unfair to impose additional motorized use restrictions in non-Wilderness areas of the Gallatin National Forest. This concept was not acceptable to me because I don't believe that our Wilderness areas satisfy the demand for half-day and evening hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking opportunities in a non-motorized setting within a reasonable travel distance from area communities. Also, based on the discussion in the Recreation section of the FEIS (Page 3-420), I have concluded that the demand for non-motorized recreation opportunities will exceed the demand for motorized uses, particularly in the summer. In addition, the non-motorized user's experience is more impacted by motorized use than vice versa. Again, my objective is to provide a balance of opportunities for Forest users. To me, a 50/50 split of area or route miles allocated to motorized and non-motorized uses does not achieve that goal.

Some commenters also suggested mitigation to resolve the noise issue rather than motorized use restrictions. The first suggestion was to impose noise restrictions on trail vehicles. This option was considered and addressed in Chapter 2 of the FEIS (Page 2-29). Noise is regulated in Montana on public lands by Montana State Code 61-9-418. This law states that all motorcycles or quadricycles operated on streets and highways in the state shall be equipped with noise suppression devices at all times. Forest roads and trails are considered public ways under this law, and are covered by this requirement. However noise infractions have been difficult to enforce (FEIS, page 3-414) and I don't believe that simply reducing motor vehicle noise is sufficient to provide the types of experiences most non-motorized users are looking for.

Another suggestion was time-share whereby trails could be opened to motorized use on alternating days, or weeks, etc., and then precluded at other times. I believe that this idea has merit and I would like to try it on certain identified motorized routes within about 30 miles of Bozeman. Over the next few years I would like to work with a variety of users to develop a schedule that may resolve conflicts among competing users on our more heavily used trails. That being said, I again did not find this to be a complete solution to the noise issue forest-wide. The alternating use concept would be confusing and difficult to enforce on such a large scale.

**16. Recreation.** Recreation was the most influential issue in my decision for a travel management plan. Responding to changes in recreation demand within the capability of the land was the primary purpose for proposing the "Starting Benchmark" (now Alternative 4) in 2002 and initiating a comprehensive analysis of public travel on the Forest. Until now, there had been no grand plan for the management of public travel on the Gallatin National Forest. The road and trail system was created over time; influenced by a number of factors including land ownership patterns, use of Forest resources, legislation, recreation demand and changes in public attitudes. In 2000, then Forest Supervisor Dave Garber realized that with the growth in population, new information on potential effects to resources and diverse personal value sets, that it was time to develop a Forest travel management plan.

The Starting Benchmark and now my decision result in a reduction of motorized use opportunities over the current situation. This reduction is largely based on several studies that

consistently show that participation in non-motorized activity exceeds that of motorized activity (see the FEIS, pages 3-421 through 3-428). The number of participants driving off-road by 2010 in the Rockies is projected to be 3,270,000 (FEIS, page 3-426). The number of participants biking, hiking and pursuing non-consumptive wildlife viewing activities projected for 2010 in the Rockies is 22,535,000 (id.). The number of days that recreationists are projected to spend hiking, biking or participating in non-consumptive wildlife viewing activities in the Rockies in 2010 is estimated at over 1,000,000,000 days (id.). The number of days people spend participating in non-consumptive wildlife viewing activities alone is projected to exceed 740,000,000 days by 2010 (id.). The number of days recreationists are projected to participate in off-road driving in 2010 in the Rockies is estimated at over 64,000,000 (id.). Of these activities, non-consumptive wildlife viewing activities are projected to have the fastest growth of all dispersed recreation activities studied in the Rockies; nearly 50% by 2020 (id.). These recreation use projections would indicate that the largest future demand for supply of recreation opportunities would be for activities that typically occur in non-motorized settings.

A study completed by the Forest Service in 2002 surveyed the American public regarding their values with respect to public lands, objectives for management of public lands (including recreation management) and beliefs about the role the Forest Service should play in fulfilling those objectives (FEIS, page 3-427). The study concludes that the public sees the promotion of ecosystem health and the protection of watersheds as important objectives. When queried specifically about recreation opportunities, the public supports multiple uses, but not all uses to the same degree. The study found that providing access to additional motorized recreation opportunities was not a high priority objective, while preserving the opportunity to have a “Wilderness experience” was important. Providing opportunities and facilities for non-motorized recreation was seen as a somewhat important objective and role for the agency. In addition, through the comments received during the three comment periods provided on the proposed Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan, I’ve learned that non-motorized recreationists feel that their recreation experience is negatively affected by motorized recreation, and in general, motorized recreationists do not perceive any user conflict. Separating these often conflicting types of pursuits (motorized and non-motorized uses) was an objective I had in building the Travel Plan.

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is a mid-scale recreation planning and analysis tool long used by the Forest Service for recreation planning. The system was developed to improve recreation planning and to recognize the importance of zoning and managing different recreation experiences and settings as important Forest resources (FEIS, page 3-435). ROS classifications in order from most developed to least developed include urban, rural, roaded natural, semi-primitive motorized, semi-primitive non-motorized and primitive settings. ROS as a planning tool was used to develop the objectives for each travel planning area (TPA) during the development of the Starting Benchmark. Desired Future Condition statements were included for each TPA to help identify the targeted setting. Because the projected demand for non-motorized recreation opportunities and settings is expected to exceed that for motorized uses and settings, and because the desired experiences of non-motorized users are adversely affected by motorized use, the Starting Benchmark resulted in an overall decrease in motorized use opportunities, particularly on trails. This basic rationale also carried forward into my final decision.

I knew that the Starting Benchmark was not a perfect plan. It was not intended to be. It was developed largely based on our thoughts for providing recreation opportunities across the Forest

and did not have the benefit of comprehensive resource effects analysis or public comment. The purpose of the Starting Benchmark was to identify the resource issues that should be considered in analysis and facilitate public feedback on how they were actually using the Forest transportation system. This information served as the basis for developing the range of six alternatives. This range was not bound by the ROS objectives used to develop the Starting Benchmark. Alternative 1 was intended to reflect a no action scenario and responded to users who felt that off-route summer motorized travel should be allowed on the Forest as it was in 1999 which was the date of the last Forest Recreation Visitor Map at the start of this analysis. Alternative 2 was developed to reflect current travel patterns, including decisions made in the Montana/Dakota OHV Decision (USDA, 2001) and would essentially maintain the status quo for the next 15 years or so. Alternative 3 was developed placing heavier weight on comments received from motorized users. While it would not allow for as much motorized use as provided in Alternatives 1 or 2, it would provide for it on additional specific routes identified by users that were not included in the Starting Benchmark (i.e. Alternative 4). Alternative 5 was developed with a greater emphasis placed on other Forest resources than with providing recreation opportunity. This resulted in it being more restrictive on motorized uses than Alternative 4. Alternative 6 was the most restrictive alternative on motorized use and reflected the position of certain groups and non-motorized users that heavy restrictions were needed to protect wildlife habitat, preserve the character of unroaded lands and maintain other resource values. All alternatives were designed to be as selectable as they could be within these basic principles. My summary here is an over-simplification and one should refer to Chapter 2 of the FEIS for a more detailed discussion of the alternatives. My decision, as well as Alternative 7 of the DEIS and Alternative 7-M of the FEIS, is a compilation of my preferred attributes of these other alternatives. From a broad recreation perspective my final decision results in recreation settings (ROS) similar to that originally identified for the Starting Benchmark. The targeted recreation setting set the context within which I attempted to respond to other issues and made the use decisions for each specific route and sub-area of the Forest. Alternatives 1 and 2 were not acceptable because they were completely unresponsive to the projected changes in demand described above. Alternative 3 would certainly be an improvement over the current situation but I felt it did not provide sufficient non-motorized settings close to area communities for shorter half-day and evening hiking and skiing opportunities. On the flip side I felt that Alternatives 5 and 6 went too far in restricting motorized opportunities. Alternative 6 in particular, removes opportunities for motorcycle rides on trails. Restricting motorcycles (and ATVs) to roads only would not provide the full spectrum of opportunities most of these users are seeking.

From the many comments and discussions I've had throughout this process I know that many motorized users will strongly disagree with my decision. For some it's a matter of principle, but in terms of the motorized opportunity provided I believe that my decision is more than adequate. Broad forest-wide comparisons using total miles or acres available often don't give an accurate picture. My objectives to increase the amount of non-motorized setting and respond to other resource issues is largely accomplished by bringing motorized use under greater management control as opposed to forcing a reduction in overall use. For example, the opportunities for pleasure driving and use of ATVs actually increase over the current situation. Pleasure driving increases due to planned improvements of some of the existing road system. ATV opportunity increases by converting parts of the old road system to ATV trails. Significant improvements in the ATV trail system will be established in the roaded portion of the Gallatin Range, the Shields drainage in the Crazyes, South Plateau and Henrys Mountains, Deer Creeks, Fairy Lake, Cooke City, Buck Ridge and in the Mill Creek area. These alternatives focus on creating loops and

connected routes to increase the total mileage of riding available within a given area. While my decision reduces the amount of single-track motorcycle routes by 36%, the bulk of this reduction is really a shift to routes shared with ATVs. While my decision increases area restrictions on backcountry snowmobiling it also increases the number of marked and groomed trails provided over current conditions.

For snowmobiling I was sensitive to the popularity of this activity around the communities of West Yellowstone and Cooke City. Maintaining this established use was the principle reason my decision did not include many additional restrictions over the current situation in these areas. I also tried to maintain opportunities for high-marking and other backcountry use in the southern Gallatin Mountain Range, the West slopes of the Crazy Mountains and the Fairy Lake Travel Planning Area. This is a shift from what I had included in my DEIS preferred alternative, largely due to public comments informing me that I would be removing a unique and popular experience for the snowmobile community. The opportunity I've provided here though is still more restrictive than it is currently due to other resource issues. Lastly, my decision still emphasizes family-oriented cross country skiing in the Hyalite drainage, but does provide a separated opportunity for family snowmobile activities in Hyalite and snowmobile access to Grotto Falls Trailhead for ice climbers. My decision will allow plowing of the main Hyalite Road to the Blackmore Day Use area and the area around the reservoir will be managed for cross country skiing.

A number of users also raised the issue of cumulative effects to motorized use from travel management plans that have been executed or are being considered on other area national forests, Yellowstone National Park, and other public lands. This issue has been addressed in the cumulative effects section of the Recreation issue of Chapter 3 in the FEIS. Based on this discussion I have concluded that it is likely that the types of opportunities available will change (that is the mix of motorized and non-motorized opportunities). I believe that overall number of summer motorized routes available today will decrease, primarily due to the elimination of a network of "unauthorized user created routes" that are not "system trails" that were established prior to the Montana and National OHV decisions. While there is likely to be a net decline in the total number of summer motorized trails available near the Gallatin National Forest, I don't believe that supply is limiting at this time. With the low population base of Montana, small proportion of OHV users to total recreation use, and the extensive trail systems on public land, ample opportunities for summer motorized recreation still exists. A Gallatin National Forest employee who rode several hundred of miles of trail during peak season while completing trail surveys in 2004 and 2005 indicated that he rarely encountered other motorized users (Personal Communication, Todd Orr). This and other similar observations supports the idea that motorized use has not reached saturation on trails within much of this area, nor does supply appear to be limited at this time.

My decision would not restrict mountain bikes to designated routes but it does place additional restrictions on the number of miles of trail available for mountain biking outside of Wilderness. It closes 200 miles of trail to mountain biking that are currently open. My reasons for mountain bike prohibitions include: (a) I believe that mountain bike trails within the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area should approximate an equivalent amount of route that was available to motorcycle use in 1977 in order to be consistent with the Montana Wilderness Study Act. (b) Trails proximate to dude ranches receive heavy stock traffic and therefore if bikes were allowed it could lead to potential safety concerns and user conflict. (c) Closure of short trail

segments that lead to wilderness boundaries made sense to me so as to not invite wilderness trespass. (d) The need to restrict mountain bikes in the Crazy Mountains where the easements across private land don't allow for bicycle travel.

Since cross-country travel is not prohibited a large network of user-created routes will be open for biking. Biking would not be prohibited on any road at any time of the year. I did not adopt the proposed blanket spring restrictions to biking on trails as was included in Alternatives 2-7 of the DEIS. I instead opted for spring closures on about a dozen specific routes known to be a problem. The reason for the original proposal was to better protect trail facilities, reduce erosion and lower maintenance costs (DEIS Forest-wide Guideline A-11). In public comments stock users and bicyclists expressed opposition to blanket spring closures arguing that spring opportunities are very important to them and that many trails are either dry in the spring or they are so durable that spring use is not a problem. My staff and I discussed this issue and I have concluded that blanket spring restrictions across the Forest was going too far in attempting to correct a problem that could otherwise be addressed through restrictions on specific routes or information and education. I was also convinced that wet, muddy spring conditions would serve as a natural deterrent to foot and horse use where I don't believe that would necessarily be true in the case of OHV use.

There are few changes in my decision that would drastically affect current opportunities for riding horses or other pack stock. A few miles of trail would be closed, primarily to address user safety concerns, either because of heavy mixed traffic or trails that are poorly suited to stock traffic and cannot be fixed. As I stated for mountain bike use above I elected not to adopt the proposed blanket spring restrictions to stock on trails as was included in Alternatives 2-7 of the DEIS, again, for the same reasons. I also did not include the proposed 34,000 acre area restriction on the trail-less portion of the Beartooth Plateau in the Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness as was proposed in Alternatives 3 through 7 of the DEIS. My decision would instead employ a seasonal restriction and a prohibition to overnight stock use within this area. I believe that the trail restrictions will accomplish the same objective of providing for public safety and protecting fragile alpine vegetation, without setting the precedent of an area prohibition.

Winter recreation activities, including snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and ice climbing, are very popular on the Forest. The number of people participating in snowmobiling in the Rockies is projected to be 848,000 in 2010 and 880,000 in 2020 (FEIS, page 3-426). The number of people participating in cross-country skiing is projected to be 721,000 in 2010 and 987,000 in 2020 (id.). The number of days people snowmobile in the Rockies is projected to be 7,102,000 in 2010 and 8,040,000 in 2020(id.). The number of days people cross-country ski in the Rockies is projected to be 6,048,000 in 2010 and 7,938,000 in 2020 (id.). These statistics indicated to me that while it was important to continue to provide quality snowmobiling opportunities, I also needed to be responsive to the fact that cross-country skiing is the fastest growing dispersed winter recreation activity in the Rockies (id.). My decision is responsive to concerns raised that there are currently few accessible areas of family-friendly cross-country ski terrain that are not shared with snowmobiles outside of Wilderness. The most substantial increases in non-motorized cross-country ski terrain would be close to Bozeman, in the Hyalite drainage and the southern end of the Bridgers Mountains. There is also an increase in the total number of miles of marked or groomed ski trails over current conditions. The amount of marked and groomed route I could provide was limited however by the need to remain consistent with

higher level management direction for lynx, a threatened species (refer to the discussion of Issue 13 above).

Another part of my decision where the recreation issue was influential was in establishing a goal, objectives and guidelines for access (see Forest-wide Goal B, Objectives and Guidelines B-1 through B-9 as well as objectives within certain TPAs in the “Detailed Description of the Decision”). This direction identifies routes and areas of national forest land where I believe better public access is needed. It also provides guidance to ensure protection of valid existing rights. Access to public land has been an increasingly controversial issue in the west. Reasonable access has been and has the potential to be blocked for a variety of reasons including ownership changes, subdivision of ranches, and just a landowner’s desire for exclusive use. Recreationists accustomed to using certain public lands may increasingly encounter “no trespassing” signs and locked gates. Lack of access reduces the amount of public land available to accommodate recreation use of the Forest. It can also give private landowners undue control of the types of activities that may be allowed on public land, including administrative activities. Acquisition of public access identified in my decision will provide opportunities to disperse recreation use over a wider area and reduce difficulties in accomplishing other resource objectives. It is important to note however, that my adoption of this programmatic direction does not constitute a final agency action. Discussion and negotiation with the respective landowners and further analysis under NEPA would be required before desired access could be acquired.

My decision also adopts an objective and standard for backcountry aircraft landing strips (Forest-wide Objective A-6 and Standard A-7). Adoption of this direction means that we will entertain proposals for the construction and use of backcountry landing strips that may be submitted by the Montana Pilots Association or others. I adopted this direction in response to an increased interest in this type of opportunity and I found no good reason to preclude it on a forest-wide scale. My decision does however identify areas where we would not consider such use including designated wilderness, the Hyalite Porcupine Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area, the Cabin Creek Recreation Wildlife Management Area, the Lionhead and Republic Mountain recommended wilderness areas, or within the Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone. Adoption of this programmatic direction is also not a final agency decision to authorize such use. Further analysis under NEPA would be required before any specific proposal is approved.

I’ve adopted additional programmatic direction in my decision, much of which was also included in Alternatives 2 through 7 of the DEIS, designed to guide Forest Service management of travel over time such that it remains consistent with the intent of this Travel Management Plan. For example, Forest-wide Objective A-1 summarizes the miles of opportunity to be provided on roads and trails for each use forest-wide. This is a way of measuring over time how well we are doing in providing the targeted mix of use intended. Similar objectives (i.e. Objectives 1-1 and 2-1) are included in the Travel Planning Area direction although I’ve chosen to use the ROS maps rather than the miles of opportunity tables at this scale. Forest-wide Objectives, Standards and Guidelines A-2 through A-12 are included to help us manage trails for their intended uses and articulate the few exceptions in which off-route summer motorized travel is permissible. Goal J and associated standard and guidelines will help us maintain a wilderness trail system that will preserve the natural integrity of the Lee Metcalf and Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Areas. I found no reason not to adopt this management direction.

Lastly, I believe that my decision is responsive to the current strategic recreation direction within the Forest Service to better address unmanaged recreation by discretely defining motorized trail opportunities. It is in accord with the Final OHV management policies presented to the public in November, 2005 as a final rule change in managing motorized recreation (USDA 2005). There are several tables and figures in the Recreation section of Chapter 3 of the FEIS that display the level and quality of opportunities that would be provided under the various alternatives (FEIS, pages 3-440 through 3-468). I believe that these tables and figures demonstrate that my decision (Alternative 7-M) for a Travel Management Plan provides a good balance in meeting the variety of recreation demands on the Gallatin National Forest.

