

# Kootenai National Forest Plan

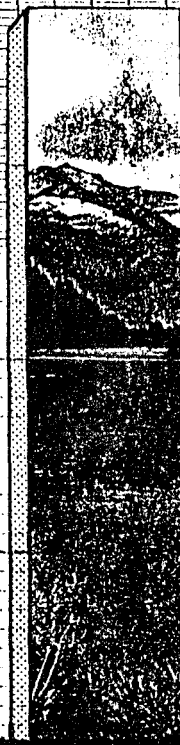
## Record of Decision

United States  
Department  
of Agriculture



Forest Service

Kootenai  
National Forest



**RECORD OF DECISION  
FOR  
USDA FOREST SERVICE**

**KOOTENAI NATIONAL FOREST**

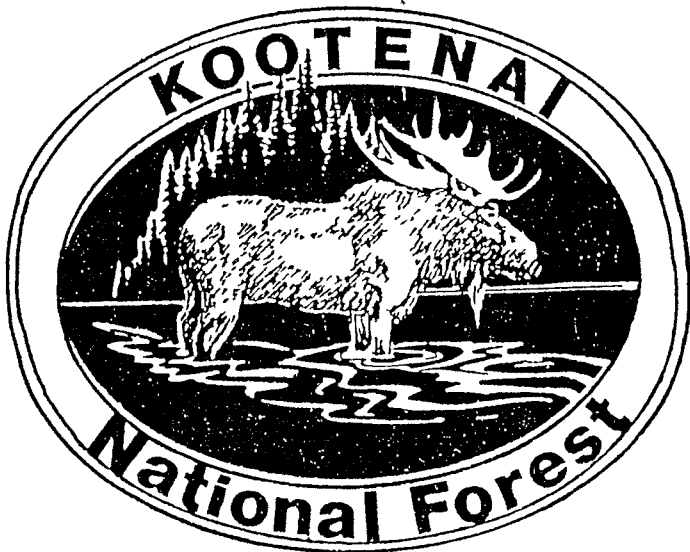
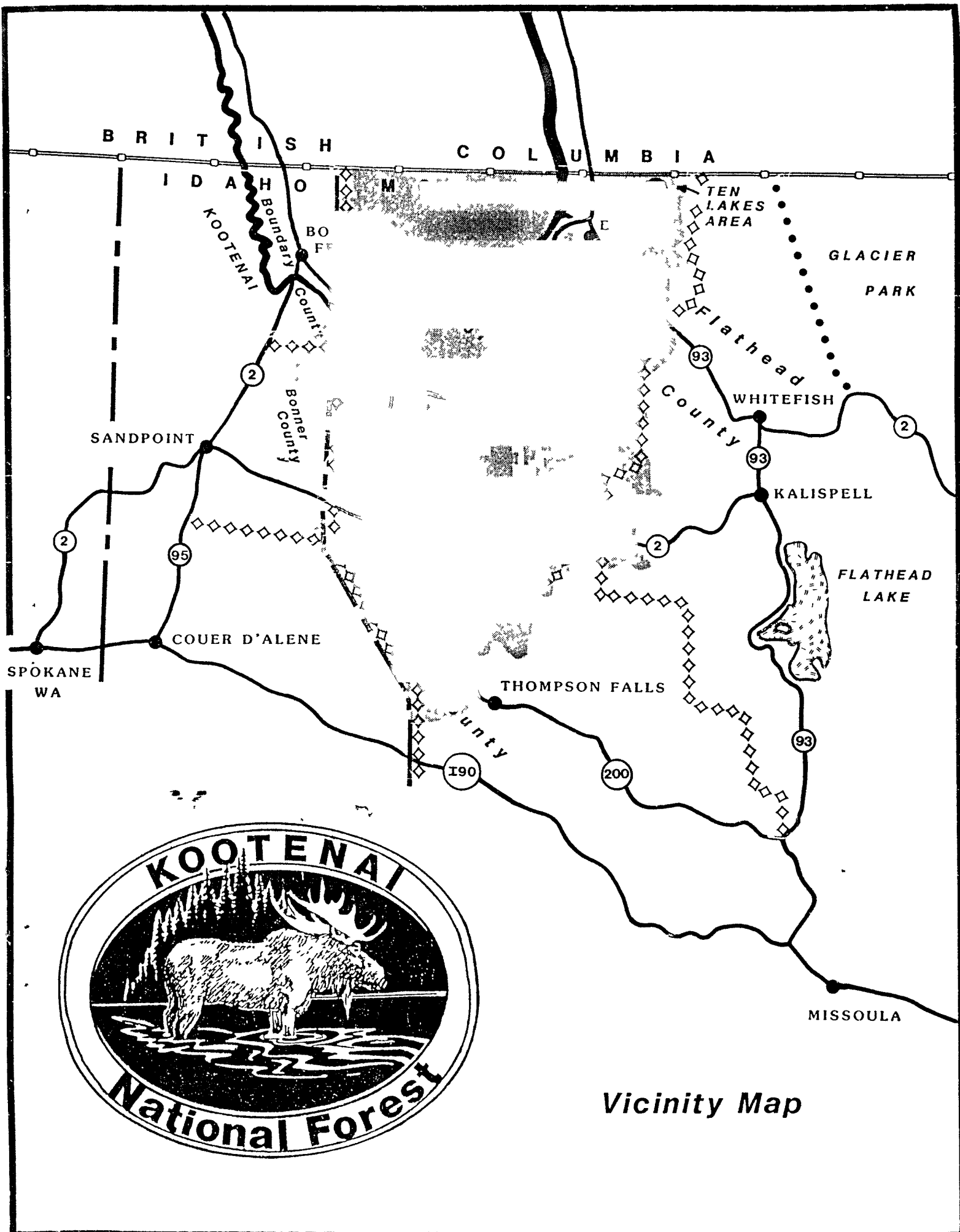
**LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN  
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

**Lincoln, Sanders and Flathead Counties, Montana  
and  
Bonner and Boundary Counties, Idaho**

**September 1987**

**KOOTENAI NATIONAL FOREST  
RECORD OF DECISION  
FOREST PLAN  
TABLE OF CONTENTS**

	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. MAJOR FEATURES OF THE KOOTENAI FOREST	2
III. THE RELATIONSHIP OF PEOPLE TO THE FOREST	3
IV. A VISION OF THE FUTURE	3
V. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, ISSUES AND MANAGEMENT CONCERNS	4
VI. THE DECISION	5
VII. THE RATIONALE	13
A. RESPONSE TO ISSUES AND CONCERNS	13
1. Timber	13
2. Wilderness and Roadless	19
3. Wildlife	25
4. Minerals	27
5. Other Issues	28
B. ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY	31
C. ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY	36
D. COMMUNITY STABILITY	36
E. COMPATIBILITY WITH THE PLANS OF OTHERS	37
VIII. ALTERNATIVES	38
IX. COMPARISON OF THE ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE AND THE FINAL PLAN	40
X. IMPLEMENTATION, MITIGATION, AND MONITORING	42
XI. PLANNING RECORDS	43
XII. APPEAL RIGHTS	44



Vicinity Map

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. What is being decided?**

This Record of Decision documents my decision and rationale for selecting an alternative for the land and resource management of the Kootenai National Forest. That Alternative, known as Alternative JF is the best strategy for management of the Forest over the next 10 to 15 years.

*Alternative JF*, the selected alternative, is contained in the document titled "Kootenai National Forest Forest Plan", (September 1987). It provides direction in the form of goals and objectives, standards, guidelines, monitoring requirements, and probable schedule of management practices. The analysis of alternatives and public comments I considered in this decision can be found in the Final Environmental Impact Statement on the Forest Plan dated September 1987.

### **B. What is the goal of the Forest Plan?**

The Forest Plan is part of the long range resource planning requirement established by the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA); an amendment to the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA).

My goal in selecting Alternative JF is to provide the greatest total benefit to the public (net public benefit). In determining net public benefit, I considered public comments, other agency goals, environmental quality, as well as the production of resources upon which dollar values can be placed (priced) and resources upon which dollar values cannot be placed (nonpriced). In Section VII. of this Record of Decision entitled, "Rationale for the Decision," I discuss how I considered these factors in my decision.

### **C. What will happen to existing plans on the Kootenai National Forest?**

All previous resource management plans will be superseded by the Forest Plan, once it is adopted. Changes from previous plans are subject to existing rights, contracts, leases, and specific authorities for special areas such as those related to wilderness.

### **D. What is the duration of the Forest Plan, and can it be changed?**

The Forest Plan is a 10 to 15 year Plan. It will normally be revised every 10 years, but by law must be revised every 15 years.

The Forest Plan can be changed at any time by either amendment or revision. Such changes will respond to changing needs and opportunities, Congressional land designations, catastrophic events such as major flood, fire, windstorm, insect epidemic, disease, etc., monitoring results, or major new management or production technology.

In making changes, the Forest Supervisor will follow amendment or revision procedures outlined in the National Forest Management Act and planning regulations (36 CFR Part 219.10(f)(g)).

### **E. What is not being decided?**

The Forest Plan contains general resource management direction. It does not cover, except

in a broad manner, projects or actions on specific sites. Site-specific environmental analysis will be done at the project level and this analysis will follow National Environmental Policy Act procedures. The Forest Plan does not address day-to-day management. For example, personnel matters, internal organization, and equipment and property management are not included.

In addition, I am not making management recommendations in this Record of Decision for those portions of contiguous roadless areas located on adjacent Forests. Recommendations for those areas have already been made, or soon will be made, in the Forest Plan Records of Decision for those National Forests.

Recommendations for the Ten Lakes Montana Wilderness Study Act area are not included in the Record of Decision, because recommendations to Congress have already been made in a separate report titled "Ten Lakes - A Final Report and Proposal".

The projected production levels presented in the Forest Plan for various resources are maximum resource output levels. As such, they are not decisions in and of themselves. While all outputs in the Forest Plan can be accomplished from a physical, biological, economic, and legal perspective, the Forest Plan does not guarantee that the maximum levels will be accomplished. For instance, the projected timber output of 2,270 million board feet over the next decade is dependent upon several external factors beyond the scope of the Forest Plan. Local demand for raw material, timber imports, national housing starts and home mortgage rates all influence the timber volume that will be actually sold. Similarly, the Forest Plan's projected elk population is dependent upon factors as diverse as hunting regulations and the severity of winter weather.

## **II. MAJOR FEATURES OF THE KOOTENAI NATIONAL FOREST**

The Kootenai National Forest is located in the far northwest corner of Montana and shares its northern boundary with Canada. Because it is on the eastern limits of the Pacific maritime influence, it receives more moisture than any other Forest in Montana and, consequently, produces the most timber of any Forest in the State. Besides timber, the Kootenai is noted for its mineral, wildlife and wilderness resources. The Kootenai River runs through the Forest, entering from Canada to the north and exiting near Troy to the west. Libby Dam, ten miles upstream from the town of Libby, impounds water in a 90-mile-long reservoir.

The grizzly bear is native to the Kootenai, and portions of two grizzly bear ecosystems have been identified:

The Cabinet Yaak Grizzly Bear Ecosystem occupies most of the west side of the Forest, north of the Clark Fork River and extends to the west into Idaho.

A small portion of the Northern Continental Divide Grizzly Bear Ecosystem is located on the northeast corner of the Forest and extends into Canada.

The Kootenai National Forest is mountainous, with the Bitterroots in the southwest, the Cabinets and Purcells in the interior, the Salish in the east, and the Whitefish range in the northeast corner. These mountain ranges are home to all of the Montana big game species except the antelope. They also hold major mineral resources. One silver/copper mine near Troy, Montana has been in production for several years and two more mines, to be located under the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness Area, are planned.

### III. THE RELATIONSHIP OF PEOPLE TO THE FOREST

These lands, however, cannot be described without including their connection with people - those who reside close by or those who have a tie, be it financial or through the heart. The natural environment and people are not separate entities, but an integral part of life.

Man has probably inhabited the area now called the Kootenai National Forest for at least 7,000 years. Most of the remains of this prehistoric activity are located in the Kootenai Valley and along the tributaries of the Kootenai River. Most certainly, the resources of the surrounding mountains were exploited, but fewer prehistoric sites have been located in the higher elevations. These early people were wandering hunters and gatherers, taking advantage of the wide range of mineral resources as well as the varied plant, animal, and aquatic life.

The last prehistoric group to occupy the area were the Kootenai Indians. Their occupation overlaps the first white settlers whose major activities dominated the late 19th and 20th centuries. Those activities included the fur trade, missionary work, mining, homesteading and agriculture, transportation, logging, and public management of the resources.

The Kootenai National Forest has traditionally contributed to a resource-based economy, dependent on timber and minerals. This economy is relatively isolated from major metropolitan areas, and provides a lifestyle and quality of life that is strongly defended at the local level.

The Forest Plan seeks to recognize the uniqueness of this area and opportunities it presents for the future by combining the peoples' needs with those of future generations. This is being done with objectives, goals, and standards and guidelines to ensure the best management possible at this time.

