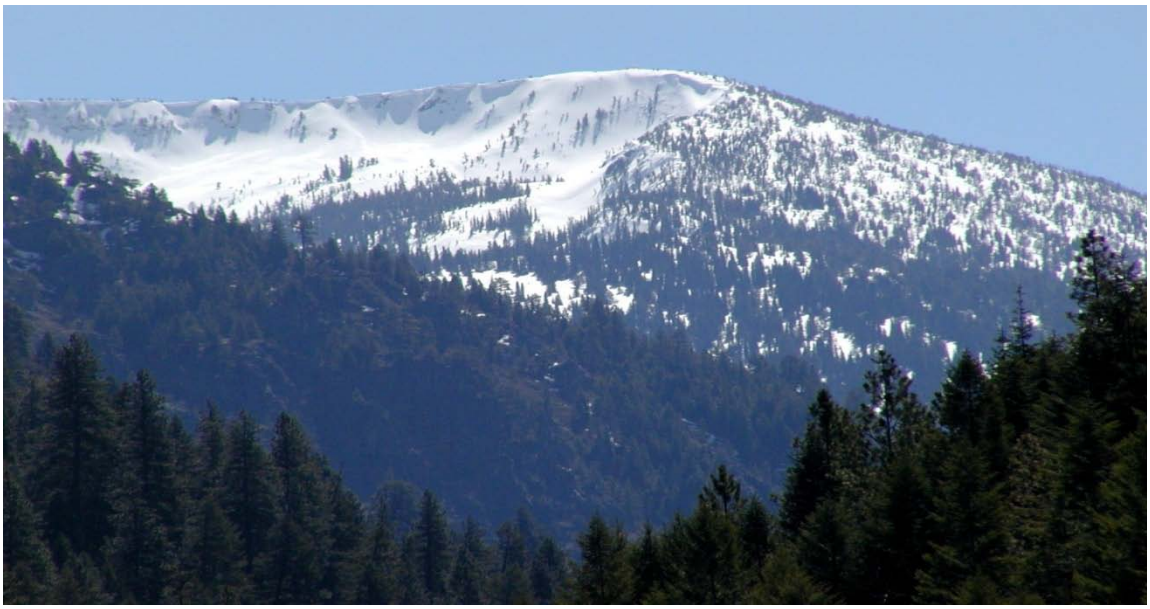
Record of Decision
For

Over-Snow Vehicle Use on the Payette National Forest
USDA Forest Service

Located in Adams, Idaho, Valley and Washington, Counties, Idaho

November 2010



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Introduction

The Payette National Forest (PNF) completed a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) addressing both summer and winter vehicular use across the Forest in 2007. Use by over-snow vehicles on National Forest System roads and National Forest System trails and in areas on National Forest System lands may be allowed, restricted, or prohibited under 212.81 of the Final Travel Management Rule of November 9, 2005. The restrictions on use by over-snow vehicles under this subpart followed the requirements governing designation of National Forest System roads, National Forest System trails, and areas on National Forest System lands in 212.52, 212.53, 212.54, 212.55, 212.56, and 212.57. An over-snow vehicle is defined under the Rule to be "A motor vehicle that is designed for use over snow and that runs on a track or tracks and/or a ski or skies, while in use over snow."

The environmental analysis was completed in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the PNF Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations and discloses effects of vehicle use on the portion of the Payette National Forest outside of the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness.

Due to the complexity of the Forest-wide analysis, I decided to separate my decision by Ranger Districts for snow-free travel management. I issued the Record of Decision (ROD) for snow-free travel on the Weiser Ranger District in January 2008, and the ROD for snow-free travel on the McCall and Krassel Ranger Districts in October 2008, and the ROD for Council and New Meadows Ranger Districts in February 2009. This is my fourth travel management decision document, and it encompasses the entire Payette National Forest's over-snow vehicle use decision at this point in time.

This Over-snow Vehicle Use Record of Decision contains a map package (Appendix C) that displays my decision. The Forest-wide map will serve as the Forest Over-snow Vehicle Use map and will be available free to the public on the Forest web page and at all Forest Ranger Districts. The Over-snow Vehicle Use Map designates roads, trails, and areas on National Forest System land where use by over-snow vehicles is allowed, restricted or prohibited, and use of over-snow vehicles that is not consistent with these designations is prohibited by federal regulations. Use of a road or trail that is authorized by a legally documented right-of-way held by a State, county, or other local public road authority, including roads administered by the counties under Forest Roads and Trails Act (FRTA) easement, is not prohibited by this decision.

The analysis of alternatives and public comment received on the FEIS for the Payette National Forest Travel Management Plan serves as the basis for my decision for over-snow vehicle use on the Payette National Forest. Over the past two years I have continued to meet with multiple recreational users from snowmobile clubs, back country skiers,

Brundage Mountain Resort, Special Interest groups, individuals from the towns of Yellow Pine and Big Creek, Council, Weiser, McCall and Boise residents and many groups in between. My decision incorporates by reference the analysis of effects and management direction disclosed in the FEIS, the errata to the FEIS located in Appendix A of this ROD, and the planning record in its entirety.

Background

Management of the PNF is guided by the Forest Plan as directed in the 1976 National Forest Management Act (NFMA). Regulations implementing the NFMA require the Regional Forester to revise forest plans and provide the basis for revision. The initial PNF Forest Plan completed in 1988 identified travel management planning as an issue and analyzed how access would be managed and restricted throughout the alternatives. A Travel Plan was prepared as a part of the Forest Plan that included a map and accompanying direction that defined the type of motorized use permitted, placed restrictions on size and type of motorized equipment that could be used, restricted seasons of use where necessary, and prohibited use of adjacent areas off the trail in all but a few cases. The Forest Travel Map was revised in 1995 (Visitor Use map sold to the public) and has been updated on a yearly basis (until 2006) by the PNF Backroads map. These maps provided visitors with information on roads, trails, and areas open for various forms of travel on the Forest for both summer and winter travel.

In 2003, the Payette National Forest revised the Forest Plan under regulations formulated in the Code of Federal Regulations (36 CFR 219) in 1982. The purpose of the revision was to guide all natural resource management activities, address changed conditions and directions, and meet the objectives of federal laws, regulations, and policies.

The *Southwest Idaho Ecogroup Land and Resource Management Plan Final EIS* for the Forest Plan identified travel management, including winter access management as issues not analyzed in detail. The responsible official decided to not address travel management in the revision process "due to the broad array of localized issues with travel management that occurs at scales below a Forest Planning unit." The decision was made to address travel management under a separate, more localized planning process (Forest Plan 2003: V.1: 2-6; USDA Forest Service, 2003a: ROD: 8). Regulations regarding travel management on National Forest System lands were recently modified (36 CFR 212, 251, 261 & 295). These regulations provide direction for travel management specifically requiring the designation of roads, trails and areas open to motor vehicle use, and prohibiting the use of motor vehicles off the designated system. This Over-Snow Vehicle Use decision is issued under 36 CFR 212.81.

Groomed Snowmobile Routes

The Forest's groomed snowmobile routes are managed under a cost agreement between the Payette National Forest, Valley County and Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation. This decision that authorized this agreement was made by the McCall District Ranger in 2007, and allows for annual adjustments to the operating plan for the snowmobile routes as agreed upon by all three parties in the agreement provided such adjustments continue to meet direction in the Forest Plan and consultation for listed species for "no net increase in groomed or designated over-the-snow routes" (TEST34).

The Forest Service may allow grooming on up to 234 miles of trail (on National Forest System land). The budget for grooming including how the funds are allocated for grooming, how often the trails are groomed and day to day management of the groomed trails are the responsibility of Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation. Actual miles groomed annually are determined by many factors, including weather, snow depth and the budget for the program. Currently, approximately 214 miles of trail (on National Forest System land) are groomed. Any new trail grooming opportunities would be addressed under the Cost Agreement, but would need to fall within the allowed and authorized trail mileage amount.

These groomed routes are all open to over-snow vehicles. Over-snow vehicles are defined under the Final Travel Rule to be "A motor vehicle that is designed for use over snow and that runs on a track or tracks and/or a ski or skies, while in use over snow." Wheeled vehicles are not over-snow vehicles, even when operating over snow (36 CFR 212.1). The use of wheeled vehicles over snow is governed by 36 CFR 212.51 and FSM 7715, 7716, and 7718.

Designations and prohibitions under the Final Rule do not apply to legally documented rights-of-way held by States, counties, or other local public road authorities. Only National Forest System (NFS) roads, trails and areas may be designated for motor vehicle use under the Final Rule. Many roads on the PNF are managed under FRTA easements and road jurisdiction on these roads lies with the accompanying County. Many of these same roads are groomed for winter snowmobile use. Since the roads are not under the jurisdiction of the PNF they are not displayed on the MVUM, but their use is discussed and mentioned in the FEIS and in this ROD, and they are open and used extensively by the public.

Decision

I have selected Alternative B – Modified, hereafter referred to as the "Selected Alternative". My Selected Alternative is within the range of analysis covered in the FEIS. Over-snow vehicle use within the boundaries of any closed areas, (with the exception of groomed snowmobile trails authorized under the cost agreement with Valley County and IDPR) with the exceptions discussed below, is prohibited and may only be pursued with a written authorization. As stated in the Final Rule, Over-snow vehicle use that is

specifically authorized under a written authorization issued pursuant to Federal law or regulations is exempted from designations made under 36 CFR 212.81 and restrictions and prohibitions established by the Final Rule. Prohibitions, Section 261.14 of the Final Rule, state that while the written authorization is an exemption, use of motor vehicles contrary to the written authorization is prohibited.

Alternative B – Modified is consistent with Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines. The modifications made to Alternative B will meet the *purpose* identified for the revised Travel Management Plan by:

- Meeting Forest Plan and national direction;
- Designating over-snow use areas;
- Balancing management considerations with recreation opportunities;
- Reducing conflicts between recreational uses.