**17. Riparian Areas.** The predicted effects to riparian areas were another factor leading me to conclude that Alternative 1 for a travel management plan was unacceptable. Riparian zones are diverse, dynamic and complex habitats. They provide habitat for a variety of species including rare and threatened species, and are sites of biological and physical interaction at the terrestrial/aquatic interface. Riparian cover types make up less than 0.5% of all land area in the Northern Region of the Forest Service yet tend to incur a disproportionate amount of human activity (FEIS, page 3-485). Allowing off-route motorized travel, which Alternative 1 does, would continue creating mechanical damage to riparian vegetation, compacting soils, contributing sediment, and disrupting wildlife. This practice would serve to increase the amount of ATV and motorcycle routes and accelerate riparian degradation (FEIS, page 3-490).

While Alternatives 2 through 7-M were developed under different guiding themes, our objective was to make each of them the best that they could be. Each of these alternatives include features that are designed to maintain and improve riparian habitat over current conditions

First, Alternatives 2 through 7-M would restrict summer motorized use to designated routes which will prevent the proliferation of new user-built routes and restrict that use on existing routes that are not otherwise designated. The Montana/Dakota OHV Decision (USDA, January 2005) alone, only restricts summer motorized use to routes where that use was already established. In absence of designation and mapping it can be difficult to determine if motorized use of a user-built route was established before or after the Montana/Dakota OHV Decision. It is also more difficult to enforce.

Second, under Alternatives 3 through 7-M, motorized trails decrease in number of miles and non-motorized trails increase slightly over current conditions. Specifically, ATV routes would decrease Forest-wide with an increased designation on existing road systems. Motorized trails, particularly those developed for ATVs and modern motorcycles, would not further add to the loss of riparian habitat. Trails identified for stock and mountain bike use would decrease slightly under these alternatives, further reducing impacts to riparian habitat. With the implementation of any of these alternatives, riparian habitat would increase in complexity and diversity (FEIS, page 3-491). The number of species using riparian habitat for foraging, nesting, cover, or as movement corridors would increase while displacement and disturbance would decrease. Habitat degradation would be minimized or eliminated indicated by an increase in biomass production and structure.

Third, Alternatives 2 through 7-M include programmatic direction (goals, objectives, standards and guidelines which would restore a number of existing project roads and trails (see Objectives D-1 and D-2 in the “Detailed Description of the Decision”) and facilitate actions and mitigation

to improve riparian habitat over time. The goals, objectives and standards to maintain Yellowstone cutthroat trout habitat, protect soil and watershed conditions and restore or stabilize roads to minimize sediment would serve to maintain riparian areas in good condition and minimize potential impacts to wildlife species within riparian areas. Refer to the “Detailed Description of the Decision”, Goal E and associated direction included under various travel planning areas.

In making my decision I recognize that existing roads and trails passing through or parallel to riparian areas have been affecting many wildlife species both directly and indirectly. Table 3.17.1 of the FEIS estimates that existing routes have resulted in a loss of about 18 percent of riparian habitat Forest-wide. In some of the more heavily roaded areas this number can range from 30 to 50 percent. I considered whether a Travel Plan alternative should be studied that would close and restore major access roads that are located within or near riparian zones (e.g., the Hyalite Road, Swan Creek Road and others within Forest Service jurisdiction) (FEIS, page 2-26). I concluded that such an alternative would be clearly unreasonable at this time and it also would not meet the purpose and need as discussed earlier in this ROD. Society in general accepts the consequences associated with most types of human use and development in exchange for opportunities and better quality of life. This includes the acceptance of major highways and other developments within valley bottoms and river corridors where the riparian habitat value exceeds what occurs on the Gallatin National Forest. While many advocated further restrictions on motorized use and an overall reduction in open road density, they did not desire a loss of passenger car access to campgrounds, trailheads and other destinations within the Forest. In addition, Alternatives 2 through 7-M all would result in improved riparian conditions and there is no proposal to construct new roads.

In conclusion, in making my decision I found that any of Alternatives 2 through 7-M were acceptable options. I found that these alternatives are consistent with Gallatin National Forest Plan direction applicable to riparian areas. The direction proposed, as well as the route-by-route management specified under each alternative, is consistent with the existing Forest-wide goal to “provide habitat for viable populations of all indigenous wildlife species and for increasing populations of big game animals” (Gallatin Forest Plan, Goal 7, p. II-1), and the Forest-wide standard that “emphasis will be given to management of special and unique wildlife habitats such as wallows, licks, talus, cliffs, caves, and riparian areas” (Gallatin Forest Plan, Standard 6.A.8, p. II-18). The unique habitat that riparian areas provide would improve over time relative to road and trail management strategies. In contrast I found that Alternative 1 would not be consistent with management direction applicable to riparian areas.

**18. Roadless Areas.** There was an identified concern by the public over motorized recreation within roadless lands and the potential that motorized activities like snowmobiling or riding ATVs have to diminish roadless character and/or negatively impact the potential for future designation of some roadless areas as Wilderness. There are approximately 700,000 acres of roadless land on the Gallatin National Forest. Originally, roadless areas were simply a result of mapping public lands without roads. The purpose of this exercise was to identify lands that may be suitable for future designation as Wilderness. The first inventory of roadless lands took place in the early 1970s during the RARE (Roadless Area Review and Evaluation) I evaluations, and then again in the late 1970s during RARE II. The inventory displayed in the current Forest Plan EIS, Appendix C, is an output of the RARE II inventory. Twelve separate Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs), located in all the mountain ranges on the Forest, were identified through this

process. During the analysis for the current Gallatin Forest Plan, all inventoried roadless areas were reviewed and alternatives considered whether to recommend these areas for designation as Wilderness. The selected alternative for the Forest Plan recommended an additional 28,000 acres of roadless land to be designated as Wilderness. These areas are located in the Lionhead area of the Henrys Mountains (Lionhead Unit 1-963), and just south of Cooke City adjacent to the North Absaroka Wilderness (Reef Unit 1-914). Neither of these recommended wilderness additions has been designated as Wilderness by Congress.

Over the last 19 years, roadless land has taken on new meaning. Regardless of whether they are ever designated as Wilderness, they hold special values for many individuals. Roadless areas often have unique characteristics that may not be found in more developed areas such as natural integrity, remoteness, and solitude. They also often provide diverse plant and animal habitat, high scenic quality, cultural sites and other attributes. Refer to the FEIS, pages 3-500 through 3-502 for a discussion of wilderness attributes and roadless characteristics. In the 1980s, the Chief of the Forest Service determined that management activities which would substantially alter the undeveloped character of a roadless area of 5,000 acres or more was a class of actions that would require an EIS [FSH 1909.15(20.6)]. In other words, the “roadless” issue was no longer just a question of whether or not these lands should be designated as Wilderness, there was also concern over the degradation of the characteristics these areas provide. Lastly since the late 1990’s there have been several changes in rules and policies that provide direction on how roadless lands should be managed. In general, these changes have affected proposals for timber harvest and road building within roadless areas (refer to the FEIS, pages 3-516 through 3-517).

In public comments received on the proposed travel management plan, some felt that roadless lands on the Gallatin National Forest should be re-evaluated for potential recommendation as Wilderness prior to, or at least in conjunction with, decisions regarding management of travel. The concern was that a decision to designate routes for motorized use within roadless areas in the Travel Plan, would preclude a fair consideration of those areas for recommendation as Wilderness in the Forest Plan revision process (currently scheduled for 2009). Early in the analysis for the proposed Travel Management Plan I determined that we would not re-visit the recommended wilderness decision of the current Forest Plan in the Travel Plan. To do so would greatly expand the scope of an already complex analysis and decision. Wilderness recommendations require consideration of other factors such as suitability of the lands for timber management, potential future needs for fuels reduction activities, and other needs for roaded access. A decision on recommended wilderness would also add an element of significant public controversy that could jeopardize our ability to attain a successful decision for the management of travel. I also concluded that my decision for a travel management plan would not preclude a fair consideration of roadless areas for recommended wilderness designation. First, motorized vehicles (ATVs, motorcycles, and snowmobiles) are currently being used on trails within roadless areas. The travel plan alternatives are not introducing new motorized uses that are currently prohibited. No new roads are proposed in roadless areas. None of the alternatives would affect roadless boundaries, nor the future manageability of these areas as potential Wilderness based on boundary or minimum size criteria. Lastly, decisions to allow motorized travel on trails within roadless areas are not irreversible. ATV routes, which are double track trails, could be converted back to single-track non-motorized trails should Wilderness designation be determined to be the highest and best use of a roadless area.

With the exception of Forest Plan recommended wilderness, the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area and the Cabin Creek Wildlife and Recreation Management Area, the fact that a trail or area was within the roadless inventory was not a factor in my decision. This is somewhat difficult to explain because, as the analysis on pages 3-502 through 3-516 of the FEIS show, some alternatives are better than others in terms of the effects to roadless character (FEIS, Tables 3.18.4 through 3.18.8). The number and miles of ATV routes within roadless areas in Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 are much greater than the amount included in Alternatives 5, 6 and 7-M. Trails designed specifically for ATVs vary in tread width from 4-5 feet, and are a more obvious, constructed facility on the ground, especially where they cross side slopes requiring larger areas of cut and fill. This can affect the natural integrity and apparent naturalness of the area. Alternatives which provide more opportunity for snowmobiling, ATV and motorcycle use would also have adverse effects on opportunities for solitude and the feeling of remoteness. Alternative 6 would be the best alternative in maintaining roadless character since it precludes motorized use of roadless area trails in the summer and heavily restricts winter snowmobile use. While there are differences in effect to roadless characteristics between alternatives, none were substantial enough to become factors in my decision. All alternatives are consistent with current Agency policy on the management of roadless lands. Therefore, my travel management decisions were based on other issues including maintenance of wildlife habitat and providing opportunities for motorized use and hiking, biking, horseback riding and cross-country skiing in non-motorized settings outside of Wilderness.

My decision was influenced by the effects to roadless character in the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area (WSA), the Lionhead and Republic recommended wilderness areas (RWAs), and the Cabin Creek Recreation and Wildlife Management Area (CCRWMA). My rationale for the travel management decisions I made in the WSA and RWAs is discussed later in this section. The CCRWMA was designated in the Lee Metcalf Wilderness Act (PL 98-140) as a special management area where motorized use is permissible. For this area the Act states:

*“The area shall further be administered by the Secretary of Agriculture to maintain presently existing wilderness character... The Secretary shall permit continued use of the area by motorized equipment only for activities associated with existing levels of livestock grazing, administrative purposes (including snowmobile trail maintenance) and for snowmobiling during periods of adequate snow cover but only where such uses are compatible with the protection and propagation of wildlife within the area: Provided, That the Secretary may, in his discretion, also permit limited motor vehicle access by individuals and others within the area where such access is compatible with the protection and propagation of wildlife and where such access was established prior to the date of enactment of this Act” (FEIS, page 3-517).*

The law was passed in October 1983. At that time, motorized use of the area was primarily snowmobiling, with limited motorcycle use. ATVs were not an established use in the area, nor were jeep trails present except on the Oil Well Road, which extends from the north in the Taylor Fork into the CCRWMA (FEIS, page 3-518). Alternatives 1-4 would manage ATV use on certain trails within the roadless portion of the area. ATV trails not co-located with jeep trails that existed in 1983 would not be consistent with the direction of the law. Therefore, my decision was to prohibit ATV use of trails within this area except on the pre-existing Oil Well Road.

For winter use the legislative record indicates that one of the primary reasons this portion of the Madison Range was not designated as wilderness was the established very popular use of this area for backcountry challenge snowmobiling. The caveat was that motorized uses be compatible with wildlife values. Alternatives that allow continued use of this area for backcountry snowmobiling (Alternatives 1 through 5 and 7-M) are consistent with the original legislative intent of the Act. The wildlife effects analysis indicates that continued snowmobile use in the CCRWMA would be acceptable (see FEIS, Chapter 3, Issue 9:General Wildlife).

**19. Soils.** Concerns over how various uses can impact soil productivity, cause compaction and erosion, and loss of ground vegetation was often brought up in public comments. Most often it was cited as a reason to restrict motorized use. Contrary to these opinions, soil impacts was not a major factor in my choice between Alternatives 2 through 7-M. It did however contribute to my decision not to select Alternative 1 and reinforced the need for certain objectives, standards and seasonal restrictions I adopted for specific areas and routes. The primary reason this issue was not a major factor is that the analysis for this issue, as well as for the fisheries and water quality issues in Chapter 3 of the FEIS, shows that soil/sedimentation impacts are largely caused by the facilities (i.e. roads and trails) and not from the use of them. My route-by-route decisions are limited to the types of uses and season of use that is appropriate for each road and trail (including potential new routes). I'm also not making final decisions to construct, reconstruct, maintain, or decommission roads and trails through the Travel Plan. My intent has been that once the appropriate uses were identified for each route through the Travel Plan, we then could begin the process of proposing construction/relocation and maintenance of the transportation system to accommodate those uses in a manner that protects soil and watershed conditions. These proposals would be subject to further analysis and decisions in compliance with NEPA, but the debate over uses would be resolved.

Alternative 1 was unacceptable to me because it allows for off-route wheeled motor vehicle use. Several studies support the assertion that impacts to trails increase from hikers and mountain bikes to higher levels for horses and motorized vehicles (FEIS, page 3-521). ATVs, with a greater width and weight than motorcycles, may cause the greatest impacts. Other studies have shown that the majority of environmental changes due to recreational trampling occur with initial trampling of vegetation or trail construction (FEIS, page 3-522). One study found that the majority of damage to plants occurred with the first off-trail pass (id.). Their research also showed that high alpine and tundra plants were especially vulnerable to trampling. Trampling also increases soil compaction, and decreased water infiltration (id.). Trampled areas with little visible vegetation wear may already have increased runoff from soil compaction and decreased infiltration (id). Increased runoff leads to increased erosion and loss of soil quality. Alternative 1 also does not adopt the programmatic direction and seasonal restrictions incorporated into the other alternatives designed to improve soil and watershed conditions in problem areas.

In all other alternatives wheeled motor vehicle use would be restricted to designated routes. I would expect some illegal off-route use to continue in the future, especially in the first few years of travel plan implementation, but as the public adjusts and through information and education I expect the situation to be manageable. For purposes of comparison, Alternative 6 would have resulted in the least amount of OHV accessible area with sensitive soils (Table 3.19.11). My decision (Alternative 7-M) results in the next lowest. In other words, these two alternatives have the least potential for off-trail impacts, respectively (Table 3.19.11).

Although there have been studies that show horses can cause deeper rutting and higher sediment yields than most other conveyances (including motorcycles), widespread concerns over off-route stock use have not been identified, nor is there higher level Forest Service direction to restrict such use to designated routes. The Montana/Dakota OHV Decision EIS (page i) indicates that between 1990 and 1998 the number of registered ATVs and motorcycles increased 92% in the three-state area. The increased use has resulted in environmental effects on public resources in numerous areas, including roads and trails that have developed as the result of repeated use. Such significant increases are not expected in the use of pack and saddle stock and therefore I did not believe that restricting stock to designated routes was necessary. There are identified effects from stock in specific areas of the Gallatin Forest but I believe that these can be adequately addressed through other means such as administration of outfitter permits and public information and education.

Travel planning areas with trails on sensitive soils include Bear Canyon, Cabin Creek, the Gallatin Crest, Porcupine-Buffalo Horn, Taylor Fork, Deer Creeks, East Boulder, Fairy Lake, Gallatin River Canyon, Gallatin Roaded, Main Boulder, Mill Creek and Mission Creek. In terms of managing these routes in the future to prevent soil erosion, sedimentation, and damage to the trail facilities, Alternative 6 would be the best alternative since it severely restricts motorized use in these areas. However, my decision also reduces motorized use on trails with sensitive soils and includes seasonal restrictions on other routes during the spring when they are most vulnerable to damage. Again, any of the alternatives, except Alternative 1, were acceptable to me. I just had to recognize that correcting facility problems in the future would require more effort and expense in Alternatives 2 through 5 and 7-M than it would under Alternative 6.

The Bear Canyon drainage is probably the best known area on the Forest with sensitive soil problems. The rutting, braiding, and erosion of trails is evident in many places. It has also been an area that is popular for summer motorized use, and I felt it was important to continue to provide these opportunities here as discussed earlier in this ROD (page 38). To correct the soil, sedimentation and facility problems in this drainage my decision includes several mitigation measures. First, Trail #440 is not to be opened to summer motorized, mountain bike and horse use until facilities are upgraded to a condition that alleviates sedimentation and water quality impacts from those facilities (Standard 3-2). Second, trails in the Bear Canyon drainage are not to be opened for the summer season to ATV, motorcycle, mountain bike and/or horse use until the trail system is of a condition that prevents adverse erosion and watershed damage (Standard 3-3). Third, due to sensitive soils in this area, wheeled motorized vehicle travel shall be prohibited off of designated routes within this travel planning area (Standard 3-4) (i.e. the 300-foot off-route allowance to access campsites provided in Forest-wide standard A-8 shall not apply). Lastly, I've incorporated seasonal restrictions on trails in Bear Canyon that would preclude motorized use, mountain bikes and stock from October 15 to July 15, thus helping limit use to the driest period. This mitigation will greatly reduce negative effects on soil quality. It should be noted that these provisions also pertain to Alternatives 2 through 7-M.

**20. Watershed Management (Water Quality).** The issues of fisheries, soils, and water quality are closely related in terms of the predicted impacts of the travel management alternatives. Similarly, my conclusions about these issues were the same (see these issue discussions earlier in this section). They were factors in my choice not to select Alternative 1, but in choosing between Alternatives 2 through 7-M, I determined that the actual use, or mode of travel (e.g., motorized versus non-motorized) was inconsequential. Rather, it is the facility itself (i.e., road

or trail) that has the highest potential to impact water quality. Again, Alternative 1 would allow off-route wheeled motorized use. This would increase the proliferation of user-built trails which can remove vegetation, expose bare soil and lead to increased sediment run-off and erosion.