### IV. A VISION OF THE FUTURE

The Forest Service vision of the Kootenai National Forest is of a Forest managed to benefit the public while maintaining a balance of resources in harmony with the capability of the land. The Forest Planning process tailors National and Regional direction to provide a combination of opportunities and uses from the diverse variety of Forest resources, both now and in the future. The basic mission of the Forest is caring for the land and serving people. It requires a balanced consideration of all Forest resources in meeting the present and future needs of society, as well as those of future generations. It relies on the application of scientific knowledge, conservation leadership and wise stewardship in partnership with other public agencies, tribal governments, and others interested and affected by the Forest programs.

This mission is still in the forefront today, but as we look over the past decades we see that society's needs have varied over the years. Direction in the Forest Plan attempts to balance varied viewpoints, but, more importantly, to minimize the effects on people's lives while caring for the land.

As the amount of timber available from private lands declines, more importance will be placed on supplies from the Kootenai Forest. This leading timber-supplier position will be retained into the foreseeable future because of the amount of productive forest land designated for the sustained yield of timber.

There will be evidence of development on the Forest. There will be more areas of obvious timber harvest and more roads. The evidence of people using the Forest will be more obvious. There will be more big game animals, especially elk, and there will be more people hunting.

Over time, especially on the Management Areas that are suitable for timber, diversity will increase as areas are cut and reforested throughout the Forest. As time goes by, more and more areas will be in various stages of revegetation and growth, creating a much wider range of diversity and healthier conditions.

Our uncut lands may be dominated by dead trees for a period of time in the near future because of the mountain pine beetle infestation.

Minerals, such as silver and copper, will also become more important to the area economy because of the recent successful exploration in the Cabinet Mountains and the successful Troy Mine. The Forest Plan has insured that most of the known important mineral areas will be available for continued exploration and possible development.

The above resource-use opportunities will provide for the continued economic support desired by the local resource-dependent communities. Local jobs in the timber industry can be stabilized and ample opportunities will be available for future investments to provide for growth in the mineral industry. Timber-related employment will probably decline due to technical developments in logging and milling.

Lifestyles will probably remain much the same for the near future, with some people relocating, within northwest Montana, to find jobs associated with the eventual location of mineral development.

The recreational use of the Kootenai National Forest will continue and probably increase steadily, especially around Koocanusa reservoir. Recreation use, in developed areas, was 297,000 recreation visitor days in 1984 and is expected to increase to 332,000 recreation visitor days within 30 years. Recreation in all areas, both with and without roads, will increase.

## **V. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, ISSUES AND MANAGEMENT CONCERNS**

The Notice of Intent to prepare a Forest Plan and Environmental Impact Statement was published in the Federal Register on July 18, 1985. The initial issues to be addressed by the planning process resulted from workshops in Eureka, Libby, Trout Creek, and Troy, Montana, in 1979. Those attending listed the issues that they felt were the most important. Organizations and State and Federal agencies were consulted and Forest Service employees added their concerns. The process is described in Appendix A of the Environmental Impact Statement and the complete list of issues and concerns is found in Chapter I of the Environmental Impact Statement.

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement and a proposed Forest Plan were released in November 1982. The public and agency review period, which included a 45-day extension, ended in April 1983. During the review period, over 500 written comments were received. In addition, meetings were held in all local communities and the Forest Supervisor or his representatives met with groups, organizations, corporations, and other public agencies from Spokane, Washington, to Helena, Montana.



The major factors resulting from the public and agency review included:

1. Recommendation of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that the management of grizzly habitat be enhanced.
2. Public desire to designate old growth timber habitat as a specific management need.
3. Public desire to have opportunities for primitive, non-motorized recreation.
4. Re-analysis of the wilderness issue based on national direction.

The total effect of the changes was so significant that a new Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Forest Plan were issued in July 1985. Public meetings to explain these documents were held in Libby, Noxon, and Kalispell. Three hundred and one responses were received, and the issues and concerns were verified.

All of the public comments to the 1985 Draft Environmental Impact Statement, and my response, to those comments are found in Appendix E of the Environmental Impact Statement.

The key issues and management concerns used in selecting the Forest Plan from the various alternatives are discussed in the following Section VI, The Decision.

## **VI. THE DECISION**

My decision is to implement Alternative JF to guide the management of the Kootenai National Forest for the next 10-15 years. This alternative established a basis to resolve the issues and concerns identified for the Kootenai National Forest, and in my opinion, maximizes net public benefit. These benefits are summarized in this decision.

Analysis of public comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and proposed Forest Plan provided additional information that caused me to make adjustments in Alternative J. I conclude the magnitude of change from the DEIS Alternative to Alternative JF, the Selected Alternative, was within the range of alternatives discussed, and that the environmental effects disclosed are adequate to make an informed decision (refer to Section VIII (Alternatives) of this document for changes).

The decision on this Forest Plan speaks to the land and its many resources. Underlying these decisions are some basic philosophies. Succinctly, I recognize people as a part of the environment, and want the decision and direction to minimize disruption to people's lives and values. As well, I want to ensure a caring for the land and provide choices for future generations.

In making this decision, I recognize the limitations of the physical and biological systems, and that the Kootenai National Forest cannot provide everything each individual or group would like.

**Some of the major aspects of the decision are:**

## Timber Production

### Allowable Sale Quantity

The allowable sale quantity of 227 MMBF includes 202 MMBF of live green timber that meets the merchantability specifications for saleable timber, as described on page 2-5 of the Northern Region Guide. Also included in the ASQ are 25 MMBF of dead or dying timber that meet merchantability specifications. The additional 25 MMBF is placed in a non-interchangeable component of the ASQ and is defined in the "Timber Resource Suitability Definitions" in Appendix B to the EIS.

The allowable sale quantity of 227 MMBF of timber which can be sold annually during the first decade will come from approximately 15,500 acres expected to be harvested each year.

I intend to increase the Allowable Sale Quantity at the end of the ten year plan period to the projected second decade timber harvest level. This will be an approximate increase of 3 MMBF/year to a new ASQ level of 230 MMBF/year. This increase will depend on future conditions. If after ten years, the Forest Plan is not revised, and conditions dictate, I intend to allow for this increase.

I recognize that timber sale purchasers need a certain amount of volume under contract to efficiently schedule and conduct their logging activities. The Forest Service, in turn, should be able to adjust the amount of timber offered for sale based on the demands of the market. I intend to conduct an annual evaluation of the planned sales program to determine if changes should be made in the program of work. I am asking the Forest Supervisor to monitor the volume under contract and the volume offered and sold each year. This information will then be evaluated along with other relevant factors to make recommendations on any necessary changes in the timber sales program.

The timber sale program quantity includes the ASQ (chargeable volume) and any estimated additional material (nonchargeable volume) planned for sale.

### Suitable Lands

I have assigned 1,263,000 acres to Management Areas that are suitable for timber production. I have determined that 457,000 acres are not suitable for timber production because they cannot produce a commercial crop of trees, timber harvest would cause irreversible damage, or they cannot be replanted. In addition, I have placed 386,000 acres into Management Areas that preclude timber harvest, including 34,000 acres into proposed wilderness. I have rescheduled 19,000 suitable acres to be harvested earlier in the planning horizon. The rescheduling adds 8 million board feet in the first decade.

I have also identified 139,000 acres that are currently unsuitable but would be suitable for harvest if the timber prices are high enough to support the more expensive logging systems and site preparation necessary. Included in the unsuitable land are 39,000 acres of stagnated, non-productive lodgepole pine trees. Once the stagnated lodgepole pine is cleared from those acres, and they are replanted and managed, the ASQ could be increased by approximately 10 MMBF. I am not scheduling this increase until the conversion from stagnated lodgepole to established reproduction actually occurs.

### **Mountain Pine Beetle**

Approximately 98 MMBF of lodgepole pine are planned for sale annually during the first ten years of the plan. This volume includes both live green and dead and dying trees.

### **Below Cost Sales**

It will be necessary throughout the life of the Forest Plan to incur below-cost timber sales to achieve multiple use management objectives as well as provide jobs to the local industry.

### **Even-age Management**

Even-age management, which includes shelterwood, seed tree, and clearcut silvicultural systems, will predominate. Uneven-age management will be used where it is biologically feasible and consistent with management objectives. Ultimately, the selection of the silvicultural system will be based on site-specific evaluation of biological and management factors at the project level. Clearcutting will be used only where it is determined to be the optimal method to meet the objectives and requirements of the Forest Plan. Refer to Section VII of this document and Appendix 2, "Vegetation Management Practices," in the Forest Plan for further information.

### **Roads and Road Management**

I anticipate that it will be necessary to build approximately 2,370 miles of road and re-construct approximately 540 miles during the first ten years of the Plan in order to harvest the scheduled volume of timber. All forms of harvest, and location of harvest units, will be examined to minimize the miles of road. The standards of road construction, especially width and alignment, will be the minimum standards necessary for the harvest equipment and safety.

There are currently 6,200 miles of road on the Kootenai National Forest, and 1,600 miles are seasonally or permanently closed to traffic. During the next ten years, 2,300 additional miles will be closed. Most of the additional closures will be on the newly constructed roads.

I have placed standards in the Forest Plan to minimize impacts from road construction and timber harvest. (See the following references in Chapter II of the Forest Plan: Goal #2, timber objectives, soil and water objectives, roads and trails objectives, soil and water standards). Even with those standards, I expect sediment to increase slightly in areas of new road construction, and I anticipate a slight reduction in numbers of fish during the first ten years of the Plan.

### **Wilderness and Roadless Management**

The Forest has 654,000 acres of roadless lands, 403,700 acres of inventoried roadless areas, 121,400 acres of non-inventoried (Not included in Appendix C of the EIS) roadless lands (lands that didn't meet the size or block ownership criteria in RARE II) and 34,000 acres of Montana Wilderness Study Act areas (Ten Lakes).

Of the 403,700 acres of inventoried roadless areas on the Forest, I am recommending 78,500 acres for wilderness. Wilderness recommendations include: 36,200 acres in the Scotchman Peak area, 35,500 acres as additions to the existing Cabinet Mountains Wilderness, and 6,800 acres adjacent to the Ten Lakes Montana Wilderness Study Act Area. The recommendation for the Ten Lakes Area has been submitted to Congress in a document separate from this Forest Plan and is not part of this Record of Decision.

My wilderness recommendations are preliminary administrative recommendations and are not appealable under 36 CFR 211.18. They will receive further review and possible modification by the Chief of the Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture and the President of the United States. Final decisions on wilderness designation have been reserved to the Congress. Until Congress determines otherwise, areas recommended for wilderness will be managed to protect their wilderness values.

#### **Scotchman Peak**

I am recommending a wilderness designation for 36,200 acres of Scotchman Peak, including 12,000 acres more than was in the Draft EIS.

#### **Cabinet Additions**

I am recommending wilderness designation for the following areas adjacent to the existing Cabinet Mountains Wilderness: Cabinet Face East (20,400 acres), Cabinet Face West (8,000 acres), McKay (6,700 acres), and Chippewa (400 acres).

#### **Ten Lakes**

Recommendations to Congress for the Ten Lakes Montana Wilderness Study Act Area are being made in a separate report that recommends wilderness for 26,000 acres. Until Congress makes a determination, the entire 34,000-acre Ten Lakes Study Area will be managed, subject to existing rights and uses, to maintain its existing wilderness character and potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. After congressional action on the Ten Lakes Area, the Plan will be amended.

In addition, I am recommending 6,800 acres contiguous to the Ten Lakes area for wilderness classification. A complete description of the Ten Lakes contiguous areas is found in Appendix C in the EIS.

This decision is not appealable under 36 CFR 211.18 because it is a preliminary administrative recommendation and is subject to further review and possible modification by the Chief of the Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the President of the United States. The final authority for wilderness classification is held by the Congress.

I am not recommending any other areas on the Kootenai National Forest for wilderness classification at this time.

#### **Roadless**

A total of 521,000 acres, including the recommended wilderness and the Ten Lakes Study Area is to remain available for non-motorized recreation. The 521,000 acres include:

1. 193,100 acres of inventoried roadless lands.

2. 121,400 acres of non-inventoried roadless lands.
3. 78,500 acres of recommended wilderness.
4. 94,000 acres of existing wilderness
5. 34,000 acres in the Montana Wilderness Study Act.

Table 2 in this Record of Decision summarizes the disposition of each inventoried roadless area.

## **Wildlife Management**

### **Old Growth**

I am increasing the amount of old growth to be retained to 10 percent of the area of the Forest that is below 5,500 feet in elevation, and I am removing these old-growth acres from the suitable timber base. Old growth will be studied, and attempts are to be made to define the components of old growth and determine if it can, in fact, be managed to optimize the important ingredients and determine if eventually a scheduled harvest can be realized. The old-growth Management Area (Management Area 13, Chapter III, of the Forest Plan) is distributed throughout the Forest.