Alternative B – Modified meets the *need* for revision of the travel plan by:
Providing an array of winter recreation experiences, while mitigating known conflicts between motorized and non-motorized use and wintering wildlife.

With this decision I have been able to provide both the motorized and non-motorized user with valuable over-snow recreational opportunities. For the motorized user I have provided over one million acres of snowmobiling opportunities. For the non-motorized recreationist I have set aside 15,157 additional acres that include several popular back-country skiing areas for the safety and enjoyment of non-motorized recreational use. Of these 15,157 acres, 8,274 acres are closed seasonally only, from January 15 – March 30th. Therefore, only 6,883 additional new acres will be closed to over-snow vehicular use the entire over-snow season.

In the Selected Alternative, acres open to cross-country travel using an over-snow motor vehicle go from 1,067,629 acres on the Payette National Forest, to 1,052,472 acres, for a changed condition and difference of 15,157 acres, which equates to less than 1% change in availability to existing over-snow motorized use opportunities. The project area total for this travel plan included 1,529,740 acres. With this decision, 31% of the project area is dedicated to non-motorized use, and 69% is open for over-snow vehicle use. Forest-wide, including areas closed in the existing condition for winter wildlife habitat, over snow motor vehicle use is prohibited on 477,268 of these acres. My stated modifications to Alternative B have all been analyzed in both Alternative B and other alternatives or are within the range of disclosed effects in the FEIS. I believe the Selected Alternative will improve our ability to meet the demands of current and future winter recreational use while providing for the protection of important natural and cultural resources across the Districts. (Note: Acres closed to motorized use in the "Existing condition – Alternative A" is slightly more than stated in the FEIS because of the update made in the Rapid River area).

Issues were raised through comments to provide for both motorized and non-motorized opportunities across the forest. I recognize there will be change to past motorized recreation opportunities on the Forest. I believe the amount of open over-snow vehicle use areas in the Selected Alternative will provide for continued use and enjoyment of the Forest by all recreationists, especially with the adjustment in the Granite/Slab Butte area and seasonal prohibition to motorized use. Future modifications, additions and subtractions to this decision will be considered as recreational needs by both motorized and non-motorized users change. These modifications may be brought forward to individual Ranger Districts by the public and analyzed as funded in annual project specific proposals.

I also received comments from publics that believe a greater reduction in over-snow vehicle use is needed to enable more non-motorized recreation opportunities and to reduce wildlife impacts. In making my decision, I considered these comments and believe that the areas set aside for non-motorized use will both provide needed non-motorized recreation opportunities and will lead to a reduction in wildlife impacts ultimately benefiting these and other resources over the short and long term.

My decision is consistent with the 2003 *Payette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* and the 2005 *Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use; Final Rule* (Federal Register 2005: 70 FR 68264). In addition my decision is based on a review of the Project Record including a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk. This decision will prohibit over-snow vehicle use under 212.81 of the Final Travel Management Rule of November 9, 2005 on the areas identified in the sections below. The restrictions on use by over-snow vehicles under this subpart followed the requirements governing designation of National Forest System roads, National Forest System trails, and areas on National Forest System lands in 212.52, 212.53, 212.54, 212.55, 212.56, and 212.57. An over-snow vehicle use map enclosed as Appendix C of the decision will serve as the official over-Snow vehicle use map displaying the areas where motor vehicle use is prohibited, and any seasonal restrictions.

The over-snow vehicle use season on the Payette National Forest will be defined to mean a time when there is adequate snow cover to prevent disturbance to soil resources. Units may specify the minimum required snow depth as part of any restriction or prohibition on over-snow vehicle use as per 7718.2. Implementation of restrictions and prohibitions on over-snow vehicle use pursuant to 36 CFR Part 212, Subpart C (FSM 7700 Travel Management). Adequate snow cover is defined with this decision to be a depth of snow that when compacted by a snow machine covers the ground with at least 2 inches of snow.

My decision for the Payette National Forest covers approximately 1,529,740 acres of National Forest System land located in four counties. After a thorough review of the Payette National Forest Travel Management Plan FEIS, consideration of Tribal, cooperator, agency and public comments, and resource specialist input, I have selected to implement Alternative B with the following modifications:

Modifications to Alternative B - Over-Snow Areas:

Hitt Mountain: In Alternative B all motorized use, both summer and winter, was prohibited within this small area. This former closure for a past ski area development will now be open to over-snow motor vehicle use. This opens 765 acres to over-snow motorized use.

This area has been opened to motorized use because the original rationale for closing it, the Hitt Mountain Ski Area, no longer exists. The area can now be used by snowmobiles and other over-snow machines to access back-country ski terrain as well as provide for off-trail snowmobile riding.

Granite/Slab Butte: The Granite portion of the Selected Alternative is as displayed under Alternative B, the modification is the addition of the Slab Butte non-motorized area (as analyzed in Alternative D). Another modification to the alternative is that now, over-snow motor vehicle use will be prohibited in this area seasonally from January 15 – March 30, not for the entire snow season. Outside that timeframe, the area will be open to over-snow motorized use. The Granite northern boundary will be the "Boulevard" as shown in detail on the Granite/Slab map located in Appendix C - Selected Alternative Map. The prohibition encumbers 8,274 acres. The Alternative E "76" area closure analyzed in Alternatives D and E has not been selected and will be open to over-snow motorized use.

The Granite/Slab Butte seasonal prohibition to motorized use will provide non-motorized back-country skiing experiences and opportunities in prime ski country terrain. This area has been used extensively by both back-country skiers and snowmobilers in the past, but safety issues and the desire to provide a non-motorized opportunity for skiers, snow shoers and other non-motorized users prompted me to set aside this area for non-motorized use. The "76 area" is also used extensively by both back country skiers and snowmobilers. This area will remain open to snowmobilers with my decision as it does in Alternative A, B and C. By keeping this area open I feel I have provided motorized users a mid-winter recreation opportunity in this popular use area.

In the areas listed below, over-snow vehicle use is prohibited the entire over-snow season.

Lick Creek: With this decision, over-snow motorized use will be prohibited as described in Alternative B, with the exception of a small area being opened up to motorized use to

provide for snowmobile access from the Crestline Trail area over to Lick Creek Road. The prohibition encumbers 6,895 acres.

Over-snow motor vehicle use will be prohibited in the area to the west of Lick Creek road to provide for expert back country skiing opportunities, without the noise, and potentially hazardous tracks left when snowmobiles pass through and use the terrain. This area was modified and reduced from the Alternative E proposal to take into account comments from snowmobilers desiring access up and over from the Twenty Mile Lakes and Crestline Trail areas in to Lick Creek Road, which still remains open to motorized use. Duck Lake will still be accessible to snowmobiles. With the modifications I have made to this closure area I feel I have been able to address back-country ski opportunities along with snowmobilers desires for access to terrain (See Appendix C, Map 3).

Bear Basin: In Alternative A this area was open to over-snow motorized use, although the Forest had been working with the snowmobile community to limit and minimize snowmobile use on the groomed Nordic ski trail. This decision prohibits over-snow motorized use as described in Alternative C in the FEIS, less acres than as proposed under Alternative B in the FEIS. However, the Payette Lakes Ski Club will be allowed to use motorized equipment, via their special use authorization, to groom and maintain the Nordic trails within this area. In addition, a snowmobile access route will be authorized on the boundary on the southern end (See map for details). This will accommodate the need for access by snowmobiles traveling from the residential areas to the groomed snowmobile system. The prohibition encumbers 752 acres.

This portion of Bear Basin will be a non-motorized area for Nordic Skiing. The Bear Basin Nordic Area has become very popular since the Bear Basin Trailhead Forest Service parking area was completed in 2007. Over 25 kilometers of groomed trail are provided to the public via a Special Use Permit to the Payette Lakes Ski Club. A snowmobile access route approximately 10 feet wide is provided along the southern boundary heading east to road 451 which provides access from the residential developments into the groomed snowmobile trail system.

Concerns have been raised about the effects of winter recreation use on great gray owls that nest in Bear Basin. Successful nesting has been occurring in the area with the existing over-snow motorized recreation. Wildlife biologists will continue to monitor recreation use and great gray owl nesting success to find if any changes in nest use and success occur over time in relation to the areas of motorized and non-motorized use (See Appendix C, Map 1).

Rapid River: Between the FEIS release and this decision, Hells Canyon National Recreation Area (HCNRA) Subpart F – HCNRA – Federal Lands Regulation, CFR 292.44 was brought to the fore front with the realization that the Wild Rapid River corridor is closed to both motorized and mechanized use. To abide by the regulation, a mapping correction was

made in March 2010 for both summer and winter use of the river corridor. This mapping correction totaling approximately 4000 acres, has became a part of Alternative A – Existing Condition description since the regulation has been in effect, but not properly mapped since 1994.

Table 1. Acres open to over-snow use.

	Alternative A	Selected Alternative
Acres open to over-snow motorized use	1,067,629	1,052,472
Acres closed to over-snow motorized use	462,111	477,268
Total Acres	1,529,740	1,529,740

Rationale for the Decision

During the travel planning efforts I have gained an increased understanding and appreciation for the complexities and controversy surrounding over-snow vehicle use on the PNF. For this decision on the Payette National Forest, I considered the site specific public comments and resource issues identified through the planning process and attempted to strike a balance between the various motorized and non-motorized uses, and the natural and cultural resource values across the PNF. While it is likely that no single user or group will completely agree with my decision, I hope they can appreciate that their comments and concerns have been heard and considered in the context of all the comments and resource issues associated with travel management on the PNF. Appendix B includes a summary of public comments and agency responses specific to Forest-wide over-snow vehicle use.

