

ISSUE 27: EXTRACTIVE USES

Changes from the Draft to the Final EIS

This section of the EIS was modified to replace information that was applicable to Alternative 7 with updated information applicable to Alternative 7-Modified (7-M). Also, the number of allotments identified within the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness that are accessed only by foot and horse trail was changed from 3 to 1, reflecting the closure of the Ash Mountain and Iron Mountain Allotments.

Introduction

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 proposed Travel Plan (Alternatives 2 through 7-M) 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 proposed Travel Plan does not authorize nor preclude road access to serve project activity and therefore this part of the issue was determined not to be 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 provides no evidence that this 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.

This section addresses the potential effects that the proposed Travel Plan may have on extractive uses of the Gallatin Forest. These include timber harvest/wood fiber production, livestock grazing, and mineral extraction. More specifically, the issues are:

- 1) The effect proposed restrictions on public motorized use may have on permittee's access to their grazing allotments.
- 2) The potential for the management of trails within active grazing allotments to result in some users redistributing livestock or leaving gates open.
- 3) The potential for proposed Travel Plan objectives to decommission roads, or restrict public motorized use to designated routes could hinder or preclude access for future timber harvest or silvicultural activities.
- 4) The potential for proposed Travel Plan objectives to decommission roads, or restrict public motorized use to designated routes could hinder or preclude access for future mineral exploration or development.

Discussion

Commodity Resources

Livestock grazing

The Gallatin Forest manages forage production for livestock grazing on 134 allotments covering about 790,000 acres of Forest land. Of these, 34 allotments are vacant and 100 are active. Total annual livestock production adds up to an average of approximately 43,000 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) per year. The Forest Plan permits grazing in all but five Management Areas (1, 3a, 18, 19 and 21). Excluded areas correspond with developed recreation sites, areas of sensitive soils in the Taylor Fork drainage, the Hyalite/Porcupine-Buffalo Horn Wilderness Study Area and Research Natural Areas. Active grazing allotments span all recreation settings including roaded, semi-primitive motorized, semi-primitive non-motorized and primitive. Most allotments are accessed by public or private roads at least to the allotment boundary, or through adjacent private land. One allotment (Slough Creek within the Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness) is accessed by trail open only to foot and horse use.

The first issue reflects concern that the proposed Travel Plan could restrict some grazing permittees' ability to use ATVs for management of their allotments. Alternatives 2 through 7-M would restrict summer public motorized use to designated routes and there is concern that this may also prevent permittees from traveling off-route to move livestock, haul salt, or install and repair improvements. The proposed Travel Plan (Alternatives 2 through 7-M) deliberately defers decisions regarding permittee access to their grazing allotments (whether motorized or non-motorized) to the development and administration of the individual grazing permits (see proposed Standard A-6, Goal J, and Objective J-1 under Alternatives 2 through 6, and Standard A-8, Goal C and Objective C-1 under Alternative 7-M). In other words, while the Travel Plan decision would prohibit public summer motorized use off designated routes, permittees could be granted permission to use a motorized vehicle to manage the allotment. They would also be able to continue to use roads only open to administrative use. Therefore, the Travel Plan alternatives would not affect permittee access to their allotments.

The second issue reflects concern that certain designated public uses of roads and trails could indirectly impact grazing permittees by increasing the potential for problems such as users running or redistributing livestock or leaving gates open. The potential effects of the Travel Plan alternatives can be evaluated by a review of the types of problems encountered in the past. Gallatin Forest range conservationists reported the following (Table 4.27.1) when asked about problems between recreationists and livestock management:

Table 4.27. 1 Types of conflict between recreation and livestock use.

Allotment	Problem Reported
Lost Creek	Gate at Basin Creek left open allowing cattle to drift up or down. This occurs nearly every year on Trail 41. Cattle pushed up or down the West Boulder Trail 41 by hikers or horseback riders.
Contact	Gate into Main Boulder pasture along Trail 14 left open several times every year prior to Allotment has now been unstocked for three years.