With the exception of a few specific routes, I found that any of Alternatives 2 through 7-M were acceptable in terms of the uses allowed on roads and trails. In my decision I responded to water quality and fisheries concerns primarily by adopting goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines (programmatic direction) for future route construction, reconstruction, maintenance and decommissioning. I established use restrictions only on a few specific trails with high erosion potential where it would not be cost-effective to attempt to move or reconstruct the facility to accommodate those uses.

Roads can increase sediment levels and are the predominant non-natural sediment source in most managed forested watersheds including the Gallatin Forest (FEIS, page 3-535). Trails generally have reduced sediment impacts since trail prisms are much narrower than roads and cut and fill slopes are smaller. Again, my decision for a travel management plan does not include final agency decisions to construct or reconstruct roads or trails. Such proposals would require further analysis under NEPA and separate decisions. The amount of existing roads that would remain open to vehicle travel also does not vary substantially among alternatives. This is because they are mostly principle routes of access to the National Forest and they service a number of activities including recreational pursuits. Project roads, not designated through the Travel Plan for public or administrative use will be targeted for effective closure and stabilization (i.e. decommissioning).

Table 3.20.10 of the FEIS shows that total sediment levels forest-wide do not vary much between alternatives. This is because watershed impacts are dominated by natural sediment, road sediment, and timber and fire sediment (FEIS, page 3-549). Alternatives vary largely in terms of the amount of trail in which motorized uses would be allowed. In general, the more restrictive alternatives are predicted to result in the lowest amount of contributed sediment but I found the differences not to be significant enough for it to influence my decision.

The State of Montana Water Quality Act requires the state to protect, maintain, and improve the quality of water for a variety of beneficial uses. Section 75-5-101, MCA established water quality standards based on beneficial uses. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality has classified all non-Wilderness surface waters on the Gallatin National Forest as B1 except for Bozeman Creek (A-Closed) and Hyalite Creek (A-1). Waters classified as B1 must be suitable for drinking, culinary, and food processing purposes after conventional treatment; bathing, swimming and recreation; growth and propagation of salmonid fishes and associated aquatic life, waterfowl and furbearers; and agricultural and industrial water supply. A 5 NTU (nephelometric turbidity units) turbidity increase above naturally-occurring turbidity is allowed in B1 waters. Surface waters within the Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness are classified as A1, and have similar suitability criteria for beneficial uses, except that no turbidity increase above naturally-occurring turbidity is allowed.

All action alternatives (Alternatives 1 through 7-M) are consistent with the State of Montana Water Quality Act as well as other applicable laws policies, and the Gallatin Forest Plan (USDA 1987) (FEIS page 3-555). Best Management Practices will be employed under all alternatives to ensure consistency with these protection measures.

Winter use (motorized or non-motorized) has essentially no incremental sediment effects since road and trail prisms are already in place and winter use causes very little additional ground disturbance.

Relative changes in cumulative sediment delivery between alternatives is small and will remain within existing Forest sediment guidelines with the exception of the Big Sky Travel Planning Area (FEIS, pages 3-555). The Forest Service cannot mitigate sediment delivery in the Big Sky TPA, as the majority of the sediment impacts are on private land.

Separate from the Travel Management Plan I believe that it is important to note that the Gallatin National Forest has had a very active land acquisition program since 1987, acquiring 143,700 acres of lands within the National Forest boundary. Many of the acquired properties have significant wildlife, wetland, and water quality values and were subject to potential subdivision and development. The net result has been considerably fewer roads and residential development on these parcels than would have occurred otherwise. Another benefit has been the opportunity to decommission about 150 miles of roads in the Taylor Fork, North Gallatin, and Shields drainages. Fisheries management projects have often been coordinated with watershed projects and objectives resulting in a beneficial effect to watershed management.

As discussed under the Fisheries section, my decision includes Forest-wide Goals, Objectives, Standards, and Guidelines that will provide important constraints and guidance for watershed management. Standard E-5 provides key constraints to allowable watershed disturbance (roads, harvest units etc.) and is directly tied to the Montana water quality standards and attainment of beneficial uses.

Goal D and associated objectives (D1 – Road Rehabilitation, D-2 Trail Rehabilitation, and D-3 Road and Trail Maintenance) give more specific direction for road and trail maintenance with particular emphasis to closing excess roads (decommissioning) and trail maintenance. Guideline D-7 provides additional direction to close and re-vegetate project roads when not needed. Again, as discussed in the Fisheries section my adopted standards E-4 through E-7 will help us in future decisions to maintain and improve water quality.

**21. Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, and Recommended Wilderness.** The Gallatin National Forest manages significant portions of the Absaroka Beartooth and Lee Metcalf Wilderness Areas. The Forest also manages one Congressionally-designated Wilderness Study Area; the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn (HPBH WSA). The Gallatin Forest Plan (USDA 1987) recommended that 22,000 additional acres of roadless lands in the Lionhead and Republic roadless units be added to the National Wilderness Preservation system. The projected impacts of the Travel Plan alternatives on these areas were the topic of discussion for this issue in the FEIS. For organization and clarity of thought I have discussed my conclusions regarding each of these areas separately.

### Designated Wilderness

As stated above, The Gallatin National Forest manages significant portions of two Congressionally designated Wilderness Areas. The Gallatin National Forest portion of the Absaroka-Beartooth encompasses about 576,000 acres of the Forest and has over 700 miles of

trail providing extensive opportunities for hiking, backpacking and equestrian travel. Hiking and backpacking are more popular in the Beartooths, while traditional stock supported pack trips and hunting adventures are more common in the Absaroka portion. The nearly one million acres of Wilderness provide ample opportunities for primitive unconfined recreation, and solitude. Many portions of the area are trail-less and rarely traveled. The Lee Metcalf Wilderness consists of four separate units in the Madison Range. The Monument Mountain Unit lies on the northwest boundary of Yellowstone National Park. It is an isolated area lightly visited by humans, but rich in wildlife, including a robust population of grizzly bears. All 30,000+ acres are on the Gallatin Forest. The 78,000-acre Spanish Peaks Unit encompasses steeply rugged, glaciated peaks rising more than 11,000 feet above scenic cirques and gem-like lakes. This heavily used area, a favorite of local and regional visitors, hosts a well-developed trail system and many popular destinations. At about 141,000 acres, the Taylor-Hilgard Unit is the largest. It runs along the crest of the Madison Range, with several peaks exceeding 11,000 feet above the Hilgard Basin. High mountain meadows and lakes are surrounded by snowcapped summits.

In Wilderness all motorized or mechanized recreation activities are prohibited by the Wilderness Act (P.L. 88-577), therefore these uses were not of issue in my decision. Trails are presently managed for hiking and pack and saddle stock use and this would remain the same under the various alternatives. There were no identified objectives for new trails and with the exception of some contemplated restrictions on stock use, non-mechanized travel would be unrestricted.

Alternatives 2 through 6 included several changes to the way trails are currently managed, both within and outside of Wilderness. Seasonal restrictions would be employed on trails, restricting stock use during spring break up (April 1 to either May 15, June 1, June 15 or July 15). The purpose of this proposed restriction was to prevent damage to trails during the freeze/thaw cycle, and to protect fragile areas during times when soils are saturated and plants are in a delicate phenological growth phase. In terms of preserving wilderness character this would facilitate keeping trails to a minimal “footprint” on the landscape, by minimizing tread creep, go-arounds, bog holes and wide muddy trails. In many portions of the Wilderness, trails are the most obvious sign of man’s presence. In addition, within the Beartooth Plateau portion of the AB Wilderness, a pack and saddle stock restricted area was proposed in Alternatives 3 through 6. This restriction would prohibit the use of stock anywhere in the restricted area, which is largely trail-less. Within the restricted areas (which differ slightly by alternative, see the summer non-motorized alternative maps) Trails #573, #574 and a spur trail to Mariane Lake would also have stock prohibitions. These trails access Lower Aero, Zimmer and Mariane Lakes. The trails are extremely rugged and steep, and are not suitable for stock travel, though it is not currently prohibited.

While the spring restrictions and Plateau area restriction would provide better resource protection of the facility and minimize impacts to apparent naturalness, additional user restrictions are philosophically counter to the Wilderness ideal in many peoples view. Wilderness is viewed as an area where challenge and risk are high and regulations few. Wilderness managers typically resort to additional user restrictions only where education and on-the-ground management techniques have been unsuccessful in mitigating an issue. In public comments stock users expressed opposition to blanket spring closures arguing that spring opportunities are very important to them and that many trails are either dry in the spring or they are so durable that spring use is not a problem. My staff and I discussed this issue and I have concluded that blanket spring restrictions across the Forest was going too far in attempting to correct a problem that

could otherwise be addressed through restrictions on specific routes or information and education. In my decision the only spring restriction I've included within Wilderness was on the Thompson Lake Trail which enters the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness from the Mill Creek drainage. This trail receives heavy use, and has multiple boggy and wet areas such that I didn't believe that information and education was sufficient to protect wilderness character here. The seasonal restriction would be in place until trail reconstruction could repair the facility issues.

Stock users were also opposed to the area restriction on the Beartooth Plateau, not so much because they felt they should be able to ride there, but because of the precedent such a restriction would set. In my decision, I still saw a need to protect the alpine vegetation and provide for user safety in this area. However, rather than establishing a yearlong area restriction, I've elected a slightly different stock restriction configuration on the Beartooth Plateau. Under my decision, stock will be prohibited seasonally within the restricted area (see the Alternative 7-M summer non-motorized map) from December 2 to August 1, and overnight camping within the restricted area would be prohibited year-long. This will allow day use traffic on the trail-less portion of the plateau during the driest months of the year when these fragile areas are more resilient. There will be two small stock closures (yearlong prohibitions): one in the Zimmer Creek drainage at the Trail # 573 and 574 junctions, and one between Summerville Lake and Castle Lake. System trails that fall within the restricted area (like the trail to Mariane Lake) will only be open to stock after August 1. Only the Russell Creek Trail (the through route from the Clarks Fork Trailhead to the East Rosebud) will be emphasized for stock use. On all other system trails (except Trail # 573 and 574 above the closure) on the plateau, stock use will be allowed but not emphasized. I believe that my decision achieves the objectives to protect natural integrity, and apparent naturalness, but still allows limited stock access (day use only) to the trail-less portion of the plateau, and minimizes restrictions that limit the public's opportunities for "primitive and unconfined recreation" in wilderness.

My decision also includes seasonal restrictions on the Pine Creek Trail #47 within the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness and on the Lava Lake Trail #77 within the Spanish Peaks. On both trails stock will be prohibited seasonally – from December 2 through September 15<sup>th</sup>. After September 15<sup>th</sup> – day use only stock travel will be allowed. Over night stock use will be prohibited year long in the area surrounding the lakes in order to eliminate damage from stock containment and allow damaged areas to rehabilitate. My decision to limit stock traffic on these trails until the fall responds to user safety concerns about mixing stock traffic on heavily traveled popular day hike routes during the summer.

In my decision, Alternative 7-M, I've also adopted a set of goals, objectives, and guidelines (see Objectives A-3, A-4 and A-5; Goal J, Standard J(1) and Guidelines J(2 and 3 in the "Detailed Description of the Decision") that will: (a) help preserve large acreages of Wilderness in its wildest state; (b) help ensure that future trail projects do not have an unintended consequence of degrading Wilderness character, particularly as related to apparent naturalness and primitive recreation opportunities; and (c) provide for human use, enjoyment, safety, and resource protection where more intensively managed trails may be necessary. Alternatives 2 through 6 included similar programmatic direction and therefore this was not a factor in my choice between these alternatives and Alternative 7-M. Alternative 1, which represents a no action scenario, did not include this direction.

## Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area (HPBH WSA)

The Montana Wilderness Study Act of 1977 (P.L. 95-150) created eight wilderness study areas in Montana, including the HPBH WSA. This study area is located in the roadless core of the Gallatin Range, running north to Hyalite Canyon and south to the Yellowstone National Park boundary. In the early 1980s, the Forest Service studied the suitability of the area for inclusion in the Wilderness preservation system, and recommended that it not be designated Wilderness at that time. The checkerboard ownership pattern was largely responsible for the conclusion that the area was unsuitable for Wilderness designation. Since then, nearly 37,000 acres of private land have been acquired within the HPBH WSA boundary (FEIS, page 3-562).

The principal legal direction for managing the HPBH WSA comes from the Montana Wilderness Study Act (S. 393). Section 3(a) of the Act states: “... *wilderness study areas designated by this Act shall, until Congress determines otherwise, be administered by the Secretary of Agriculture so as to maintain their presently existing wilderness character and potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System*” (FEIS, page 3-597). For the HPBH WSA my primary objective was to design a travel management scenario that is consistent with the direction of the Montana Wilderness Study Act.

A Region 1 Forest Service Manual Supplement (FSM 2300-2005-1) provides interpretations of what sorts of activities are appropriate in a WSA. This manual supplement provides clarity on the issue of ATVs and mountain bikes, types of recreational vehicles that did not exist in their current form in 1977. It states that ATVs are appropriate on routes that were used as four-wheel drive jeep routes in 1977, but are not appropriate on what were single-track motorcycle trails in 1977. It also states that mountain bikes are appropriate on all trails that were open to motorcycles in 1977. This interim directive expired in August of 2006, and is being re-written to clarify several sections (personal communication, Chris Ryan). It is expected to be republished in October 2006. One key section that has been redrafted relates to mountain bikes in WSAs. The draft id-2320-2006-1 addresses mountain biking as follows: FSM 2329 section 3 (d) states: “Mountain bikes may be allowed on trails that had established motor-bike use in 1977, or on non-motorized trails as long as the total amount of mountain bike and motorcycle use maintains the wilderness character as it existed in 1977 and the area’s potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System”. This clarification was developed recognizing that mountain biking has become an established use on some routes that may not have had motorcycle travel in 1977, while acknowledging that the mere presence of mountain biking does imply that wilderness character as it existed in 1977 (defined by the Wilderness Attribute Rating System - WARS) has necessarily been compromised.

Alternatives 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 all have some feature that could be construed as contrary to the direction in the law, or the clarified intent found in the Congressional record associated with the law. Alternatives 1-4 all would designate some trails within the study area for ATV use. There were no four-wheel drive jeep routes in the HPBH WSA in 1977. The continued use of ATVs within the WSA would not be consistent with the manual supplement interpreting the Montana Wilderness Study Act nor the mandate to maintain existing wilderness (circa 1977) character found within the Act. Alternative 6 would prohibit motorized use entirely which was not the intent of Congress nor in keeping with current Forest Plan direction.

Alternatives 1-4 and 7-M would allow mountain bikes on two trails that were closed to motorcycles in 1977 (Blackmore/South Cottonwood, and Big Creek). This would be inconsistent with original (now expired) direction in the interim directive FSM 2300-2005-1, but would not be inconsistent with the proposed revised interim directive (see Schlenker's 9/2006 letter). Mountain bike use on the South Cottonwood/Blackmore and Big Creek trails has not altered the physical wilderness characteristics originally inventoried in the HPBH WSA using the WARS (Wilderness Attribute Rating System) during the Congressionally mandated study of the WSAs. The total number of motorcycle and mountain bike trails taken together in Alternative 7M are less (by 20 miles) than the total number of open motorcycle trails in 1977, resulting in an improvement of wilderness character as it existed in 1977.

Alternative 6 would eliminate all motorized recreational use in the WSA, as well as mountain biking. Examination of the Congressional record associated with this law provides clarity on the intent of Congress at the time. House of Representatives Report No. 95-620 specifically addresses the use of off-road vehicles within WSAs, concluding that: *"The use of off-road vehicles, while generally prohibited in designated wilderness, is entirely appropriate in wilderness study areas, including the nine areas in S. 393. Nothing in S. 393 will prohibit the use of off-road vehicles, unless the normal Forest Service planning process and travel planning process, which applies to all national forest lands, determines off-road vehicle use to be inappropriate in a given area"* (FEIS, page 3-597). There are no demonstrated Wilderness Study Area specific issues nor other recreation goals or objectives that would compel the Forest to eliminate all motorized recreation activities within the WSA, to be in keeping with S. 393, thus Alternative 6 would not be consistent with Congressional intent for the management of this WSA.

My decision (similar to Alternative 7-M) would maintain a mix of summer motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities in the HPBH WSA. The configuration of open routes for motorcycles and mountain bikes was developed to provide a mix of motorcycling and mountain biking options, and to provide areas dedicated to hiking and horseback riding. Several key components of my decision include:

- The "Crest" trail will remain open to motorcycles from the north beginning in the Hyalite drainage – south to Windy Pass.
- Several other popular loops will remain open to motorcycles including Porcupine/Buffalo Horn loops, Storm Castle and Swan Creek Trails.
- Motorcycles will be restricted to a mid-July to early-September season of use to protect facilities, and mitigate wildlife conflicts in the fall.
- Mountain bikes will be allowed on all routes open to motorcycles.
- The East Fork of Hyalite Creek Trail will remain open to motorcycles and mountain bikes however it is my intention to develop a "time share" scenario where these mechanized vehicles will alternate use with pedestrians during the peak summer season. I believe that time share will provide a good means of resolving user conflict on this very popular trail<sup>3</sup>. My objective is to

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<sup>3</sup> Time share was a concept suggested in public comments as a means for resolving user conflict instead of yearlong prohibitions. While I believe it to be a good suggestion for heavily used trails like the East Fork Hyalite Creek Trail, it would be too confusing and difficult to administer on a Forest-wide scale. The scope of my decision documented in this ROD determines whether certain uses will be allowed on specific roads and trails and any seasonal restrictions that may apply. I intend to work with various user groups in developing a schedule for time share on the more popular trails within a 30 mile radius around Bozeman.

work out the exact details of this system with the various user groups before the 2007 summer season.

- A core of trails in the eastern and southern portion of the study area will be managed for non-motorized use to provide discrete opportunities for hiking/horseback use and to improve grizzly core area.
- ATVs will be prohibited on all routes within the HBPH.

It was recognized in 1977 that use would grow and conditions within wilderness study areas would not remain static into the future. Use can be adjusted or modified to meet resource or recreation objectives as long as it did not diminish the integrity of the area. The Congressional record is clear that Congress did not intend for the Forest Service to exclude existing “ORV” use until they decided whether to add the study areas to the wilderness system. ORV use can however be adjusted through the normal travel planning process if it is determined to be inappropriate in a given area.