While making my decision, I considered effects on the PNFs natural and cultural resources, public safety, provision of recreational opportunities, access needs, conflicts among uses on the Forest, the need for maintenance and administration of areas designated by my decision, and the availability of resources for maintenance and administration of these trails and areas. I chose an alternative that has placed prohibitions on motor vehicle use in areas that I believe the Districts can maintain with the available funding allocations (including grants) and human resources (volunteers) to accomplish the work. The success of this decision will be shared with both motorized and non-motorized users and their ability to educate each other about the requirements of the new over-snow vehicle use plan. If the closure areas are not respected I may need to re-examine the boundaries, closing additional areas to better define the boundaries with large geographical features.

Given the quantity of information received and compiled as part of this process, it is likely that there may be minor errors or unforeseen consequences associated with some travel

designations. Errors identified through the public and internal review of the FEIS have been captured and documented in Appendix A of this decision, and will continue to be corrected with the annual updates of the over-snow vehicle use maps.

As we proceed with implementation of this decision, I assure you that through monitoring and continued public input we will work collaboratively with the public, Tribes, cooperators, and other agencies to address and work through potential issues in an open and constructive manner. This kind of collaborative and adaptive approach is imperative to build public support and to successfully implement travel management on the PNF now and into the future.

In addition it is important to realize that this decision reflects the best available information for this point in time. The Forest does not expect over-snow management objectives to remain static over time. The Final Rule recognizes that designations to travel routes are not permanent and that unforeseen environmental impacts, changes in public demand or monitoring may lead to Responsible Officials revising designations, 36 CFR 212.54 provides for revision of designations as needed to meet changing conditions. I recognize there may be a need for changes, e.g., based on information obtained from the wolverine and recreation impact study, and will address any needs as they arise. Necessary changes or alterations to travel management will continue across the Forest through site specific project analyses and continued public collaboration and feedback on travel management across the PNF. All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm, based on known information, have been adopted.

Forest Plan Consistency

My decision to implement the Selected Alternative is consistent with Forest Plan goals and objectives, and standards and guidelines as documented in each resource section in Chapter 3 of the FEIS and in the Rationale Section of this ROD. In addition, my decision incorporates management requirements from the Forest Plan that are designed for the protection of Forest resources and to ensure consistency with Forest Plan direction. These are discussed and summarized in the FEIS on pages 2-51 to 2-56.

Public Involvement and Alternatives Considered

Public Involvement

Public involvement in this project officially began in October of 2004 when the proposed action was issued to 616 members of the public. A Notice of Intent (NOI) was published in the Federal Register on October 4, 2004. Public comment was taken through January 7th, 2005. Many comments were received including: 130 comment forms, 165 emails, 34 faxes, 254 letters, and 964 postcards. All comments received were reviewed and categorized by issue. Major issues were incorporated into the design of two new alternatives. Documents detailing the review of public comments and how the agency

incorporated the substantive comments into new alternative design are available in the Project Record.

Public meetings were held in McCall, Riggins, Council, New Meadows, and Weiser, Idaho in October of 2004. Informational meetings were held at the request of many stakeholders during the scoping phase of the project.

The project (including the Proposed Action, press releases, and additional information) was featured on the PNF website at http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/payette. The Proposed Action maps, narratives, and summaries were available for review at the Weiser, Council, New Meadows, and McCall Ranger Districts of the Payette National Forest, the Hell's Canyon National Recreation Area in Riggins, and the Payette National Forest Supervisor's Office in McCall.

Scoping letters were sent to three Tribal Nations: Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of Duck Valley, and Nez Perce Tribe. Formal government–to-government consultation has occurred with the Nez Perce, Shoshone-Bannock, and Shoshone-Paiute Tribes including briefings to the tribal councils and their technical staff.

The DEIS was published in early February of 2006. The comment period on the DEIS officially began on February 17, 2006 when the Notice of Availability (NOA) was published in the Federal Register. The Forest initially established a 46-day comment period. The comment period was extended an additional 46 days at the request of members of the public.

Public meetings were held Boise, Weiser, Council, New Meadows, and McCall in February and March of 2006. The DEIS and accompanying maps were featured on the PNF website. Copies of the DEIS and the maps were available at all Forest offices.

Copies of the DEIS were also sent to the three Tribal Nations: the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes of Duck Valley, and the Nez Perce Tribe. Formal government-to-government consultation on the project continued with the Nez Perce Tribe, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes.

During the 92-day comment period on the DEIS, the Forest received approximately 450 comments including letters, emails, and faxes. All comments received were reviewed and categorized by issue. The Forest then developed a new action alternative, Alternative E, to respond to these comments and to address Ranger District specific needs and preferences.

The FEIS was published in April 2007 and a final 30-day comment period officially started on May 25, 2007 with publication of the NOA in the Federal Register. The comment period was extended from June 25 to July 10, 2007 based on public request. While there

is no requirement to allow a comment period on a FEIS, I felt it was important to gain feedback from the public on the newly developed Alternative E before making a final decision.

Since the end of the comment period the Forest has continued to engage with various publics including formal information sharing meetings with Travel Plan cooperators including members of the winter recreation forum, Adams, Idaho and Valley County Commissioners, Idaho Department of Fish and Game and Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation. Aside from these formal meetings, travel plan team specialists have been responsive to numerous public requests for additional information or clarification on the Travel Plan. The comment periods generated over 2000 letters, e-mails, and faxes from a range of individuals, groups and other agencies. Along with Travel Plan team members, I reviewed and evaluated these comments, and my decision reflects responsiveness to many comments and concerns received on the FEIS. With the release of the RODs to date we have also had public information meetings in Weiser on February 27, 2008, in McCall on October 29, 2008 and in Yellow Pine on November 1, 2008.

Due to the lack of definitive information on the effects of winter recreation on wolverine, particularly females with young, the Forest has partnered with a variety of groups, including the Rocky Mountain Research Station (RMRS), Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho State Snowmobile Association, Southwest Idaho Resource Advisory Committee, Central Idaho Recreation Coalition, Brundage Mountain Resort, Round River Conservation Studies, and the Boise and Sawtooth National Forests to implement a study on the potential effects, beginning in 2008. Local Tribes have also expressed interest in the study.

The study was spearheaded by the Idaho State Snowmobiling Association (ISSA), who outreached to Jeff Copeland, a wolverine researcher at the RMRS. Preliminary studies were initiated in 2009 and the formal study plan launched in 2010. A report on the first year of the study: *"Investigating the Interaction between Wolverines and Winter Recreation Use, 2010 Annual Report,"* (Heinemeyer 2010) is available on request. Final results of the study are expected in 2012 or 2013.

This decision was presented to the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes on October 14, 2010. The Tribes emphasized to the Forest that the wolverine is a special animal of concern to them.

Since spring 2004, numerous newspaper articles and press releases regarding the travel planning effort have been published in the local and regional papers, including *The Star News* (McCall), *Long Valley Advocate* (Cascade), *Adams County Record* (Council), *Weiser Signal American* (Weiser), and *Idaho Statesman* (Boise). Legal Notices of comment and availability were published in *The Star News*, *Idaho Statesman*, *Adams County Record*, *Idaho County Free Press*, and *Weiser Signal American*. In addition, the Forest has maintained a website (http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/payette) providing public access to

current information, environmental documents, maps, and other items pertaining to travel management.

Response to Primary Comments Received in the FEIS that pertain to the Over-Snow Vehicle Use Decision

The following sections document my consideration and responsiveness to the main issues and concerns both general and specific to Over-Snow Vehicle Use on the Forest brought forth during the FEIS comment period. A more complete summary of specific public comments and agency responses is provided in Appendix B of this document.

Opening Recommended Wilderness to additional Over-Snow vehicle use

The FEIS did review the request to open portions of the Needles and Secesh IRAs (both of which have large portions of their IRAs within recommended wilderness) to over-snow vehicle use. Many acres have been, and remain open to motorized use in these two IRAs both in the summer months on motorized trails, and in the winter months for over-snow vehicle use. In Alternative A, 81,403 acres of the Secesh IRA and 16,610 acres of the Needles IRA **are open** to over-snow motorized use. There is **no change** to these acreages with my Selected Alternative.

No **new** additional motorized use in the recommended wilderness areas of Secesh and Needles was added in any alternative, and the rationale for that is stated on page 2-3 of the FEIS "Forest Plan direction (Standard for MPC 1.2, Recommended Wilderness, USDA Forest Service 2003: III-82) states that "No new motorized or mechanical uses will be allowed, except where theses uses must be allowed in response to outstanding rights, statute, or treaty." Part of the purpose and need for this project was to meet Forest Plan direction.

Economic Analysis

Some individuals and user groups disagreed with the comparisons made in the FEIS to the Gallatin economic study, and stated the need for additional economic analysis. I reviewed and considered other economic studies and took into account public comments, and believe I had enough information to make a reasoned decision on the potential economic impacts of this travel management decision.

The FEIS clearly discloses the rationale for citing the Gallatin economic study. Given the scale and diversity of the total economy in the counties, the fact that a variety of recreational uses are maintained under all alternatives and that economic effects related to travel on NFS lands are more driven by national trends than by the supply of recreation areas, reliance on this study as an indicator of the economic relationship of travel management on the PNF was appropriate.

Under this decision, changes in use opportunities vary little from existing condition and do not represent an elimination or massive reduction of any one particular recreational use. I heard the comments from concerned publics regarding the amount of dollars snowmobile users bring into the area, and that drastic changes to this use could affect the economy. Understanding this concern I maintained a significant amount of over-snow motorized use, and made the most popular snowmobile closure area a "seasonal" closure, allowing snowmobile use during the busy December holiday season. I also know that both back-county and Nordic skiers can bring money in to the local area as was evident with the stimulation to the economy during the Masters Nordic Event in 2009.

