

## Chapter 2: Proposed Action and Alternatives

### 2.1. Introduction

This chapter describes and compares the alternatives considered for the Mountain City, Ruby Mountains, and Jarbidge Ranger Districts Combined Travel Management project. It describes alternatives considered in detail and those eliminated from detailed study. The project area for the alternatives includes National Forest System (NFS) lands on the three districts. The alternatives are presented at the end of this chapter in tabular format so both the alternatives and their environmental impacts can be readily compared. The chapter is divided into four parts:

- Development of the alternatives
- Alternatives considered in detail
- Alternatives that were considered, but eliminated from detailed analysis
- Comparison of the alternatives

All routes considered for inclusion on the FTS are depicted on the Mountain City, Ruby Mountains, and Jarbidge Ranger Districts Combined Travel Management Project maps. Due to the large size, the location of the maps varies by document format.

Hard copy: CD inside back cover

Website: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/htnf/projects>

CD: CD map

Hard copy versions of these maps can be reviewed at the following locations:

- Mountain City Ranger District, Elko, Nevada
- Ruby Mountains and Jarbidge Ranger Districts, Wells, Nevada
- Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Supervisors Office, Sparks, Nevada
- Jarbidge Fire Station, Jarbidge, Nevada
- Elko Public Library, Elko, Nevada
- Wells Public Library, Wells, Nevada
- Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of Duck Valley, Owyhee, Nevada
- Te-Moak Tribe of Western Shoshone, Elko, Nevada

### 2.2. Development of the Alternatives

Between 1999 and 2004, the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest undertook an inventory of transportation routes on the Mountain City, Ruby Mountains, and Jarbidge Ranger Districts. This inventory (2005-2006) used satellite imagery, historic travel route atlases, and aerial photography to display the existing motorized routes. The Forest Service displayed these routes on the internet and distributed them to the public to solicit comments. A series of open houses were held in Elko and Wells, Nevada. Through this effort, the districts received more accurate information on road locations, conditions, and potential resource issues.

In 2007, the interdisciplinary team reviewed the route maps with respect to public comments and known natural resource locations and issues. The team included specialists in recreation,

wilderness, fire, fuels, rangeland management, archeology, wildlife biology, special uses, minerals, botany, engineering, and hydrology. The team reviewed each route and recommended whether the road or trail should be included in the initial proposed action. The district rangers provided the team with the following general direction for the overall transportation system.

- The team should not designate routes through private land unless the Forest Service or the county holds a right-of-way across the private parcel. The Forest Service has no jurisdiction to invite the public to cross private property without the owner's permission.
- The team should identify routes that access dispersed campsites. Dispersed camping is a large part of the recreation experience in northeast Nevada. Many of the routes accessing dispersed campsites are not currently part of the FTS and to ensure continued access, the team needed to include routes to sites in the proposed action.
- The transportation system should more accurately reflect road maintenance levels and conditions. Many of the NFS roads and unauthorized motorized routes on the districts are maintained at a low level and are only appropriate for high-clearance vehicles. If a NFS road is only suitable for four-wheel drive, high clearance vehicle traffic, they should be considered for a status change to "motorized trail, open to all vehicles."
- When the team had information on existing cultural or natural resources, that information should be used when recommending whether to bring routes into the forest transportation system (FTS).

After the initial proposed action was developed, specialists spent time in the field to ground truth the routes and inventory for rare plants, wildlife, and cultural resources. In addition, specialists developed geographic information system (GIS) models to determine where proposed routes intersected key habitat features or potential habitat for plants and animals. The data that was available in the late fall of 2008 was used to refine the proposed action.

In January 2009, the districts initiated scoping and distributed an initial set of routes proposed for inclusion in the FTS. In March 2009, the comment period was extended and additional public meetings held. In April 2009, the comment period was again extended and field trips were scheduled for the summer. Throughout the summer, the district rangers and their staff met with groups and individuals discussing the travel management project and goals. Based on these interactions with the public, the district rangers decided to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS).

In October of 2009, the Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS was published in the Federal Register. Four additional public meetings were held in Elko County: Elko, Wells, Mountain City, and Jackpot. During this effort, the public provided additional input on specific routes and seasonal designations.

As a result of public comments received between October 19 and November 11, 2009, the proposed action was again refined. Some routes that provided needed access to NFS lands were added to the proposed action. Several routes that would have caused impacts to cultural and/or biological resources were dropped from the proposed action.

Several seasonal designations were added to some routes to protect wildlife species and their habitat. Another change to the proposed action involved the modification of vehicle class on motorized trails proposed for addition to the FTS from "trails open to vehicles less than 50 inches wide" to "trails open to all motor vehicles." During the comment period, it was suggested that trails less than 50 inches wide would no longer permit access to some ATVs since the industry is now making wider single-rider and side-by-side ATV models.