### **Threatened and Endangered Species**

All identified grizzly habitat in Situations 1 and 2 (described in Appendix 8 of the Forest Plan and Appendix D of the Environmental Impact Statement) will be managed in a manner that is supportive of, or compatible with, the requirements of the grizzly bear. Grizzly habitat will be maintained or improved to support the population level outlined in the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Included in the grizzly management program is the intent to increase the existing population through relocation. Any augmentation will be made in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of Montana with public involvement.

All identified nesting habitat for bald eagles will be protected. The population trend will be monitored to determine any adverse change. Potential habitat for peregrine falcons will be identified. Identified grey wolf habitat will be maintained or enhanced to facilitate recovery of the species.

### **Elk**

Elk habitat will be managed to accommodate population increases from an estimated present population of 5,500 to a potential population of 8,000 in approximately 30 years. The habitat will be managed using seasonal or permanent road closures, browse restoration projects (usually burning), and timber harvest to maintain a preferred cover/forage situation.

## **Minerals**

**Leasable Minerals** - All lands on the Kootenai National Forest are available for leasing unless formally withdrawn.

The consent decision or recommendation for lease application permits and licenses will be formulated in compliance with NEPA and processed in a timely manner based on the direction in the Plan, including standards in the Management Area prescriptions.

**Oil and Gas:** I have identified lands available for leasing, lands available for leasing with no surface occupancy (NSO) stipulations, and lands where conditions may lead to recommendations not to lease. (EIS Chapter II.)

- a. Areas that are available for leasing using the stipulations in the Forest Plan are Management Areas 3, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 23 and 24, totaling 1,516,000 acres.
- b. Areas available for leasing with NSO stipulations are Management Areas 2, 6, 19, 20, 21, 29, and 30, and a few other specific areas, totaling 515,000 acres. In these areas, surface disturbance is incompatible with surface resource values.
- c. Areas where leasing is not compatible with long-term goals are mostly in Management Areas 7, 8 and 9 and a few other specific areas such as administrative sites, totaling 227,000 acres.

**Locatable minerals** - All lands on the Kootenai National Forest are available for entry unless formally withdrawn. About 2,000,000 acres on the Forest are open to mineral entry. Surface disturbing activities on mining claims, mill sites, and tunnel sites will require a Notice of Intent and/or a Plan of Operations under 36 CFR 228 to assure orderly development of the mineral resource and protection of surface resources. Decisions on submittals for development will be formulated in compliance with NEPA and processed in a timely manner based on direction in the Plan, including standards identified in Management Area prescriptions. About 264,000 acres will be recommended for formal withdrawal from mineral entry.

The 2 million acres are available for locatable minerals exploration and development, but some environmental constraints may be applied to the developmental activities. Chapter IV of the Forest Plan has more specifics relating to minerals development and the environmental and social effects.

**Common variety minerals** - Lands on the Kootenai National Forest are available for development of common variety resources. About 1,988,000 acres on the Forest are available for development of common variety resources. Decisions on proposals for development will be formulated in compliance with NEPA and processed in a timely manner based on direction in the Plan, including standards identified in Management Area prescriptions. About 642,000 acres are formally withdrawn or development is not permitted by direction in the Forest Plan.

The specific distribution of acres by potential for discovery is listed in Table II-24 in the EIS. Chapter II in the EIS summarizes the withdrawals for leaseable and locatable minerals.

## **Water Quality**

The Forest will meet or exceed all standards for water quality established by the State. Those standards include sediment and other possible contaminants. Since the Draft Forest Plan for the Kootenai National Forest was released, I have agreed with the State of Montana that adhering to the requirements of the "Soil and Water Conservation Handbook" (FSH 2509.22) will constitute the Best Management Practices. Alternative JF requires those management standards.

## Visual Quality

Alternative JF will maintain the scenic quality on lands that are adjacent to population centers, major travel corridors, and recreation sites.

## Wild & Scenic Rivers

Currently, there are no Wild and Scenic Rivers on the Kootenai National Forest. Four rivers are judged to be eligible for consideration as Wild and Scenic Rivers: the Yaak River, Kootenai River, Bull River, and Vermilion River. I have decided that the portions of those rivers discussed in Chapter III of the EIS will be studied, and a recommendation to Congress for or against inclusion in the Wild and Scenic River system will be submitted. In the interim the Wild and Scenic values will be protected on National Forest land in the river corridor. Final designation as a Wild and Scenic River can be done only by Congress, and only after thorough study and public involvement, which will occur during the life of the Forest Plan.

The potential classifications that will be studied include:

**Yaak River System:** 37 miles of Recreation River consideration and 8 miles of Wild River consideration.

**Kootenai River System:** The entire 47 miles for Recreation River consideration.

**Bull River System:** The entire 21 miles for Recreation River consideration.

**Vermilion River System:** The entire 12 miles for Recreation River consideration.

## Special Interest Areas

### Research Natural Areas

The following summarizes my decisions concerning areas of special interest on the Kootenai National Forest. A complete description of all Special Interest Areas is found in Chapter III in the Forest Plan.

I am recommending that the following areas be studied for possible designation as *Research Natural Areas (RNA)*:

**Table 1.--Research Natural Areas (RNA)**

Big Creek	190 acres
Hoskins Lake	300 acres
Norman Mountain	1200 acres (This RNA candidate area is entirely within the proposed Cabinet Mountains Wilderness additions.)
Parmenter	60 acres
Pete Creek Meadows	120 acres
Ross Creek Cedars	720 acres (380 acres are within the proposed Scotchman Peak Wilderness Area)
Ulm Peak	690 acres
Wolf/Weigel	240 acres

In addition to the recommended RNAs, I am designating the following Special Interest Areas:

CULTURAL RESOURCE AREAS	
Boyd Hill Cemetery	90 acres
Bull River Guard Station	110 acres
Kootenai Falls Cultural Resource District	250 acres
Yaak Historic Mining District	450 acres
SCENIC AREAS	
Northwest Peaks	4420 acres
Ross Creek Cedars	190 acres (This area is adjacent to the proposed RNA.)
Wood Creek Larch	110 acres
GEOLOGIC AREAS	
Devils Gap	850 acres
Rexford Hoodoos	90 acres
Star Creek Canyon	80 acres
Sunday Creek Falls	20 acres
Ten Mile Talus	350 acres
West Fork Yaak Falls	140 acres
BOTANICAL AREAS	
Berray Mountain Cedars	40 acres
OTHER	
Upper Big Crk Riparian Ecosystem	3230 acres



## VII. RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

The factors I have used to determine which alternative maximizes net public benefit include response to issues, concerns, and opportunities; environmental quality; economic efficiency; and compatibility with other agency and Native American goals.

Of critical importance is the minimization of disruptions to people's lives and values. By this, I mean to contribute to a predictable, orderly and manageable rate of change in the local communities. Quick and significant short-run changes caused by this decision would be viewed as undesirable. I want to allow sufficient time for community leaders, businesses, and other individuals to react to those changes.

While the Forest Plan is a decision which shapes and affects communities and people, other factors are also at work. Variables include national supply and demand, changes in preferences, and social changes within communities close to home as well as nationally and world-wide.

My reasoning for making the decision follows:

### A. Response to Issues, Concerns and Opportunities

One of the major reasons I chose to implement Alternative JF is because it responds positively and thoroughly to public issues and management concerns on the Kootenai National Forest. Since many issues and concerns conflict, it is not possible to resolve them all. Following is my evaluation of the selected alternative's response to each issue.

#### 1. Timber Production

Some respondents to the Draft Forest Plan and Environmental Impact Statement supported timber volumes from slightly higher to significantly higher than in the past. They cited reduced availability of private timber, need to earn a living, productive capacity of the Forest, and compatibility of other resources with the harvest of timber. They also mentioned using the lodgepole pine before it is killed by the mountain pine beetle. Most of these same respondents felt that wilderness designation, grizzly bear management, other wildlife management, and roadless recreation were overly emphasized and not supportive of higher levels of timber harvest. Other respondents felt that the timber harvest was too high, and they cited past harvest levels, backlog volume, clearcut acres, sediment production and fisheries reduction, and below-cost sales. These respondents felt that the past harvest level of 173 MMBF average from 1973 to 1984 was high enough for the next decade.

I believe that the required budget is more realistic as requested by the public comments on the Draft Forest Plan, and that the 78,000 additional acres of wilderness responds to the public comments while providing a high degree of flexibility for mineral exploration and possible development. The wilderness and roadless recommendations also provide more flexibility for managing wildlife habitat, including protection of old-growth habitat. The roadless designations will retain their existing potential for wilderness and will be reconsidered for wilderness designation in the next major revision of the Forest Plan. Alternative JF provides for the third lowest amount of road construction in response to the public comment on the Draft Forest Plan. This will give greater assurance that the State Water Quality Standards can be achieved, which was also a strong public concern.

In deciding to implement Alternative JF, I have considered the effect on the economy, the effect on other resources, and the efficient operation of the Forest.

## Allowable Sale Quantity

I have considered the supply situation portrayed in "Montana's Timber Supply: An Inquiry into Possible Futures," USDA Forest Service Resource Bulletin, INT-40, which indicated that there will be an increasing dependence on timber from public lands over the next few decades. The projection for the first two decades displays an anticipated need from the Kootenai National Forest for between 178 MMBF and 224 MMBF for the first decade and between 192 MMBF and 224 MMBF in the second decade. A separate analysis (Five-County Analysis - Haugen, 1986. See Appendix B, Section H: Local Timber Supply Analysis) displays the possibility of a more significant local reduction in available timber from private lands amounting to as much as 180 MMBF reduction in the first decade from the local five-county area. The Final Environmental Impact Statement addresses three alternatives with volumes less than or equal to Alternative JF and twelve alternatives that are higher.

As part of the ASQ, I have included 25 MMBF of timber that comes from suitable Management Areas but is recently dead or dying timber that meets merchantability specifications. I have included this volume because the Kootenai National Forest has historically sold similar volumes, especially recently dead lodgepole pine killed by the mountain pine beetle. I expect to continue to provide equivalent volumes in the future.

I have decided that, because timber harvest and the wood products are so important to the local economy, I am selecting Alternative JF to provide timber to maintain the economy. A healthy economy that can be counted on is not only important for the financial well being of an area, it is also important for the social well being. The social variables that I evaluated in deciding to implement Alternative JF are (as described in Appendix B in the EIS) population changes, community cohesion, lifestyles, attitudes, beliefs, values, and aesthetics. It is my determination that maintaining or improving the local economy will have a direct influence on the social well being and contentment of the affected communities.

Approximately 70 percent of the jobs in Lincoln County are related to the wood products industry, and 50 percent of that industry is attributable to timber harvest on National Forest lands. The Five County Analysis described in Appendix B in the EIS indicates that the dependence on National Forests for timber will be increasing in the next few years. Because of modernization, employment in the wood products industries and the related service industries has decreased approximately 10 percent in the last few years. Even with an increased harvest level, the trend to use fewer people and be more labor efficient will undoubtedly continue.

My decision to reschedule 19,000 acres from the suitable land base to be harvested earlier in the planning period also relates to community stability and economic well being. I added the acres to assist in providing timber volume to maintain stability in the local economy. The effect of the 19,000-acre rescheduling is described in Appendix B in the EIS.

The harvest volume planned for the first decade, much of which can be maintained and eventually increased on a non-declining schedule, is a 35 percent increase from the last 10-year harvest. It will help stabilize the local economy if private timber harvest levels drop more drastically than anticipated in the Montana Timber Supply Study.

## Suitable Land

A part of the timber production decision is the question of which lands are suitable and which are not. Some lands are not suitable because they cannot produce trees, harvest will cause irreversible damage, or they cannot be replanted. Other lands are unsuitable because current costs of management are higher than the expected benefits, and some lands are unsuitable because I have assigned them to Management Areas that preclude timber harvest. A complete discussion of timber supply and suitable land evaluation is found in Appendix B of the EIS.

I recognize that placing tentatively suitable acres into Management Areas that preclude timber harvest limits the future options. A discussion of the various alternatives for suitable acres is found in Chapter II in the EIS. In some cases, I tried to place lands of lowest productivity into the unsuitable Management Areas. In other cases, such as old-growth (Management Area 13), the location was fixed by the conditions at the site, and I didn't have much flexibility.

As I mentioned before, I have identified 139,000 acres that are currently unsuitable but are not limited by the Management Area they are in. They are unsuitable because the management costs are higher than the expected benefit. If the timber prices are high enough, the 139,000 acres can become suitable. A Plan amendment will be required to change any acres from unsuitable to suitable.

A total of 193,000 of the suitable acres may or may not be economically efficient, but timber harvest is the cost effective means to meet multiple use objectives, such as cover/forage ratio or maintenance of browse production.

I believe that Alternative JF is also more realistic because commercial thinnings are not scheduled during the life of the Plan. Commercial thinnings will still be permitted on a case-by-case basis, but recent experience has demonstrated that commercial thinnings are not economical on many areas and that these types of timber sales cannot be sold. If they can be sold, they will only increase the number of below-cost timber sales, which is a national concern. Commercial thinning represents an opportunity for increases in timber harvest. I have elected to analyze the effect of not scheduling commercial thinning in Alternative JF because it fits best with the intent to provide for the local economy, but do it as efficiently as possible.

