

ISSUE 26: ENERGY CONSUMPTION

Changes from the Draft to the Final EIS

There have been no changes from the Draft to Final EIS for this issue.

Introduction

Managing for motorized uses on the Gallatin National Forest and promoting recreation use in general, under all the alternatives would result in the consumption of energy. For environmental impact statements, the National Environmental Policy Act requires a discussion of the energy requirements and conservation potential of proposed alternatives and mitigation measures [40 CFR 1502.18 (e)]. The following addresses these topics.

Discussion

Location and Description

The area of analysis for this issue, the affected environment, is at least regional in scope and cannot be defined solely for an individual National Forest. There are numbers of vehicles that drive on state and local highways that pass through the Gallatin Forest as they travel to other destinations, commute or vacation in the region. There are numbers of vehicles that drive to Forest access sites or drive on Forest roads to access recreation opportunities. And there are motorized recreation vehicles (ATVs, motorcycles and snowmobiles) that use the Forest roads, trails, and areas. The region has been attracting increasing numbers of visitors for the past several years (see Issue 37: Tourism) and the amount of energy use associated with this travel has increased. Likewise, the numbers of highway vehicles and motorized recreation vehicles that use the Forest have been increasing, although there is no quantifiable estimate of the numbers of these vehicles.

General Effects

The categories of energy-consuming activities directly or indirectly connected with recreational use of the Gallatin Forest include: motor traffic that passes through the Forest on state and local highways, vehicle traffic that goes to Forest access sites or drives on Forest roads, and motorized recreation vehicles that use the Forest.

The first category of use cannot be considered as being affected by the Travel Plan even though the users could be enjoying the scenery as they are traveling through the Forest and they would certainly have to be counted as visitors to the National Forest. None of the Travel Plan alternatives would affect this category of travel differently.

The second category of use, those who drive to the Forest access points or drive Forest roads, also would not be affected differently by the alternatives of the Travel Plan. This is because the public Forest Service roads that are currently in place and managed for vehicular use would remain so in all alternatives except Alternative 6. Alternative 6 reduces the open road mileage by 10%. That reduction would not likely reduce the mileage driven by Forest visitors, as drivers could substitute

areas with roads that would remain open for those that would be closed, and the amount of energy consumed would remain the same.

The third category of use could have differing amounts of energy consumption depending on the alternative, even though the differences among the alternatives would be minimal. Motorcycles and ATVs are used in the summer months and are restricted to Forest roads and trails in all alternatives except Alternative 1. Alternative 1 would keep the most trails open to motorized use and during the 10 to 15-year life of the Travel Plan, would see the most motorized trail traffic and therefore would be the alternative with the highest energy consumption. Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 each progressively reduce the trail miles open to motorized use. Riders would use the trails that are available more and use would be concentrated more. Individual riders may choose to use the trails less as they become more crowded, but total use would likely remain at today's levels, while not increasing in the future as it would if more opportunities were available. Alternatives 5 and 6 would see the least energy consumption, because these alternatives have the fewest miles of motorized trail available for use. Snowmobiles are used in the winter months and can travel on roads and trails, but generally use large open expanses of the Forest. Different alternatives close or restrict different areas of the Forest to snowmobile use. The analysis for snowmobile use in Issue 16: Recreation shows that some of the additional areas restricted in Alternatives 2 through 7-M have very little actual use due to terrain, vegetation and snow conditions that are not favorable. For this reason, all alternatives have approximately the same amount of actual opportunity. Therefore, the energy consumption by snowmobiles would be approximately the same for all alternatives. In Chapter 2, Table 2.2 shows the amount of trail open to motorcycle and ATV travel by alternative and Table 2.4 shows the amount of area open to snowmobile use by alternative.

People will continue to recreate on the Gallatin Forest and consume energy for that purpose, regardless of the alternative that is implemented. In addition, the rationale for and choice of use will be affected more so by factors other than which Travel Plan alternative is chosen. Energy consumption from all choices, whether it is a decision to go to the Forest to recreate or to go to the mall and shop, should be seen in perspective. For example, if 100 visitors enter each of the 25 Forest entrances each week, excluding major highways that cross the Forest, and their round trip averages 30 miles, the distance traveled would be 75,000 miles. If each of the approximately 25,000 registered drivers in the Gallatin National Forest area chose to make an extra trip to the mall in a given week and their average round trip was 30 miles, the distance traveled for the two different choices would be the same, 75,000 miles, and the energy consumed would be the same.

Cumulatively, recreation use is expected to continue to increase on the Gallatin Forest for the next 10- 15 years. Factors such as population growth in the area, the increasing reputation of the Forest and surrounding area as a destination point, and peoples' increasing leisure time and disposable income contribute to this expected growth. None of the travel alternatives will affect these factors.

Consistency with Laws, Regulations, Policy, and Federal, Regional, State and Local Land Use Plans (including the Forest Plan)

For environmental impact statements, the National Environmental Policy Act requires a discussion of the energy requirements and conservation potential of various alternatives and mitigation measures (40 CFR 1502.18 (e)). This section of the EIS is designed to meet this requirement.