## 2.3. Alternatives Considered in Detail

The Forest Service identified five alternatives (No Action, Proposed Action, Current System, Forest Visitor Map Additions, and Reduce Impacts to Biological, Physical, and Cultural Resources) in response to issues raised during the scoping process. In the following text and tables describing the alternatives, all numbers are estimates based on the best information currently available from GIS. Miles are approximate and have been rounded for summations. Corrections and adjustments will occur as needed during finalization of this EIS and during project implementation.

Further changes to the FTS may be considered in future environmental documents as outlined in the travel analysis report. These may include closure of NFS routes that are impassable or no longer needed; development of new routes as needed for public use and resource management; and/or closure of routes in response to changes in conditions on the ground. Any such changes to the FTS will be accompanied by appropriate environmental analysis and public involvement.

Some exemptions to designations (36 CFR 212.51(a)) and prohibitions (36 CFR 261.13) would apply under all alternatives. Exemptions provide for motor vehicle use for emergencies, national defense, Forest Service administration, and activities authorized in writing. Examples of emergency use could include fire, law enforcement, and search and rescue activities. Activities allowed under written authorizations could include vegetation management (timber, fuel reduction), firewood gathering, wildlife management and research, livestock operations, mining, access to private lands, and outfitter-guide operations. Written authorizations will specify when, where, who, and under what circumstances motorized travel is allowed.

### 2.3.1. Alternative 1: No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, current management plans would continue to guide travel management in the project area.

- No change would be made to the current FTS that includes 1,103 miles of NFS roads and trails and 1,151 miles of unauthorized routes open to motorized use by the public.
- Unauthorized routes would not have status or authorization as FTS facilities.
- No motor vehicle use map would be issued.

Under this alternative, motor vehicles would continue to travel on and off most routes except in designated wilderness areas and areas already closed to motor vehicle use by the Forest Plan. This means motorized use would be restricted to designated routes on about 240,000 acres; approximately 960,000 acres would continue to be open to cross-country motorized travel. Additional unauthorized routes would likely become established over time.

If implemented, the No Action Alternative would not meet the purpose and need for this project, the requirements of the Travel Management Rule, or Executive Orders (EO) 11644 or 11989. National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) regulations require the Forest to include the No Action Alternative even if it fails to meet the purpose and need or is illegal (40 CFR 1502.14) to serve as a baseline for the evaluation and comparison of effects between alternatives. The No Action Alternative serves as the baseline for this analysis and addresses the motorized recreation issue.

Appendix A displays the routes that would be open under this alternative.

### **2.3.2. Alternative 2: Proposed Action**

The Proposed Action Alternative would include the following changes and additions to the FTS.

- Motorized use would be authorized on about 1,103 miles of existing NFS roads.
- About 21 miles of existing NFS roads would be reclassified as NFS trails to reflect on-the-ground conditions and to better convey their condition and status to the public.
- About 947 miles of existing unauthorized routes would be designated as NFS roads or NFS trails open to motorized vehicles for a total FTS of approximately 2,065 miles.
- The majority of these unauthorized routes (938 miles) would be designated as motorized trails. Most of these routes have been in existence for many years, but have never been formally adopted as a part of the FTS.
- The motor vehicle use map would identify those roads, trails, and areas designated for motor vehicle use. Use that is not consistent with the designations on the map would be prohibited under 36 CFR 261.13. This would bring the entire 1.2 million acres of the Mountain City, Ruby Mountains, and Jarbidge Ranger Districts under a designated route system.

Aside from designating additional routes, the Proposed Action Alternative has been modified in other ways since publication of the scoping document in January 2009. These modifications are based on additional information from public scoping and additional analysis on the effects of the routes on Forest resources.

- Vehicle class on motorized trails proposed for addition to the FTS would be modified from “trails open to vehicles less than 50 inches wide” to “trails open to all motor vehicles.”
- About 110 miles of the added routes would only be open seasonally to protect important sage grouse and goshawk habitat and critical deer winter range.
- In addition to designation of many spur routes to individual dispersed campsites, dispersed camping would be permitted at two locations within 150 feet of the designated roads and trails. The first location is near Maggie Summit on the Mountain City Ranger District and extends approximately 1 mile along route M15774. The other location is along the Coon Creek road (56748) on the Mountain City Ranger District and parallels the road for 6 miles.

This alternative meets the purpose and need for action by designating the FTS and additional roads, trails, and areas open for motor vehicle use to meet the administration needs of the districts and the access needs of Forest users. This alternative may require a forest plan amendment if there is a reduction in the area considered semi-primitive non-motorized. If so, the analysis included in this EIS would be sufficient to make a decision regarding the need for that amendment.

Refer to appendix A and the project map for a complete listing of proposed route additions and changes to the FTS.

### **2.3.3. Alternative 3: Current System**

The Current System Alternative would make no changes to the current FTS. The net effect of this alternative would be to restrict motor vehicles to currently open, designated routes across the three districts.

- Approximately 1,103 miles of NFS roads would remain open for use by the public. There would be no change in the status of any NFS road related to this alternative.
- None of the existing unauthorized routes would be added to the FTS.
- The motor vehicle use map would identify those roads designated for motor vehicle use. Use that is not consistent with the designations on the map would be prohibited under 36 CFR 261.13. This would bring the entire 1.2 million acres of the Mountain City Ruby Mountains, and Jarbidge Ranger Districts under a designated route system.