Allotment	Problem Reported
Deer Creek	Cattle harassed by four-wheelers in Cherry Creek pasture (2001 and 2002). Wire gate at Dore and Bohee crashed through by pickup truck (2002), Road 206 and Trail 208. Cattle chased up and down Trail 208 by four-wheelers, and possibly hikers, Castle-Enos pasture, 2002 and other years. Fence on ridge above Enos Tank allegedly cut by hunter (2002).
West Bridger	Gate on ridge along Road 6675 left open about six times each year (2002 and 2003) allowing private cattle onto Forest.
Nurses Lake	Gate at Piper Homestead along Trail 94 left open, allowing cattle into East Boulder Campground (2003).
Blind Bridger	Gate on ridge between Big Timber District and Beartooth District along Trail 340 propped open, usually by people with pack strings. Cattle leave Big Timber allotment nearly every year.
Hyalite	Livestock deliberately run into by vehicles in 2002. Fences cut in 2003. Gates left open every year since 1997.
Big Bear	Livestock deliberately run into by vehicles in 2002.
Bear Canyon	Gates left open periodically since 1997.
Red Knob	Gates left open periodically since 1997.
Squaw Creek	Gates left open 2002.
Flathead	Hikers with dogs redistributed livestock from where permittee had moved them (most years).
West Bridger	Hikers/runners redistributed livestock from where permittee had moved them.
Blacktail	Target shooters redistributed livestock from where permittee had moved them (1999 to present).
Watkins Creek	Gates often left open and fences cut. Holiday weekends seem to be the worst times (Independence Day, Memorial Day and Labor Day). Campers at Spring Creek Campground and a small dispersed site often leave a gates open in those vicinities. The Watkins Creek Trailhead gate is often left open. This trail is used by hikers, ATVs and stock. ATV users often cut a small piece of fence and go around the locked gate across the road that runs up Wally McClure Creek.
South Fork	Fishermen sometimes leave gates open on the north pasture between the pasture and the road (#167) and between the north pasture and the middle pasture.
Horse Butte	While this allotment was active, protesters routinely cut fences. Snowmobilers also cut fences in this area. In the summer, anglers often left gates open.
Wapiti	Two gates along the Oil Well Road are often left open.

It is likely that many problems encountered by grazing permittees from recreationists go unreported to the Forest Service, and therefore the extent of the overall problem is unknown. It would be expected that allotments occurring in areas popular for recreation would have a greater number of incidents than those located in areas of difficult access or that have fewer attractions (e.g., scenery, wildlife, lakes, etc.).

Timber Management

There are 305,000 acres of Gallatin Forest land classified as suitable for timber management (Forest Plan, FEIS:B-105). Much of this is within inventoried roadless areas and the Forest Plan FEIS had projected that two-thirds of the volume to be produced in the first decade were to come from these lands. In actuality, very little timber has been harvested outside of roaded areas over the past 15 years.

The third issue reflects concern that the objectives to decommission roads or restrict public motorized use to designated routes could hinder or preclude access for future timber harvest or silvicultural activities. Similar to livestock grazing, access for timber management would not be precluded by the Travel Plan alternatives. However, the closure of existing roads could make future access to suitable timber lands more difficult or costly. Effects can be measured by calculating the

number of roads, by alternative, to be closed to public and administrative motorized use that access suitable timber lands.

Minerals Management

In general, National Forest lands are open to development for recovery of valuable mineral resources. There are six areas on the Forest that have had recent active mining or quarrying operations. They are:

- 1) A gold mine at Jardine, Montana in the Gardiner Basin Travel Planning Area (TPA).
- 2) A travertine quarry near Gardiner Montana in the Gardiner Basin TPA.
- 3) A platinum/palladium mine south of Big Timber Montana in the East Boulder TPA.
- 4) A gold mine in Placer Gulch in the Deer Creeks TPA.
- 5) A gold mine in Emigrant Creek in the Mill Creek TPA.
- 6) A gold mine in Arrastra Creek in the Mill Creek TPA.

In addition, there was a proposed gold mine (New World Mine) near Cooke City, but this area was later withdrawn from mineral entry.

The fourth issue reflects concern that the objectives to decommission roads or restrict public motorized use to designated routes could hinder or preclude access for possible future mineral exploration and development. The proposed Travel Plan (Alternatives 2 through 7-M) deliberately defers decisions regarding access for mineral exploration and development to the analysis and decision process that would be completed for any such proposals (see proposed Goal J, and Objective J-1 for Alternatives 2 through 6, and Standard A-8, Goal C and Objective C-1 under Alternative 7-M). Access to these or any future proposed mining or oil and gas operations would not be precluded by the Travel Plan alternatives. In addition, none of the seven alternatives propose to close or decommission existing open roads that access the six mine sites listed above.