Use can be excluded, reduced, patterns of use changed, or use can be geographically limited in portions of the HPBH WSA while still maintaining an appropriate recreation opportunity. For recreation uses such as motorcycling and mountain biking I can continue to provide a high quality backcountry single track riding experience as long as it does not encourage single track riding proliferation across the entire Study Area.

Interim Directive FSM id-2320-2005-1 clearly states that ATV use is appropriate on jeep roads that were open to that sort of travel in 1977. There were no “jeep roads” or double track routes open to vehicles larger than 50” wide in the HPBH WSA in 1977, except for private roads accessing timber harvest on private land. Therefore my decision prohibits ATVs on all routes within the HPBH WSA.

All routes to be managed for motorcycles in my decision were open to motorcycles in 1977 (FEIS, page 3-566). The seasonal restrictions I’ve included are designed to protect wilderness character and trail facilities in this high elevation area, as well as to minimize motorized traffic in critical grizzly bear habitat during critical pre-den feeding periods in the fall.

The southern portion of the Gallatin Crest Trail will be managed for foot, stock and mountain bike travel only. This configuration along with foot, stock and mountain bike only on several other routes allows us to significantly improve grizzly bear secure area in the Gallatin 3 bear management sub-unit that does not currently meet open motorized route density criteria. Additionally, the southern portion of this trail would have to be reconstructed to be passable to motorcycles – which would be in conflict with 2329 1(c.) in the interim directive.

In my decision approximately 85% of the area will be closed to snowmobiling. The open snowmobile areas include the historic Big Sky Trail – which will be managed as a designated route through a closed area. The open area where cross country snowmobiling is allowed runs from Windy Pass across the Crest through Rock Creek. This allows high quality “challenge” snowmobile opportunities but limits the acreage available to remain consistent with the Montana Wilderness Study Act. I also considered a designated route from Hyalite through a closed area, to a small open area in the East Fork of Hyalite (Heather/Emerald) but concluded that opening both this area and the Windy Pass/Rock Creek area would not maintain wilderness character as it existed in 1977. Cross country snowmobiling will also be prohibited in the historic use area of

Buffalo Horn, with a designated open snowmobile route to Ramshorn Lake instead. This area closure in Buffalo Horn facilitates management of the State Gallatin Wildlife Management Area sections, and reduces conflicts with wintering big game, thus improving natural integrity.

In summary, the rationale for my decision in the HPBH WSA is as follows:

- It maintains recreation opportunities that existed in 1977.
- It provides very high quality single track motorcycling and mountain biking opportunities in a way that preserves wilderness character circa 1977 and that will not preclude future wilderness designation.
- It provides high quality “challenge” snowmobile opportunities, but does not allow proliferation of use across the entire area.
- It maintains the pre-existing wilderness character as it was in 1977.
- It adjusts geographic use patterns to reduce social conflict.
- It prevents proliferation of motorcycle and mountain bike use across the Wilderness Study Area as a whole.
- It improves grizzly secure habitat in a critical area of the Forest, improving natural integrity and apparent naturalness.
- It provides non-motorized and non-mechanized settings for backcountry recreation throughout a substantial portion of the Wilderness Study Area.
- It will lead to the restoration of trails that have developed into double tracks over time to their 1977 single track condition.

### Recommended Wilderness

The Lionhead RW addition straddles the Continental Divide along the Idaho/Montana border. The roadless (and RW addition) portion of this area extends into Idaho on the Targhee National Forest. The Gallatin Forest Plan (USDA 1987) recommended adding 22,800 acres of the 32,780-acre roadless unit (Gallatin portion) to Wilderness. This recommendation has been in most of the Montana Wilderness bills introduced as legislation in the 1990s. As of today, Congress has not acted to designate the area as Wilderness. Trails in the Mile Creek, Sheep Creek, Watkins Creek and Coffin Creek drainages access several cirque basins and small lakes. The southeast portion of the area receives some backcountry snowmobile use. The Sheep Creek trail is popular for hiking and horseback use, and receives occasional motorcycle traffic, as does the connector trail from Watkins Creek to Sheep Creek (#216). Currently, the Sheep Creek and West Fork trails are open to motorcycles. All the other trails within this RW are closed to motorized uses. The area is also closed to snowmobiles, though trespass in upper Watkins Creek and in the Slide Rock Creek drainage is common.

The Gallatin Forest Plan (USDA 1987) also recommended adding an area to the North Absaroka Wilderness located immediately south of Cooke City, Montana. This area is known as the Republic Mountain recommended wilderness consisting of a rugged trail-less zone that is steep with numerous talus slopes, ravines and spur ridges. The area receives light use, mostly hiking, hunting and some backcountry skiing in the winter. There are currently no motorized restrictions for any uses in the area though it receives little if any motorized use.

My travel management decision for both of these areas is to manage them strictly for non-motorized use only. This was a difficult choice for the Lionhead area in particular because it currently receives some summer motorized use and a portion of it has become popular for snowmobiling. However, since the roadless area evaluation of the Gallatin Forest Plan led to the conclusion that these areas should become part of the Wilderness Preservation System, I believe that they should be managed that way until such time that Congress acts on these recommendations or a revised Forest Plan concludes that these areas have some other higher, better use than as wilderness. Forest Service Region 1 guidance is also to generally prohibit motorized and mechanized use within recommended wilderness. My decision does not preclude mountain biking on trails with the Lionhead recommended wilderness at this time, but I believe it ultimately should for the same reasons as I've discussed above. The reason I have not chosen to prohibit them is because of an oversight on our part in developing the range of alternatives. We failed to present such a prohibition in any alternative that was released with the DEIS (although it has now been included in Alternative 6). This meant that the public was never made aware that this was to be considered and therefore had no opportunity to comment on it. It is my intent to propose a change to the Travel Plan within the next year or so that would prohibit mountain bike travel within Gallatin National Forest recommended wilderness areas.

**22. Wolverine.** The wolverine (*Gulo gulo*) is a mid-sized forest carnivore that persists at low densities across the Gallatin Forest. In this area, wolverines are classified as a Forest Service Sensitive Species, which are those species identified by the Regional Forester for which population viability is a concern. Direction for management of sensitive species is contained in the Forest Service Manual (FSM 2672.1), which states that these species must receive special management emphasis to ensure their viability and to preclude trends toward endangerment that would result in the need for Federal listing. The Montana Natural Heritage Program and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Department also consider the wolverine a Species of Concern (FEIS, page 3-598).

In consideration of this issue, I had two objectives. The first was to ensure that my decision would be consistent with Forest Service direction for sensitive species; that is to provide adequate habitat to sustain wolverine viability and to preclude trends toward endangerment that would result in the need for Federal listing. The second objective I had was to improve wolverine habitat on the Forest over current conditions. Based on the analysis of this issue in the FEIS, I found that for both summer and winter uses, Alternatives 3 through 7-M meet my objectives. However, Alternatives 4 through 7-M each incorporate specific measures designed to reduce known impacts on wolverine habitat (e.g. they spread the distribution of low motorized route densities more evenly across the Forest) and therefore I found these to be preferable.

There are four primary ways in which human activities can impact wolverine: habitat modification, disturbance, exploitation and pollution (FEIS, page 3-602). The primary effect of concern to me in making my decision was disturbance. Similar to my conclusions regarding summer use for wildlife in general, the wolverine analysis in Chapter 3 of the FEIS basically shows that the more restrictive one gets on human travel within the Gallatin National Forest, the less disturbance potential there would be for the wolverine (FEIS, pages 3-598 through 3-365). For summer travel Alternatives 3 through 7-M would result in lower motorized route density when compared to Alternatives 1 and 2. I expect the lowering of motorized access route density and restricting motorized use to designated routes to improve habitat utilization by wolverines (FEIS, page 3-609). I drew this conclusion because motorized users have the ability to cover

more territory and can reach wolverine habitat in shorter time frames as opposed to non-motorized users. There is little information on the effects of non-motorized use to wolverines (FEIS, page 3-606). Therefore my decision was not based on a belief that summer motorized use results in greater effect than non-motorized use within a given travel distance.

Winter is the most critical time for wolverine. Environmental conditions are more extreme, food sources can be limited and energy demands are highest during this time (FEIS, page 3-617). In the analysis for the FEIS, designated winter routes and areas open to dispersed snowmobile use were used to compare winter access among alternatives and travel planning areas (TPAs). Snowmobile area closures were considered to provide a measure of habitat protection, particularly in wolverine denning areas. Each travel planning area was evaluated relative to winter route densities combined with proportion of land base open to dispersed snowmobile use for all alternatives. Using a combination of route density and proportion of land base open to snowmobile use, four categories of winter use appeared meaningful for effects analysis: 1) lower route density ( $\leq 0.7$  mi/mi<sup>2</sup>) combined with lower ( $\leq 50\%$ ) proportion of land base open; 2) higher route density ( $> 0.7$  mi/mi<sup>2</sup>) combined with lower proportion open; 3) lower route density combined with higher ( $> 50\%$ ) proportion open; and 4) higher route density combined with higher proportion open. For analysis purposes, category 1 was considered to have the least winter impacts for wolverines, with progressively greater impacts for categories 2-4. For the travel planning areas that contain high quality winter habitat for wolverines (FEIS, page 3-621) conversion from higher impact winter access categories (3 or 4) to lower impact categories (1 or 2) is expected to benefit wolverines. Alternatives 1 and 2 (which reflect current conditions for winter) result in less than half the Forest land base falling in category 1. Under these alternatives, most of the category 1 lands are in designated Wilderness Areas. Only one TPA outside of designated Wilderness, Yankee Jim Canyon, is in category 1 under Alternatives 1 and 2. Alternatives 3 through 7-M all bring the proportion of the Forest in category 1 to over half the land base. These alternatives add progressively more area restrictions to dispersed snowmobile use outside of designated Wilderness. My decision (Alternative 7-M) falls between Alternatives 4 and 5. Category 3, where lower winter route densities are combined with higher proportions of land open to snowmobile use decreases considerably from Alternatives 1-2 (existing condition) to Alternatives 3 through 7-M. An increase in category 1 coupled with a decrease in category 3 (as indicated for Alternatives 3 through 7-M) will benefit wolverines.

Lastly my decision adopts a number of goals, objectives, standards and guidelines that will be of benefit to a number of wildlife species, including wolverines, as future management activities are undertaken. Refer to the FEIS, pages 3-632 through 3-635, for a discussion of these projected benefits.

**23. Wolves.** Wolves were reintroduced to the Greater Yellowstone Area in 1995, and were designated a “non-essential experimental” population under Section 10 of the Endangered Species Act. After reintroduction, gray wolves quickly colonized areas of the Gallatin Forest adjacent to Yellowstone National Park (YNP). In identifying this as an issue I was interested in whether human travel within the Forest could affect wolf populations. Based on the discussion beginning on page 3-636 of the FEIS, I concluded that none of the travel plan alternatives would result in significant adverse effects. While my selected alternative reduces open motorized route densities from the current situation, which is considered to be of some benefit, this really wasn’t a factor in making my decision. Livestock depredation, illegal killing, and vehicle collisions on highways are the key factors that limit the distribution and population size of wolves.

## **Non-significant Issues**

NEPA provides for the identification and elimination from detailed study those issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review, thus narrowing the discussion of those issues to a brief statement as to why they will not have a significant effect on the human environment or by providing reference to their coverage elsewhere (40 CFR 1501.7(3)). The following issues were evaluated but found not to be significant to decisions regarding human travel on the Gallatin Forest.

**24. Air Quality.** Concern was raised over the potential effects of travel under the alternatives (particularly motorized uses) on air quality. I determined this issue to be non-significant to the decision between Travel Plan alternatives. The issue was raised in public comments as an undesirable effect of encountering motorized use emissions on Forest roads and trails. We acknowledge that odor generated by emissions from combustion engines, particularly two-cycle engines, can diminish a non-motorized user's experience of Forest trails. However, this is a recreation (user satisfaction) issue rather than a general air quality issue. Air quality is not significantly affected by potential motorized use of Forest roads and trails under any of the seven alternatives.

**25. Research Natural Areas.** Research Natural Areas (RNAs) are a part of a national network of ecological areas designated in perpetuity for research and education and/or to maintain biological diversity on National Forest System lands (FSM 4063). RNAs are managed such that natural physical or biological processes are allowed to prevail without human intervention. According to FSM 4063.3, standards for protection and management of an RNA must support and promote the basic objectives and purposes of establishing the area. No logging or firewood gathering is permitted; grazing is only permitted under specific management prescriptions. Also prohibited is any form of recreation use that may threaten or interfere with the objectives for which the RNA was established. Roads, trails, fences, signs, or buildings are not permitted.

Seven RNAs were established on the Gallatin Forest through an Environmental Assessment and Decision Notice in 1997. These include Sliding Mountain, East Fork Mill Creek, Passage Creek, Palace Butte, Wheeler Ridge, Black Butte, and Obsidian Sands. Each RNA contains representative or unique natural features in a relatively undisturbed condition. The designation of these areas provides long-term protection and recognition of their natural values for research and baseline ecological study, observation, and conservation of biological diversity.

Most of the RNAs are within wilderness area boundaries and would continue to be managed in accordance with wilderness goals. For those RNAs outside of designated wilderness, there are no system roads or trails within the established boundaries. No snowmobile use is occurring in the RNAs due to heavy forest and it is not considered rideable terrain. There are no proposals to construct any new routes or introduce new recreational uses in the RNAs through objectives included with my decision and therefore this issue was not a factor.

**26. Energy Consumption.** Managing for motorized uses on the Gallatin Forest and just promoting recreation use in general under the alternatives will result in the consumption of energy. However, regardless of the alternative selected, people will continue to use the Forest for recreation and continue to consume energy for that purpose. All alternatives provide for a

variety of recreation opportunities, both motorized and non-motorized. While Alternatives 5 and 6 provide less miles of opportunity for motorcycle and ATV use than the others, it cannot necessarily be said that they would result in significantly less energy consumption. Motorized trail use in these alternatives could simply become more concentrated or the restrictions could attract more visitors for non-motorized activities. The gasoline used by motorcycles, ATVs and snowmobiles is insignificant when compared to that consumed to access trailheads and other destinations by car or truck, or from a broader perspective, the gasoline consumed for people to travel to the Yellowstone area from other parts of the country. There was no aspect of the proposed Travel Plan that could be modified to notably reduce overall energy consumption from a regional perspective. Even closing the Forest to human use would simply result in people traveling elsewhere to recreate. Therefore this issue was not a factor in my decision.

**27. Extractive Uses.** During scoping, concern was raised over the potential effects that the Travel Plan alternatives may have on extractive uses of the Gallatin National Forest. Primarily, how any road restrictions or decommissioning may affect timber harvest/wood fiber production, livestock grazing and mineral extraction. The scope of the Travel Plan deliberately defers decisions regarding potential road use, construction or reconstruction for access to timber stands to the analysis that would be completed for those specific actions. In other words, the Travel Plan does not authorize nor preclude road access to serve project activity and therefore I determined that this part of the issue was not significant.

Another facet of this issue was the potential for the management of trails within active grazing allotments to result in some users redistributing livestock or leaving gates open. Reports from Gallatin Forest range conservationists provide no evidence that bad human behavior is associated with any particular user group. Since none of the alternatives propose to restrict humans from allotment areas, it can be concluded that no Travel Plan alternative is any better or worse than another in terms of potential recreation/livestock use conflicts.

**28. Fire.** This issue concerns the potential for various forms of travel allowed under the alternatives to increase the risk of unplanned fire ignitions. Several comments were received expressing concerns that illegally or improperly operated vehicles can often create a fire hazard on public or private lands and that the Forest Service should restrict travel in the entire Forest when the fire danger is high and before “extreme” dryness occurs.

According to the Forest’s fire occurrence records, there have only been four fires caused by vehicles since 1980. Motorized vehicle use is typically restricted during times of high fire danger through the implementation of the Forest’s fire restrictions and Forest closure process. Unwanted fire starts from the improper use of motorized off-road vehicles off designated trails and roads are rare, and therefore this is not considered a significant issue for travel management planning.

**29. Fire/Fuels Management.** This issue concerns the potential effects of travel management under the alternatives on the Gallatin Forest’s fire prevention/fuels reduction program and the ability to suppress wildfire. Roads and motorized trails provide access for fire suppression and fuel management activities and ground-based fire suppression equipment; access to and from water sources, lookouts and helicopter staging areas; fire breaks for fire suppression and fuels management activities for low severity fires; and from a safety standpoint, anchor points for pre-

positioning firefighting resources and fire line construction. Roaded access can also have a negative effect by providing an increased opportunity for unwanted human-caused fires.

In planning suppression strategies for fire events lasting several days or weeks, roads and motorized trails provide alternative transportation options. These options play an important role in developing a wider range of strategies, commensurate with management area objectives that address cost-effectiveness and public and firefighter safety.

Road and motorized trail access is an important factor in effectively managing fuels and providing protection to wildland-urban interface areas. In a wildfire situation, response time for suppression actions can become a critical factor, especially when human lives are at stake. Roaded access allows pre-positioning of firefighting resources in the immediate area. All alternatives maintain the existing roaded access around wildland-urban interface areas.

In terms of cost-effectiveness, road and motorized trail access are important considerations for fire suppression and fuels management activities on the Gallatin Forest. They provide a wider array of treatment and suppression tactic options. Under all alternatives, road and motorized trail access for Forest administrative uses would be allowed on roads and trails closed to public motorized uses, except in designated Wilderness areas. Proposed Alternatives 2 through 7-M would adopt programmatic direction that would allow road and motorized trail access for fire emergencies and fuel management projects on National Forest lands. Therefore, the access concern was not considered a significant issue.

**30. Fragmentation.** The Forest Service considered whether there could be the potential for travel uses on the road and trail system under the alternatives to fragment wildlife or aquatic habitat, but concluded this was not of issue. Fragmentation is a concern related to vegetative manipulation or construction activities and these are not proposed in the Travel Plan alternatives. Fragmentation in relation to wildlife corridors was addressed for the Biodiversity issue and fragmentation of aquatic habitat was addressed for the Fisheries issue. Therefore, fragmentation was not addressed as a separate issue.