The Current System Alternative differs from the No Action Alternative through the publication of the motor vehicle use map and its subsequent prohibition of uses inconsistent with the designated routes on the map.

This alternative would meet the purpose and need for action by designating the FTS. While fewer roads would be designated, administration, utilization, and protection of the Forest could still occur. There would be no need for a forest plan amendment if this alternative were selected.

Appendix A displays routes open under this alternative.

### **2.3.4. Alternative 4: Forest Visitor Map Additions**

The Forest Visitor Map Additions Alternative would include all the routes on the current (2005) Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Visitor/Travel Maps for the three ranger districts as well as all routes claimed by Elko County. The purpose of this alternative is to reflect the transportation system as presented in public documents and as commonly perceived by the public as currently “open”. A few routes on the Forest visitor maps were not included in this alternative because of resource concerns (USDA FS 2009a); others may not have been added because when attempts were made to inventory the route, the district staff found it did not exist on the ground. Other routes were not included because previous NEPA decisions have been made which determined current and future use.

Alternative 4 would make the following changes to the FTS.

- Approximately 1,603 miles of roads and trails on the three districts would remain open for public use. About 1,115 miles are currently designated NFS roads or trails, the remaining 488 miles are unauthorized routes that are either on the Forest visitor maps or claimed by the county.
- The Forest visitor maps depict roads and four-wheel drive trails. Where a trail is displayed on the map, the alternative would designate the route as a trail. Where a road is displayed, it would be designated as road. Routes claimed by the county would be designated as roads or trails based on how they intersect with the routes depicted on the Forest visitor maps.
- Of the approximately 1,603 miles of roads and trails open to the public, about 363 miles would be designated as NFS roads; the remaining 1,240 miles would be NFS trails open for motorized use.
- The motor vehicle use map would identify those roads and trails designated for motor vehicle use. Use that is not consistent with the designations on the map would be prohibited under 36 CFR 261.13. This would bring the entire 1.2 million acres of the

Mountain City, Ruby Mountains, and Jarbidge Ranger Districts under a designated route system.

Under this alternative, there would be approximately 644,745 acres of NFS lands open for cross-country travel solely for the purpose of retrieving a legally taken elk. Motorized big game retrieval only applies to those portions of Nevada Hunt Unit 062, 061, 071, 072, 101, 102, and 103 within the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest boundary. The use of motorized vehicles to retrieve a legally harvested elk is limited to a distance of 0.5 mile either side of NFS roads and NFS trails and off other public roads crossing NFS lands. Access across other private, state, or federal lands is only authorized by permission of those entities. Only one vehicle and only one trip in and out would be allowed for game retrieval per harvested animal. Based on the number of hunters using hunting units located on NFS lands, this allowance could result in as many as 300 trips per year. As many hunters may not take advantage of the game retrieval allowance, the actual number of trips is likely to be less.

This alternative meets the purpose and need for action in that it designates a FTS that would provide access to the national forest for utilization, administration, and protection. It also meets more of the needs of the public to access NFS lands than the Current System Alternative because it provides more traditional road and trail access to areas where dispersed camping, picnicking, and hunting occur than the current FTS.

There may be a need for a forest plan amendment depending on the number and location of roads and trails in relation to areas described as semi-primitive non-motorized. If so, the analysis included in this EIS would be sufficient to make a decision regarding the need for that amendment.

Appendix A displays the routes that would be open under this alternative.

### **2.3.5. Alternative 5: Reduce Impacts to Biological, Physical, and Cultural Resources**

The Reduce Impacts to Biological, Physical, and Cultural Resources Alternative was formulated to address questions from the public regarding what effects the proposed action would have on inventoried roadless areas, threatened and endangered species, wildlife habitat, aquatic and rare plant species and habitat, watershed quality, and cultural resources. Using the risk assessment completed as part of the TAP, unauthorized routes were only proposed for addition to the FTS if they received a risk rating of 2 or less (with few exceptions) for aquatic resources, water resources, sage grouse or goshawk, and cultural resources (see project record). Under this alternative, no unauthorized routes located in IRAs were proposed for addition to the FTS. This alternative also addressed the need for additions to the FTS.

Alternative 5 would include the following changes to the FTS.

- Approximately 1,103 miles of NFS roads and trails on the three districts would remain open for public use.
- Approximately 20 miles of existing NFS roads would be reclassified as NFS trails.
- About 450 miles of existing unauthorized routes would be added to the FTS for a total of 1,570 miles.
- Of the 1,570 miles of roads and trails open to the public approximately 1,113 miles would be NFS roads; the remaining 457 miles would be NFS trails open for motorized use.

- The motor vehicle use map would identify those roads and trails designated for motor vehicle use. Use that is not consistent with the designations on the map would be prohibited under 36 CFR 261.13. This would bring the entire 1.2 million acres of the Mountain City Ruby Mountains, and Jarbidge Ranger Districts under a designated route system.