General Effects to Livestock Grazing

As stated above, the proposed Travel Plan (Alternatives 2 through 7-M) deliberately defers decisions regarding permittee access to their grazing allotments (whether motorized or non-motorized) to the development and administration of the individual grazing permits (see proposed Standard A-6, Goal J, and Objective J-1 under Alternatives 2 through 6, and Standard A-8, Goal C and Objective C-1 under Alternative 7-M). In other words, while the Travel Plan decision would prohibit public summer motorized use off designated routes, the permittee could be granted permission to use a motorized vehicle to manage the allotment.

There are some differences between alternatives in how much road is available for motorized travel within allotments (Table 4.27.2). Alternative 1 closely reflects the current condition. As shown in the table, Alternatives 2 through 7-M would result in some roads within allotments being closed to pick-up trucks or other high clearance vehicles. However, the roads to be closed have been identified as excess to recreation or administrative needs. These roads are generally short routes that were built to access specific stands for timber harvest. They lie within areas that were heavily roaded for harvest activity, such as in the Gallatin Roded, Bangtail and Fairy Lake TPAs. No principal access roads to allotments are proposed for closure. Alternatives vary in how much road

is available, due to variations in the number of backcountry four-wheel drive opportunities being considered.

Table 4.27. 2 Miles of road within allotments, by alternative.

Alternative	Miles of Road
1	632
2	507
3	551
4	557
5	491
6	450
7-M	484

Therefore, the Travel Plan alternatives would not affect permittee access to their allotments. Thirty-two of the 100 active grazing allotments currently have routes passing through or adjacent to them that are available for ATV use, including 11 of the allotments listed in Table 4.27.1. An additional 14 allotments have trails that are available to motorcycles but not ATVs, including three of the ones listed in Table 4.27.1. With the exception of three allotments located within the Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness, all allotments are currently open to mountain bike use (both on- and off-trail) and all allotments are open to cross-country travel by foot and horse.

Table 4.27.1 provides no evidence that problem 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.

Public travel through grazing allotments, under any of the alternatives, will likely lead to occasional livestock management problems. Table 4.27.1 identifies some of the reported incidents where ATV riders, stock users, snowmobilers and hikers have cut fences, left gates open and redistributed livestock. It is likely that other, unreported problems have also occurred. Table 4.27.1 also shows that there are conflicts with other types of users (campers, fishermen, protesters). From a cumulative effects perspective, as long as the public is allowed free access to the National Forest, there will likely be these types of problems in managing grazing allotments.

General Effects to Timber Management

As stated above, the proposed Travel Plan alternatives (Alternatives 2 through 7-M) deliberately defer 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 proposed Travel Plan does not authorize nor preclude road access to serve project activity. However, the alternatives do designate a portion of the existing road system as project roads. Project roads would be closed to both public and administrative use, and therefore would be unavailable for vehicle access to specific timber stands for harvest or silvicultural activities unless barriers are removed and/or the road is reconstructed. Table 4.27.3 shows the amount of Forest Service system road within the suitable timber base that is currently or would be closed to public and administrative use, by alternative.

Table 4.27. 3 Miles of Forest Service road within the suitable timber base closed to public and administrative use, by alternative.

Alternative	Miles of Road
1	463
2	463
3	458
4	458
5	471
6	477
7-M	447

Project roads were constructed to provide access to timber stands scheduled for treatment. The roads would not have been permanently closed until all activities associated with the treatment were complete. In other words, seldom would there be a vegetation management reason to re-open a project road within 20 years of the original treatment entry. Table 4.27.3 also shows that there would be very little variation between the seven Travel Plan alternatives (a range of plus or minus 3%) and therefore roaded access is not a significant factor in the decision.

Alternative 1 would retain the existing Forest Plan standard (Forest-wide Standard 6.a.4) for elk effective cover (Forest Plan:II-18). Since it is likely that future proposals for timber harvest would occur in existing roaded areas, it is most likely that the Forest Service would continue to propose and make site-specific amendments to exempt timber sale and fuels reduction projects that involve harvest from meeting the standard in areas that currently exceed it, and where it is either not possible or highly undesirable to close additional roads. Currently however, there are no proposed timber harvest or fuels reduction projects that would require amendment to the elk effective cover standard. For more information, refer to the section addressing the consequences of amendment to remove existing direction from the Forest Plan.