Table 2

# TIMBER RESOURCE LAND SUITABILITY

## KOOTENAI NATIONAL FOREST

NOT SUITED		ACRES	Note:		
Not Capable & Non Forest		373,000	* Volume figures include: ~ Chargeable Volume Only ~ Non-Interchangeable Components to meet management objectives  (1) Includes 25 MMBF of non-interchangeable volume of dead lodgepole pine in addition to 165 MMBF of live green volume of all other species including lodgepole pine.  (2) Opportunity for 24 MMBF/year possible timber harvest is available in the second decade with a Forest Plan amendment.		
Irreversible Soil and Watershed Damage		49,000			
No Assurance of Adequate Restocking		0			
Withdrawn from Timber Production		35,000			
Subtotal of Above		457,000			
FORESTED and NON FORESTED		SUITABLE		EFFECTS	
		* LANDS COST EFFICIENT		1st Decade	LTSY
				Acres	MMBF
		Direct Benefits Exceed Direct Costs	1,051,000	13,700	190 <sup>(1)</sup>
		Direct Costs Exceed Direct Benefits			
		Meet Non Timber M.U. Objective	193,000	0	29
		Local Jobs/Income	19,000	1,800	8
		Subtotal of Above	1,263,000	15,500	227
				RESOURCE OPPORTUNITY	
				1st Decade	LTSY
				Acres	MMBF
		Lands Not Cost Efficient to Meet Objectives- Future Timber Production Possible	139,000	0 <sup>(2)</sup>	0 <sup>(2)</sup>
		Multiple-Use Objectives Preclude Timber Production			
		Other Uses	352,000	-	-
		Proposed Wilderness	34,000	-	-
		Subtotal of Above	525,000	0 <sup>(2)</sup>	0 <sup>(2)</sup>
TENTATIVELY SUITABLE					
TENTATIVELY NOT SUITED					
TOTAL NATIONAL FOREST LANDS		2,245,000			

Effective Period: from 1987 thru 1996

## Mountain Pine Beetle

Harvesting 98 MMBF of lodgepole pine annually for the first ten years will not stop the spread of the mountain pine beetle, but the harvest will enable the use of the timber before it is no longer sound enough. A description of the mountain pine beetle infestation is found in Chapter III of the EIS. At 98 MMBF, temporary effect on wildlife and aesthetics is offset by the increased harvest volume, decreased fire control costs, and new productive stands as a result of site preparation and regeneration after logging. I have not selected higher volumes of lodgepole pine for harvest because of the environmental constraints of watershed and wildlife.

## Even-age Management

There are two basic ways to manage timber stands on the Kootenai National Forest, even-age and uneven-age.

In determining which of these is the appropriate silvicultural system, I considered the major timber types, the needs of wildlife, the public comments, applicable laws and regulations, and available research.

State-of-the-art silvicultural information indicates that either even-age or uneven-age management can be used on any of these vegetative types; however, individual stand conditions are critical to the decision (*Silvicultural Systems for Major Forest Types of the United States*, Agricultural Handbook 455, USDA Forest Service.) With even-age systems, stands with a high percentage of overmature, suppressed, or diseased trees can be rapidly regenerated into young, vigorous stands. There is also more opportunity to control species and stocking to minimize future pest problems.

The major timber types on the Kootenai National Forest include: ponderosa pine/Douglas fir on the southerly slopes and the lower elevations; mixed conifer on the northerly slopes and the mid elevations; lodgepole pine (a generally ubiquitous species); and Engelmann spruce/subalpine fir on the upper elevations. The existing stands in all of the timber types regenerated as even-age stands in large units, usually as a result of fire.

Infestations of mountain pine beetle are currently centered in the mature lodgepole pine stands, and recently in some ponderosa pine stands. There are few stands, if any, where the infested trees can be removed and leave any trees that could constitute a residual stand. Even-age methods have proven to be the most effective for recovering the volume from stands invaded or threatened by the mountain pine beetle.

I considered the non-timber resource objectives and the ways they are affected by silvicultural systems. Included were the amount of wildlife disturbance due to logging and related timber activities; economic efficiency of timber harvesting and transportation systems; the impact on visual quality; ability to meet riparian-dependent resource needs; and the growth rate of regenerated stands.

Even-age management maximizes the volume of timber per unit of road and enhances the economics of harvesting. This is an important consideration in maintaining water quality and fish habitat without severely affecting timber harvest. Even-age management, even though it has a more immediate impact on wildlife than uneven-age management, usually requires only one to three entries during an 80 to 120 year rotation.

I did consider uneven-age management for those areas where resource objectives can be met by stand conditions and harvest operations associated with selection harvest. Uneven-age management generally provides continuous tree cover, resulting in less apparent visual change and hiding cover for some wildlife species; however, it also requires frequent logging entries over a larger land area to harvest the same volume of timber. It is my opinion that minimizing disturbance to wildlife is more important than continuous tree cover in most instances, but that continuous tree cover is desirable in certain areas to maintain high visual quality. Uneven-age management may be used in both visually sensitive areas and in riparian areas depending on the site-specific silvicultural prescriptions.

I considered the standards for silvicultural systems established in the Northern Region Guide. This includes the ability to create stand conditions required to meet other resource objectives in the Forest Plan; the ability to promptly regenerate the site and maintain adequate stand production; stand conditions that minimize risk of damage from pests, animals and fire; and the choice of a system that is compatible with current technology and logging systems.

I have decided that, in general, even-age management is the appropriate silvicultural system to use on the Kootenai National Forest. However, since a wide variety of unique site-specific conditions exists on the Forest, all vegetative management practices will be preceded by a silvicultural examination, an on-the-ground analysis of the area, and a site specific prescription. These prescriptions will detail the actual silvicultural system or vegetative manipulation method to be implemented on a case-by-case basis.

Clearcutting and shelterwood are the primary regeneration harvest methods used in even-age management. Under certain physical and biological conditions, clearcutting is also the optimum harvest method when considering other multiple resource objectives. The conditions under which clearcutting will be considered are: favorable moisture and temperature on the cleared site for tree regeneration; disease and/or insect conditions in the existing stand that can best be treated by complete removal; and overall resource objectives for the stand. See Chapter IV of EIS for further discussion on shelterwood and clearcutting methods. I estimate that clearcutting will be the optimum harvest system on approximately 50 percent of the acres harvested during the Plan period.

The selected alternative provides mitigation standards which I believe will make even-age management acceptable to multiple use-management (Forest Plan, Chapters II and III). Included are the size limit for openings of 40 acres, dispersal of harvest units with requirements for recovery prior to removal of adjacent stands, design of cutting units to approximate natural landscape patterns, longer than normal cutting cycles, and a high visual quality objective for areas adjacent to, or readily visible from, major travel and recreation routes and valley bottom residential areas.

The final decision on which harvest method will be used will be based on a site-specific silvicultural prescription and interdisciplinary review. Additional discussion on the impacts of even-age and uneven-age silvicultural systems and an evaluation of each can be found in Appendix 2 "Vegetation Management Practices" of the Forest Plan.

All of these silvicultural considerations will facilitate the opportunity to maintain needed wildlife diversity and distribution to meet specific wildlife and fish habitat objectives.

## **Roads and Road Management**

Although there was little public comment about road standards, there was a significant interest in the environmental effects of roads, and there were comments concerning the costs of timber sales. I have determined that roads will be constructed to minimum standards to lessen the impact on the environment, especially water quality. Building roads to the minimum standards also lowers the cost of timber harvest. (Road standards are discussed in Chapter II of the Forest Plan.)

Even though some who commented on the Forest Plan urged me to leave all the Forest roads open, I have chosen to close an eventual 57 percent of the roads. This will include most of the new roads built during the first decade of the Plan. Road closures reduce road maintenance costs and are an important tool for providing security for some wildlife species, such as elk and grizzly bears. (Road closures and their effects are discussed in Chapter II in the EIS.)

## **Summary of Timber**

Alternative JF, while not completely responsive to the entire timber supply shortage predicted for the five-county impact area, allocates 71 percent of the potentially suitable land to timber production. Another 8 percent can become suitable if timber prices are high enough to support the cost of management. Alternative JF requires a realistic budget of \$19.2 million and limits the required capital investment to \$3.58 million. I believe this alternative provides the best balance of all the resources.

## **2. Wilderness and Roadless**

The issue of wilderness and roadless recreation was highly polarized. Some respondents wanted to have all the roadless areas recommended for wilderness. Others wanted wilderness recommendations for some areas and roadless for others. The roadless areas most often mentioned for wilderness consideration were: Scotchman Peak, including Pellick Ridge; Trout Creek, Ten Lakes, Thompson-Seton/Tuchuck, and the Cabinet Mountains additions including Cabinet Face East, Cabinet Face West, McKay, and Chippewa.

Some respondents wanted no further wilderness and no more roadless areas, and all areas available for non-wilderness uses including timber harvest. Other respondents supported designating some roadless areas in locations of low timber productivity but didn't support any further wilderness. They felt that wilderness designation is too inflexible.

I have considered the public support for wilderness, and I have carefully examined the various reasons for that support. I have also evaluated the timber productivity and economic manageability of the areas along with knowledge of the potential for minerals, and oil and gas. I have considered the effect on the other resources such as grizzly bear, big game species, water quality, and recreation potential. I have also considered off-road vehicle opportunities.

### **Scotchman Peak**

I have recommended an additional 12,000 acres on Pellick Ridge for proposed wilderness as part of the Scotchman Peak Proposed Wilderness. I have added them because of comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Draft Forest Plan, and more recent information which indicates that the mineral potential in Star Gulch is not as significant as was previously thought. I have not recommended some areas that have existing roads, timber harvest units, private water sources, and high timber productivity. A complete description of the Scotchman Peak area, including capability, availability, need, and alternatives, is found in Appendix C, pages C-5 to C-13, of the EIS. The Scotchman Peak area has very high wilderness quality and varies from many wildernesses because it has very few mainline trails. Most of the use is cross country. Only one lake contains fish so there are few areas of concentrated recreational use because of fishing. There are many opportunities for primitive forms of recreation and solitude. The wilderness recommendation will enhance the security of the Cabinet Yaak grizzly bear ecosystem. The Scotchman Peak roadless area extends onto the Idaho Panhandle National Forest and decisions on that portion of the Scotchman Peak area will be documented in the Record of Decision for that Forest Plan.

### **Cabinet Additions**

The proposed Cabinet Mountains Wilderness additions consist of four separate inventoried roadless areas:

#### **Cabinet Face East**

The addition of 20,400 acres on the east side of the existing Cabinet Mountains Wilderness will enhance the existing wilderness. The area is forested and offers opportunity for solitude. The proposal was generally supported by comments to the DEIS. The area is heavily used by recreationists because of its proximity to Libby and because roads lead to the boundary in several places. A wilderness designation will maintain the roadless non-motorized use and is supportive of grizzly bear. The entire area is grizzly habitat. Almost all of the potentially suitable timberland is on steep slopes and would require expensive harvesting techniques. While wilderness will preclude any timber harvest options I believe the actual timber harvest possibility is very low. Some winter range for big game occurs, but I believe the amount and significance are such that the security of wilderness offsets the forgone opportunity to manage the winter range.

I have not recommended the southern portion of the Cabinet Face East roadless area for wilderness because of the potentially significant mineral resources, the many patented private mining claims, and the approximately 4,400 acres of private ownership. There are many road intrusions of long-established use and these would lower the effectiveness of the area for solitude. I have, however, assigned most of the area that was not recommended for wilderness to semi-primitive non-motorized recreation (Management Area 2). MA 2 will provide many of the same roadless recreation opportunities, but will give me flexibility to manage for access to patented mining claims, and flexibility to determine the potential for minerals in the area.

A complete description of the Cabinet Face East Roadless Area is on page C-58 in the EIS.



### **Cabinet Face West**

I have recommended 8,000 acres of this area for wilderness classification. It is an important addition to the existing wilderness. There are opportunities for roadless recreation in the proposed addition, and some areas provide opportunities for solitude. The entire area is grizzly habitat, and wilderness offers security for that species. Wilderness is compatible with the mountain goats in Camp Creek and the bighorn sheep around Ibex Peak. The addition of this area will also provide more manageable and locatable boundaries for the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness, and provide additional width to the long, narrow configuration of the existing wilderness.

Ninety five percent of the potentially suitable timberland is on steep slopes and would be expensive to harvest. Mineral potential is low, even though there are 25 mining claims in the area. Oil and gas potential is moderate.

I have not recommended 2,900 acres in a portion generally central to the Cabinet Face West area, and lying west of Gordon Mountain. I have designated most of that 2,900 acres as Management Area 2. I believe this results in a more manageable wilderness boundary in a drainage that already has timber harvest and road construction.

This addition can improve the existing wilderness, create a more manageable boundary, provide security for the grizzly bear and other wildlife, with little impact on timber volumes or mineral opportunities.

A complete description of Cabinet Face West is found starting on page C-46 in the EIS.