This alternative meets the purpose and need for action in that it designates FTS that would provide access to the national forest for utilization, administration, and protection. It also meets more of the needs of the public to access the NFS lands than the Current System Alternative because it provides more traditional road and trail access to areas where dispersed camping, picnicking, and hunting occur than the current FTS.

There may be a need for a forest plan amendment depending on the number and location of roads and trails in relation to areas described as semi-primitive non-motorized. If so, the analysis included in this EIS would be sufficient to make a decision regarding the need for that amendment.

Appendix A displays the routes that would be open under this alternative.

### **2.3.6. Design Features Common to All Action Alternatives**

The following features would apply to all action alternatives and were designed to protect natural and cultural resources and help manage potential user conflicts.

- The Forest would follow national direction for signing and maps. (The Forest Service has developed a standard national format for the motor vehicle use map. These maps would be available at local Forest Service offices and, as soon as practicable, on Forest Service websites).
- User education and enforcement of the new travel management regulations would occur. This would include news releases, public meetings, and brochures describing the new travel management policy and use of the motor vehicle use map.
- Use of dispersed campsites at the end of designated routes would continue to be permitted. Use of these sites would not be restricted to camping. These sites would also be available for day use activities.
- Parking along designated routes and at the end of routes would be permitted. Parking adjacent to the travel lane, in pullouts, or along wide spots in the road would be considered consistent with the designation.
- Road and trail maintenance would continue as funding is allocated by Congress. Maintenance would continue to be prioritized on an annual basis to address the most important safety and resource protection needs.
- If monitoring determines unacceptable levels of resource damage is occurring, steps to prevent further damage would be taken. If monitoring documents considerable adverse effects, the route would be immediately restricted from motor vehicle use until the effects have been mitigated or eliminated and measures have been implemented to prevent future recurrence (36 CFR 212.52(b)(2)).
- Monitoring would evaluate levels of user satisfaction and/or conflict. If considerable user conflict occurs, the districts may intensify education efforts or may consider other responses in the future.
- Cultural resource monitoring would be implemented on the newly authorized routes where eligible or potentially eligible sites have been identified that might have a potential

for some form of damage related to the route or use of the route. If new threats were identified, mitigation measures would be applied as necessary to eliminate any newly identified risks to cultural resource values.

There are several occurrences on the three ranger districts where private property, either outside the district boundaries or inside, blocks public access to NFS lands beyond the private property. When the proposed action or alternatives identify a NFS road or unauthorized route open to the public beyond the private property boundary, the district rangers will work with the private landowner to acquire a right-of-way. If the private landowner does not wish to grant public access, then the route beyond the private land will not be shown on the motor vehicle use map. Some landowners have already notified the Forest Service they do not want to give the public access across their private property. The Forest Service respects the landowner's private property rights and will not display those routes as open to the public beyond or across the private property. If over a two-year period (starting from the date of the record of decision) no agreement is made towards public access across the private property, the route(s) in question will be closed. This two-year timeline may only be extended if the landowner allows access to continue while a formal agreement is being finalized.

The agency has a great deal of direction on such topics as cultural resource protection, proper design of road drainage structures, and wildlife conservation. These types of design features are not applicable to this project because no new construction of roads or trails is proposed. Roads and trails proposed for addition to the FTS were screened to determine what effects continued use might have on resources. Effects of continued use of these routes, as well as the potential effects of increased use and the concentration of use in areas are discussed in chapter 3 of this DEIS. Also refer to the "Recent, Current, and Planned Activities to be Considered for the Cumulative Effects Analysis" in the introduction to chapter 3 for more information about road maintenance on the district.

### **2.3.7. Implementation**

After a decision is made, a motor vehicle use map would be published and made available to the public at no cost. This map is the legal document that identifies those roads, trails, and areas on the districts designated for motor vehicle use, including class of vehicle and time of year. The motor vehicle use map would be reissued annually and any changes or corrections necessitated by future travel management decisions would be incorporated. National Forest System roads and trails would be signed on the ground with a road or trail number. Use inconsistent with the designation displayed on the map would be prohibited.

## **2.4. Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis**

The Forest Service has rigorously explored and objectively evaluated all reasonable alternatives. This section describes those alternatives that were considered and evaluated but were not carried forward for detailed study and the rationale for this determination (40 CFR 1502.14). Public comments received during the scoping process provided suggestions for alternative methods for achieving the purpose and need. Some of these alternatives were outside the scope of travel management, duplicative of the alternatives considered in detail, did not meet the purpose and need, or would cause unnecessary environmental harm or unnecessarily restrict public use of the Mountain City, Ruby Mountains, or Jarbidge Ranger Districts. These proposals are grouped into two themes, which include alternatives that overall reflected suggestions for increased access and those that suggested less access.