This decision maintains a variety of recreational uses and as such is not expected to have a measurable effect on local businesses reliant on recreational users and uses across the Forest. Where motorized use was prohibited in some areas, non-motorized use was increased. If there were to be any reduction to motorized users visiting the area, the increase in non-motorized users is likely to even out the balance of recreational visitors coming into the area, thus negating any effect to the local economies with the changes in across the Forest for over-snow vehicle use.

In summary, when compared with the force of national trends, regional and local demographics and larger economic factors influencing the economies of Adams, Valley, Washington and Idaho Counties, the changes in different recreational travel designations on the Forest are unlikely to have measurable economic impacts.

Effects of Winter Recreation on Wildlife

Assessment of the habitat needs for wolverine and lynx are required by direction in the Forest Plan (USDA 2003a) and supported by Federal and State biologists. The Forest Plan contains specific standards and guidelines for conservation of wolverine and lynx habitat, which the Travel Plan analysis addressed. In addition, the lynx is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act and effects to the species must be disclosed in a Biological Assessment and consulted upon with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The wolverine is listed as a "sensitive" species by the Intermountain Region of the Forest Service. It has also been petitioned for Federal listing under the ESA. The sensitive species program is designed to conserve or restore habitat conditions (including corridors) for sensitive species to prevent them from becoming federally listed under ESA (Forest Plan 2003; Appendix E-2).

The primary management concern for wolverine is vulnerability during denning. Areas where wolverines live, historically, have not been subject to human activities due to their remote, steep, and harsh environments. Whether increased human activities in these environments are impacting wolverine habitat and populations has not yet been verified. For that reason, the PNF in partnership with the Rocky Mountain Research Station (RMRS) and other groups have launched a study of the possible effects. Currently, the PNF has a number of areas closed to over-snow motorized use for other reasons. About 54% (67,600

acres) of the potential wolverine denning habitat on the PNF (including habitat in the FC-RONR Wilderness) is closed to over-snow motorized use. The Selected Alternative would increase the potential denning habitat closed to over-snow motorized use by 1%. Until the study helps us to determine if winter recreation (both motorized and non-motorized) is impacting wolverines, we believe that the existing closures provide sufficient "quiet" areas for wolverine survival and viable occupancy on the PNF until new scientific information can inform future decisions. This determination is based on the percentage of potential denning habitat currently closed to motorized use and inaccessible to most non-motorized use and also on consistent sightings of wolverine within areas of recreation use. In addition, due to the ongoing study, it was deemed best to make only minor changes to the existing winter recreation use patterns for study area consistency. In the first year of the study, six wolverines were captured and instrumented with radio-telemetry to begin to determine their response to various recreation uses.

Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)

My decision to implement the Selected Alternative will not result in any change to the current winter ROS. While there were areas designated for non-motorized use, since motorized special uses still predominate within or directly next to the areas, no changes were made to the ROS of these areas. Acres displayed in the table below are approximate and don't match exactly the acres displayed for the project area.

Table 2 Forest-wide Winter Over-snow ROS Acreage

ROS	Alternative A – Current Condition	Alternative B - Modified
Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM)	446,262	same
Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM)	744,912	same
Roaded Natural (RN)	39,147	same
Roaded Modified (RM)	300,961	same
Total acres	1,531,282	same

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the Selected Alternative (Alternative B – Modified), I considered five other alternatives (FEIS page 2-2 thru 2-75) including four that were analyzed in detail. Those four are listed below. One alternative considered was dismissed from detailed consideration (FEIS page 2-2 (2.2)).

Alternative A – Existing Condition/No Action

This alternative is required by the National Environmental Policy Act and serves as a baseline for analyzing effects. The No Action Alternative represented "no immediate change" from current condition. Alternative A was not selected because it did not

address the need for change to reduce conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users in the winter season. It also did not respond to safety concerns brought forward by the non-motorized community regarding shared use areas and the potential hazards of snowmobile tracks to skiers. This alternative was not selected because it did not best address issues that developed and were raised during the comment periods.

Alternative C – Additional Motorized Opportunities

The over-snow vehicle use portion of Alternative C responds to issues raised by user groups to whom winter motorized access is important. This alternative analyzed opening new areas to snowmobile use by opening an additional 78,160 acres to motorized over-snow use over the No Action alternative. This alternative was not selected because it did not address safety hazards in areas of shared use or needs of the non-motorized over-snow recreation user for an untracked powder experience. Alternative C also called for the opening of new areas to over-snow motorized use. The Forest Plan incorporates guidance from the lynx conservation assessment strategy on snow compaction effects on lynx (Forest Plan Standard TEST34), and sets a standard for no net increase in groomed or designed over-the-snow routes or play areas outside of baseline areas. The intent of this standard is to minimize snow compaction and potential disturbance to lynx and their habitat.

Alternative D – Additional Non-motorized Opportunities

The over-snow portion of Alternative D responded to issues raised by non-motorized user groups relating to a need for more non-motorized over-snow opportunities. It also addresses associated concerns with noise and safety related to motorized and non-motorized uses in the same area. This alternative created more opportunities for winter non-motorized uses. It also responded to protect Forest resources and reduce conflicts between uses. Protection of wildlife habitat connectivity corridors, particularly wolverine denning habitat, was also emphasized. This alternative decreased the area open to over-snow motorized use by 204,800 acres below the No Action alternative. This alternative was not selected because, while it did propose to set aside large expanses of land for non-motorized use, it would result in the loss of some popular over-snow vehicle use opportunities. Many of the prohibitions to over-snow motorized use were proposed to potentially reduce wildlife impacts, and the science was not available to support protection for such large areas at this time and given that relatively large amounts of potential wolverine denning habitat occur in areas closed to over-snow motorized use. Without better information to support the need for such prohibitions I did not want to prohibit motorized use to that extent.

Alternative E – Response to Internal and External Comments on the Draft EIS

The over-snow portion of Alternative E responded to issues raised during the comment period on the Draft EIS. Alternative E was developed by the Forest Supervisor and the interdisciplinary team, with technical assistance from the local county commissioners, and representatives from Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation. These parties worked to

balance resource protection, input from the public, and non-motorized and motorized recreation opportunities. This alternative was not selected because I felt the prohibitions to over-snow vehicle use were above and beyond what is needed at this time in part due to the lack of information on wildlife impacts and given that relatively large amounts of potential wolverine denning habitat occur in areas closed to over-snow motorized use. In addition, after continued discussions I had, between the release of the FEIS and this ROD, with both motorized and non-motorized user groups, the areas analyzed under Alternative E were not going to meet public needs.

Compliance with Environmental Laws and Regulations

Clean Air Act of 1970, as amended

The purpose of the Clean Air Act is to protect and enhance the quality of the nation's air resources. This is addressed under Issues Not Analyzed in Detail (FEIS Section 1.10.2 on page 1-17). The Travel Management Plan is not expected to have discernible effects on air quality and therefore I have determined that my decision is consistent with the Clean Air Act.

Clean Water Act of 1977, as amended

The objective of this Act is to restore and maintain the integrity of the nation's waters. This objective translates into two fundamental goals: (1) eliminate the discharge of pollutants into the nation's waters; and (2) achieve water quality levels that are fishable and swimmable. This act establishes a non-degradation policy for all federally proposed projects. The non-degradation goals would be accomplished through implementation and monitoring of Best Management Practices (BMPs) as described in Appendix C of the FEIS. The Clean Water Act is also addressed through Table 2-27 Management Requirements, Section 2.3.2 Project Design Features and in the Soil and Water (Section 3.4) effects discussions in the FEIS. Based on my review of the FEIS including required project design features, BMPs and water related effects analysis, I have determined that my decision is compliant with the Clean Water Act.

Compliance with American Indian Treaty Provisions

The Forest Service is acting as a representative of the United States with regard to treaty rights reserved by the Nez Perce Tribe, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, and the Shoshone-Paiute Tribes. The Forest Service is required to preserve the rights reserved by the Tribes, and the agency is not attempting to balance this proposal against the rights the Tribes have reserved unto themselves. The Forest understands and respects the trust responsibility to the Tribes to manage lands in a manner that protects and preserves Indian trust assets and treaty resources. This travel management decision will not conflict with American Indian treaty provisions or federal trust responsibilities, and will preserve the rights of the Tribes.

Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended

The purpose of this act is to provide for the conservation of endangered fish, wildlife, and plants, as well as their habitats. Biological Assessments (BA) and/or Evaluations were prepared to document possible effects of the Selected Alternative on endangered and threatened species. Appropriate coordination, conferencing, and consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) have been completed.

The Canada lynx and gray wolf are the only listed wildlife species that may be affected by the winter travel plan action. NIDGS hibernate in winter and the areas where they occur are not highly desirable for winter recreation activities, so a determination of "No Effect" was made for this species. In Idaho, populations of the gray wolf south of Interstate 90 are currently considered experimental/non-essential (USDI FWS 2004), hence these populations are evaluated similar to a proposed species. The BA made the determination the winter travel plan action *"May Affect, but would not jeopardize the continued existence of the gray wolf."* The BA made a determination of *"May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect"* (NLAA) for the Canada lynx.

The Selected Alternative received a determination of *"No Effect"* (NE) for three fishes listed as "Threatened" that occur in the area of additional closures. These species are Snake River spring, summer and fall Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*, 57 FR 14653), Snake River Basin steelhead (*O. mykiss*, 62 FR 43937), and Columbia River bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*, 63 FR 31647). No designated critical habitat for bull trout occurs in the area of additional closures (75 FR 63898), but there is designated critical habitat for Chinook (58 FR 68543) steelhead (70 FR 52629) and bull trout (75 FR 63898) downstream of the closure areas in the Little Salmon River, so the determination for Chinook and steelhead critical habitat was also *"No Effect"*.