### **McKay**

The 6,700 acres that I am recommending for wilderness out of the 13,500 acres in the total roadless area will be a high quality addition to the existing Cabinet Mountains Wilderness. The recommended portion of McKay provides many opportunities for solitude as well as offering access via trail to the popular Wanless Lake. Adding the area will improve the manageability of the boundary because it can be located and described on the ground. The entire area is grizzly habitat and wilderness provides security for the bear.

Timber productivity is fair to poor. More than 90 percent of the potentially suitable timberlands are on steep slopes that would require expensive harvesting techniques. I have not recommended the areas of highest timber productivity and the highest mineral potential for wilderness. The boundary I have recommended is more definable and manageable.

A complete description of the McKay area is found starting on page C-83 of the EIS.

### **Chippewa**

I am recommending 400 acres of this 2,300-acre roadless area. (Areas less than 5,000 acres were considered for wilderness when they were located adjacent to existing wilderness.)

Although the entire area would add to the existing wilderness, the boundary is difficult and does not follow well-defined features. I am recommending the 400 acres that do follow a boundary and will add to the quality of the existing wilderness.

The opportunity for solitude in the portion of the roadless area not recommended for wilderness is moderate since the aspect faces into the developed Bull River Valley. Roads and cutting units border the area on the west.

There is winter range for mountain goats to the south of the goat rocks and that area is in Management Areas that will remain roadless. No habitat management is expected.

The entire roadless area is within grizzly habitat and I have assigned some of the tentatively suitable timberlands that I am not recommending for wilderness to Management Area 14 which recognizes the timber productivity and manages for the grizzly bear. The timberlands are steep and harvest will be expensive but I believe that on this westerly aspect there are some opportunities to harvest timber and manage grizzly habitat for forage and openings.

A complete description of the Chippewa area is found starting on page C-95 of the EIS.

#### **Ten Lakes Contiguous Area**

The 6,800 acres contiguous to the Ten Lakes Montana Wilderness Study Act area were the result of recommendations received during the public review of the Draft Forest Plan and Environmental Impact Statement in 1982. The contiguous areas have low locatable mineral potential. There are areas of potentially suitable timberland but it is either of low productivity or expensive to manage. Habitat manipulation (burning) for wildlife will eventually be desirable but I believe that will occur naturally as fires are managed in the area. The contiguous areas are visible from the town of Eureka and the Tobacco Valley. Wilderness classification will perpetuate the important visual resource. The opportunities for solitude are not very good because of the "finger" configuration of the area, but there are lots of opportunities for primitive recreation, and the access to the edge of the area is very good. Its use has been day use primarily and I feel that this small, easily accessible area can be a valuable addition to the wilderness system. A wilderness designation will provide security for grizzly bear. This 6,800 acres will complement the 26,000-acre wilderness recommendation that has been submitted to the Chief of the Forest Service in a previous Report and Proposal.

#### **Trout Creek**

The 31,400-acre Trout Creek area received strong support for wilderness recommendation but it contains a combination of other resources:

(1) It is an important area for big game, especially elk. Portions of the area have been periodically burned which has maintained a healthy mosaic of cover and forage. I want to continue to use fire as a tool to maintain or enhance the big-game habitat and I don't expect natural fires to play a major role in this area.

(2) A portion of the area contains potentially high mineral values. The area is relatively unexplored for minerals, and by not recommending wilderness classification I am maintaining options for possible mineral discoveries.

(3) There are 24,000 acres of tentatively suitable timberland in the area, but more than 90 percent is on steep slopes and would be difficult and costly to log. I have decided to place 8,900 acres in the suitable timber base to be managed for a continued yield of timber, and the rest in management for resources other than timber.

Considering all of these factors, I have decided to retain 19,000 acres for primitive recreation and 3,500 acres in semi-primitive non-motorized recreation to protect the wilderness quality of the Trout Creek area, but I am not recommending wilderness so that I may retain future options for minerals and wildlife.

The Trout Creek roadless area extends onto the Idaho Panhandle National Forest and decisions on that portion of the Trout Creek roadless area will be made in the Record of Decision for that Forest Plan. I have coordinated similar decisions for both Forests.

The roadless non-wilderness recommendation for the Thompson-Seton/Tuchuck areas on the Kootenai National Forest are in support of the recommendation for the contiguous portions located on the Flathead National Forest. See the Record of Decision for the Flathead National Forest dated January 1986.

**Table 3.--Summary of Roadless Area  
Management Strategy for the Final Forest Plan**

Roadless Area Name	No.	Total Acres (M)	Recommend Wildern. (M Acres)	Primitive or Semi- primitive Nonmotorized Recreation	Designated for Develop. (M Acres)	1)Limited Develop. (M Acres)
Scotchman Pk	662	51.9	36.2	9.8	4.3	1.8
Ten Lks Cont.	663A	7.1	6.8	0	0.3	0
Trout Creek	664	31.4	0	22.5	8.9	0
Cab.Face West	670	10.9	8.0	1.4	1.5	0
Cab Face East	671	50.4	20.4	27.1	2.9	0
Govt. Mtn.	673	8.6	0	5.6	1.5	1.5
McKay	676	13.5	6.7	1.4	4.8	0.3
Chippewa	682	2.3	0.4	0.4	1.4	0
Rock Creek	693	0.4	0	0.4	0	0
Roderick	684	24.8	0	10.7	14.2	0
Galena	677	15.5	0	10.8	1.6	1.6
Catarack	665	17.7	0	11.1	1.8	4.8
Buckhorn	661	22.0	0	18.2	3.8	0
N W. Peaks	663	13.4	0	13.2	0	0.2
W Fk Elk Cr.	692	4.8	0	0.4	1.4	3.0
Gold Hill	668	10.7	0	1.8	5.1	3.8
Gold Hill W.	176	10.2	0	0	9.0	1.2
Berray Mtn.	672	8.3	0	0	2.5	5.8
E.FK Elk Cr.	678	5.0	0	0.7	2.9	1.3
Lone Clf-Smds.	674	6.8	0	0	2.6	4.0
McNeeley	675	7.7	0	0	5.2	2.5
Flagstaff	690	9.5	0	3.9	2.0	3.5
Roberts Mtn.	691	8.0	0	5.5	2.5	0
Grizzly Peak	667	6.0	0	3.1	2.5	0.4
Zula	166	6.4	0	0.4	5.9	0
Marston	172	6.0	0	3.8	0.1	2.1
Willrd Lk.Est.	173	18.5	0	17.1	1.4	0
Cube Iron	784	1.2	0	1.2	0	0
Thomp.-Seton	483	20.1	0	17.8	1.5	0.8
Tuchuck	482	2.3	0	2.1	0	0.2
Maple Peak	141	1.4	0	1.4	0	0
Le Beau	507	0.7	0	0.5	0.2	0
<b>Totals*</b>		<b>403.7</b>	<b>78.5</b>	<b>193.1</b>	<b>93.5</b>	<b>39.1</b>

\* Totals are not exact because of rounding

1) Limited Development includes Management Areas in which timber may be harvested for salvage or to meet Management Area objectives, but is not part of the Allowable Sale Quantity.

### **Summary of Wilderness and Roadless**

Of the 403,700 acres of inventoried roadless areas on the Forest, I have recommended 78,500 acres for additional wilderness and 193,100 acres for primitive and semi-primitive non-motorized recreation. The use of this type of recreation has been increasing slightly and that trend is expected to continue. Assigning 193,100 acres will meet the expected demand as described in Chapter III of the EIS and help prevent damage to some over-used spots. In addition, there are 121,400 acres that were not "inventoried" roadless acres in Management Areas that will remain roadless. I have tried to put the acres of lowest timber productivity into the primitive and semi-primitive non-motorized recreation Management Areas to lessen the impact on the local economy.

Approximately 15 percent of the dollar value of the local economy is based on recreation. Alternative JF insures a steady flow of timber within the local economy while providing for the needs of the growing recreation economy. I recognize the importance of recreation both to the economy and to the lifestyle of the local residents. Alternative JF has enough roadless and wilderness areas either implemented or recommended to accommodate the potential increases in roadless recreation. The developed recreation will be dependent on the fisheries in Lake Koocanusa and is also expected to increase. Management around Lake Koocanusa will accommodate development.

While timber harvest accounts for most of the present net value of the Kootenai National Forest I have tried to recognize the importance of roadless areas to the net public benefit, and yet not affect the economy too much. I believe Alternative JF does this. A complete description of the inventoried roadless areas is found in Appendix C of the EIS.

### **3. Wildlife**

Those who have been involved in the planning process and those who have commented on the Draft Forest Plan agree that fish and wildlife are important to the Kootenai National Forest and should be maintained or enhanced. (That agreement doesn't extend to the grizzly bear.) There is less agreement about how fish and wildlife should be managed. Some believe that timber harvest and the associated road building harm wildlife by destroying habitat, reducing security, and causing animals to move to other areas. They add that logging and associated road building add sediment to the streams and reduce the fish populations. They favor more roadless areas and less timber harvest. Other respondents believe that timber harvest doesn't affect the wildlife and the harvest areas actually create more food and are beneficial. Some of those respondents cite the occurrence of animals around roads and logging operations as evidence to support their preference.

In consideration of the public concerns, my decision and rationale regarding the important wildlife issues are as follows:

#### **Old Growth**

Much of the public response dealt with old-growth. Some felt that there was enough old growth in roadless areas while others felt that a minimum of 15 percent of the Kootenai National Forest should be old-growth. Some felt that the old growth should be located in the riparian areas wherever possible. Many people felt that the 8 percent old-growth in the Draft Forest Plan was too little, and they also felt that we could not reasonably manage old-growth on the 250-year rotation that was a part of the plan.

I am increasing the amount of old-growth timber stands to about 10 percent of the Kootenai National Forest land area below 5,500 feet in elevation to be retained for diversity and for old-growth dependent wildlife species. This is most of the inventoried old-growth and it will provide for an increased assurance that old-growth dependent wildlife species will be maintained. It will also allow time to more thoroughly research the amounts and types of habitat needed for old-growth dependent species (See old-growth Management Area 13, Chapter III of the Forest Plan).

### **Threatened and Endangered Species**

The issue of grizzly bear management is intense and highly polarized. Some felt that the level of activity and Management Areas specified in the Forest Plan would not support the recovery of the grizzly bear. Others felt that the Forest should not manage the bear at all, and they would just as soon not even have the species around.

Alternative JF is the alternative of least risk for recovering the grizzly bear because it has scheduled development in the fewest acres of grizzly habitat of all the alternatives. Forage is important for the grizzly but security is key to preventing its mortality. Chapter II in the EIS contains a complete discussion. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said that the Plan will not jeopardize the species. There was very little response dealing with any other threatened or endangered species other than the fear by some that any management for any threatened or endangered species would unacceptably reduce the timber harvest.

The Kootenai National Forest will continue to seek biological evaluation by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service whenever a project may affect some grizzly situation. I am required by law (Endangered Species Act of 1973) to recover the population of the grizzly bear and I believe that the Forest Plan will assist in recovery of the species.

The management of bald eagles, peregrine falcons, and grey wolf habitat is an important national and regional goal and required by the Endangered Species Act. The Forest Plan provides direction that will protect the habitat until species are recovered. For further information, see Goal #5, threatened and endangered species objectives, and the wildlife standards, all in Chapter II of the Forest Plan

### **Elk**

I recognize that there are different management principles and habitat needs for all species. While the Kootenai National Forest will be managed for all species, elk is used as the indicator species to evaluate effects of management activities on other big game species. Comments to the Forest Plan generally agreed that a larger population of elk would be in the public interest. The capability to support elk is increased from 5,500 to 8,000. My rationale for this increase is that this would not only be desirable for local residents but would attract hunters from outside the area and the local economy would benefit.

This increase is realistic to achieve. The Kootenai National Forest can improve the ratio of forage to cover by timber harvest, and the health of the forage can be improved by periodically burning old browse plants, especially on winter range. The security to accompany the improved habitat can be accomplished by closing most roads on important habitat. Roadless areas will also provide important security. Alternative JF provides the appropriate level and location of timber harvest as well as including standards for managing roads. The use of fire is allowed on most areas of the Forest.

I believe that the elk habitat availability, as described in Alternative JF, is the best balance of elk, timber production for a healthy economy, and open roads for motorized use.

### **Riparian**

I have decided to accommodate management of riparian areas as part of the Management Areas established for the Kootenai National Forest; riparian areas will not be served any better by establishing a separate Management Area. The management standards for riparian areas are found in Chapter II of the Forest Plan. Some respondents mentioned the importance of riparian areas because of sensitive soils, water quality, growth potential, and recreation. I believe that there is more management flexibility for use of the areas as well as protection, when necessary, by not designating separate Management Areas.