## **2.4.1. Theme A: Fewer Motorized Use Restrictions, More Motorized Use Opportunities**

Several commenters provided a series of conceptual suggestions for development of an alternative that would further emphasize motor vehicle use of NFS lands. These suggestions were considered and many were incorporated into the development and modification of the proposed action, pursuant to Forest Service NEPA regulations (36 CFR 220.5(e)(1)). The key suggestions and rationale for not developing another alternative for detailed analysis follow.

### **2.4.1.1. Designate maximum number of routes.**

*This suggestion is encompassed within the existing range of alternatives analyzed in detail.*

The No Action Alternative displays the effects on the social, physical, and biological environment associated with continued use of all existing unauthorized routes in areas that are not restricted from motorized cross-country use. During the scoping process, the public suggested specific routes for inclusion in the FTS. These routes were reviewed by the responsible officials and routes were included in the proposed action if they did not present unacceptable environmental effects and provided needed access or motorized recreation opportunities. Consequently, another alternative is not needed. Although the routes proposed for addition to the FTS were considered to have acceptable levels of environmental effects, some routes did present some effects. These effects and any balancing of competing needs are discussed in chapter 3.

### **2.4.1.2. Allow use of all routes not currently included on the inventory until there has been an opportunity to map and study them.**

*This suggestion is encompassed within the existing range of alternatives analyzed in detail.*

While the Forest recognizes there may be some routes on the ground that are not included in the current inventory, allowing use on “unknown” or “unmapped” routes would be very similar to allowing continued cross-country travel. This suggestion could not be incorporated within the framework of the Travel Management Rule, which depends on designated routes being reflected on a motor vehicle use map. The No Action Alternative would allow continued use on all unauthorized routes and continued cross-country travel on approximately 960,000 acres. Allowing continued use of routes that are currently not mapped would not meet the purpose and need, which is to designate a system of roads and trails vehicles can travel on and prohibit use inconsistent with that designation.

### **2.4.1.3. Review the historic road network to see if portions could be downgraded from a road and designated as a motorized trail.**

*This suggestion is encompassed within the existing range of alternatives analyzed in detail.*

The proposed action considers changes in road classification and includes provisions reclassifying certain existing roads as trails. Approximately 938 miles of existing NFS roads and unauthorized routes would be designated as motorized trails to reflect on the ground conditions. In Alternative 4, approximately 1,240 miles would be designated as motorized trails; in Alternative 5, 457 miles of NFS roads and unauthorized routes would be designated as NFS trails open to motor vehicles. New ground disturbing activities are outside the scope of this analysis. Mapping, surveying, and routing new trails on the ground may be considered at some time in the future. Consequently, another alternative is not needed.

**2.4.1.4. Designate historic access routes suggested by the public to provide access to areas that have important historic value or serve as connectors.**

*This suggestion is encompassed within the existing range of alternatives analyzed in detail or does not meet the purpose and need.*

Routes meeting the criteria discussed previously were considered in the development of the proposed action and its modification based on public scoping comments and interdisciplinary team analysis. Some of these routes are incorporated in the proposed action; others are not included in order to protect important historic and cultural resources. Consequently, another alternative is not needed.

**2.4.1.5. Create new mountain bike, ATV, and motorcycle trails.**

*This suggestion is beyond the scope of this analysis.*

This project is focused on managing currently existing routes. New trail construction is beyond the scope of this project and will be addressed in future site-specific environmental analyses as appropriate.

**2.4.1.6. Access should be provided to all dispersed campsites.**

*This suggestion is encompassed within the existing range of alternatives analyzed in detail.*

The proposed action was in part designed to designate motorized routes to specific campsites needed for public recreation, including many historically-used campsites identified by the public where resource effects were within acceptable levels. It is possible that some campsites and spur routes were not identified in this process. As people bring these sites to the attention of the districts, additional access will be considered. Any additional access would include appropriate environmental analysis and public involvement. In addition, because the No Action Alternative does not restrict motor vehicles to designated routes (allowing cross-country travel for access to dispersed campsites and routes to continue), this proposal is included within the range of alternatives analyzed in detail.

**2.4.2. Theme B: More Motorized Use Restrictions, More Non-motorized Use Opportunities**

Several commenters provided a series of conceptual suggestions for development of an alternative that would emphasize resource protection and forest uses other than motor vehicle use. These suggestions were considered and many were used in the development and modification of the proposed action and alternatives to it, pursuant to the Forest Service NEPA regulations (36 CFR 220.5(e)(1)). The key suggestions and rationale for not developing another alternative for detailed analysis follow.

**2.4.2.1. Decommission FTS routes in wilderness; habitat for threatened, endangered, or sensitive (TES) species; inventoried roadless areas; cultural sites; and meadows.**

*This suggestion does not meet the purpose and need.*

The Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest completed a comprehensive review of the FTS through the TAP, resulting in identification of needs for change in the transportation system, including potential additions and routes that potentially should be removed from the FTS. This proposal is focused on those actions necessary to restrict motor vehicles to designated routes, including consideration of appropriate additions to the FTS of unauthorized routes in areas currently open to cross-country travel. Decommissioning of unneeded NFS roads and trails will be considered in

a separate environmental analysis and is beyond the scope of this proposal. No roads or trails where motor vehicle use is allowed are located in wilderness. Alternative 3 and 5 would not designate any unauthorized routes in IRAs or routes considered high risk to threatened and endangered species. Effects to threatened or endangered species, IRAs, cultural sites, meadows, and aspen are considered further in this analysis and in particular, on existing unauthorized routes included in Alternative 2 and other action alternatives.