**31. Land Values.** There were two facets to this issue. The first was, what potential effect do the proposed goal, objectives and guidelines to acquire access to National Forest across private land (Goal B, Obj. B-1 through B-3, and Guidelines B-4 through B-9) have on the private land value. The second was, what potential effect could traffic volume on Forest roads have on adjacent private land value.

I did not find the first facet of this issue significant to the decision among alternatives because the access objectives exist with the Forest Service regardless of whether they are stated as part of the Travel Management Plan. For the most part they are common to all alternatives, except that under Alternative 1, the existing Forest Plan direction for access would remain in effect. In addition, proposed Objective B-3 only serves as disclosure of the general locations where the agency believes that there is a need for access should the opportunity arise. The appropriate decision point in which to analyze and consider the effects to private land values is when a specific proposal has been identified (e.g., during a negotiated land exchange or when a private landowner approaches the Forest Service for access).

I also found the second facet of the issue to be not significant, for two reasons:

- 1) Because there is no information indicating that varying the types and mix of uses on roads and trails accessed by roads adjacent to or through private land would affect traffic flow.
- 2) It cannot be concluded that more or less traffic on roads adjacent to or through private land has a positive or negative effect on land values.

Therefore this issue was not a factor in my decision.

**32. Public Safety.** In managing travel on the Gallatin Forest, consideration must always be given to public safety. Concerns include hazards of two-way travel on trails open to motorized use, mechanized travel encounters with horse and pack stock, snowmobile encounters with skiers and snowshoers and mountain bike encounters with foot and horse travel. The effects to user safety were similar for all alternatives. Three factors influence the safety of the road and trail system: the condition of the facilities, the mixture of uses on a particular facility and user behavior. Safety is enhanced if Forest roads and trails are routinely maintained and unexpected damage or unsafe conditions are identified and corrected in a reasonable amount of time. Safety was not a factor in my choice between alternatives but will become a concern in Travel Plan implementation. Better facilities and better user information will be the key factors in providing for public safety.

**33. Rare Plants.** The Gallatin National Forest currently has 21 plant species listed as “sensitive” by the Forest Service. Most are found in bogs, wet meadows and along streambanks. For a list of these species and their habitats, refer to the Rare Plant Effects Report in the project file (Cherry 2004). There are no plants on the Gallatin National Forest currently listed as threatened or endangered.

I determined this issue to be non-significant to my decision between Travel Plan alternatives. The Travel Management Plan does not include the project-specific actions to construct or reconstruct new roads or trails. Alternatives 2 through 7-M would also restrict summer motorized use to designated routes (i.e., existing routes where the surface is already devoid of vegetative cover). Therefore, no new impacts to rare plant habitat were predicted.

**34. Sensitive Wildlife.** All Forest Service planned, funded, executed or permitted programs and activities are to be reviewed for possible effects on sensitive species (FSM 2672.4). The following terrestrial species are listed as sensitive on the Regional Forester’s Sensitive Species list and are either known or suspected to occur on the Gallatin National Forest: northern goshawk, peregrine falcon, black-backed woodpecker, flammulated owl, Townsend’s big-eared bat, harlequin duck, trumpeter swan and wolverine. An identified management consideration for most of the sensitive species included restricting human activities during critical times such as breeding seasons. However, special closure orders are a tool that can be used to site-specifically manage transportation routes for specific periods of use based on a particular species’ annual activity. Use of this tool would serve to effectively mitigate without unnecessarily restricting public use or access to a particular area. The Travel Plan does not prevent temporary use restrictions when there is a need during critical times in critical habitat areas.

**35. Snags/Down Woody Debris.** This issue concerned the potential habitat loss of snag habitat. Snags serve as a growth substrate for microorganisms and invertebrates and provide nesting and foraging habitat for a variety of wildlife species. Directly, building roads or trails through

forested habitats can reduce snag and down log density. Indirectly, roads facilitate public access for hazard tree removal and firewood retrieval, which leads to a reduction of snags. I determined this issue not to be significant because none of the alternatives propose to construct new roads or trails so there are no additional direct effects on snags and down logs. Additional NEPA analysis would have to be completed for any newly constructed routes. Effects on snag and down woody habitat could be addressed at that time. In terms of the potential loss of snags and downed trees through firewood cutting from the existing road system, I believe that any problems identified is better addressed through area cutting restrictions than it would be by closing roads for all public access. Firewood cutting restrictions were not within the scope of my decision for a travel management plan.

**36. Subnivian Small Mammals.** This issue concerned animals dwelling and/or foraging under snow cover. It was mentioned in several comments received. Subnivian habitat areas occur seasonally throughout the higher elevation areas of the Gallatin Forest. Typically, area of persistent deep snow cover occurs above 6,000 feet in elevation on the Forest, but may vary widely because of localized events and topographical features. Many trail systems are present within this zone and provide recreational opportunities for snowmobiles, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and other winter recreation. The effects of this recreational use to subnivian mammals can be described in general terms of thermal regulation concerns and direct loss of subnivian habitats. I did not consider this a significant issue because analyses revealed that the extent of potential winter recreation impacts to subnivian species was very limited, both temporally and spatially regardless of the alternative.

**37. Tourism.** A total of 3.8 million non-resident travel groups, generally couples or families, visited Montana in 1998 (FEIS, page 4-32). By 2005 this number had risen to 4.3 million groups. According to the Institute for Tourism and Research eighty-four percent of these visited during the summer, spring and fall, while 16% visited during the winter (id.). The top five recreation activities of visitors are viewing wildlife, hiking/walking, viewing natural features, relaxing and driving for pleasure. Except for hiking and walking, these are all passive activities. In addition, while the Travel Plan alternatives varied in terms of restrictions applied to certain routes and areas, no alternative contemplated the elimination of opportunities that exist today. There is no evidence that adjustments in travel management within the range of alternatives would have any notable effect on area tourism. For these reasons I determined this issue not to be significant to my Travel Plan decision.

- a. Most non-resident visitors come because of the attraction of Yellowstone National Park and surrounding tourist communities.
- b. The top five recreation activities identified above are accommodated in each of the seven alternatives.

**38. Water (Snow) Chemistry.** Water chemistry poses only limited and slight differences in effects between alternatives. The EPA (1995) indicates that roads, highways, and bridges can be a significant source of pollutants to surface water in areas of heavy vehicle traffic such as urban areas and major highway corridors. Run-off pollution from rainwater or melting snow over roads, highways, and bridges can flush dirt and dust, rubber and metal deposits from tire wear, antifreeze and engine oil, and trash into surface water. Vehicle use on the Gallatin Forest is far less than that in the more urbanized areas used in the EPA (1995) evaluation.

Ingersoll (2002) reported on a snowpack chemistry monitoring network at 52 sites along the Rocky Mountains from New Mexico to Montana including local monitoring of snowpack chemistry in concentrated snowmobile use areas in Yellowstone National Park (West Entrance and Old Faithful). There was a measurable increase in ammonium and sulfate detected in snowpack samples taken directly in the roadway. However, in samples taken 50 meters from roads or parking lots, the snowpack chemistry samples did not detect elevated levels of contaminants. Ingersoll (2002) concluded that the contribution of snowmobile emissions in the Rocky Mountain region to regional atmospheric deposition is likely to be minimal. Ingersoll (1998) also concluded that elevated snowmobile emission levels in snow along highway corridors are dispersed into surrounding watersheds at concentrations below levels likely to threaten human ecosystem health. Since snowmobile use on the Forest is far more dispersed than those concentrated areas evaluated by Ingersoll, streamflow chemistry effects from snowmobile emissions in each alternative is expected to be very low and not of ecosystem or water quality significance.

## **E. Alternatives Studied In Detail**

The Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) studied 7 alternatives in detail. They were developed to be responsive to the significant issues identified over the “Starting Benchmark” (i.e. Proposed Action) that was released for public comment in August of 2002. See Section D of this ROD for a discussion of these issues. The alternatives also had somewhat of a philosophical foundation. Those who use, or are otherwise interested in management of the Gallatin National Forest have different value sets and therefore varied opinions on how travel should be managed.

Many people that favored more restrictions on motorized use tend to see the value of the Gallatin National Forest as one of very few places remaining that are largely free of societal influences. It is important to these individuals that here, humans remain subordinate to wildlife and natural processes.

Many letters indicating opposition to restrictions on motorized use see travel more as an issue of civil rights. The National Forest belongs to all American citizens and it is not “right” to exclude one user group in favor of another. These individuals tend to not be in support of separating uses wondering “why can’t we just all share and get along.” They value the experience of nature, relating memories of riding with their families to special places and hoping that their grandchildren can have those same opportunities. They would not agree that motorized use equates to adverse resource impacts, or at least they are willing to accept higher levels of impact in order to maintain motorized recreation opportunities.

We were able to use these two different value sets to define each end of the range of alternatives (i.e. Alternatives 1 and 6). They also served to define the range of variation in resource impacts that would be incurred as I considered travel management options that would go from lower levels of restrictions to higher levels of restrictions. Analysis of the Starting Benchmark (i.e. Proposed Action) and the current situation relative to the significant issues showed, in general, that impacts varied with the level of human use, particularly motorized use. Therefore the range of alternatives varied mostly on the amount of motorized use opportunity provided. Alternative 1 was the least restrictive and Alternative 6 was the most restrictive. Alternatives 2, 3, 4 and 5 fall within this range and are incrementally more restrictive on motorized uses. Alternative 4

closely represented the Benchmark. See pages 2-15 through 2-19 of the FEIS for a more detailed description of the alternative development process. The six alternatives were presented for public comment in August of 2003 to ensure that they sharply defined the issues and sufficiently represented the different interests.

Travel planning is different than a typical NEPA analysis for a site-specific project. Alternatives 1 through 6 were developed with the understanding that my final decision would be made based on a comparison of the merits of each of these options on a Forest-wide, Travel Planning Area, and route-by-route scale. In other words, my decision would likely be some combination of these alternatives and thus would be described as a new alternative. Alternative 7 of the DEIS and Alternative 7-M of the FEIS were identified based on a comparison of the benefits and consequences of the other six alternatives. This principle is important as I explain my rationale for not selecting the other alternatives below. Alternative 7-M was the only alternative I found to be acceptable for all issues. Other alternatives were acceptable for specific issues, but not all of them. This could lead to the question as to why we didn't make adjustments to any of the other alternatives to make them acceptable. For example, we could have made Alternative 6 acceptable in terms of impacts to lynx by adjusting snowmobile use within the Crazy Mountains. The reason is that if we were to change any or all of the alternatives to make them acceptable in terms of their effect on each of the significant issues, they would duplicate Alternative 7-M. While we strived to make each alternative as selectable as it could be, it was also important to stay within the overall guiding theme for that alternative. This gives a better understanding of the consequences and provides the public with an understanding of why I didn't find certain philosophical views of how best to manage travel acceptable.

### **Alternative 1 – no action**

This alternative most closely reflects “no action” as required under NEPA, plus it reflects a large share of the comments received. There were many who stated that they liked the Travel Plan the way it was before the January 2001 Montana/Dakota OHV decision and that the Starting Benchmark proposal was overly restrictive, particularly on motorized uses. This alternative reflects the consequences of no change to travel management as outlined on the 1999 Gallatin National Forest Recreation Visitor Map. It also reflects the effects that we might anticipate over time even with the Montana/Dakota OHV decision in place because routes legal to motorized use would not be designated, and therefore such use, although illegal, could become established where it does not exist today. Under this alternative existing snowmobile and seasonal restrictions would remain unchanged. Current Gallatin National Forest Plan direction would not be amended.

I had a number of reasons for not selecting this alternative not the least of which was that it would not meet my purpose and need for proposing a travel management plan. It would not bring area, road and trail use into compliance with higher level management direction for grizzly bear and lynx, which are listed under the Endangered Species Act as “threatened” species. It would allow motorized travel within the Cabin Creek Wildlife and Recreation Management Area and the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area in a way that I don't believe is consistent with the Lee Metcalf Wilderness Act and the Montana Wilderness Study Act respectively. It also does not amend the Gallatin Forest Plan to remove outdated and problematic programmatic direction for the management of travel. I also have concluded that it would not be

adequate to correct unacceptable resource damage that has been occurring and more likely it will make the situation worse.

This alternative would allow for a proliferation of motorized summer use which I found to be unacceptable in terms of effects to wildlife, biological diversity, fisheries, soils, and water quality. Essentially, this alternative to me represents unmanaged use. With the growth in population and increased visitor use expected this scenario has the potential to create serious resource problems in the future. This Alternative also does not respect (i.e. preclude motorized travel from) the high elevation area of the Crazy Mountains that is of traditional importance to the Crow Tribe.

Another principle reason that I found this alternative unacceptable is that it is not responsive to projected changes in recreation demand and public attitudes over what's important. Several studies consistently show that participation in non-motorized activity exceeds that of motorized activity (see the FEIS, pages 3-421 through 3-428). A study completed by the Forest Service in 2002 surveyed the American public regarding their values with respect to public lands, objectives for management of public lands (including recreation management) and beliefs about the role the Forest Service should play in fulfilling those objectives (FEIS, page 3-427). The study concludes that the public sees the promotion of ecosystem health and the protection of watersheds as important objectives. Alternative 1 is not responsive to the fact that the projected demand for non-motorized recreation opportunities and settings is expected to exceed that for motorized uses and settings, and that the desired experiences of non-motorized users are adversely affected by motorized use.

Lastly, I concluded that Alternative 1 would not be reasonable to implement. A conscious decision to select this alternative reasons that all routes that were legally open to motorized uses prior to the imposition of the Montana/Dakota OHV decision (January 2001), will in fact be converted into ATV routes. Since many of the trails outside the Wilderness are open to motorized uses, most would have to be rebuilt to accommodate ATVs. I would also expect off-route summer motorized travel to lead to user-created routes with inadequate drainage and/or high erosion potential. This would significantly increase the investments we would have to make to correct problems and minimize impacts to other resources.

## **Alternative 2**

This alternative may be described as maintaining the status quo. In general it took the current Travel Management Plan (i.e., the 1999 Gallatin National Forest Recreation Visitor Map as modified by the 2001 Montana/Dakota OHV decision) and focused on incorporating mitigation (such as programmatic direction, seasonal restrictions, information and education) to respond to issues rather than opting for some uses over others on specific routes. In other words, Alternative 2 was designed to correct resource problems to the extent possible while retaining as much of the existing opportunities as possible.

The benefits of Alternative 2 over Alternative 1 were substantial. By restricting summer motorized use to designated routes I could be sure that resource impacts would not worsen and in many cases would improve. As compared to Alternative 1, I found Alternative 2 to be acceptable in terms of the impacts to big game, fisheries, migratory birds, riparian habitats, soils and water quality. I also found it to be reasonable to implement, although more costly than the

higher end of the range of alternatives. I did not select this alternative primarily because I didn't think it went far enough in improving some resource conditions nor was it responsive to projected changes in recreation demand and public attitudes.

Alternative 2 would be consistent with the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Conservation Agreement (CA) with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) (ICST 2003:12-13), as well as Forest Plan direction for protection of the grizzly bear, however I didn't find it adequate in improving secure habitat within the Gallatin #3 subunit at the southern end of the Gallatin Mountain Range. Alternative 2 would also not be consistent with the Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy (LCAS) in terms of compacted snow in the Bridger/Bangtails and East Gallatin Lynx Analysis Units (LAUs). In addition, Alternative 2 did not adequately meet an objective I had to improve winter habitat for wolverine nor reduce motorized route density sufficiently in corridors between mountain ranges.

In terms of recreation I did not select Alternative 2 (the status quo) because it does not provide sufficient front-country area in non-motorized settings for hiking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and to some extent mountain biking. In other words, it is not responsive to the increases in projected demand for these opportunities. It also allows a level of motorcycle and snowmobile use in the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area that I don't find as being consistent with the Montana Wilderness Study Act, and it allows ATV use in the Cabin Creek Wildlife and Recreation Management Area which I don't believe to be consistent with the Lee Metcalf Wilderness Act except on the Oil Well Road. As with Alternative 1, this Alternative also does not respect (i.e. preclude motorized travel from) the high elevation area of the Crazy Mountains that is of traditional importance to the Crow Tribe. Lastly, Alternatives 2 through 6 included a proposed blanket spring restriction on mountain bike and stock use to protect trail facilities. I concluded that this was going too far in attempting to correct a problem that could otherwise be addressed through restrictions on specific routes and/or information and education.

### **Alternative 3**

This alternative was developed in response to many of the comments received from motorized users on the Starting Benchmark proposal. Essentially, it emphasized motorized recreation outside of Wilderness, but in comparison to Alternatives 1 and 2, would more actively manage for it. It would reinstate many of the popular motorcycle trails and, to a lesser extent, ATV trails that would have been restricted under the Benchmark. Alternative 3 included new trail routes that would be opened to motorized use, primarily to create loop opportunities and prevent the temptation to proceed beyond trail ends. The area legally available for snowmobile use would be approximately 80% of what is currently legally available. Additional marked and groomed snowmobile and ski routes were also included under this alternative. The number of existing open roads would not increase but objectives would be adopted to upgrade some backcountry (4x4 only) road such that it could accommodate passenger car travel. Horse and mountain bike opportunities would not be prohibited but there would be blanket spring restrictions forest-wide to protect trail facilities.

My conclusions over Alternative 3 were similar to Alternative 2. As with Alternative 2, I found Alternative 3 to be acceptable in terms of the impacts to big game, fisheries, migratory birds, riparian habitats, soils and water quality. I also found it to be reasonable to implement, although

more costly than Alternative 2. Again though, I did not select this alternative primarily because I didn't think it went far enough in improving some resource conditions nor was it responsive to projected changes in recreation demand and public attitudes.

Alternative 3 would be consistent with the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Conservation Agreement (CA) with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) (ICST 2003:12-13), as well as Forest Plan direction for protection of the grizzly bear, however I didn't find it adequate in improving secure habitat within the Gallatin #3 subunit at the southern end of the Gallatin Mountain Range. Alternative 3 would also not be consistent with the LCAS in terms of compacted snow in the Bridger/Bangtails, East Gallatin, Emigrant, Henry's Lake, N. Gallatin, S. Fork Madison, Upper Gallatin, West Crazies and West Gallatin Lynx Analysis Units (LAUs). It also does not adequately meet an objective I have for improving winter habitat for wolverine nor does it reduce summer motorized route density sufficiently in corridors between mountain ranges.