The project botanist concluded that the action would have no effect on threatened, endangered, proposed or candidate plant species.

Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974

This act provides for the control and management of non-indigenous weeds that injure or have the potential to injure the interests of agriculture and commerce, wildlife resources, or the public health. The FEIS addresses noxious weeds and provides for management requirements and project design features aimed at reducing levels of noxious weeds across the Forest consistent with this act (FEIS pp. 1-14, 2-7, 2-51).

Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as amended and Executive Order 13186

The purpose of this act is to establish an international framework for the protection and conservation of migratory birds. Executive Order 13186 directs executive departments and agencies to take certain actions to further implement the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Federal agencies that undertake actions that may affect migratory birds must develop and

implement a Memorandum of Understanding with the USFWS that would promote the conservation of migratory birds. Federal agencies must also "ensure that environmental analysis of federal actions required by NEPA …evaluate the effects of actions and agency plans on migratory birds, with emphasis on species of concern." Migratory Birds are addressed in the FEIS and an effects determination was made that migratory bird habitat would not be measurably impacted and no significant effects are anticipated from this action (FEIS pp. 3-189 to 190; 3-236 to 237).

National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended

The NEPA establishes the format and content requirements of environmental analysis and documentation. The process of preparing this environmental analysis was undertaken to comply with NEPA and its implementing regulations. Information on the process of preparing this analysis can be found within this document and the Project Record. This ROD and the Payette National Forest Travel Management Plan FEIS comply with NEPA and its implementing regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508).

National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA)

This act guides development and revision of National Forest Land and Resource Management Plans. The NFMA also has several specific provisions including maintenance of biodiversity. Project and activity decisions need to be consistent with a number of provisions of NFMA. The Payette Forest Plan was developed to implement NFMA. All action alternatives in this project's EIS were developed to meet the Payette Forest Plan and comply with NFMA (FEIS p. 1-20).

Environmental Justice (E.O.12898)

As required by Executive Order, all Federal actions will consider potentially disproportionate effects on minority or low-income communities. Potential impacts or changes to low-income or minority communities within the project area due to the proposed action must be considered. Where possible, measures should be taken to avoid negative impacts to these communities or mitigate adverse affects. This decision is not anticipated to disproportionately impact minority or low income communities who use the Payette National Forest (FEIS p. 1-22).

National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as Amended (NHPA)

This Act requires federal agencies to consult with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and American Indian Tribes when nonrenewable cultural resources, such as archaeological sites and historic structures, may be affected by a federal action. Section 106 of this Act requires federal agencies to review the effects project proposals may have on cultural resources in the project area. The Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer has been consulted concerning the over-snow vehicle use decision and the SHPO agreed with the "No potential effect to historic properties" determination prepared by the Forest Archeologist for Over Snow Travel Management.

Roadless Area Conservation Final Rule

In October 2008, the U.S. Department of Agriculture adopted a state-specific, final rule establishing management direction for designed Roadless Areas in the State of Idaho (36 CFR Part 294). The final rule designates 250 Idaho Roadless Areas (IRAs) and established five management themes that provide prohibitions with exceptions or conditioned permissions governing road construction, timber cutting, and discretionary mineral development. Twenty Roadless IRAs exist in whole or part on the Payette National Forest and were analyzed as a part of the FEIS for this travel plan (FEIS pages 3-67 thru 3-75). These Roadless Areas include both motorized and non-motorized road, trail and area opportunities. Site specific information on existing open areas and trails is contained within this decision.

Subpart 294.26, Other Activities in Idaho Roadless Areas, (a) *Motorized travel* states: "Nothing in this subpart shall be construed as affecting existing roads or trails in Idaho Roadless Areas. Decisions concerning the future management of existing roads or trails in Idaho Roadless Areas shall be made during the applicable travel management process."

Environmentally Preferable Alternative

Regulations implementing the NEPA require agencies to specify the alternative(s) considered to be environmentally preferable (40 CFR 1505.2(b)). Forest Service policy further defines this as the Alternative that best meets the goals of Section 101 of NEPA. In determining the environmentally preferred alternative, I referred to the goals of Section 101 and determined that Alternative D is the Environmentally Preferred Alternative. Alternative D is considered the environmentally preferred alternative since it will cause "the least damage to the biological and physical environment". However, the Selected Alternative, over the long-term, will "attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment while minimizing risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences". The Selected Alternative provides a mix of recreation opportunities and settings; while moving forest resource conditions towards the desired future conditions identified in the plan. The emphasis of the Selected Alternative is to maintain many of the existing motorized over-snow recreation opportunities that exist today, while continuing to maintain existing closed winter wildlife over-snow motorized areas, and also provide for several new non-motorized areas for back-country skiers.

Alternative D would result in the greatest potential protection to wildlife, but we lack the data to show if such extensive protections are warranted given that this alternative would substantially reduce motorized access for recreational users in some areas.

The goals of Section 101 of NEPA require consideration of, among other things, a "variety of individual choice" and "balance between populations and resource use." Given those parameters, the Selected Alternative maintains forest resources while providing for a variety of recreational choices, both now and into the future.

Unavoidable Adverse Environmental Impacts

The Selected Alternative likely will produce adverse effects on some components of the environment that cannot be avoided or mitigated. Actions that benefit one component can have at least temporary adverse effects on another. The Selected Alternative includes management requirements and mitigation measures designed to avoid or reduce adverse environmental effects. Monitoring and evaluation was incorporated to measure how effective the management requirements and mitigation measures are in reducing adverse environmental impacts.

Monitoring and Mitigation

My decision incorporated monitoring plans as described in the FEIS. Monitoring plans are listed in the FEIS – Appendix E, pages E-1 through E-10. Monitoring is also discussed in the FEIS on pages 2-8.

In addition, my decision incorporates mitigation measures and project design features aimed at avoiding or reducing environmental impacts associated with implementation of travel management designations.

Implementation

Implementation includes the publishing and distribution of the official Forest-wide over-snow vehicle use map that is included in this decision.

The final rule places a responsibility on users to get an over-snow vehicle use map from Forest Service offices or websites and to remain on routes and in areas open to motor vehicle use. These maps will be available at all District offices, and also on the Forest web page, and will be free of charge. Although new travel restrictions were designed to be less complex and easier to define on the ground, any change will require a period of adjustment for Forest visitors. Enforcement of new travel restrictions will require additional emphasis by the PNF, with assistance from other public agencies and the public. During the first several winter field seasons after this decision, Forest recreation staff will emphasize travel plan education with forest users. We will have maps available at each winter trailhead parking area, and a large map at each winter kiosk showing the areas where over-snow vehicle use is prohibited. We will also have a Forest Service employee working on the weekends at the major snowmobile trailheads to meet and greet visitors going into the backcountry and familiarize them with the new over-snow vehicle use map. We will also work to sign some of the areas where feasible. It is reasonable to assume there will be increased potential for violations during the initial stages of implementation. During the first winter field season, Forest staff will strive for travel plan education; however, Forest travelers will be cited if they are blatantly ignoring obvious geographical features and/or signs prohibiting over-snow vehicle use.

Some of the non-motorized area boundaries are located on definable geographic or man-made features such as ridge-tops, drainages, snow-cat roads, or trails. Other areas have

few if any definable features to mark the boundary. These areas, when feasible, will be signed or flagged. Signing on the Lick Creek closure will be maintained primarily by the outfitter using the area for back-country skiing. The Bear Basin signing will be maintained primarily by the Payette Lakes Ski Club, the permit holder for the Nordic area. Partners, including outfitters, Idaho State Snowmobile Association, the McCall snowmobile club, Brundage Mountain Resort and the Southwest Idaho Rural Advisory Committee (RAC) will all be instrumental in helping the Forest purchase, mark and sign critical boundaries for the non-motorize areas. The cost of signing will be borne by both the Forest and the partners. The Forest will work to patrol the areas where over-snow vehicle use is prohibited as a critical part of the winter program. The Forest already has several employees that work almost full time in the back-country in the winter months installing and maintaining snowmobile junction signs, boundary marker signs, conducting avalanche forecasting and checking outfitters and guides. During the implementation phase of this decision, boundaries may be slightly modified to follow clear definable on-the-ground features to better enable enforcement of the areas where over-snow vehicle use is prohibited.

I want to emphasize implementation of my decision will require not only education of users but also enforcement of restrictions. To better educate the public on the new non-motorized recreational areas, detailed topographical maps displaying the non-motorized recreational areas are being provided with this decision document, and will be available for free at all ranger districts and major winter trailheads. The Forest will annually print new over-snow MVUMs if needed because of new project decisions. Districts will continue the process of signing non-motorized recreational areas. The Forest is committed to work with local motorized snowmobile clubs, outfitter and guide partners, ski area permitees, environmental groups, and other interested organizations to form volunteer patrols to assist with signing and public awareness campaigns regarding the new over-snow travel regulations.

Administrative Appeal

My decision is subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 215. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. Any notice of appeal must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14 and include at a minimum:

- A statement that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215.
- The name, address, and telephone number of the appellant.
- Identification of the decision to which the objection is being made.
- Identification of the document in which the decision is contained, by title and subject, date of the decision, and name and title of the Deciding Officer.
- Identification of the specific portion of the decision to which objection is made.
- The reasons for appeal, including issues of fact, law, regulation, or policy and, if applicable, specifically how the decision violates law, regulation, or policy.
- Identification of the specific changes(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks.

Only individuals or organization that submitted comments or otherwise expressed interest in the project during the comment periods may appeal. Appeals must be postmarked or received by the Appeal Deciding Officer within 45 days of the publication of the legal notice of decision in the *Idaho Statesman* newspaper. This date is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Timeframe information from other sources should not be relied upon. Incorporation of documents by reference in an appeal is not allowed.