#### **2.4.2.2. Do not add routes to the FTS within wilderness or special areas.**

*This suggestion is encompassed within the existing range of alternatives analyzed in detail.*

The proposed action encompasses this suggestion and does not add any routes to the FTS within designated wilderness, the Ruby Crest Trail, or research natural areas.

#### **2.4.2.3. Do not add routes to the FTS within IRAs.**

*This suggestion is encompassed within the existing range of alternatives analyzed in detail.*

The No Action Alternative and Alternatives 3 and 5 would not add any unauthorized routes to the FTS within IRAs. The Alternatives 2 and 4 do propose to add some existing trails in IRAs to the FTS. Alternative 2 substantially reduces the potential for adverse impacts from motorized vehicles by closing all of the districts, including IRAs, to cross-country motor vehicle travel. Finally, the trails proposed for addition to the FTS in Alternatives 2 and 4 are routes that are currently in use and have been legally used for years.

No new construction of roads or trails is proposed in this project. This project only proposes to add routes currently in use to the FTS; therefore, no new environmental effects will result from this project.

#### **2.4.2.4. Do not add routes to the FTS within habitat for threatened, endangered, or sensitive species habitat, meadows, or Riparian Conservation Areas.**

*This suggestion is encompassed within the existing range of alternatives analyzed in detail.*

The No Action Alternative and Alternative 3 do not add any routes to the FTS within known habitat for threatened and endangered species, meadows, or Riparian Conservation Areas. The proposed action protects wildlife habitat and riparian/meadow areas by substantially reducing the potential for adverse impacts from motorized vehicles by restricting use to designated routes. Some existing routes are proposed for designation in these areas, but these are only the most needed routes with low potential for adverse resource effects. Refer to the wildlife, aquatic habitat, and watershed sections in chapter 3 for more information. The few routes proposed for addition to the FTS that could have effects on sensitive resources are specifically analyzed in chapter 3.

## **2.5. Comparison of Alternatives**

Chapter 3 describes the environmental consequences of the alternatives in detail. This section compares the alternatives by summarizing key differences. The major features of the alternatives are also compared in chart and table format.

### **2.5.1. Issues**

**Recreation:** The recreation issue is addressed in the No Action Alternative and Alternatives 2 and 3. In the No Action Alternative, motor vehicle users are free to travel on or off NFS routes. Under Alternative 3, the opposite is true. Motor vehicles are restricted to a finite set of NFS roads. Alternatives 2, 4, and 5 allow use only on NFS roads and trails designated for motor

vehicle use. With the exception of dispersed camping within 150 feet of 56748 (Coon Creek) and M15774 between the intersection with M15775 south to 56165b (Maggie Summit) in Alternative 2 and game retrieval of legally taken elk in Alternative 4, cross-country travel would be prohibited under all of these alternatives. As a result there may be an effect on users wanting to travel cross-country or that have always driven down a road not included in the alternative. While all areas of the national forest would be accessible, the areas immediately accessible by motorized vehicle would be reduced.

For those seeking a non-motorized recreation experience, the No Action Alternative would have the highest potential for adverse impacts. Those visiting the Forest with the idea of escaping the sights and sounds of the modern world would potentially have to travel further to meet their needs. Without the restriction of motor vehicles to designated routes, there would always be a potential to find a favorite isolated location accessed by new tracks.

Alternative 3 would not designate any unauthorized routes and prohibits motor vehicle use that is inconsistent with the designation. Alternatives 2 and 5 would decrease the number of open routes and prohibit cross-country travel. Recreationists interested in a non-motorized experience would be better served under these alternatives since cross-country travel would be prohibited. . The amount of routes designated under each of the alternatives in IRAs and across the districts in general would provide for differing degrees of solitude.

Alternative 4 allows cross-country travel solely for the purpose of big game retrieval; this use would not be allowed under Alternatives 2, 3, or 5. By designating some unauthorized routes to access dispersed campsites and hunting areas, Alternative 2 continues to provide access into areas that have had motor vehicle access in the past. Not all unauthorized routes would be open, and the prohibition on use inconsistent with the designation would be in effect. Those seeking distance from the sights and sounds of motor vehicles would be less likely to encounter a motor vehicle as they move further away from roads or motorized trails.

**Roadless:** The roadless issue is addressed primarily in Alternatives 3 and 5 which avoid any additions to the FTS in IRAs. Contrasting the amount of routes in the No Action Alternative currently open in IRAs, the action alternatives all reduce impacts to roadless attributes and wilderness characteristics.