## **4. Minerals**

The recent discoveries and development of locatable minerals, especially silver and copper, have concentrated interest and exploration on portions of the Kootenai National Forest. The development of the ASARCO mine near Troy has been important to the area economy and further discoveries near the southern end of the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness indicate that additional mineral deposits exist. Mining is not without controversy. Some favor the economic benefits while others do not favor the environmental effects. In deciding on Alternative JF, I have tried to maintain future options for the minerals potential on the Forest. I have especially reviewed the areas of high mineral potential and have not restricted exploration. I am not guaranteeing that, if minerals are found, I will allow development and extraction, but I must comply with the Mining Law of 1872 in a reasonable manner. I believe it is responsible to know what all the values are before choosing a direction withdrawing areas from mineral entry.

In deciding on Alternative JF, I am electing to maintain the economic base of the local area by providing opportunities to locate and recover minerals.

The Forest Plan does not approve mineral or oil and gas exploration and development. The Plan provides stipulations to guide activities related to mineral exploration and development. Before such activities take place, site-specific analysis of possible adverse effects to other resource values and uses will be made.

I believe direction in the Forest Plan provides for mineral, oil, gas, and geothermal exploration and development in a manner that will provide adequate environmental safeguards. The effects on other resources will be evaluated utilizing the National Environmental Policy Act analysis process.

Alternative JF provides sufficient latitude for oil and gas operations, even though there are approximately 515,000 acres that do not allow surface occupancy. Interest in oil and gas leasing on the Kootenai is waning, but, like the opportunity for locatable minerals, I plan to maintain some flexibility until the situation is defined.

## 5. Other Issues

### Water Quality

There were many comments about water quality and its effect on the number of fish. Some felt that any amount of sediment was too much, and opposed any reduction in number of fish. Others felt that the amount of sediment and the fish population decrease were overestimated, and the change would not be as much as what was predicted. Concern was also expressed about the reliability of the fisheries model that was being used to calculate changes in the fish population.

The activities of the Kootenai National Forest, principally road building and timber harvest, will continue to generate some sediment into the streams. Alternative JF seems to be a proper balance of the minimum roads necessary to provide an economically healthy timber harvest level and still minimize the sediment resulting from road construction. The Management Standards in Chapter II and the Standards for each Management Area in the Forest Plan contain constraints that are designed to minimize sediment and fish loss.

The numbers of stream fish are expected to show slight decline during the first ten years of the Plan. Using the same water quality indicators that lead to the estimate of a 3 percent decline in stream fish, a theoretical 0 percent decline was calculated. While any reduction in numbers of fish is not desirable, the timber harvest level would have to be as low as 125 MMBF/year, with the resultant lower rate of road building to attain a 0 percent decline in fisheries. I have elected to provide timber for the economy because I believe the 3 percent potential decline in fish is an acceptable tradeoff, and in addition I believe it represents a worst case scenario. With the Management Standards in the Forest Plan (Especially Goal #19, the timber objectives, the soil and water objectives, and the standards, all found in Chapter II), and with emphasis on maintenance and improvement of the stream fishery, we can reduce or even eliminate the decline. More discussion about the fisheries issue is found in Chapter IV in the EIS.

### Visual Quality

The appearance of the Forest environment is important to the people who visit and use the Kootenai National Forest. The visual resource is especially important to those who travel through on the major roads, and in areas visible from campgrounds and other recreational sites. I have applied Forest Plan standards to those areas that require sensitivity to the aesthetics. Maintaining a pleasing view in a forested environment requires that management activities be designed, usually at higher costs, to maintain or improve the visual values. Both Forest-wide and Management Area standards (Management Areas 16 and 17 in the Plan, Chapter III) are used to establish the requirements necessary to accomplish visual resource objectives.

I recognize that as the level of visual quality is increased, the present net value (PNV) decreases because more cost efficient timber management practices are replaced with more costly practices. A description of visual quality and a comparison of alternatives is found in Chapter II of the EIS. The application of visual quality is found in Chapter III in the



EIS. A discussion of PNV as related to the protection of visual quality is found in Appendix B in the EIS.

I have recognized and have evaluated the effects that accomplishing visual resource objectives can have on the total volume of timber harvested over time. I believe that Alternative JF provides for the economy and maintains the visual quality of the Forest in areas where the appearance is important.

#### **Wild and Scenic Rivers**

My decision for all the inventoried and eligible river segments is to preserve future management options for recreational/scenic/wild Congressional classification. This decision is based on the current inventory and national policy to study eligible rivers prior to changes in their classification.

I will study the segments of the rivers listed in Chapter III of the EIS for their suitability for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

I have decided to study 45 miles of the Yaak River system because of its scenic values, and the historic values related to the gold mining days.

I selected to study 47 miles of the Kootenai River system because of the fishery values and the historic and prehistoric values that are related to the early days of Northwest exploration and settlement.

I will study 21 miles of the Bull River system because of the scenic values.

I selected 12 miles of the Vermilion River system because of the scenic values, including Vermilion Falls, and the historic values related to the early gold mining days.

The eligible segments will be protected until future studies provide the information necessary to make a recommendation for these important rivers.

### **Special Interest Areas**

#### **Research Natural Areas**

I have selected the previously listed Research Natural Area (RNA) candidates because they represent unique or unusual biologic attributes that are of special public and scientific interest. The habitats represented can be found in Chapter III of the EIS and on pages II-19 through II-26 of the Northern Region Guide. The management standards for RNAs are found in Management Area 21 in Chapter III of the Forest Plan. I have located the RNAs where they best represent the habitat type or aquatic type of interest and I have considered the effect on allowable sale quantity and minerals access.

#### **Cultural Resource Areas**

I have designated the cultural resource areas listed earlier in the Record of Decision and in Chapter III of the Forest Plan because it is important to preserve these sites. The cultural resource areas represent nonrenewable values that are the cultural foundation of our nation. The sites and the applicable management standards are listed on pages III-96 through III-99 of the Forest Plan.

### **Scenic Areas**

I have designated the areas listed earlier in this Record of Decision as Scenic Areas because of the especially spectacular or pleasing views. The Northwest Peaks area is a high elevation Scenic Area and such a designation is not a conflict with allowable sale quantity. The entire area is not productive for timber. The Northwest Peaks Scenic area extends on to the Idaho Panhandle National Forest and the management of that portion will be addressed in that Forest Plan.

Ross Creek and Wood Creek Larch were both potentially suitable for timber production, but the Ross Creek area is already a heavily used recreation spot adjacent to a proposed wilderness and adjacent to a recommended RNA. Designating the Wood Creek Larch area a Scenic Area is a direct conflict with allowable sale quantity, but it provides an example of such an infrequent and magnificent stand of old growth larch that I believe the protection afforded by the Scenic Area is appropriate for the net public benefit.

### **Geologic Areas**

All of the areas listed earlier in this Record of Decision are examples of unique or unusual characteristics. There is nothing planned or foreseeable that would affect the appearance or status of these geologic areas. Nevertheless I have designated them as Special Interest Areas so that the standards for management would be clear, and the areas would be preserved. The management standards are listed in Management Area 21, Chapter III, in the Forest Plan. The areas are not productive for timber so there is no conflict with the allowable sale quantity.

### **Botanical Area**

Berry Cedars is a good example of a mid-elevation western red cedar stand. Its designation as a botanical area will conflict with its suitable timber potential. However, the Botanical Area designation is important to preserve this example of a botanical community for study, observation, and recreational enjoyment. I believe the public will benefit by preserving the stand. Management Standards are found in Management Area 21, Chapter III, in the Forest Plan.

### **Upper Big Creek Riparian Ecosystem**

This area represents an important example of riparian areas around the Kootenai National Forest. It is rich in wildlife, including grizzly bear. It is spawning habitat for cutthroat and rainbow trout, and the trails are used for non-motorized recreation. Because of the character and the significance of this particular riparian ecosystem, I am removing it from the suitable timber base. I will allow salvage harvest because the age of the lodgepole pine makes them susceptible to the mountain pine beetle. If the lodgepole pine die and enough of them fall into Big Creek, stream blockages could occur.

I am not allowing motorized recreation because of the effect on wildlife and the desire for solitude by recreationists using this type of area. The Management Standards are in Management Area 21, Chapter III, in the Forest Plan.

## B. ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY

In determining the most economically efficient alternative, the Forest Service uses an estimate of present net value, which is the difference between discounted benefits and discounted costs. In calculating present net value, a dollar value is assigned to various outputs. Some of these output values are market-determined, such as timber, and produce a revenue. Other resource outputs use assigned values derived from research studies, such as recreation. However, present net value does not include a value for some resources that neither produce revenue nor have a basis from which to estimate a value as in the case of fish and water quality. Therefore, present net value cannot be the only criteria used in selecting the Preferred Alternative. The criterion used was the maximization of net public benefit, which includes both the net value of the priced outputs and the consideration of the nonpriced outputs.

Related to the issue of economic efficiency is the controversy over below-cost sales which have become a national concern. In the past three years, overall timber related costs have not been recovered by Forest-wide timber sale receipts. This has been a management concern and emphasis is being placed on reducing timber management and related costs. Regional direction requires additional project level analysis of each timber sale over one million board feet to assure that the sale has been designed with the most cost-effective measures possible in keeping with environmental concerns. Therefore, "below cost" sales that may occur are the least cost method of accomplishing the Forest Plan goals and objectives.

Timber harvesting can produce benefits other than direct cash receipts such as improved wildlife habitat (big-game winter range), opportunities for increasing livestock forage, opportunities to reduce fire protection costs and managing insects and disease in forest stands, provide for plant diversity and improve visual quality.

In making my decision, I felt it was necessary to evaluate how opportunities would change by selecting alternatives with varying combinations of present net value and nonpriced outputs. This helped me understand the interactions occurring between resources in determining net public benefit. Table 4 displays each alternative along with the estimate of present net value arranged in order of decreasing present net value. In addition, Table 4 shows estimated outputs for selected priced and nonpriced resources which relate to the key issues used in selecting the Forest Plan.

Table 4 shows the comparison of present net value and some of the key issues considered in the net public benefit for the Kootenai National Forest. A complete table for a comparison of all the major issues, concerns, and opportunities is found in Table II-14 in the Environmental Impact Statement. A complete table for a comparison of all of the items compared for net public benefit is found in Table II-23 in the Environmental Impact Statement.

On the Kootenai National Forest the present net value is almost entirely a result of the costs of harvesting and the value of the harvested timber. The value of grazing and the value of recreation, including hunting, have a minor influence on the present net value. Most of my other considerations in selecting Alternative JF were considerations of non-priced values as part of maximizing net public benefit. Some of the following discussion of the tradeoffs and present net value of alternatives will include resources or issues that are not compared in the table. A complete description of present net value comparisons is found in Appendix B to the Environmental Impact Statement.

When considering the present net value and tradeoffs with non-priced resources as displayed in Table 4, it is important to note that Alternative JF does not include commercial thinning which more realistically reflects the market situation that the Kootenai National Forest has experienced for several years. This change did, however, reduce the present net value, and, since it was done only for Alternative JF, comparisons of present net value with other alternatives may be misleading. The present net value of these other alternatives would be similarly reduced if commercial thinning was not included.

Table 4.--Net Public Benefits for the Kootenai National Forest

Alt	PNV MM \$	Plnd Tbr Sell 1st Decade (1)	Total Rdless Rec (M/Ac)	Total Rec Wldn (M/Ac) (2)	Add'l Rds Built (Mi) (3)	Low Risk Grizzly Habitat Ret (%) (4)	Old Growth Habitat Ret (%) (5)	Area Withdrawn Mineral Explor. (M/Ac) (6)	1st Dec Approp Budget (MM \$) (7)
M - PNV	1,163	302	389	0	5,230	434	8	185	24.1
N	1,148	285	393	0	5,270	424	8	185	23.2
A	1,143	261	399	0	5,270	425	8	185	21.7
B	1,136	257	428	64	5,200	434	8	249	21.6
C	1,129	260	419	81	5,150	439	8	265	21.8
E	1,113	251	476	187	4,950	475	8	371	21.1
G	1,073	246	534	305	4,750	514	8	484	20.6
D - RPA	1,064	262	410	64	5,690	469	8	249	21.5
O	1,064	248	574	81	4,680	444	8	265	21.8
L	1,046	294	349	0	6,360	354	8	185	28.1
H	1,035	240	583	404	4,590	545	8	579	20.0
J - Prop	916	233	518	66	4,690	589	8	252	20.3
K - Dep	911	265	518	66	4,720	589	8	252	22.0
JF - FP	733	233	521	78	4,050	609	10	264	19.2
F	658	189	401	0	3,850	339	8	185	16.8
I - Cur	460	173	441	64	3,840	551	8	249	16.6

**Notes:**

(1) First Decade Annual Timber Sell includes regulated and salvage (non-interchangeable and unregulated) volumes.

(2) Recommended Wilderness acres are part of the Total Roadless Recreation acres shown in the previous column.

(3) As of January 1, 1984.

(4) Acres of grizzly bear habitat on which little or no development is planned. The more acres of little or no development, the less chance of human/grizzly confrontation and the lower the risk to eventual recovery.

(5) The percent of land area below 5,500 feet elevation which is considered to be the area most beneficial for the species dependent on old growth habitat.