In terms of recreation I did not select Alternative 3 because, like Alternatives 1 and 2, it does not provide sufficient front-country area in non-motorized settings for hiking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and mountain biking. In other words, it is not responsive to the increases in projected demand for these opportunities. It also allows a level of motorcycle and snowmobile use in the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area that I don't find as being consistent with the Montana Wilderness Study Act, and it allows ATV use in the Cabin Creek Wildlife and Recreation Management Area which I don't believe to be consistent with the Lee Metcalf Wilderness Act except on the Oil Well Road. As with Alternatives 1 and 2, this Alternative does not respect (i.e. preclude motorized travel from) the high elevation area of the Crazy Mountains that is of traditional importance to the Crow Tribe. Lastly, Alternative 3 included the blanket spring restriction on mountain bike and stock use to protect trail facilities and as with Alternatives 2 and 4 through 6, I concluded that this was going too far in attempting to correct a problem that could otherwise be addressed through restrictions on specific routes and/or information and education.

#### **Alternative 4**

This alternative essentially was the Starting Benchmark proposal developed for scoping/public involvement in August 2002. It was responsive to projected changes in recreation demand and it attempted to bring area, road and trail use into compliance with laws, regulations, and other higher-level direction. To this extent this alternative was more restrictive on motorized uses than Alternatives 1 through 3. Since it was developed as the initial proposal, this alternative did not have the benefit of early environmental analysis nor public involvement.

Alternative 4 would have designated approximately 180 miles of existing single-track motorcycle trail to combined ATV/motorcycle use. Objectives were proposed to bring this trail up to ATV standard. New trail connectors were also proposed, similar to Alternative 3, to create loop opportunities and prevent the temptation to proceed beyond trail ends. Alternative 4 would have provided about 90% of the OHV trail opportunity provided under Alternative 2 but the amount of trail allowing motorcycles without ATVs would decline over 50%. The area legally available for snowmobile use would be approximately 80% of what is currently legally available. Additional marked and groomed snowmobile and ski routes were also proposed under this Alternative. The number of existing open roads would not increase but, like Alternative 3,

objectives would be adopted to upgrade some backcountry (4x4 only) road such that it could accommodate passenger car travel. Horse and mountain bike opportunities would not be prohibited but there would be blanket spring restrictions forest-wide to protect trail facilities. This alternative would also preclude mountain bike use on the Hyalite and East Fork of Hyalite Trails. Seasonal restrictions would be adopted on uses other than foot and ski travel on certain routes throughout the Forest.

As with Alternatives 2 and 3, I found Alternative 4 to be acceptable in terms of the impacts to big game, fisheries, migratory birds, riparian habitats, soils, water quality and in our ability to implement it. In addition, I found Alternative 4 to be acceptable in terms of providing sufficient front-country area in non-motorized settings for hiking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and mountain biking. It was developed to be responsive to the increases in projected demand for these opportunities. The restrictions on summer and winter motorized use were also sufficient to me in alleviating potential adverse effects on biological diversity and wolverine habitat. However, I did learn through public comment that the configuration of motorized routes (including new loops) identified in this alternative was not as desirable to the users as other routes were. Therefore, from a recreation perspective, I did not select Alternative 4 in preference for the route configuration I adopted in my decision (Alternative 7-M).

Through analysis I also found that Alternative 4 was not acceptable in providing habitat for the grizzly bear and lynx. As with Alternatives 2 and 3, I didn't find it adequate in improving secure bear habitat within the Gallatin #3 subunit at the southern end of the Gallatin Mountain Range. Alternative 4 would also not be consistent with the LCAS in terms of compacted snow in the Bridger/Bangtails, Emigrant, N. Gallatin, S. Fork Madison, West Crazies and West Gallatin Lynx Analysis Units (LAUs).

Alternative 4 was also not acceptable to me in terms of the designated uses that would have been allowed in the Cabin Creek Wildlife and Recreation Management Area, the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area, and also the Lionhead recommended wilderness area of the Gallatin Forest Plan. In the Cabin Creek Wildlife and Recreation Management Area, Alternative 4 would allow ATVs which I believe is inconsistent with the Lee Metcalf Wilderness Act except on the Oil Well Road. In the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area some trails would be designated under Alternative 4 for ATV use which I believe is contrary to the Montana Wilderness Study Act. In the Lionhead recommended wilderness the Sheep Lake Trail would be managed for motorcycle use which is not consistent with Regional guidelines on travel management within these areas. As with Alternatives 1 through 3, this Alternative does not respect (i.e. preclude motorized travel from) the high elevation area of the Crazy Mountains that is of traditional importance to the Crow Tribe. Lastly, Alternative 4 included the blanket spring restriction on mountain bike and stock use to protect trail facilities and as with Alternatives 2, 3, 5 and 6, I concluded that this was going too far in attempting to correct a problem that could otherwise be addressed through restrictions on specific routes and/or information and education.

### **Alternative 5**

Early in the analysis it became apparent that there is an inverse relationship between the level of human use of the Forest and the condition of other resources. For example, as opportunities for motorized use is increased, wildlife habitat security is decreased. Conversely, the more

restrictions one places on recreation use of the Forest, the better it is for wildlife and other resources. It is a sliding scale of travel management options. For many of the issues, I found Alternative 4 (the Starting Benchmark proposal) to be acceptable. However, that does not necessarily mean that these effects were preferable. Alternative 5 was developed to identify a travel management scenario that would further improve wildlife habitat and other resource conditions beyond Alternative 4. Consequently, this alternative is more restrictive for both summer and winter motorized use. Alternative 5 would provide about 70% of the OHV trail opportunity provided under Alternative 2. The area legally available for snowmobile use would be approximately 65% of what is currently legally available. The amount of marked or groomed snowmobile or ski trails would remain close to what it is today. Overall, the amount of open road, particularly high clearance vehicle roads would decline somewhat. The shift to non-motorized use is focused on trails. Mountain biking would be restricted beyond Alternative 4 in some areas including the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area. Horse use would generally be managed the same as in Alternatives 2 through 4. The length of seasonal restrictions applied to various uses would be greater than the previous alternatives for many Forest trails.

I found Alternative 5 to be preferable to Alternatives 1 through 4 for all of the environmental issues discussed in Chapter 3 of the FEIS. It resolved the unacceptable impacts I found for Alternative 4 relative to grizzly bear habitat in the Gallatin #3 subunit, and winter lynx habitat in the Bridger/Bangtails, Emigrant, N. Gallatin, S. Fork Madison, West Crazies and West Gallatin Lynx Analysis Units (LAUs). I also found the motorized use restrictions in the high elevation area of the Crazy Mountains to be responsive to Crow Tribal concerns. The reason I did not select this alternative was based primarily on it being too restrictive on motorized recreation opportunities. My primary objective in management of travel was to provide well-distributed opportunities for motorized vehicle use and exclusive hiking, horseback, skiing and mountain biking in non-motorized settings. Alternative 5 was not sufficient in providing the former in my judgment. This alternative would have prohibited motorcycle use on many trails that are currently popular for this use such as the Hyalite Creek Trail and trails on the west side of the Bridger Mountains. In the winter, this alternative virtually eliminated snowmobiling in the higher elevations of the Gallatin National Forest and I found that to be unacceptable.

Another reason I did not select this alternative is because it would have precluded mountain biking in the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area, even on trails that would be open to motorcycles. While the objective was to limit travel in this area to uses known to occur in 1977, it made little sense to preclude mountain bikes when motorcycles were allowed. Lastly, Alternative 5 included the blanket spring restriction on mountain bike and stock use to protect trail facilities and as with Alternatives 2, 3, 4 and 6, I concluded that this was going too far in attempting to correct a problem that could otherwise be addressed through restrictions on specific routes and/or information and education.

### **Alternative 6**

Alternative 6 was responsive to a significant number of comments received and reflected a position that heavy restrictions on motorized use were needed to protect wildlife habitat, retain the primitive character of unroaded lands and maintain other resource values. Under this alternative, motorized use would be precluded in the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area, the Lionhead Travel Planning Area and in other inventoried roadless areas. ATV

and motorcycle use would be largely removed from the trail system. There would be more area closures on snowmobile use than in the other alternatives. More restrictions are placed on mountain bikes in certain areas including the Wilderness Study Area. Horse use would be managed similar to the other alternatives but there would be some additional seasonal restrictions imposed as a potential solution to correct resource damage and reduce maintenance costs.

Because of the heavy motorized use restrictions, Alternative 6 was preferable to Alternatives 1 through 4 for all of the environmental issues discussed in Chapter 3 of the FEIS. As with Alternative 5 however, I found it to be much too restrictive on motorized and mountain bike use. I found no good reason to eliminate motorcycle opportunities from the trail system entirely or to prohibit snowmobiling throughout so much area of the Forest. Essentially, Alternative 6 would manage inventoried roadless areas as if they were designated wilderness and I do not believe that to be appropriate. As with Alternatives 2 through 5, Alternative 6 also included the blanket spring restriction on mountain bike and stock use to protect trail facilities and I concluded that this was going too far in attempting to correct a problem that could otherwise be addressed through restrictions on specific routes and/or information and education.

**Table 7. Comparison of Alternatives. Summary of summer opportunities by miles (approximate).**

<b>Recreation Opportunity</b>	<b>Alt. 1</b>	<b>Alt. 2</b>	<b>Alt. 3</b>	<b>Alt. 4</b>	<b>Alt. 5</b>	<b>Alt. 6</b>	<b>Alt. 7-M</b>
<b>Pleasure Driving</b>							
Miles of Road	309	314	421	415	397	401	400
Emphasized for passenger car use. Other uses allowed include any licensed vehicle, motorcycle or ATV plus mountain biking. Hiking and stock use are not prohibited, but they are not encouraged.							
<b>Backcountry Roads (4x4)</b>							
Miles of Road	417	411	354	360	326	289	347
Emphasized for 4X4 driving. Other uses allowed include any licensed vehicle, motorcycle, or ATV. Some roads may be dual designated for unlicensed ATV and motorcycle use. Hiking and stock use are allowed.							
<b>ATV and Motorcycle</b>							
Miles on Road	77	73	372	342	308	285	389
Miles on Trail	680	281	225	234	130	51	145
Total Miles	757	354	597	576	438	336	534
ATV and motorcycle use is emphasized on these roads and trails. Mountain biking is also emphasized on many of these routes while all other uses are allowed but not encouraged.							
<b>Motorcycle</b>							
Miles on Road	3	8	14	7	9	0	17
Miles on Trail	71	458	393	194	149	0	279
Total Miles	74	466	407	201	158	0	296
Motorcycles are emphasized on these roads and trails while ATVs are prohibited. These are in addition to the miles of road and trail listed above under ATV and motorcycle. Mountain bikes are also emphasized on some of these routes and other non-motorized uses are allowed.							
<b>Mountain Bike (Use Emphasized)</b>							
Miles on Road	1,071	1,071	509	496	488	488	545
Miles on Trail	1,315	1,269	787	743	609	599	769
Total Miles	2,386	2,340	1,296	1,239	1,097	1,087	1,314
These roads and trails are emphasized for mountain bikes and in some cases, there is a dual emphasis with motorized road or trail use. All these trails allow foot and horse use but horse use may not be encouraged.							

Recreation Opportunity	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4	Alt. 5	Alt. 6	Alt. 7-M
<b>Mountain Bike (Use Allowed)</b>							
Miles on Road	880	880	1,453	1,467	1,475	1,474	1,371
Miles on Trail	18	17	447	473	353	341	400
Total Miles	898	897	1,900	1,940	1,828	1,815	1,771
These roads and trails are emphasized for other uses such as hiking, stock use, or motorized use, but mountain biking is also allowed. Many of these roads are revegetated.							
<b>Pack and Saddle Stock (Use Emphasized)</b>							
Miles on Trail	2,115	2,034	1,766	1,750	2,018	2,034	1,767
These trails are emphasized for horse use and generally have a dual emphasis with hiking. These are both inside and outside Wilderness. Other uses are also allowed and in some cases these trails are shared with motorcycle use.							
<b>Pack and Saddle Stock (Use Allowed)</b>							
Miles on Trail	1	81	342	354	99	109	331
These are managed for other emphasis such as motorcycle, ATV, or mountain biking, but horses are allowed.							
<b>Hiking (Use Emphasized)</b>							
Miles on Trail	2,109	2,000	2,046	2,036	2,054	2,114	2,008
<b>Hiking (Use Allowed)</b>							
Miles on Trail	1	115	137	147	126	63	149

**Table 8. Comparison of Alternatives. Summary of winter opportunities in miles (approximate).**

Recreation Opportunity	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4	Alt. 5	Alt. 6	Alt. 7-M
<b>Pleasure Driving (Plowed Road)</b>							
Miles of Plowed Road	162	170	177	168	173	172	168
<b>Snowmobiling</b>							
Miles of Groomed Trail	320	333	374	347	336	327	346
Miles of Marked Trail	80	80	146	136	85	87	134
Total Miles	400	413	520	483	421	414	480
<b>Cross-country Skiing</b>							
Miles of Groomed Trail	48	50	71	79	52	54	52
Miles of Marked Trail	166	160	180	179	152	181	174
Total Miles	214	210	251	258	204	235	226

**Table 9. Comparison of Alternatives. Summary of snowmobile area restrictions by acre.**

Recreation Opportunity	Alt. 1 Acres	Alt. 2 Acres	Alt. 3 Acres	Alt. 4 Acres	Alt. 5 Acres	Alt. 6 Acres	Alt. 7-M Acres
<b>Yearlong Closure</b>							
Wilderness	717,369	717,369	717,369	717,369	717,369	717,369	717,369
Non-Wilderness	179,267	184,838	376,241	430,900	541,800	583,409	498,857
<b>Seasonal Closure *</b>							
Wilderness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Non-Wilderness	91,767	109,437	93,720	76,677	142,043	36,907	77,908
<b>No Restrictions</b>							
Wilderness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Non-Wilderness	953,969	948,398	756,995	702,336	591,436	549,827	634,379

\* Seasonal restrictions are displayed under the route-by-route management section.

**Table 10. Comparison of Alternatives. Forest-wide summary of facilities by miles (approximate).**

<b>Alt. 1 Miles</b>	<b>Alt. 2 Miles</b>	<b>Alt. 3 Miles</b>	<b>Alt. 4 Miles</b>	<b>Alt. 5 Miles</b>	<b>Alt. 6 Miles</b>	<b>Alt. 7-M Miles</b>
<b>MILES OF ROAD</b>						
<b>Passenger Car Roads (Non-PFSR)<sup>1</sup></b>						
309	314	196	193	175	179	192
<b>Passenger Car (PFSR)<sup>1</sup></b>						
0	0	225	222	222	222	208
<b>Backcountry Roads<sup>1</sup></b>						
417	411	354	360	326	289	347
<b>Project Roads – open to all trail uses including motorized uses</b>						
36	36	103	94	84	66	106
<b>Project Roads – motorized uses prohibited; all other uses not prohibited</b>						
805	805	732	741	776	798	704
<b>Administrative Use Roads – open to all trail uses including motorized uses</b>						
30	30	98	77	90	97	89
<b>Administrative Use Roads – motorized uses prohibited; all other uses not prohibited</b>						
354	354	255	276	289	312	270
<b>User-Built Roads<sup>2</sup></b>						
160	160	100	100	100	100	160
<b>New Roads to be Constructed</b>						
0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL ROAD MILES</b>						
2111	2111	2062	2063	2063	2062	2076
<b>MILES OF TRAIL - SUMMER</b>						
<b>Existing Trails – Open to most uses including motorized</b>						
750	738	563	382	248	39	386
<b>New Trails to be Constructed – Open to most uses including motorized</b>						
0	0	54	46	31	13	39
<b>Existing Trails – Open to most uses excluding motorized</b>						
1358	1370	1545	1726	1860	2070	1722
<b>New Trails to be Constructed – Open to most uses excluding motorized</b>						
0	0	59	57	48	48	0
<b>TOTAL TRAIL MILES</b>						
2109	2109	2222	2211	2187	2169	2147
<b>MILES OF TRAIL - WINTER<sup>3</sup></b>						
<b>Existing Trails – Open to most uses including motorized</b>						
399	413	520	482	421	415	480
<b>New Trails to be Constructed – Open to most uses including motorized</b>						
0	13	120	83	22	15	80
<b>Existing Trails – Open to most uses excluding motorized</b>						
246	241	288	297	234	270	260
<b>New Trails to be Constructed – Open to most uses excluding motorized</b>						
0	0	43	51	0	24	14
<b>TOTAL TRAIL MILES</b>						
645	653	808	779	655	685	739
<sup>1</sup> PFSR = Public Forest Service Roads. Road miles include dual designated ATV and motorcycle routes. <sup>2</sup> User-built roads in Alternatives 3-7 include short spur roads next to main roads that access dispersed areas. <sup>3</sup> Most winter trails including new trails are located on existing summer roads and trails.						

## **Environmentally Preferred Alternatives**

Alternatives 2 through 7-Modified were all projected to improve environmental conditions over current management of Forest travel and therefore would be environmentally preferred over Alternative 1 or no action.

### **F. Alternatives Not Given Detailed Study.**

There were several other alternatives that I considered but, for one reason or another, I had determined that they did not warrant detailed study in the EIS. These alternatives and my reasons for not having them studied in detail are described below.

#### **Eliminate Motorized Use of the Forest.**

This alternative was not given detailed study because:

- 1) No issues were identified that would warrant closure of the entire road and trail system to motorized use.
- 2) Most public comments from non-motorized interests advocated a management scenario that parallels Alternative 6 above.
- 3) Closing the entire Forest to motorized use would preclude passenger vehicle access to many trailheads, thus reducing opportunities for shorter day hikes and horseback rides.

#### **Increase Motorized Recreation Opportunities Beyond that Provided in Alternative 1.**

This alternative was not given detailed study because I determined that Alternative 1, which represents the management of travel as it was in 1999 and allows for off-route summer motorized travel, to be sufficient in representing the more motorized end of the range of alternatives. I saw no reason to consider alternatives that would further relax control of motorized use in general. While these alternatives may be favored by certain users, they would be in violation of legal requirements and higher level direction imposed since 1999 (e.g., the Endangered Species Act for grizzly bear and lynx, the Montana Wilderness Study Act for parts of the Gallatin Range) and would not be responsive to much of the purpose and need identified for a Travel Management Plan.