Alternative 5 minimizes the impacts to inventoried roadless areas and biological, physical, and cultural resources by not designating any routes in IRAs. Routes included in the FTS under this alternative were low or moderate risk routes for aquatic habitat, soil and water, wildlife, and cultural resources (see project record). This alternative would reduce the amount of disturbance in IRAs and protect/preserve roadless area characteristics more than the other alternatives because it would not designate unauthorized routes in IRAs to the FTS and would prohibit cross-country travel.

**Biological and Physical Resources:** Alternatives 3 and 5 were developed to address concerns regarding the effects of roads on the biological, physical, and cultural resources. Generally, the effects are measured by the miles of routes located in wildlife habitat, rare plant habitat, within a Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) 6 watersheds or crossing cultural resource sites. Route density was used to identify where the presence of routes (either roads or trails) could have an impact within the HUC or within a specific wildlife habitat. The result of the road density analysis then focused the effects analysis on specific areas where density suggested the potential for conflicts. Alternatives 3 and 5 would have less impacts to the biological and physical resources than Alternatives 1, 2, and 4.

**Social/Economic:** Some people believe that designating roads and trails open for motor vehicle use and prohibiting use that is inconsistent with that designation may affect the economic

activities in the counties. Restricting motor vehicles to designated routes means that ranchers and mining companies would need written authorization to drive motor vehicles off the FTS. While such authorization is expected to be routinely granted, the requirement itself may be seen as a restriction on economic activity. The No Action Alternative provides a baseline for comparison of economic impacts from the action alternatives. Alternative 2 would designate the greatest number of routes and have the least impact on economic activity of any of the action alternatives.

### 2.5.2. Comparison of the Miles of Routes by Alternative.

Figure 1 compares the miles of routes available for motorized use on the Mountain City, Ruby Mountains, and Jarbidge Ranger District by alternative.

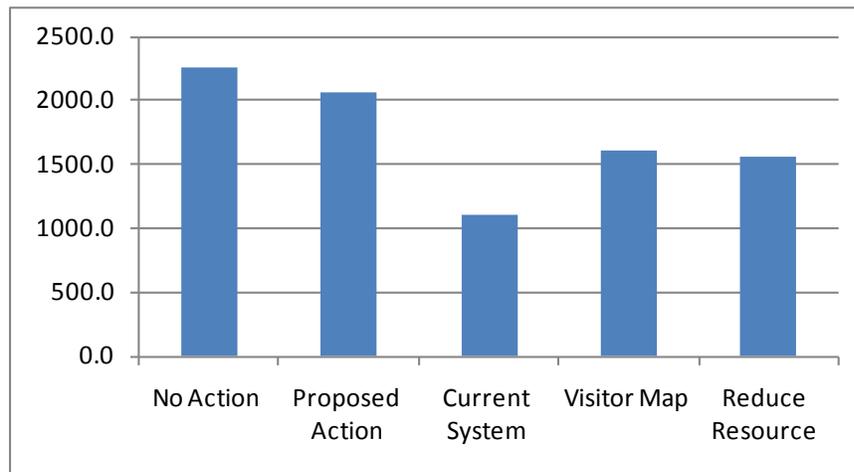


Figure 1. Miles of Routes by Alternative.

### 2.5.3. Comparison of the Effects Indicators by Alternative

Issue/Resource	Alternative 1 No Action	Alternative 2 Proposed Action	Alternative 3 Current System	Alternative 4 Forest Visitor Map Additions	Alternative 5 Reduce Impacts
<b>Impacts on Recreation Use</b>					
Routes Available for Motorized Travel (miles)	2,254	2,065	1,103	1,603	1,599
Changes in ROS Class (acres)					
Primitive	98,651	94,965	104,197	95,633	96,643
Semi-Primitive Non-motorized	499,434	508,099	573,453	536,353	545,868
Semi-Primitive Motorized	70,331	78,764	29,440	171,460	52,061
<b>Impacts on Roadless Inventoried Areas</b>					
Motorized Routes in Inventoried Roadless Areas (miles)	227	230	26	82	28
<b>Economic Impacts</b>					
Number of Mineral Operations expected to be active annually.	No change expected				