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day appeal period, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

Appeals must be sent to the Appeal Deciding Officer, Harv Forsgren, Regional Forester of the Intermountain Region. Appeals can be mailed, faxed, e-mailed or hand delivered to:

Regional Forester of the Intermountain Region
USDA-Forest Service
324 25th Street
Ogden, UT 84401
Fax: 801-625-5277
E-mail: appeals-intermtn-regional-office@fs.fed.us

E-mailed appeals must be submitted in rich text (rtf), Word (doc) or portable document format (pdf) and must include the project name in the subject line. Appeals that are hand delivered can be made to the address above during the regular business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Contacts

More information on the FEIS and the ROD for Forest-wide Over-Snow Vehicle Use can be obtained by contacting one of the following people:

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Or

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The 2007 Final EIS for Travel Management was a result of Payette National Forest personnel working with Tribal staff, cooperators, other agency personnel, and members of the public. With this Record of Decision for Forest-wide Over-Snow Vehicle Use the public can see the result of this work. I look forward to moving on with implementation of the Over-Snow Vehicle Use Plan in cooperation and collaboration with all who use and enjoy the Payette National Forest.

Suzanne C. Rainville November 9, 2010

SUZANNE C. RAINVILLE
Forest Supervisor
Payette National Forest

Date

Appendix A – Errata Information for the PNF Travel Plan FEIS Document

Errors Identified in Body of FEIS document pertaining to the over-snow vehicle use plan decision include:

1. EIS Page 3-18: First sentence of the winter description for MA 7 references "26,700 miles" as closed when it should read "26,700 acres".
2. FEIS Page 3-62: Last paragraph on bottom of page references MA 12 only. Paragraph should reference MA 12 and 13.
3. FEIS Volume II – Page 6-57: snowmobile registrations did not drop in 2006, they dropped in 2005. See response to comment in the ROD #42.

Appendix B – Summary of Public Comments and Agency Response

Appendix B summarizes comments and associated responses to specific over-snow season comments received Forest-wide. Comments listed in this document are ones that were not addressed in the FEIS, suggest a new alternative or action, or questioned the analysis. Comments received that "voted" for an alternative have not been listed.

Winter Travel Management

Bear Basin Area

1. Extend the east boundary described in Alternative E to the Forest boundary which starts on the ridge above Bear Basin Meadows. This will allow an area for dispersed winter recreation use, which was never addressed in the travel plan. Encourage snowmobilers to use this ridge to access Green Gate groomed trails. Do not allow snowmobiles to use Forest Road 451 through Bear Basin. If the FS allows snowmobiles to use the Bear Basin road on FS land north of our properties, there will be trespass and safety issues, because Warren Wagon residents cannot directly access Rd 451 without trespassing on private property.

Agency Response: The Selected Alternative opted to keep the Bear Basin Nordic area smaller to allow snowmobiles access through this popular area. Snowmobilers will be able to use Forest Road 451 in the Selected Alternative, but the road is not groomed for use. There is groomed access from the east from Green Gate to Forest Road 451. Thousands of acres are available throughout the Forest to accommodate winter dispersed recreation needs for both motorized and non-motorized users.

2. Road 451 is not a good on-the-ground feature to use as an eastern boundary because it is not discernible under snow. The ridgeline to the east of the meadow is a distinct on-the-ground boundary and would allow a route for snowmobiles from the Warren Wagon road area to access the groomed Green Gate trails.

Agency Response: Road 451 is will be signed on the ground as the boundary by the Forest.

3. Bear Basin should be designated as non-motorized to provide an area close to town without the sound and smell of motorized machines

Agency Response: A large portion of the Bear Basin area has been designated non-motorized for the over-snow season in the Selected Alternative.

4. Provide a route for King Pine residents to snowmobile legally from their homes to the groomed snowmobile trail network.

Agency Response: The Forest worked with the landowners in this area to provide an access route into the groomed snowmobile trail system. This snowmobile access route, about 10 feet wide, is located along the southern Forest boundary leaving east out of the Bear Basin Parking lot heading to road 451, which then leads into the groomed trail system. This route will not be groomed. It will be marked and serve as the non-motorized boundary for the Bear Basin Nordic area. See the Bear Basin map located within Appendix C.

Big Creek Area Closure

5. We suggest the Smith Creek loop road be open to over snow travel.

Agency Response: The Smith Creek Road and many surrounding play areas are open to motorized travel in the Selected Alternative. No changes from existing condition were made to the area around Big Creek or Smith Creek road.

6. The Big Creek snowmobile closure area is not needed to protect wildlife as only a small portion of the area is used by snowmobiles.

Agency Response: The Selected Alternative did not close any new areas in the Big Creek area to motorized use for wildlife reasons. If data become available to indicate a need for change, a new analysis and decision may be necessary.

Granite Mountain Slab Butte/76 Areas

7. Combine and modify Alternatives B, D, and E by moving the boundary in D from the ridge north of Twin Lakes to the ridge south of Twin Lakes while making Dead Tree area and the Boulevard non-motorized because of safety issues and to provide an easily defined boundary. To do this, a snow road along the Twin Lakes ridge would be needed to provide access to the top of Granite for snowmobiles.

Agency Response: The Forest used a northern boundary feature known as the Boulevard in the selected alternative to designate a definable boundary. This feature is a cat ski road and the only cat ski road open to both the cat ski and snowmobilers. Snowmobilers can use this route to access Granite Peak. The Selected Alternative was a modification of Alternative B and D with the addition of a portion of the Slab Butte area added to the closure area, but the Twin Lakes area remain open to snowmobile use, as well as Goose Lake.

8. Where is the analysis that drove the closing of Slab Butte to over-snow motorized use?

Agency Response: Alternative D and E discuss the rationale to close a portion of the Slab Butte area to over-snow motorized use to provide for back-country winter use opportunities within a reasonable distance to trailhead access points (page 3-49, 3-52, 3-58, 3-59, 3-60, 3-61.

9. In no way does opening Hitt Mountain or Warren begin to mitigate the loss of Slab/76 and Granite.

Agency Response: The Forest notes your concerns. Area 76 does remain open to over-snow motorized use in the Selected Alternative. In addition, adjustments have been made to the season of use for Granite and Slab Butte areas to allow for snowmobile use of the area until the January 15 and after March 30th. This will allow use of the area during one of the major popular holiday seasons in December. Warren Highlands, closed in Alternative A, was not opened to over-snow motorized use with this decision.

Lick Creek Closures

10. The Lick Creek closure creates additional defacto closures on the level of tens of thousands of acres that were not addressed or even considered in the FEIS. The plan does not acknowledge the cascading effects of the Lick Creek Summit closure on riding in and to other areas.

Agency Response: The Selected Alternative adjusted boundaries to address this concern and has opened a section of the Lick Creek area to motorized use to allow for access to Lick Creek road by snowmobiles through the Duck Lake area. The Lick Creek road would continue to be open to snowmobile riders, and would be accessed up Lick Creek Road, or over this ridge top. Crestline Trail and the ridge also remain open in the selected alternative.

11. The Lick Creek winter closures will have significant impact on the local economy.

Agency Response: The Lick Creek closure has been modified to allow for snowmobile access from one side of the mountain to the other as described on page ROD-8. Benefits to non-motorized recreation with additional new non-motorized areas and the economic benefit these users bring into the economy are also expected. The Forest heard the comments from concerned publics regarding the amount of dollars snowmobile users bring into the area, and that drastic changes to this use could affect the economy. Understanding this concern a significant amount of over-snow motorized use was maintained. Any impacts to the local economy are unlikely due to the immense amount of snowmobile country that will continue to be available to the motorized community in the winter months.

Crestline Closure

12. No analysis was done to address how proposed closures to snowmobiling would affect connectivity to open areas, for example, the closure of Crestline South.

Agency Response: The Crestline South closure found in Alternative E was dropped from the Selected Alternative and will continue to be open to motorized over-snow use. Although connectivity was not addressed as a specific issue, it was considered by the decision maker when selecting the final alternative.

13. The Crestline South closure to snowmobiles closes a known route along the Fall Creek/Crestline trail that provide access to the Box Lake area, and all of MA 7 northwest of Lick Creek road.

Agency Response: The Crestline South closure was dropped in the Selected Alternative.

14. The FEIS states that snowmobilers do not use the Marshall Meadow area. This is false, riders do use this area. A major arterial route goes through Marshall to War Eagle Lookout.

Agency Response: In the comment letters the Forest received from the FEIS, local Warren and Secesh resident snowmobilers wrote and told us they use the area. Snowmobilers use the area, just not in high use numbers compared to other, more popular areas on the Forest, because the area is so far from McCall. The Selected Alternative did not close the Marshall Mountain area to over-snow motorized use.

15. This closure is troubling because it was not included in the DEIS.

Agency Response: The Marshall Meadow closure was included in the DEIS under Alternative D, but is not closed under the Selected Alternative.

Existing Conditions and General Winter comments

16. The Forest should make the snowcat permitting decision open for public comment.

Agency Response: The Forest, in a separate decision specific to the re-issuance of the snow-cat permit, did have a public comment period prior to reissuing a special use permit to the Brundage Snowcat operation.

17. There is no mention of the hazards an unwary snowcat driver can place on snowmobile users or backcountry skiers. Snowcats should also have a state park and recreation trail users sticker and compensate other trail users by grooming the trails.

Agency Response: Snowcat roads are closed to use by snowmobiles and back-country skiers because of the dangers associated with dual use along these steep routes. Where dual use does occur – along some stretches of the groomed trail system, the roads are wide and the line of sight allows for all users to see each other over a distance. The Snowcat operation is under a special use permit that pays fees annually to the Forest Service. The Forest partners with Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation under a cost agreement for the groomed trails.