Cumulatively, and based on past experience, difficulty in constructing, reconstructing or opening closed roads has been due mostly to concerns over the effects it could have on specific resources. Concerns over the potential effects of roads and road use to grizzly bears, big game, fisheries, water quality and other resources can lead to extensive environmental analyses, appeals and litigation.

The Interim Roadless Directive (FSM 1920-2006-1) also increases the difficulty in constructing road within inventoried roadless areas. While the Directive does not specifically preclude it, there is a requirement that such proposals be approved by the Chief of the Forest Service. The intent of the Directive is to retain the roadless character of these lands until a final rule is issued. Building road must be highly justified. Access for timber production is not adequate justification. It is unknown at this time what direction will be provided for long-term management of roadless areas. Two-thirds of the suitable timber base on the Gallatin Forest is within inventoried roadless areas.

Complying with the Endangered Species Act and the foreseeable Conservation Strategy for the Grizzly Bear also has the effect of requiring no increase in open road density within the Greater Yellowstone Recovery Zone (or Primary Conservation Area), and in certain subunits there is a goal to reduce existing road density. This means that in order to open a closed or new access route within the Recovery Zone, another open route of equal length would need to be closed.

General Effects to Mineral Exploration and Development

As stated in the Affected Environment section, the proposed Travel Plan (Alternatives 2 through 7-M) deliberately defers decisions regarding access for mineral exploration and development to the analysis and decision process that would be completed for any such proposals (see proposed Goal J, and Objective J-1 under Alternatives 2 through 6, and Standard A-8, Goal C and Objective C-1 under Alternative 7-M). Access to existing or future proposed mining or oil and gas operations would not be precluded by the Travel Plan alternatives. None of the seven alternatives propose to close or decommission existing open roads that access the six existing mine sites.

This issue is not significant to the choice between Travel Plan alternatives. Presently, there has been activity in the Cooke City area to reclaim the old mine sites and tailings, along with stabilization and decommissioning of some of the road system. Federal lands in this area have been withdrawn from mineral entry, and therefore future development is not foreseeable. Complying with the Endangered Species Act and the foreseeable Conservation Strategy for the Grizzly Bear could also affect mineral exploration and development on the National Forest within the Recovery Zone, as it would affect access to timber stands. Essentially, no increase in open road density would be allowed, not even on a temporary basis. Mineral exploration and development is not foreseeable within this area at this time.

Effects of Proposed Goals, Objectives, Standards and Guidelines

Alternatives 2 through 7-M propose the following forest-wide goal(s) and objective(s) relevant to access for potential future extractive uses (see “Detailed Description of the Alternatives”, Chapter I):

For Alternatives 2 through 6

Goal J. Administrative Access: *“Retain or establish adequate routes of access that accommodate the implementation of a variety of administrative and project activities, including but not limited to, law enforcement, timber harvest, reforestation, cultural treatments, prescribed fire, fire suppression, watershed restoration, wildlife and fish habitat improvement, private land access, livestock grazing, and mineral exploration and development.”*

Objective J-1. Administrative Uses: *“Allow for the construction, opening, and/or reconstruction of roads and trails for administrative and project purposes consistent with future decisions made on such proposals in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act.”*

For Alternative 7-Modified

GOAL C. Administrative Uses. *Retain or establish the means to access Gallatin National Forest lands for the implementation of a variety of administrative and project activities, including but not limited to, law enforcement, timber harvest, reforestation, cultural treatments, prescribed*

fire, fire suppression, watershed restoration, wildlife and fish habitat improvement, private land access, livestock grazing, and mineral exploration and development.

OBJ. C-1. Administrative Uses. *Allow for the construction, opening, and/or reconstruction of roads and trails for administrative and project purposes consistent with future decisions made on such proposals in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act.*

The proposed Travel Plan, in general, is designed to achieve tighter controls on public motorized use of the Forest (i.e., summer motorized travel is to be prohibited off of designated routes). This goal and objective specifically allows roads to be opened or constructed (temporarily) for administrative and project purposes without modifying the Travel Plan.

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

The Travel Plan alternatives do not propose to construct or reconstruct new road. Decisions regarding access for timber management, livestock grazing and mineral exploration and development are also deliberately deferred to the specific analyses that would occur when those actions are proposed. Therefore, there would be no conflicts with laws, regulations, policy or land use plans. In addition, there is no law, regulation, policy or plan that precludes public use of National Forest land within grazing allotments. Decisions that would allow or restrict cross-country travel by livestock permittees are also deferred to the development and administration of the individual grazing permits.