(6) Areas that will be eventually withdrawn from locatable mineral exploration. Areas unavailable for leasable minerals are similar in size.

(7) Average Annual Appropriated Budget includes Capital Investment funding necessary for road construction.

M = Thousands, MM = Millions, BF = Board Feet (a timber measurement)

**Alternative M (Present Net Value):** This is the highest present net value alternative because it has the most flexibility in the timber harvest schedule. It allows timber harvest to fluctuate plus or minus 25 percent from one decade to the next, and because of this fluctuation, I believe that Alternative M would not contribute to community stability. In addition, I do not believe Alternative M is responsive to the wilderness issue because it recommends no additional wilderness. The 5,230 miles of additional road and the potential risk to water quality would not be responsive to the public concerns. This alternative requires \$4.9 million more in the budget than Alternative JF. The risk of not recovering the grizzly bear is significantly higher than Alternative JF, and finally, the roadless recreation designations are minimal and thereby not responsive to public concerns. Alternative M does provide 79,000 more acres than Alternative JF for mineral exploration because no wilderness is recommended.

**Alternative N** provides less fluctuation in the timber harvest schedule than Alternative M and thus provides more community stability. But even though Alternative N requires a budget of nearly a \$1 million less than Alternative M, it responds to the other issues such as road construction, very much like Alternative M.

**Alternative A** is similar to Alternatives M and N but it contains a non-declining timber harvest schedule to provide a higher level of community stability. My concern is that there is no additional wilderness recommended, 122,000 fewer acres of roadless recreation, 1,020 more miles of road required, and 184,000 fewer acres of unroaded grizzly habitat than Alternative JF. In addition, \$2.5 million more budget is required than Alternative JF.

**Alternative B** responds well to community stability and also recommends 68,000 acres of additional wilderness, but the roadless recreation acres are minimal, and nearly 100,000 acres less than Alternative JF. Alternative B is comparable to Alternative A in the road mileage, grizzly management, and budget issues.

**Alternative C** will contribute to community stability by providing adequate timber harvest levels and recommends 3,000 acres more wilderness than Alternative JF, but it also requires 1,000 miles more road, and \$2.6 million more than Alternative JF. In addition, recovering the grizzly bear has a higher risk than Alternative JF.

**Alternative E** responds to the timber supply and wilderness issues very well. There are 109,000 more acres recommended for wilderness than in Alternative JF but this reduces the opportunity for mineral exploration because of the nearly 100,000 more acres to be withdrawn from mineral exploration. Alternative E requires 900 more miles of road than Alternative JF, and nearly \$2 million more in the budget.

**Alternative G** recommends 227,000 acres more wilderness than Alternative JF, and provides for a substantial non-declining volume of timber for community stability, but there are still 95,000 more acres of roaded grizzly habitat. Alternative G has 220,000 acres more to be withdrawn from mineral exploration and still requires \$1.4 million more in the annual budget than Alternative JF. The additional acreage in wilderness does not respond to both sides of the wilderness issue, and it reduces my flexibility to allow for mineral exploration and development, and to manage for big game.

**Alternative D (RPA)** responds well to community stability by providing adequate timber supplies and is responsive to the wilderness issue, but Alternative D requires 1,640 more miles of road than Alternative JF, which adds risk to assurances that water quality and fisheries can be successfully protected. Alternative D also requires \$2.3 million more than Alternative JF.

**Alternative O** responds well to the public issues in most categories but I believe the risk that the grizzly bear will not be recovered is still too high, and the budget is high.

**Alternative L** harvests 295 MMBF of timber annually in the first decade, second only to the present net value alternative (M), and provides well for mineral exploration. It does not, however, respond to the other public issues: No additional wilderness is proposed, there are 2,310 more miles of road than Alternative JF, recovering the grizzly bear would be much more risky, and the required budget at \$28.1 million is very high. The decrease of \$117 million in present net value from Alternative M results from the inclusion of all the potentially suitable harvest acres whether they are cost effective or not. This would result in a higher amount of below-cost timber sales, which is a current national issue.

**Alternative H** responds to the timber issue by providing 7 MMBF more in the first decade than Alternative JF, requiring only \$800,000 more budget and a total of 540 more miles of road than Alternative JF. But Alternative H recommends all of the 404,000 acres of inventoried roadless area for wilderness, which would result in a total of 579,000 acres withdrawn from mineral exploration; this is 315,000 acres more than Alternative JF. The lack of flexibility in minerals exploration, as well as things such as big-game management, does not respond to the issues and management concerns as well as Alternative JF.

**Alternative J (Proposed Action in the Draft EIS)** is less responsive than Alternative JF because it requires 640 more miles of road, \$1.1 million more budget, and has only the minimum recommended amount of old growth (8 percent). Alternative JF also recommends 12,000 more acres of wilderness than Alternative J in response to the public comments on the Draft Forest Plan.

**Alternative K (Departure on the Proposed Action)** is nearly the same as Alternative J except it provides a higher level of timber harvest in the first decade by allowing a departure from non-declining sustained yield. While this departure may add to employment in the short-term as the timber on private lands is liquidated, it will not contribute to community stability in the long run because the harvest level on the Kootenai Forest lands would decline before the harvest level on the private lands can increase enough to offset the decline. I do not believe this departure, and the high first-decade annual budget necessary for the departure, are appropriate. In addition, the increased amount of road construction necessary to support the increased timber harvest places greater risk on the assurance that State water quality standards will be met.

**Alternative JF (Selected Alternative and Final Plan)** responds to my understanding of the public issues and the management concerns better than any of the other alternatives. The present net value is 63 percent of the maximum present net value and an increase of 59 percent over the current direction. In trading off present net value the Kootenai National Forest gains in net public benefit. Alternative JF provides a higher level of old growth (10 percent) in response to the public comments on the Draft Forest Plan. The 609,000 acres of habitat managed for the grizzly bear is the highest of all the alternatives, and will give greater insurance to the eventual recovery of the species. Because of this greater insurance, I believe Alternative JF provides more flexibility for possible private initiatives, such as mineral exploration and development or recreational development.

The planned timber harvest for the first decade, is a 35 percent increase from the average annual harvest during the period from 1974 - 1983 and will help stabilize the local economy if private timber harvest levels drop. I believe that the required budget is more realistic and

that the 78,000 acres of additional wilderness responds to the public comments while providing a high degree of flexibility for mineral exploration and development. The wilderness and roadless recommendations also provide more flexibility for managing wildlife habitat, including protection of old growth. The roadless designations will retain their existing potential for wilderness and will be reconsidered for wilderness designation in the scheduled revision of the Forest Plan. Alternative JF provides for the third lowest amount of road construction in response to the public comments on the Draft Forest Plan. This will give greater assurance that the State water quality standards can be achieved, which is also a strong public concern.

I believe that Alternative JF is also more realistic by not scheduling commercial thinning during the life of the Plan. Commercial thinning will still be permitted but recent experience has demonstrated that commercial thinnings are not economical on many areas and that this type of timber sale cannot be sold. Alternative JF best fits my intent to provide for the local economy but do it as efficiently as possible.

### **C. ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY**

Environmental quality was an important consideration in my selecting Alternative JF as the Final Plan. I considered environmental consequences of the various alternatives such as water, air and visual quality. Water quality will meet the State water quality standards, and air quality will also meet State standards. Long-term productivity of the soil will be maintained and erosion will be minimized by using the practices outlined in the Soil and Water Conservation Practices Handbook (FSM 2509.22), incorporated in the Forest Plan in Forest-wide and Management Area prescriptions in Chapters II and III. Visual quality around local communities, along major roads, and around recreation developments will be maintained and improved.

The management standards developed to protect environmental quality are displayed in Chapters II and III of the Forest Plan. These standards provide the specific direction and mitigating measures to assure that environmental quality will be protected.

The adverse effects that cannot be avoided are identified in Chapter IV of the Environmental Impact Statement. Although the application of the Forest-wide Standards are intended to limit the number and duration of adverse effects, short-term increases in sediment and a reduction in air and visual quality are associated with timber harvest and road construction in all of the alternatives.

After consideration of all the alternatives while comparing the economic efficiencies discussed in the previous section, I feel that Alternative JF will best maintain air, water and visual quality.

### **D. COMMUNITY STABILITY**

I considered the social and economic consequences of the alternatives in arriving at my decision. I feel that Alternative JF provides for the maintenance of the local resource-based economy in the next 10-15 years without an undue risk to the environment and at a reasonable budget. Local jobs that are dependent on the timber and minerals available on the Kootenai Forest will be maintained and the potential for an increase are provided because of the increase in potential timber harvest over the last 10-year average. This will provide an increase to offset the expected decline in timber harvest on industrial lands. Jobs that are dependent on the success of the mineral industry will be maintained because



opportunities for mineral exploration have been retained. Other alternatives, such as Alternatives A and D for example, would provide for more timber and mineral-related jobs, but they require higher budgets and have greater environmental impacts such as increased amounts of road construction. Alternative JF contributes to community stability without undue risk to the environment, at a reasonable cost while responding better to the other issues such as wilderness and the grizzly bear.

## E. COMPATIBILITY WITH THE PLANS OF OTHERS

In consideration of Alternative JF, I assured myself that the Plans and concerns of other agencies and the State have been incorporated into the Final Plan.

The Final Plan has been coordinated with the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS) to insure the least risk to the successful recovery of the grizzly. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a non-jeopardy opinion on the Proposed Forest Plan (Alternative J) in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (See Appendix E, Letter #1) as a result of formal consultation required by the Endangered Species Act. In the USF&WS letter, suggestions were made for improvement to the Final Plan and these have been incorporated. The USF&WS has reviewed the changes made between the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements, and a letter from that agency dated June 3, 1986, stated that the Final Plan should be an improvement over the Proposed Action.

Concerns expressed by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Governor of Montana about water quality have been incorporated into the Final Plan. Requirements have been added to Alternative JF which mandates that State water quality standards will be met during all projects and activities. If they cannot be met, then the project or activity will be modified, deferred, or stopped. In addition, the Final Plan has been modified to build fewer miles of road to reduce the risk of water quality degradation.

Concern for the protection of cultural resources as expressed by the State Historic Preservation Officer have been incorporated into the Final Plan by the addition of Appendix 19. This appendix outlines the Kootenai Forest intent and minimum requirements to ensure the protection of cultural resources as required by the regulations issued by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (36 CFR 800) and the State Historic Preservation Office.

Coordination with adjacent National Forests (Flathead, Idaho Panhandle and Lolo) has been done, and I believe that compatible land designations and management direction will occur along the entire Kootenai Forest boundary.

Hunting and fishing rights guaranteed by Indian Treaty with the Salish-Kootenai Tribe are not in conflict with the Forest Plan, and coordination has been done to insure that sites associated with the guarantees insured under the American Indian Religious Freedom Act are protected.

Other concerns of the State of Montana as expressed in the Governor's Letter (see Appendix E, Letter #305) have been incorporated into Alternative JF. I believe that the State's concern for the economic well-being of northwestern Montana, including the maintenance of the timber industry and the protection of opportunities for the expansion of new industries such as tourism and recreation, have been adequately addressed in the Final Plan. Alternative JF will provide for a 35 percent increase in timber harvest levels, which should help to offset an expected decline in timber harvest on private lands. Increases in opportunities for outdoor recreation have been provided by closely following the Governor's recommendation on wilderness and roadless designations.

## VIII. ALTERNATIVES

Alternatives were developed to display an array of options for managing the land and resources of the Kootenai National Forest. The alternatives compare the effects of different ways of addressing the issues and concerns and they provide analytical data to help you and me evaluate those comparisons.

The alternatives described below are the alternatives that were evaluated in the 1985 Draft Environmental Impact Statement with one additional alternative (JF). The changes that occurred between the 1982 Draft Environmental Impact Statement and the 1985 Draft Environmental Impact Statement are described in Chapter I, Section D, of the Environmental Impact Statement.

Analysis of public comments on the 1985 Draft Environmental Impact Statement produced important information that caused me to modify Alternative J. However, considering the adjustments made as a result of the public comments, I find that no significant new information has been produced or major changes made. Therefore I conclude that the final results in Alternative JF are within the range of alternatives discussed and the environmental effects disclosed in the 1985 Draft Environmental Impact Statement, and that no further Draft Environmental Impact Statements or supplements are necessary. A complete discussion of the changes in Alternative JF is presented in the Environmental Impact Statement, Chapter II and Appendix B. (See especially Table B-29 on page B-224 in the EIS.)

All alternatives that were addressed are briefly described below. More detailed information on the alternatives can be found in Chapter II, Section C, of the Environmental Impact Statement.

**Alternative I (Current Direction, or No Action Alternative)** displays the direction that the Forest is currently following. It is the representation of all current plans, especially the goals, objectives, management standards, and land designations from the 25 separate Unit Plans. The timber harvest and budget approximate the average amount actually harvested and spent during the 1980-1982 period. The wilderness recommendation is the same as RARE II, which is also the same as Alternatives B and D.

**Alternative D (RPA)** meets or exceeds the 1980 Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) goals assigned to the Kootenai National Forest for timber, wilderness, and wildlife. The wilderness recommendation is the same as RARE II.