18. The Forest should not reserve for the exclusive use of an outfitter and guide, such as the snowcat program, large expanses of land.

Agency Response: The Forest has not set aside or reserved any land exclusively for an outfitter/guide in any alternative. Winter non-motorized use areas are being set aside for a broad group of non-motorized users, not exclusively for the Snow cat program, although, the Snowcat program and its public recreational user base, will benefit as a result of the areas closed to snowmobiles. The Brundage snow-cat permit covers over 17,500 acres so over 50% of the area within the boundaries of the snow-cat permit are open to both motorized and non-motorized use with the Selected Alternative.

19. There is very little mention of Brundage Mountain Resort expanding ski terrain. The effect on other users is not noted. The FEIS treated the Brundage Ski area as if its expansions did not need to be noted in the FEIS.

Agency Response: A prior Environmental Analysis was completed in April of 2003 regarding Brundage Mountain Resort Master Development planning, and was not addressed in this FEIS, it was outside the scope of this decision.

20. Many of the areas designated for non-motorized use are in fact used by motorized vehicles, like Bear Basin, Granite/Slab/76 and the Lick Creek area where noise will affect the experience anywhere in the area.

Agency Response: This statement is true, when Bear Basin is being groomed several hours each week, when the Snowcat is using the Granite/Slab Butte area several hours each day when trips are booked, and when snowmobiles are driving up Lick Creek road, there will be motorized use occurring. But, there are many hours of non-motorized time in between these motorized intrusions to enjoy a peaceful experience free of motorized noise.

21. Social impacts to the non-motorized recreationist have been ignored while impacts to the most obtrusive users are addressed extensively. Issues such as the effects on solitude, sense of adventure, remoteness self-sufficiency were not given full consideration.

Agency Response: The FEIS addressed the issues raised by the non-motorized community on pages 3-7, 3-8, 3-9, 3-17, 3-18, 3-29, 3-30, 3-31, 3-32, 3-36, 3-37, 3-38, 3-43, 3-44, 3-49, 3-50, 3-51, 3-52, 3-53, 3-58, 3-59, 3-60 in the FEIS.

22. The areas designated non-motorized are too small to truly enforce and the boundaries are hard to define both on the ground and on the map.

Agency Response: Enforcement of the area winter closures to over-snow motorized use will take time once the decision is made. The Forest will have to work with users on the ground to educate them on the areas open and closed to motorized use. Some areas will need actual on-the-ground signing, and some areas will have definable geographic boundaries. New maps have been included as a part of the ROD, Appendix C, to address some of the winter mapping concerns.

23. I have been witness to many near miss collisions, and one particular collision of 2 snowmobiles colliding, barely missing the snowcat. Separated use is needed for safety reasons.

Agency Response: Safety was addressed throughout the document in the Recreation section of chapter 3, and used as rationale for the selected alternative, which does in fact separate uses.

24. Wong's Bowl on Slab Butte is known far and wide and it is not clear if this will be a closed area.

Agency Response: The Wong's Bowl area remains open to over-snow motorized use in the Selected Alternative.

25. Comments regarding connectivity of non-motorized winter use, accessible backcountry skiing opportunities and lack of ability to enforce alternatives were not seriously addressed therefore the range of alternatives were not completely analyzed.

Agency Response: Connectivity was best addressed for the non-motorized user in Alternative D, where the most non-motorized over-snow opportunities would be available. Connectivity was not developed as an indicator. Accessible backcountry skiing opportunities were developed as an indicator, and are tracked through each alternative under that indicator. Enforcement was addressed in several areas under plan implementation on page 3-25: Implementation; and in the "Cost to program management" indicator. Implementation is also addressed in the ROD.

26. The Jughandle closure areas should be amended to allow access from Louie Lake along the road that continues up to Boulder Lake and trail 103 that follows Round Creek.

A major snowmobiling trail passes through the closure above Louie Lake and goes to the Boulder riding area, it was included in the closure area by error.

Agency Response: The Forest is not quite sure which "road" you are referring too, but the area from Louie Lake along a jeep road up to Boulder Lake and trail 103 is open to over-snow motorized use. Access to Louie Lake is actually on state land. This closure area has its challenges with enforcement because the access up to the area is all state land not under the closure. There is no definable boundary between state and federal land that the skier and snowmobiler can easily identify.

27. The actual loss of area open to over-snow motorized use between the existing situation and the preferred Alternative E is not "less than 1%" as claimed, it is more like 25%.

Agency Response: The 1% difference, as displayed on page 2-58 (in Alternative E) of the FEIS describes the existing condition of the Forest as having 70% of the project area open to snowmobile use (1,067,629 acres). The Selected Alternative has 69% of the project area open to snowmobile use (1,052,472 acres), a difference of 1% from existing condition.

28. The development of a yurt operation on the forest, which we understand will place skiers winter-long in an area closed in Alternative E to snowmobiler because of wildlife concerns, is not even covered by the travel plan.

Agency Response: A separate environmental analysis was completed by the McCall Ranger District for this yurt operation. A separate public notification and comment period was granted for that particular yurt location. The yurt is located on the boundary of the Secesh Recommended Wilderness, near the Duck/Hum Trailhead. The Secesh Recommended Wilderness was not closed solely for wildlife reasons but for protection of wilderness character (which includes protection of resource values such as wildlife habitat from influences of man, but also many other resources).

29. Exclusive use ski areas were depicted in terms of net skiable terrain, not gross acreage available as was used with snowmobile allocations.

Agency Response: There were "Winter Recreation Scenarios" developed by the Winter Recreation Forum that looked at terrain available for snowmobiles, human powered back-country skiers, Nordic skiers, cat skiing, and machine powered skiers. Net usable snowmobile terrain was computed by considering slopes between 0-40 degrees, removing the dense timbered strata, removing the ski areas, removing elk winter range, removing Wilderness, and looking only at areas within 40 miles of a portal, 20 miles from secondary set of portals, and removing existing areas closed to over-snow motorized use. Using these criteria approximately 873,460 acres are available to snowmobiles in Alternative A,

205,080 acres less than the gross acres used in the FEIS. The acreage numbers displayed in this Record of Decision refer to gross acres for both motorized and non-motorized use. We recognize that not all gross acres are available to either user group.

30. Table 2-29 page 2-58 is very misleading. You state in Alternative C that 27% of the area open to snowmobilers is open to non-motorized over snow use. Areas open to snowmobiles are not closed to non-motorized over snow use. Your numbers are misleading.

Agency Response: While it is true that areas open to snowmobiles are also open to non-motorized users, the non-motorized user is not able to fully enjoy and in many cases even participate in non-motorized sport (due to snowmobile tracked areas) in those areas so the analysis is based on the areas set aside specifically for non-motorized use.

31. If the snowcat skiing areas are closed to motorized travel, it should be closed to all motorized travel, including snow-cats.

Agency Response: The Travel Rule allows for exceptions to the designations of motorized and non-motorized use for administrative purposes and for Special Use Permits. Much of the terrain within the boundaries of the Brundage Snowcat Special Use Permit is open to over-snow motorized use. Only 8274 acres (47%) of the 17,685 acres Brundage Snowcats have under permit is restricted to non-motorized use. In addition, the area closure is only in effect from January 15 – March 30th in the Selected Alternative. The Snowcat only runs during the season when there is enough snow to construct snow-cat roads and access the backcountry with the machine. There will be many weeks each winter, where there is no authorized motorized use in these non-motorized areas. Allowing the Snowcat into these areas via their Special Use Permit will provide a desired user recreation opportunity, which the Forest is trying to provide with this planning process.

32. Snowcats are as dangerous to snowmobiles as vehicles are on the trails. Snow-cats should be required to have flashing lights.

Agency Response: This issue is outside the scope of the travel planning process and will be addressed under the Special Use Operating Plan.

33. The comment was made in the FEIS that no additional snowmobile parking areas are needed.

Agency Response: The FEIS does not state that no additional parking areas are needed, it states on page FEIS 1-14 (Parking and Trailhead Facilities) that new construction of parking lots and trailheads would not be analyzed in this document, but under a separate site specific document. The document lists several potential parking area opportunities in

Chapter 2, under specific MAs in the "Opportunities" section (such as page 2-17 "Opportunities").

34. Exclusive non-motorized use areas tend to force the displaced users to seek other areas to recreate and results in the increase in acres where snow is compacted in the National Forest. These statistics and findings must be considered by the FS in the preparation of the Payette Travel Plan.

Agency Response: With the Selected Alternative over 1,052,472 acres remain open to over-snow vehicle use. This equates to 69% of the project area being open to over-snow vehicle use and 31% being closed to over-snow vehicle use, a changed condition of less than 1% (See ROD-6). Only three new areas have been designated for non-motorized use, for a total of 15,157 additional non-motorized acres, and of that, 8274 are closed seasonally only from January 15 – March 30th. Of these, snowmobile users had not been using the Bear Basin area for several years. With the vast amount of terrain still available to over-snow vehicle use the Forest does not believe there will be a measurable increase in new snow compacted areas.

35. The document describes some of the winter boundaries will be difficult to find on the ground and are too large to sign effectively. How will the Forest Service enforce such a boundary? How will people honestly trying to honor the boundaries have any chance at knowing where they are?

Agency Response: The deciding official took winter boundary identification into account with her final decision and selected alternative as stated in the ROD and its rationale. In addition, a section in the ROD addresses the implementation, including enforcement process for the Travel Plan. High quality topographical maps are included with this decision in Appendix C to help the user identify boundaries. These maps will be placed on the Forest's web page and be made available as links to other web pages including Brundage Mountain Resort, ISSA, and any other wishing to post closure maps to disseminate information to their specific user group.

36. Nowhere else in any Forest Plan or Travel Plan can the term "human powered" be found. So why is it being used in place of common and accepted language in the PNF Travel Plan?