#### **Managing Helicopter Landings on the National Forest.**

Comments received on the Benchmark (Proposed Action) expressed concern over helicopter landings on the National Forest, primarily for backcountry downhill skiing. Federal Aviation Regulation 7-4-6a prohibits the landing of aircraft on lands or waters administered by the National Park Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service or the US Forest Service without authorization from the respective agency. Part 6b further requires pilots to maintain a minimum altitude of 2,000 feet above the surface in Wilderness and Primitive areas. I do not intend to authorize helicopter landings for recreational purposes at undesignated sites and therefore it wasn't necessary to address it in the EIS.

### **Close and Obliterate Primary Access Roads into the Gallatin National Forest.**

Environmental analysis of the impacts of Forest travel to riparian areas discloses that historical roaded development into the Forest has significantly impacted riparian habitat. This raised the question on whether a Travel Plan alternative should be studied that would close and restore major access roads that are located within or near riparian zones (e.g. the Hyalite Road, Swan Creek Road and others within Forest Service jurisdiction). I concluded that such an alternative would be clearly unreasonable at this time. Society in general accepts the consequences associated with most types of human use and development in exchange for opportunities and better quality of life. This includes the acceptance of major highways and other developments within valley bottoms and river corridors where the riparian habitat value exceeds what occurs on the Gallatin National Forest. While many advocated further restrictions on motorized use and an overall reduction in open road density, they did not desire a loss of passenger car access to campgrounds, trailheads and other destinations within the Forest. In addition, Alternatives 2 through 7-M all would result in improved riparian conditions and there is no proposal to construct new roads. For these reasons, this alternative was not given detailed study in this EIS.

### **Restrict Mountain Bikes to Designated Routes.**

Consideration was given to whether mountain bikes should be restricted to designated routes, as is proposed for motorized uses. Some parts of the country are incurring problems with off-route bike travel but that is currently not the case on the Gallatin Forest. Growth of mountain biking over time, and resulting resource or social effects, may cause the Forest to have to consider additional mountain bike restrictions in the future. There are no known areas of the Forest where off-route mountain bike impacts would compel me to manage biking on designated routes only at this time and therefore I dismissed this alternative as not ripe for decision.

### **Restrict Stock to Designated Routes.**

There were some comments that suggested if off highway vehicles (OHVs) were to be restricted to designated routes then so should pack and saddle stock. Restricting OHV use to designated routes is proposed in part, in response to the Montana/Dakota OHV decision (Off-Highway Vehicle Record of Decision and Plan Amendment for Montana, North Dakota, and portions of South Dakota, January 2001). This decision amended the nine forest plans (including the Gallatin Forest Plan) and established a standard that restricted wheeled motorized cross-country travel yearlong. The decision also directed forests to conduct site-specific planning that would result in the designation of roads and trails for their appropriate uses (id., page 4). The goal of managing OHV use is to provide a range of safe motorized recreation opportunities, recognizing their legitimate use while minimizing the current or anticipated effects on wildlife and their habitat, soil, native vegetation, water, fish and other users (EIS for the Montana/Dakota OHV decision, page i). According to the OHV EIS (id.,) between 1990 and 1998 the number of registered ATVs and motorcycles increased 92% in the three-state area. The increased use has resulted in environmental effects on public resources in numerous areas, including roads and trails that have developed as the result of repeated use.

Similar widespread concerns have not been identified over off-route stock use nor is there higher level Forest Service direction to restrict such use to designated routes. There are identified effects from stock in specific areas of the Gallatin Forest but I believe that these can be

adequately addressed through other means such as trail reconstruction, potential seasonal restrictions, administration of outfitter permits and public information and education. Therefore this alternative was not given detailed study.

### **Restrict Snowmobiles to Designated Routes.**

There were a number of commenters that suggested snowmobiles be restricted to designated routes and areas, similar to how summer motorized use is proposed to be managed. I considered this option but then eliminated it from detailed study for the following reasons:

1. There were no significant adverse effects identified at a forest-wide scale that would indicate such blanket restrictions were necessary. Over-snow travel does not have the potential to cause soil and vegetation damage like off-route summer motorized travel can. In specific areas where snowmobile impacts can be of concern (e.g. windswept ridges, big game winter range, and other areas of low snowpack) we included area and seasonal restrictions within the range of alternatives studied in detail within the EIS.
2. Snowmobile trails do not have a defined tread like summer routes do which makes defining an exact designated route on the ground more difficult. Again, using area and seasonal restrictions, along identifiable boundaries to the extent possible, was considered a better approach to addressing resource concerns.
3. In response to comments that snowmobiling should be restricted to designated play areas, the alternatives studied in detail accomplish the converse of that. In other words they identified areas, otherwise suitable and attractive to snowmobilers, where that use would not be allowed due to a resource protection need. It should be noted that snowmobiling opportunities are also limited by topography, brush and tree cover, and areas of low to no snow.

### **Evaluate Roadless Areas for Potential Recommendation as Wilderness.**

There were comments that we should not make decisions regarding mechanized travel in Inventoried Roadless Areas without first re-evaluating these areas for potential recommendation as wilderness. I chose not to do this through the travel planning process because:

1. Inventoried Roadless Areas were evaluated in the analysis for the existing Gallatin National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan, Sept. 1987). The Forest Plan recommended two areas for wilderness designation at that time; Lionhead and Republic Mountain. The remaining roadless lands, outside of the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area, were allocated for management of a variety of uses. Travel Plan decision-making regarding mechanized travel in Inventoried Roadless Areas is consistent with the Forest Plan.
2. Motorized travel is currently an allowed and established use within Inventoried Roadless Areas. The proposal to manage motorized use within these areas would not be a new and irreversible decision that would preclude their future designation as Wilderness.

3. Designation of public lands as Wilderness is a decision reserved for the United States Congress. It is also highly contentious, particularly in the western states. If the Forest Service were to propose wilderness recommendations through the Travel Plan, it would generate intense public debate without providing any better information on how to manage travel within roadless areas.

It is important to understand that the choice not to re-evaluate Inventoried Roadless Areas for potential recommendation as wilderness does not mean that I considered concerns over the effects of the Travel Plan on wilderness character or designatability to be irrelevant. Chapter 3 of the EIS includes a discussion of this issue and the Alternatives studied in detail varied considerably in the amount of motorized use that would be allowed within roadless lands.

### **Establish Noise Restrictions on Motorized Vehicles.**

There were comments recommending that the Forest Service establish noise restrictions on motorized vehicles. I did not study this alternative in detail because noise is regulated in Montana on public lands by Montana State Code 61-9-418. This law states that all motorcycles or quadricycles operated on streets and highways in the state shall be equipped with noise suppression devices at all times. Forest roads and trails are considered public ways under this law, and are covered by this requirement. For any cycles manufactured after 1987, the decibel limit is 70 dbA, measured at 50 feet. For snowmobiles, the same requirement applies (Montana Code 23-2-634) with a decibel limitation on machines that were built after 1975 of 78 dbA, measured at 50 feet. State game wardens have the authority to enforce noise infractions, but have not been successful in doing so due to difficult testing requirements. Accurate field-testing of noise from OHVs has been problematic for many enforcement entities. While field-testing equipment is available, ambient noise can create erroneous readings, as can other environmental factors. Field tests have been successfully challenged in court, limiting the effectiveness of this enforcement tool (FEIS, page 3-414).

The Forest Service also has the authority to enforce noise standards set by other federal (typically EPA or OSHA) agencies and by the state under 36 CFR 261.13. The agency also has the authority to set specific limitations through special order 36 CFR 261.55 (j). The standard fine for noise violations is \$50. Several years ago, an attempt was made to establish such a noise regulation for snowmobiles in the West Yellowstone vicinity on National Forest land. Officers investigating this enforcement option came to the conclusion that the field-testing equipment and test rigor available at that time would not hold up in court, and dropped the proposal (FEIS, page 3-414). In order to accomplish a test that would hold up in court, the vehicle would have to be tested in a controlled environment where ambient noise and other factors would not bias the test.

### **Separate Motorized and Non-Motorized Uses in Time (e.g. Time Share).**

A number of public comments were received suggesting that we consider the concept of alternating use periods to address social problems (i.e. "user conflict") between motorized and non-motorized users on popular trails rather than prohibiting motorized use altogether. For example, a trail could be managed as open to motorcycles on alternating days, alternating weeks, or even by the time of day. This concept has merit and I plan to implement it on trails in the Bozeman area (see discussion on page 17 of this ROD). However, for the purpose of the analysis disclosed in the EIS (i.e. to assess potential environmental consequences) routes were

identified as either open or closed to specific uses. For example, if a trail was identified as a good candidate to consider allowing motorcycle use on alternating days, it would be identified in an alternative or alternatives as managed for motorcycles.

### **Consider Actions to Construct, Reconstruct and Conduct Maintenance on Roads and Trails.**

A number of public comments were received that raised issues and concerns relevant to conditions on specific roads and trails (i.e. facility issues). For example a concern about erosion and sedimentation of streams is primarily a facility issue, not a “use” issue. Our intent is to address these through future site-specific analysis, consistent with applicable NEPA procedures. My travel plan decision was needed first so that we would know the use or uses to be designed for in future proposals for road and trail construction, reconstruction, or maintenance. For example, roads that are to accommodate passenger cars must be designed to a different standard than roads that are targeted for 4 X 4 travel. Trails that are to accommodate ATVs must be designed to a different standard than trails targeted for motorcycle, foot or horse use. In addition, attempting to make these type of decisions through this travel plan would have been complex and impractical. For these reasons the scope of the analysis was limited to those actions described in Chapter 1 of the EIS (e.g. “appropriate uses”).

## **VI. Public Involvement**

### **A. Overview of the Public Involvement Process**

Scoping to determine potential issues and concerns was conducted over a two year period, beginning in 2002. The first scoping period was for the Starting Benchmark (i.e. Proposed Action), distributed to approximately 1,700 people in August, 2002. The Starting Benchmark provided the initial opportunity for people interested in Gallatin Forest travel planning to submit comments. The document represented an aggregate of opportunities that could be provided in various areas throughout the Forest. The Starting Benchmark did not represent our preferred alternative. It was a beginning point from which to develop alternatives based on issues identified and information on how the public was using the Forest’s transportation network (i.e. roads, trails and specific geographical areas). This comment period ran for 90 days and during that time we hosted six open houses and a number of individual and group meetings. Over 1,600 comment letters were received.

The comments received on the Starting Benchmark, along with early analysis by Forest Service specialists, were used to develop six draft alternatives. These alternatives were presented for public comment in August of 2003 to ensure that they sharply defined the issues and sufficiently represented different interests and points of view on how travel should be managed. This comment period ran for 60 days and again during this time we hosted six open houses. Over 3,200 comment letters were received. The resultant alternatives, along with my preferred alternative (Alternative 7), became the basis for analysis in the DEIS.

Open Houses for both the Starting Benchmark and alternatives were held in:

- Cooke City
- Gardner
- Big Timber
- Livingston
- Bozeman
- West Yellowstone

In addition to the open houses we met with numerous groups and individuals to discuss and explain the documents and maps.

A Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement was prepared and published in the Federal Register on December 13, 2002. The proposed Travel Management Plan has also been included on the Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions since 2002. Prior to the comment periods, news releases were distributed to area media outlets announcing the availability of each document and the schedule of open houses. Direct notification was also provided to those asking to be included on our travel planning mailing list. The documents and maps were made available in both printed and electronic formats (internet and compact disc).

The Forest released the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Proposed Travel Management Plan in mid-February, 2005. The DEIS disclosed the analyzed consequences of the six alternatives discussed earlier in this ROD plus my preferred alternative at the time which was identified as Alternative 7. During late February and early March 2005, ten open houses, attended by approximately 1,000 people, were held in communities surrounding the National Forest. In addition to the open houses, the Forest met with over 80 groups and individuals to discuss the DEIS and preferred alternative. The written comment period was extended twice and ultimately closed on September 2, 2005. During this time approximately 2,500 written comments and 9,000 electronic comments were received on the DEIS.

A more detailed discussion of the public involvement process can be found in Chapter 5 of the FEIS. Copies of comments received, meeting notes, and Forest Service correspondence can be found in the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan project file. Responses to comments received are available electronically, either on compact disk or the Gallatin Forest website, as an appendix to the FEIS.

## **B. Consideration of Public and Other Agency Comments**

As discussed above, there were thousands of comment letters submitted during the three comment periods provided on the proposed Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan. We've prepared responses to those received during the comment period on the DEIS and they are available electronically on the Gallatin National Forest website or on compact disk. It would be impractical to elaborate here on how each of the comments were considered in making my decision but I do want to provide a general overview.

Comments on the Starting Benchmark. In August of 2002 we began the public involvement process for travel planning with the release of a document we called the "Starting Benchmark." Typically, when beginning analysis under NEPA, federal agencies refer to planned actions as a

“proposal” (40 CFR 1508.23) or “proposed action.” We elected not to use that terminology because we thought it implied that this was the Plan we intended to implement and therefore would encourage comments that were simply in favor of or opposed to it. The Starting Benchmark (i.e. Benchmark) was intended to be one option for travel management that we believed would meet the several objectives we had (i.e. Purpose and Need) as discussed at the beginning of this ROD. The Starting Benchmark however did not have the benefit of effects analysis or public input in its development. I and my staff had thoughts on how people were using their National Forest but we really didn’t know for sure. We needed input from Forest users to help us determine how to best meet the recreation demands of the public we serve. Our primary goal in soliciting public comment at this stage was to get the public to tell us where they most like to hike or ride and why. Through the Benchmark we also wanted to give them something to react to, thereby helping us to understand the issues and concerns we should address through analysis and in the development of alternatives. While we did still receive numerous comments that were simply for or against the Benchmark or specific modes of travel (e.g. against motorized use), I believe we accomplished our objectives during this phase. We were amazed at how important certain roads, trails and parts of the Forest were to people in their desired recreational pursuits. One surprise was the large number of comments received from ice climbers using the Hyalite area. While we are aware of that activity, we underestimated the number of people taking advantage of it. We also learned a lot about the divergent value sets our constituents have and how mixed uses in certain areas can lead to diminished recreational experiences. The public comment received on the Starting Benchmark helped us considerably to identify the alternatives to study and issues to consider through the analysis process.

Comments on the Alternatives. Travel planning is a very complex undertaking. The Gallatin National Forest is approximately 1.8 million acres in size with over 1,000 miles of road and over 2,000 miles of trail. Combine this with nine primary modes of travel to be managed for, possible seasonal restrictions on use, and other components of a Travel Management Plan and the result is an infinite number of permutations and combinations that could have been developed as alternatives. Yet, through early analysis and consideration of comments we received on the Benchmark, we condensed this down to six (6) alternatives to study in detail. Public comment was very important to us at this stage to validate that our range of alternatives was adequate to sharply define the issues and represent various points-of-view.

The alternatives provided options for management of specific routes and sub-areas of the Gallatin Forest. We knew that there would be issues associated with many of these routes and areas that may not be adequately addressed by an overall Forest-wide management philosophy (i.e. alternative theme). Public comment at this stage helped us identify different approaches to resolving these more site-specific issues such that they could be incorporated into one or more of the alternatives and their relative merits considered. Likewise, we wanted to be sure that we did not include features within any of the alternatives that had no real merit and thus could bias the comparison of effects. The public comment we received helped us understand where there was no identified need for change, or where a proposed change was clearly necessary and/or non-controversial and therefore should apply to more than one alternative. The goal was to make each alternative (2-6) the best it could be within the scope of the guiding theme for that alternative.

Comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Comments at this stage certainly met the purpose for which they were intended under NEPA (40 CFR, Part 1503). That is they helped

us improve upon the analysis in the DEIS to create a better FEIS. Each section of the FEIS now begins with a section titled “Changes from the Draft to the Final EIS.” Many of the changes made were due to the comments received. However, the largest benefit to me was through the discussions we had and letters we received specifically commenting on Alternative 7, which was my preferred alternative at the time. Some of the more significant changes I made in my decision based on what I heard from the public included the following:

- Stock users convinced me that blanket spring restrictions across the Forest on mountain bike and stock use was going too far in attempting to correct a problem that could otherwise be addressed through restrictions on specific routes or information and education. I also agreed with stock users and mountain bikers that wet muddy conditions would provide a natural deterrent to those uses.
- Stock users also influenced my decisions regarding a yearlong area restriction on the Beartooth Plateau and for the Lava Lake and Pine Creek Trails. My decision now permits stock use on the Beartooth Plateau area from August 1<sup>st</sup> to December 2<sup>nd</sup>. Instead of stock use prohibitions on the Lava Lake and Pine Creek Trails, these will now be available for riding during the fall.
- Comments from the Montana Pilot’s Association led me to include an objective and standard for potential future proposals for backcountry landing strips but with a caveat to exclude areas of the Forest where this use would clearly be inappropriate.
- Cross-country skiers convinced me to drop the marked ski route and associated snowmobile area closure from the Skunk Creek Road (#974) to the Stone Creek Divide.
- Comments from skiers and snowmobilers led me to reconfigure the snowmobile area restriction in the Fairy Lake area to allow for some high-marking opportunities and transport of skiers to popular areas. They also influenced me to make the first two miles of the Bear Canyon trail a ski trail only in winter and to lift the rest of the snowmobile area restriction within the canyon.
- Snowmobilers were influential in my decision regarding the area to leave open for snowmobile use within the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area.
- Motorcyclists helped me identify a trail configuration for the Cabin Creek and Taylor Fork Travel Planning areas more conducive to the opportunities they desired while still maintaining secure habitat for grizzly bears. They were also influential in my decisions for trails within the Deer Creeks Travel Planning Area and other parts of the Forest.
- We had a number of meetings with the Crow Tribe to design a travel management plan for the east side of the Crazy Mountains that would respect their traditional values and still provide for a variety of both motorized and non-motorized uses.
- Recommendations of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks were used in making my decision on snowmobile area restrictions within the Bridger Mountains, the Taylor Fork Travel Planning Area and the Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Travel Planning Area.
- Comments from ice climbers, skiers and others helped me craft my decision for winter travel in the Hyalite Travel Planning Area and develop a contingency plan should the plowing of the road become infeasible.
- Non-motorized users helped me conclude that separation of these uses from motorized uses was important in some areas.