**Alternative A** provides the most cost effective land base for timber management while meeting grizzly bear recovery goals as well as the other minimum management requirements. No additional wilderness is recommended in keeping with the intent of providing opportunities for timber management.

**Alternative B** displays the wilderness recommendations from RARE II (April 1979). Otherwise this alternative is similar to Alternative A and reflects similar tradeoffs of other resources in the effort to manage for timber production outside of the proposed wilderness areas.

**Alternative C** reflects a wilderness recommendation similar to the Montana wilderness bill of June 1984, with some additions on contiguous areas in Idaho. Timber management is emphasized outside of the proposed wilderness areas.

**Alternative E** exceeds the acres recommended for wilderness in RARE II and the 1984 Montana wilderness proposals. Wildlife, fish, and visual quality receive minimum emphasis to provide timber management opportunities outside the recommended wilderness areas.

**Alternative F** emphasizes the production of elk more than timber, and no additional wilderness is recommended.

**Alternative G** recommends significant amounts of wilderness while providing a high level of timber production. Like Alternative E, wildlife, fish, and visual quality receive minimum emphasis to provide for timber management outside of the recommended wilderness areas.

**Alternative H** recommends the most possible wilderness while maintaining a high level of timber production.

**Alternative J (Proposed Action in the 1985 Draft Forest Plan)** reflects a combination of wilderness, roadless, and timber management designations that provide for economic stability and future options. The recovery of the grizzly bear is emphasized. Roadless designations are provided where timber management appears to be environmentally unsound or not cost efficient. Wildlife and fish are emphasized to provide for a balanced multiple resource program. While the total recommended wilderness acreage is similar to RARE II, the actual locations are different. The allowable sale quantity and the budget are higher than the current direction (Alternative I).

**Alternative JF (Final Forest Plan)** is a variation of, and quite similar to, Alternative J. It is a combination of wildlife, wilderness, roadless, and timber management which will provide multiple resource balance, economic stability, and future options. Alternative JF maintains the same total timber sale program, exclusive of the non-interchangeable component, as Alternative J during the life of the plan.

Several changes were made to alternative J after the Draft Forest Plan was released. These changes were in response to public comments received on the DEIS and Forest Plan. The important changes include:

A total of 12,000 acres on Pellick Ridge was added to the Scotchman Peak proposed wilderness.

The road system will require 640 fewer miles.

Old-growth timber habitat was increased from 8 percent of the Forest to 10 percent, and the old-growth (Management Area 13 as described in Chapter III in the Forest Plan) was removed from the suitable timber harvest base.

The non-interchangeable component as described in the Decision section of this Record of Decision (Section IV) is now part of the allowable sale quantity.

Alternative JF also displays 139,000 acres that can become suitable for timber if the price of timber is high enough, and there are 39,000 acres of stagnated lodgepole pine that will be suitable when converted to new stands.

It was assumed for the purposes of calculating the allowable sale quantity that commercial thinning would not occur. This is not a decision that bans commercial thinning from the

Forest, but instead an effort to recognize that sales of commercial thinning size have not, and are not expected to be, commercially feasible in the near future.

**Alternative K (Departure on the Proposed Action)** is the same as Alternative J except to approach the RPA timber goals more closely in the first two decades, it provides for an increase in timber harvest through departure from non-declining sustained yield.

**Alternative L** provides for the highest possible timber yield. No additional wilderness is recommended, and roadless recreation is provided only on lands that do not produce timber. Wildlife, fish, and visual quality receive minimum emphasis. This alternative serves as the baseline for determining timber tradeoffs.

**Alternative M (Maximum PNV)** provides for the highest possible present net value. Timber harvest levels depart from non-declining yield, and no additional wilderness is recommended. Wildlife, fish, and visual quality receive little emphasis. This alternative serves as the baseline to measure the opportunity cost of the other alternatives.

**Alternative N** is similar to alternatives A and M, but provides a high timber harvest in the first decade by allowing a limited departure from non-declining yield. Wildlife, fish, and visual quality receive minimum emphasis.

**Alternative O** recommends wilderness designation on areas similar to the 1984 Montana wilderness bill (as in Alternative C), and designates roadless recreation on all of the remaining inventoried roadless areas. Timber management receives minimum emphasis.

## **IX. COMPARISON OF THE ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE AND FINAL PLAN**

The Current Direction (Alternative I) represents one of the environmentally preferable alternatives. This alternative provides for no increases from past levels in timber harvest and it has the least amount of road construction to produce the least amount of change to the biologic, social and economic environment of the Kootenai Forest. This low level of impact provides assurance that human/grizzly conflicts will be minimized and that the grizzly bear recovery goals can be achieved. Approximately 63,000 acres are recommended for wilderness. The emphasis on timber harvest in lodgepole pine will prevent excessive loss from the mountain pine beetle infestation. Visual quality receives adequate protection in the most sensitive areas around local communities and along major highways. In the developed portion of the Forest, objectives for water quality, fish, and wildlife would assure full protection of these resources.

In addition to Alternative I, Alternative H would recommend the most lands, 403,700 acres of the inventoried roadless areas, for wilderness, and would manage another 54,000 acres without additional roads or development. Alternative H harvests more timber and builds more miles of new road, which results in slightly lower fish numbers and visual quality.

The environmentally preferred alternatives differ from the selected alternative in several respects:

**Timber production and the associated road building, including the harvesting of lodgepole pine infected with mountain pine beetle, and the effect of timber harvest on water quality and fisheries.**

In addition to Alternative I, Alternative H would recommend the most lands, 403,700 acres of the inventoried roadless areas, for wilderness, and would manage another 54,000 acres without additional roads or development. Alternative H harvests more timber and builds more miles of new road, which results in slightly lower fish numbers and visual quality.

The environmentally preferred alternatives differ from the selected alternative in several respects:

**Timber production and the associated road building, including the harvesting of lodge-pole pine infected with mountain pine beetle, and the effect of timber harvest on water quality and fisheries.**

Alternative I would harvest 9,000 acres per year during the plan period for an annual sale quantity of 173 MMBF. Alternative JF, the selected alternative, provides for a potential harvest of approximately 15,500 acres annually for a volume of 233 MMBF during the period from 1988 to 1997. The lower harvest in Alternative I means 52 fewer miles of road constructed each year, and provides greater flexibility in scheduling timber harvest.

#### **Wilderness and Roadless Management**

Alternative I would maintain 157,300 acres as wilderness and 250,200 acres of roadless. Alternative JF, the selected alternative, will maintain 172,900 acres of wilderness and 314,000 acres of roadless. Wilderness and roadless management would have the least environmental impact when comparing the differences between the alternatives.

**Wildlife, including management for the recovery of the grizzly bear, and species dependent on old-growth.**

Alternative JF provides habitat and security for a population of 8000 elk within thirty years. Alternative I provides for 7,300 elk or nearly 9 percent less than the Forest Plan. Alternative JF contains 126,000 acres dedicated to old growth timber habitat and Alternative I contains 93,000 acres. Alternative JF has 11 percent more grizzly habitat with little or no development planned. Alternative JF, the Forest Plan is environmentally preferable to Alternative I for grizzly, other wildlife, and old growth.

Objectives for water quality and fish in Alternative I are similar to those in Alternative JF. As a result fish habitat potential varies about 4 percent between the two alternatives. Because of the fewer miles of new road construction needed and the lower level of timber harvest in Alternative I, the risks of adversely affecting water quality and fish is greater in Alternative JF.

**Local economic effects, including economic stability and economic diversity.**

Alternative JF provides 19 percent more jobs than Alternative I, mainly in the timber industry. The total recreation is about the same so Alternative JF is economically superior to Alternative I.

Alternative I also requires a budget that is \$5 million lower than Alternative JF, and requires less capital investment.

Alternative I has a Present Net Value of \$460 million. Alternative JF has a Present Net Value of \$733 million and therefore provides greater dollar benefits.

#### **Other Issues**

Alternative JF contains objectives for protecting visual quality on 1,311,000 acres and Alternative I does the same on 1,240,000 acres.

### **Summary**

Alternative I, the current direction, was constrained by the current budget and consequently harvests less timber and builds fewer miles of road. Road building and timber harvest activities have the most environmental impact on the Kootenai National Forest. So, Alternative I has the least overall environmental effect and costs the least. Nonetheless, Alternative JF provides more old growth, more wilderness, more economic stability, more big game habitat, and an increased emphasis on grizzly bear.

## **X. IMPLEMENTATION, MITIGATION, AND MONITORING**

### **Implementation**

Implementation of the Forest Plan will begin 30 days after the Notice of Availability of the Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision appear in the *Federal Register* (36 CFR 219.10 (c) (1)).

Implementation requires moving from an existing land-use management program with a budget and schedule of activities, to the level of management outlined in the Forest Plan. In areas where management activities have already been imposed, some period of adjustment may be required to attain Forest Plan goals and objectives. However, as soon as practicable the Forest Supervisor will ensure that, subject to valid existing rights, all projects and contractual obligations are consistent with the Forest Plan.

The schedule listing individual timber sales is not a decision in the Forest Plan on these sales. It provides public information as required by Forest Service Manual 1922.5. This schedule is subject to updates based upon budget, market or other considerations. The public will be notified, at least annually, of changes to this schedule during Forest Plan implementation.

The Forest Supervisor has authority to change the implementation schedule to reflect differences between proposed annual budgets and actual appropriated funds. Such scheduled changes are considered an amendment to the Forest Plan, but are not considered a significant amendment or require the preparation of an environmental impact statement, unless the changes significantly alter the long-term relationships between levels of multiple-use goods and services projected under planned budget proposals as compared to those projected under actual appropriations (36 CFR 219.10 (e)).

If, during Forest Plan implementation, it is determined that the best way to achieve the prescription for a management area does not totally conform to a management prescription standard, the Forest Supervisor may amend that standard for a specific project. Such site specific amendments (CFR 219.10(f)) and the rationale for the changes must conform to the National Environmental Policy Act and the Threatened and Endangered Species Act and other statutory requirements.

### **Budgets**

Most outputs will be affected by the budget. The Plan specifies the total budget and mix of

funding items necessary to produce the proposed outputs. Changes to the budget, in any given year, may require projects scheduled for that year to be rescheduled. If the budget is significantly different from the Plan over a period of several years so that Forest Plan objectives cannot be met, the Plan itself may have to be amended.

### **Mitigation**

Mitigation measures are an integral part of standards for each management area and therefore an essential part of the Forest Plan. Implementation is guided by the Forest-wide management standards located in Chapter II of the Forest Plan, and by the specific management area prescriptions and requirements addressed in Chapter III of the Forest Plan. The management standards were developed through an interdisciplinary effort and contain measures necessary to mitigate or eliminate any long-term adverse environmental effects. Additional mitigation measures and management standards are discussed in the various appendices to the Forest Plan. The disclosure of effects described in Chapter IV of the EIS is premised on the assumption that implementing any alternative will include the mitigation of effects by employing selected mitigation measures. To the best of my knowledge, all practical mitigation measures have been adopted and are included in the Forest Plan.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

The management control system for the Forest Plan includes monitoring and evaluation. It will provide you and me with information on the progress and results of implementation. This information and evaluation will provide feedback into the Forest planning process for possible future change.

Table IV-1 in the Forest Plan displays the basic outline of the monitoring process. An annual monitoring program, developed in accordance with its outline, will be prepared as part of the Kootenai National Forest annual work program. Detailed programs will be prepared for all resources and activities requiring monitoring. These programs will be based on funds available. If funds are inadequate to properly monitor the Forest Plan goals and objectives, an analysis will be made to develop a further course of action. This may include Forest Plan amendment or revision, or dropping of projects.

The results and trends of monitoring will be described in the monitoring report, and be evaluated and summarized periodically. A report will be available for public review.

Data acquired by monitoring will be used to update inventories, to improve further mitigation measures, and to assess the need for amending or revising the Forest Plan.

## **XI. PLANNING RECORDS**

Planning records contain the detailed information and decisions used in developing the Forest Plan and the Environmental Impact Statement as required in 36 CFR 219.12. These records are incorporated by reference into the Environmental Impact Statement and the Forest Plan.


All of the documentation chronicling the Forest Planning process is available for inspection during regular business hours at the Forest Supervisor's Office, Kootenai National Forest, Highway 2 West, Libby, MT 59923.

## XII. APPEAL RIGHTS

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 211.18. Notice of appeal must be in writing and submitted to:

James C. Overbay, Regional Forester  
Northern Region  
U.S.D.A. Forest Service  
P.O. Box 7669  
Missoula, Montana 59807

Notice of appeal must be submitted within 45 days from the date of this decision or within 30 days after publication by the Environmental Protection Agency of the Notice of Availability of the Environmental Statement and Forest Plan in the Federal Register, whichever date is later. A statement of reasons to support the appeal and any request for oral presentation must be filed within the 45-day period for filing a notice of appeal.

  
JAMES C. OVERBAY  
Regional Forester

9-14-87  
Date