Table 3. Comparison of Effects Indicators by Alternative					
Issue/Resource	Alternative 1 No Action	Alternative 2 Proposed Action	Alternative 3 Current System	Alternative 4 Forest Visitor Map Additions	Alternative 5 Reduce Impacts
Number of Cattle and Sheep Grazed on NFS Lands	No change expected				
Relative Change to the Amount of Expenditures by Recreationists	No change expected				
<b>Social Impacts</b>					
Ability of Forest Users to Participate in Forest Activities	No change expected				
NFS Lands Accessible by Foot within 1.0 mile of an Open Motorized Route (acres)	951,941	928,678	802,043	901,023	870,610
NFS Lands Accessible by Foot within 0.5 mile of an Open Motorized Route (acres)	754,789	715,947	536,616	663,186	627,298
<b>Impacts to Water Quality/Soil Erosion</b>					
Routes within 300 feet of Perennial Streams (miles)	365	347	257	316	297
Routes within 150 feet of Intermittent Streams (miles)	377	353	211	289	281
Number of Perennial Stream Crossings	420	391	275	343	313
Number of Intermittent Stream Crossings	1,741	1,618	950	1,281	1,273
Routes Located on Slopes Greater than 30% with Erosive Soils (miles)	151	131	69	102	97
<b>Impacts to Aquatic Resources</b>					
Road Density (miles/miles <sup>2</sup> )					
Mountain City	2.34	2.37	1.59	2.09	2.01
Jarbidge	1.65	1.66	1.11	1.32	1.40
Ruby Mountains	1.94	1.95	1.05	1.48	1.68
<b>Lahontan Cutthroat Trout</b>					
Road Crossings (number) on Occupied Streams	79	60	33	58	41
Routes within 300 feet of Occupied Stream (miles)	49.7	45.8	36.2	43.3	39.2
Routes within 150 feet of Non-occupied Streams (miles)	76.5	73.8	35.5	61.3	49.8
<b>Bull Trout</b>					
Road Crossings (number) on Occupied Streams	5	10	5	5	10
Routes within 300 feet of Occupied Stream (miles)	2.8	3.2	2.8	2.8	3.2
Routes within 150 feet of Non-occupied Streams (miles)	9.8	12.1	5.8	8.2	9.4
<b>Columbia Spotted Frog</b>					
Road Crossings (number) on Occupied Streams	212	174	104	168	131
Routes within 300 feet of Occupied Stream (miles)	141.6	126.5	91.0	115.2	103.5

Table 3. Comparison of Effects Indicators by Alternative					
Issue/Resource	Alternative 1 No Action	Alternative 2 Proposed Action	Alternative 3 Current System	Alternative 4 Forest Visitor Map Additions	Alternative 5 Reduce Impacts
<b><i>Redband Trout</i></b>					
Road Crossings (number) on Occupied Streams	245	208	121	189	145
Routes within 300 feet of Occupied Stream (miles)	136.3	124.3	97.8	118.8	105.3
Routes within 150 feet of Non-occupied Streams (miles)	215.7	201.0	120.5	170.4	166.3
<b>Impacts to Wildlife</b>					
<b><i>Greater Sage-Grouse</i></b>					
Routes within 0.31 miles (.5 km) Lek Disturbance Buffer	25.3	27.8	14.9	21.4	15.0
Routes within Potential Sage-grouse Nesting Habitat (miles)	160.0	146.0	69.4	108.7	109.6
Road Density in Nesting Habitat (miles/miles <sup>2</sup> )					
Mountain City/Jarbidge	2.64	2.62	2.11	2.38	2.42
Ruby Mountains	2.84	2.64	2.45	2.61	2.70
Zone of Influence (200 meters) (acres)	40,122	38,563	21,896	30,886	34,098
<b><i>Bighorn Sheep</i></b>					
Routes within Potential Bighorn Sheep Habitat (miles)	1,690.1	1,568.0	797.0	1,166.7	1,136.5
Road Density in Bighorn Sheep Habitat (miles/miles <sup>2</sup> )					
Mountain City/Jarbidge	1.89	1.89	1.29	1.57	1.58
Ruby Mountains	1.82	1.82	1.37	1.57	1.61
Zone of Influence (300 meters) (acres)	358,321	388,593	211,705	270,002	297,342
<b><i>Pygmy Rabbit</i></b>					
Routes within Potential Pygmy Rabbit Habitat (miles)	1,315	1,347	692	709	1,021
Zone of Influence (50 meters) (acres)	56,192	55,964	28,195	39,737	45,106
<b><i>Northern Goshawk</i></b>					
Routes within 30 acre (0.12 mile) Nest Disturbance Buffer (miles)	19.8	18.5	10.6	15.1	13.1
Routes within Potential Nesting Habitat (miles)	94	88.1	50.2	68.6	65.4
Zone of Influence (400 meters) (acres)	22,640	22,227	14,020	18,425	19,102
<b><i>Mule Deer</i></b>					
Routes within Mule Deer Habitat (miles)	2,222	2,036	1,085	1,574	1,543
Zone of Influence (200 meters) (acres)	299,460	318,840	164,448	226,018	241,400
<b>Impacts to Forest Service Sensitive and State Protected Plants</b>					
Routes within Occupied Rare Plant Habitat (High to Moderate Risk) (miles)	64.1	30.8	24.3	34.7	29.5
Routes within Potential Rare Plant Habitat (Low-Very Low Risk) (miles)	3,645.8	3,311.3	1,773.2	2,581.1	2,525.9

Table 3. Comparison of Effects Indicators by Alternative					
Issue/Resource	Alternative 1 No Action	Alternative 2 Proposed Action	Alternative 3 Current System	Alternative 4 Forest Visitor Map Additions	Alternative 5 Reduce Impacts
<b>Impacts to Noxious Weeds</b>					
Routes in High-Risk Areas (miles)	108.4	105.1	87.1	96.4	95.3
Routes in Medium-Risk Areas (miles)	2,024.6	1,332.4	950.2	1,409.7	1,370.1