These are just a few examples of how public and other agency comments were used. Throughout the analysis process the comments that were received helped me to continue to formulate my thoughts and ultimately arrive at this decision for a travel management plan.

## **VII. Determination of Non-Significant Forest Plan Amendment**

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) regulations contain a provision that allows for amending Forest Plans [16 U.S.C. 1604(f)(4), 36 CFR 219.10(f), 1982]. My decision amends that Gallatin Forest Plan to remove direction that is outdated, does not effectively provide limitations on management activities, is open to misinterpretation, and/or could be in conflict with the concept of establishing forest-wide, travel planning area and route-by-route management direction. For amendments, the NFMA regulations require the decision-maker (me) to determine whether the amendment would result in a significant change to the Plan based on an analysis of the objectives, guidelines and other contents of the Plan.

Based on the analysis and other information provided within the FEIS (i.e. FEIS, pages 1-11 to 1-14, pages 3-14 to 3-24, and Appendix A), I have determined that my amendment decision is not significant. The Forest Service Handbook at FSH 1909.12(5.32) provides a list of factors to be considered in making this determination. These include timing; location and size; goals, objectives, and outputs; and management prescription. The following discloses my conclusions on each of these factors.

### Timing

This Forest Plan amendment is to become effective immediately, or at such time that any stay of this decision is lifted. It also applies indefinitely.

### Location and Size

This Forest Plan amendment removes 119 standards from the Forest Plan and applies Forest-wide.

### Goals, Objectives, and Outputs

This Forest Plan amendment does not alter the long-term relationships between the levels of goods and services projected by the Forest Plan. All of the 119 standards proposed for replacement pertain to travel management or road and trail facilities.

Eighty-four (84) standards fall into one or more of the following categories that do not limit or compel management action and therefore I don't see why they are necessary. No concerns about removing them from the Forest Plan were identified during the public comment periods and there are no identified consequences in doing so.

- 1) The standard provides procedural direction to use a certain methodology or publication in environmental analysis, or coordinate management with other agencies (e.g., analysis for transportation needs will be integrated into resource area analysis). Removal of this type of direction does not mean that using appropriate methodology, publications or other agency coordination will be discontinued. It simply allows Forest Service specialists to select the most current and most appropriate scientific approach to environmental analysis.

- 2) The standard repeats direction that already exists in laws, regulations or higher-level policy direction (e.g., rights-of-way across National Forest will be granted in situations involving a statutory right of access, subject to compliance with applicable rules and regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture). There is no need for the Forest Plan to repeat direction that is already covered elsewhere.
- 3) The standard highlights a project proposal that has already been completed (e.g., the Hyalite Road will be reconstructed). This type of direction is no longer meaningful.
- 4) The standard provides notice to the public of possible management actions that could occur in the future (e.g., road and trail use may be restricted to meet management needs). This type of standard is simply a notice. It does not establish a goal or objective to be achieved nor does it set sideboards on future management activities.

Other standards are removed because they no longer are meaningful given the direction included in the Travel Plan. The Travel Plan identifies specifically how each road and trail on the Forest would be managed. Maintenance would be performed consistent with their specific designated uses. This is in contrast to the Forest Plan that included much broader direction. Many of the existing standards, while not necessarily in conflict with the Travel Plan, are not specific enough to provide meaningful direction. Examples of non-specific, broad-scale wording that is removed from the Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service 1987) include:

- 1) *“Existing roads and trails will be maintained consistent with management area goals.”* (II-28)
- 2) *“The Forest Service investment in road and trail maintenance will be at a minimal level necessary to protect the investment and provide for soil and water protection and user safety.”* (III-6, 7)
- 3) *“Coordinate with other agencies to improve roads under their jurisdiction to achieve the goals of this management area.”* (III-14, 16)
- 4) *“Existing trails may be closed, reseeded or relocated.”* (III-8)
- 5) *“Develop trails and end-of-road facilities to provide access and disperse use throughout the area.”* (III-17, 18)
- 6) *“Conflicting recreational uses such as hiking, trail biking, horse riding, snowmobiling, and skiing may be separated or restricted in some areas.”* (III-17, 18)

These types of standards are so permissive that they have not provided guidance for management that would not have occurred in their absence. Since the Forest Plan was signed they have been seldom, if ever, referenced. Therefore it can be inferred that removal of these standards would not affect future management decisions or goals, objectives, and outputs. No concerns were identified during the comment periods over removing this direction from the Forest Plan and there are no identified consequences in doing so (FEIS, page 3-215).

Concerns were raised during public scoping over the proposed removal of existing standards relating to open road density (one Forest-wide standard and one Management Area standard) and the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) (23 Management Area standards).

The open road density standards require an “elk effective cover” analysis to be conducted in conjunction with timber sales and that effective cover ratings (HEI) of at least 70% be maintained during the general hunting season (Forest-wide Standard 6.a.4, Gallatin Forest Plan, page II-18). In Management Area (MA) 11 there is a standard to maintain an HEI of at least

60%. The 70% standard essentially equates to an open road density of 0.75 miles per square mile.

Removing these standards may seemingly appear to relax restrictions, thus allowing more of the Forest to become open to motorized use in the future, but this would not be the case. The amendments to the Forest Plan to remove this direction are connected actions to the Travel Plan decisions for management of specific roads and trails. In other words the Travel Plan has determined which routes will be open and which will have restrictions to motorized use. In addition, my Travel Plan decision adopts a series of goals, objectives, standards and guidelines that limit potential increases in motorized use. In particular, Forest-wide standards D-5 and D-6 specify no increase in summer public motorized routes and that temporary roads constructed for project activity be permanently closed following completion of the activity. Existing Forest Plan direction, through Amendment 19, also requires that any new motorized route constructed within the grizzly bear recovery zone be offset by closure of another motorized route of equal or greater length. Future adoption of conservation strategies for the grizzly bear and lynx could also restrict future motorized routes and use. Recently, the Forest Service nationally adopted regulations that would prohibit summer motorized use off routes unless otherwise designated through completion of travel plan analysis. These regulations mimic the Montana/Dakota OHV decision made by the Northern Regional Forester in January of 2001.

In addition, the purpose of this standard was obviously to maintain habitat for big game populations (primarily elk). As evidenced by the analysis in the FEIS for big game (pages 3-15 through 3-64) we are fully achieving these goals and would do so even if I had chosen a Travel Plan alternative that resulted in higher motorized route densities (see pages 67 through 69 of this ROD).

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) standards within various management areas (MA's) were included to target various recreation settings. In MA's that feature timber management or that are located in more developed areas (MA's 1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 13) the specified ROS classes are urban, rural, roaded-modified and roaded-natural appearing. Because these MA's are already developed or contain objectives for timber harvest, removing these ROS standards will not change the recreation setting. In other words, the specified ROS classes identified for these MA's are actually an acknowledgement of the setting that exists or will be created by development. The standard for the undeveloped Management Areas outside of designated Wilderness (including MA 3, 3a, 6, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 24) states: "*Recreation Opportunity Spectrum classes are semi-primitive motorized and semi-primitive non-motorized.*" Since these MA's do not include goals and objectives for timber harvest, the ROS direction is most applicable to management of trails (i.e. travel management). The Travel Plan establishes the areas that provide semi-primitive motorized recreation settings and semi-primitive non-motorized settings through my decisions to allow or restrict motorized use on trails. However, since the ROS standards did not distinguish between motorized and non-motorized use any configuration of designated uses would be consistent with this Forest Plan direction. In other words, the travel planning process itself is evidence that removing the Forest Plan ROS standards will not result in recreation settings that were not otherwise targeted by the Plan.

### Management Prescription

I have determined that my decision to amend the Gallatin Forest Plan does not alter the desired future condition of the land nor does it affect the level of goods and services targeted by the Plan. The goods and services to be managed for under the Forest Plan include recreation, scenery, water, fish and wildlife habitat, threatened and endangered species habitat, timber, livestock forage, fire protection and cultural resources. The standards I have removed are applicable to travel management, access and the transportation network. As I discussed above, these standards are not effective or they are no longer needed in light of the decisions made through the Travel Plan. I could find no basis to conclude that this amendment would have any bearing on providing the goods and services of the Forest Plan.

In conclusion, even though this amendment removes 119 standards from the Forest Plan, applies forest-wide, and is effective immediately, it results in very little practical change. No goals and objectives are being removed and it has no effect on the types or level of goods and services to be provided under the Plan. It is on that basis that I've determined this to be a non-significant amendment.

## **VIII. Findings Required by Other Laws, Regulations, and Policies**

### **36 CFR 219 National Forest System Land and Resource Management Planning (1982)**

There is one finding requirement applicable to my decision for the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan. The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) implementing regulations requires me to ensure that my decision is consistent with the Gallatin Forest Plan [(36 CFR 219.10(e); 1982)]. Based on the discussions of consistency with laws, regulations, policy and Forest Plan direction included at the end of each issue discussed in Chapter 3 of the FEIS, I have concluded that, with the exception of the included amendments [provided for under 36 CFR 219.10(f)] my decision is consistent with the Forest Plan.

### **USDA Forest Service, 2005. Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motorized Use (36 CFR 212, 251, 261).**

The Forest Service regulations for travel management at 36 CFR 212.15 identifies criteria for designation of National Forest System roads, National Forest System trails, and areas on National Forest System lands for motorized use. They require me to consider the following:

1. *Effects on natural and cultural resources.* The associated FEIS for my travel plan decision addresses the effects of seven alternatives for a travel management plan on natural and cultural resources. Specifically refer to Chapters 2, 3 and 4.
2. *Public safety.* Public safety was addressed in the FEIS beginning on page 4-20. My conclusion on this issue is discussed on page 117 of this Record of Decision.
3. *Provision of recreational opportunities.* Providing recreation opportunities is one of the primary purposes for the travel management plan. Refer to the FEIS, Chapter 1, the Recreation discussion beginning on page 3-420, and the rationale for my decision beginning on page 21 of this Record of Decision.

4. *Access needs.* The identification of access needs is part of my travel plan decision. Refer to the “Detailed Description of the Decision”, pages I-3 through I-8, and page 30 of this Record of Decision. In summary, Goal B, Objectives B-1 through B-3, and Guidelines B-4 through B-9 address my intent to provide and maintain reasonable, legal access to Gallatin National Forest lands to provide for human use and enjoyment and to protect and manage Forest resources and values.

5. *Conflicts among uses of National Forest System lands.* My first two decision criteria, discussed on page 13 and 14 of this Record of Decision, demonstrates my desire to provide well-distributed opportunities for both OHV’s and exclusive, quiet non-motorized uses of the Gallatin National Forest trail system. The rationale for my decision, beginning on page 21 of this Record of Decision also demonstrates my efforts in providing a balance of recreation opportunities in a variety of settings. The Recreation section of the FEIS (beginning on page 3-420) also addresses user conflict. Lastly, beginning on page 4-9 of the FEIS, there is a discussion of potential impacts of the travel plan alternatives on extractive uses of the Forest (i.e. timber, grazing, and mineral exploration and development).

6. *The need for maintenance and administration of roads, trails, and areas that would arise if the uses under consideration are designated.* Transportation system implementability was discussed beginning on page 3-330 of the FEIS.

7. *The availability of resources for that maintenance and administration.* This consideration is also addressed under the issue of “Transportation System Implementability” beginning on page 3-330 of the FEIS.

8. *Damage to soil, watershed, vegetation, and other forest resources.* All resources identified as being potentially affected by travel management were addressed in Chapters 3 and 4 of the FEIS.

9. *Harassment of wildlife and significant disruption of wildlife habitats.* The effects of the travel plan alternatives on wildlife and wildlife habitat were addressed in a number of sections of Chapters 3 and 4 of the FEIS.

10. *Conflicts between motor vehicle use and existing or proposed recreational uses of National Forest System lands.* Again, my first two decision criteria, discussed on page 13 and 14 of this Record of Decision, demonstrates my desire to provide well-distributed opportunities for both OHV’s and exclusive, quiet non-motorized uses of the Gallatin National Forest trail system. The rationale for my decision, beginning on page 21 of this Record of Decision also demonstrates my efforts in preventing conflicts between motor vehicle use and recreational uses. The Recreation section of the FEIS (beginning on page 3-420) also addresses effects to recreational uses.

11. *Conflicts among different classes of motor vehicle uses of National Forest System lands or neighboring Federal lands.* My decision, as demonstrated by the associated maps, and the “Detailed Description of the Decision”, discriminates between various modes of travel. For example, some roads are designated for 4x4 travel but not passenger cars, and some trails are designated for motorcycles but not ATVs. I and my staff also communicated with line officers on adjacent national forests to ensure that the types of uses designated near our borders were compatible.

12. *Compatibility of motor vehicle use with existing conditions in populated areas, taking into account sound, emissions, and other factors.* Most of the Gallatin National Forest is removed from population centers. There is adjacent Forest land around the towns of Cooke City and West Yellowstone, but these are tourist communities that largely cater to the types of motorized uses designated through the Travel Plan. Noise impacts are discussed beginning on page 3-413 of the FEIS and emissions are addressed in the Recreation section beginning on page 3-420, and in the Air Quality section beginning on page 4-2.

13. *Speed, volume, composition, and distribution of traffic on roads.* My decision results in a designed road system that safely balances anticipated recreational and administrative traffic. Factors used to craft my decision include road geometry, surface type, anticipated vehicle speed and volume, and traffic composition and distribution. For example, use of ATVs are discouraged on roads where traffic volumes are anticipated to be moderate or high, surfacing such as aggregate or asphalt encourage higher speeds, or the mix of traffic is more than just for recreation. Refer to the FEIS sections on Transportation System Implementability and Public Safety (FEIS, pages 3-330 and 4-20).

14. *Compatibility of vehicle class with road geometry and road surfacing.* Refer to the discussion under #13 above.

## **IX. Implementation**

Implementation of the Travel Management Plan is scheduled to begin in the spring of 2007 upon signing a special order pursuant to 36 CFR 261 and release of the motor vehicle use map and over-snow vehicle use map.

The designation of “go-down” access routes and enforcement of the prohibition of off-route travel except at these designated locations along the west shoreline of Hebgen Lake, along the Gallatin River, the Taylor Fork Road, the Beaver Creek Road, the Hyalite Road, the Main Boulder Road, the Mill Creek Road, the Beartooth Highway (#212) and in Bear Canyon, is scheduled to be completed by the summer of 2008 or within 2 years of the lifting of any stay of implementation of this Travel Plan.

## **X. Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities**

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. Only individuals or organizations that submitted substantive comments during the comment period may appeal under this rule. A written appeal must be submitted within 45 days following the publication date of the legal notice of this decision in the Bozeman Daily Chronicle, Bozeman, Montana. It is the responsibility of the appellant to ensure their appeal is received in a timely manner. The publication date of the legal notice of the decision in the newspaper of record is the *exclusive* means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Appellants should not rely on date or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Paper appeals must be submitted to: USDA Forest Service, Northern Region, ATTN: Appeal Deciding Officer, P.O. Box 7669, Missoula, MT 59807; or USDA Forest Service, Northern Region, ATTN: Appeal Deciding Officer, 200 East Broadway, Missoula, MT 59802. Office hours: 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Fax (406) 329- 3411.

Electronic appeals must be submitted to: <appeals-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us>. In electronic appeals, the subject line should contain the name of the project being appealed. An automated response will confirm your electronic appeal has been received. Electronic appeals must be submitted in MS Word, Word Perfect, or Rich Text Format (RTF).

It is the appellant's responsibility to provide sufficient project- or activity-specific evidence and rationale, focusing on the decision, to show why the decision should be reversed. The appeal must be filed with the Appeal Deciding Officer in writing. At a minimum, the appeal must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14, and include the following information: The appellant's name and address, with a telephone number, if available; A signature, or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for electronic mail may be filed with the appeal); When multiple names are listed on an appeal, identification of the lead appellant and verification of the identity of the lead appellant upon request; The name of the project or activity for which the decision was made, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the date of the decision; The regulation under which the appeal is being filed, when there is an option to appeal under either 36 CFR 215 or 36 CFR 251, subpart C; Any specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks and rationale for those changes; Any portion(s) of the decision with which the appellant disagrees, and explanation for the disagreement; Why the appellant believes the Responsible Official's decision failed to consider the substantive comments; and, How the appellant believes the decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy.

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of appeal disposition.

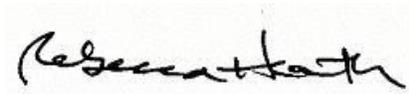
*Offer to Meet.* When an appeal is received under this rule, the Responsible Official (me), or my designee, must contact the appellant and offer to meet and discuss resolution of the issues raised in the appeal (36 CFR 215.17). If the appellant accepts the offer, the meeting must take place within 15 days after the closing date for filing an appeal (i.e. 45 to 60 days from the publication date of the legal notice of this decision in the Bozeman Daily Chronicle). These meetings, if they take place, are open to the public. For information on if, when and where such a meeting is scheduled, please visit the following web site:

“[www.fs.fed.us/r1/planning/final\\_appeals/current\\_appeals\\_and\\_objections.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/planning/final_appeals/current_appeals_and_objections.pdf)”

My decision to amend the Gallatin National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) is also appealable under 36 CFR 217. Written appeals under this rule must also be submitted within 45 days following the publication date of the legal notice of this decision in the Bozeman Daily Chronicle, Bozeman, Montana and should be sent to the same addresses indicated above for appeals under 36 CFR 215. Under the 36 CFR 217 rule there is no requirement that I make an offer to meet with the appellant. Appeals cannot be filed under both 36 CFR 215 and 36 CFR 217.

## **XI. Contact Person**

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Steve Christiansen, Environmental Coordinator, Gallatin National Forest Supervisors Office, P.O. Box 130, Bozeman, MT 59771, (406) 587-6701.



REBECCA HEATH  
Forest Supervisor  
Gallatin National Forest

10/30/2006

Date

## **XII. References**

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