Agency Response: This term was used and presented by the Winter Recreation Forum here in McCall Idaho, consisting of members of both the motorized and non-motorized community as a way to describe a skier that will park at a trailhead and ski up to a recreation opportunity – slope, without the use of a machine to get there. This term seemed very understandable and a good way to describe this type of recreation user, and was widely used by the winter recreation group as a definition to describe these types of users.

37. Alternative C neglects to mention anything about opening any more area to winter motorized recreation in MA 12.

Agency Response: The FEIS mentions in several locations the opening of additional over-snow motorized areas on pages 2-44 in the Winter section paragraph 1 "In Alternative C, over 51,000 acres located in the South Fork drainage are opened to over-snow motorized use. This proposal was developed in response to public comment on the Proposed Action". Also on page 3-43 of the FEIS, last paragraph "Also in the final EIS, two areas in MA 12 are proposed as open to over-snow motorized use…". See the winter map for Alternative C that displays the proposed open areas in MA 12.

38. Where is the material that documents these phantom collisions (between skiers and snowmobiles) outside of the Brundage Ski Resort operation as sited in Alternative A and chapter 3 – existing conditions? The Forest Service needs to define what a "collision" is.

Agency Response: As cited in the FEIS, and contained within the project record, there are numerous reports filled out by the Brundage Snowcat operators and their clients, by Forest Service law enforcement and recreation technicians, documenting near-misses between skiers and snowmobiles. We have included the definition used by the recreation specialist on a "collision" as found in the Webster's New World Dictionary: "a clash of opinions, interest, etc; conflict.", and is not necessarily a physical impact between snowmobile and skier, although in many cases, there almost was, as is documented by the numerous reports filed.

39. Alternative C says there is an increase of 78,000 + acres in open terrain for snowmobiling over Alternative A, yet the FEIS does not include most of the 78,000 acres in the alternative description. This does not make sense because the FEIS ignores requests to re-open the Needles and Secesh IRAs to winter motorized use. The numbers in the tables are misleading, or in error.

Agency Response: The increase in approximately 78,000 acres open for snowmobiling in Alternative C come from opening Squaw Point located in MAs 7 and 11 (page 3-43 FEIS), acres within the South Fork (MA 12) and the Cottontail (MA 10) and Chimney Rock (MA 11) IRAs (Page 3-43 FEIS). The FEIS did look at opening additional recommended wilderness in the Secesh and Needles IRAs but eliminated that alternative for detailed study. See page 2-2 of the FEIS.

The FEIS did not ignore the request to re-open the Needles and Secesh IRAs to winter motorized use. Many acres are, and remain open in these two IRAs. In Alternative A, 81,403 acres of the Secesh IRA and 16,610 acres of the Needles IRA are open to over-snow motorized use. The Selected Alternative would not change the acres available to

over-snow motorized use within either IRA. The 1988 Payette Forest Plan contains the same number of acres open to motorized use in the Secesh Recommended Wilderness area. The ID team did not research motorized use past the previous 1988 Forest Plan. There has been no change in the past (documented back through 1988) to recommended wilderness in these two areas in open to over-snow motorized use. No new additional motorized use in the recommended wilderness areas of Secesh and Needles was added in any alternative, and the rationale for that is stated on page 2-2 of the FEIS "Opening portions of the Secesh and Needles Recommended Wilderness Areas to Over-snow Vehicle Use". In Alternative A and the Selected Alternative thousands of acres within the recommended wilderness remain open to over-snow motorized use in the Burnside Lake area in MA 12, east of Jughandle Mountain in MA 8, in the South Fork in MA 12 and Big Creek area in MA 13.

In addition, any additional areas open to motorized over-snow use would need to be offset by closures to meet Forest Plan direction (TEST34) that states: "no net increase in groomed or designated over-snow routes or play areas, outside of baseline areas of consistent snow compaction, by LAU or in combination with immediately adjacent LAUs unless the Biological Assessment demonstrates the grooming or designation serves to consolidate use and improve lynx habitat."

40. The 1988 Forest Plan states that motorized use was allowed and took place in both the Needles and Secesh IRAs. Motorized use is most certainly not new to these areas, so reopening the Needles and Secesh IRAs to winter motorized recreation would not violate the MPC 1.2 standard.

Agency Response: See response to # 39 above.

41. The Valley County Board of Commissioners unanimously agreed the Needles and Secesh IRAs should not be managed as recommended wilderness, also known as Wildland Recreation in the Idaho State Roadless Petition. Why was this fact ignored?

Agency Response: The Final Rule for Special Areas; Roadless Area Conservation; Applicability to the National Forest in Idaho was signed into effect on October 16, 2008. Under this Rule, the Secesh and Needles IRAs are listed under a management theme of "Wild Land Recreation". The emphasis of this designation is that these lands would show little evidence of human-caused disturbance and natural conditions and processes would be predominant.

42. The FEIS incorrectly states that snowmobile registrations for the State of Idaho dropped in 2006.

Agency Response: The FEIS states on page 3-8 "In 2006, resident snowmobile registrations for Valley County totaled 5,440. This represents a 1.7% per year increase on

average." In the Appendix to the FEIS, Response to comments section, page 6-57 the comment was made that 2006 registrations dropped. The data for registrations for 2005 was collected in 2006, but the drop in registrations was indeed for 2005, as you state. 2006 registrations were up from 2005, but still not up to the numbers they were in 2004 (53,709 registrations). Therefore 2006 registrations (52,244 registrations) were still below 2004 (53,709 state-wide snowmobile registrations). We regret the confusion and incorrect statement on page 6-57 regarding drop in registrations for 2006 and will add the correction to the errata Appendix A section of this ROD.

43. McCall Ranger District recreation staff quote, regarding dispersion is undocumented; there is no data to back up this statement. He is incorrect in his assumptions concerning parking and dispersal. To base decisions in an EIS on such information is indefensible.

Agency Response: This statement was only one of many to describe existing winter use on the forest. Professional judgment statements are allowed in an environmental analysis, and the employee has worked in winter recreation in the McCall area for over 20 years, and over half his work- time is spent in the field in the winter months. His knowledge of winter backcountry recreation is extensive. Also used and referenced was the documented data in the 2003 National Visitor Use Survey, which analyzed crowding issues.

44. There was no attempt to quantify any of the snowmobile use. No traffic counts are provided or even any estimates of trail or over-snow use.

Agency Response: Valley County and Adams county snow-mobile registrations, which include resident, non-residents and rental snowmobiles, provided us with some estimation of use. But, the number of users for a particular recreational activity was not the driving force behind motorized and non-motorized use designation. The primary purpose was to provide each user group with an opportunity. For the non-motorized users, an opportunity is provided when there are no snowmobiles tracks to have to maneuver through, and an area free from motorized noise, pollution, and safety hazards resulting from both user groups using the same area. Also used and referenced is the "Winter Recreation on Western National Forest Lands – A Comprehensive Analysis of Motorized and Non-Motorized Opportunity and Access" produced by Winter Wildlands Alliance, which displays general western state use figures, and specific Payette National Forest figures. This document can be found in the Project Record.

Beginning in 2009, the Forest embarked on a study in cooperation with the ISSA to begin to gather and quantify information on snowmobile use across the Forest, but especially in areas of known wolverine habitat. These studies are ongoing and will provide the forest with more in-depth information over the next several years.

45. No serious efforts were made to collaborate with organized snowmobile groups to develop an understanding of current snowmobiling activities on the PNF.

Agency response: Chapter 1, pages 1-7 and 1-8 display the multitude of Public Involvement done for the Travel Plan. The Forest worked intensely with the three County Commissioner Representatives (Adams, Washington and Valley) and with Idaho State Parks and Recreation Department throughout the process. These representatives were at the table with the ID team throughout the process. The decision maker met individually with user groups throughout the process to hear their individual concerns after the draft EIS and the Final EIS. The comments received by snowmobile users were taken into account when formulating alternatives, and reviewed while making the final decision in the ROD.

The ID team also worked with key Forest Service personnel that have worked on-the-ground, in the field using snowmobiles, monitoring snowmobile parking lots, patrolling the snowmobile terrain, monitoring the snowmobile closures, and interacting with the snowmobile community for many years. These Forest service representatives know the current snowmobiling activities on Forest. In addition, the Forest is currently working with ISSA on a wolverine wildlife study that is charting snowmobile use patterns across the Forest.

46. Page 3-60 has a brief analysis of parking and travel to non-motorized areas with a snowmobile. Some of these closures are made for wildlife purposes. We find no similar analysis or concern for snowmobile parking and access.

Agency response: The environmental analysis does discuss in Chapter 3, under the section "Issue 2 – Motorized and non-motorized opportunities in winter" for each alternative, snowmobile access and use. Also, that concern has been addressed in Response #170, which shows the Forest analyzed snowmobile access within 40 miles of a primary portal, and 20 miles from a secondary portal.

47. Snowmachines have limitations as to their travel capabilities.

Agency Response: We agree, and have used the figures of 40 miles from a primary portal, and 20 miles from a secondary portal as a basic access scenario.

48. The comments taken out of context from the winter recreation group are bothersome to me, as a member of the group, discussions that did not have consensus of the group did not get any recognition. This infers support and is an inappropriate use of the group's discussion and should be taken out of the document.

Agency Response: The Winter Recreation forum has been kept in the information loop during the entire five year travel planning process via program presentations from the

travel plan ID team, and updates from the McCall District staff. The Winter Recreation Forum, because of its diverse group nature, both motorized and non-motorized constituents, never did come to a consensus on any one alternative in the travel plan. But, ideas from this group are features in all alternatives of the travel plan.

49. The forest urgently needs to seriously examine opportunities to expand snowmobile access and disperse use. The PNF must develop an adequate database of snowmobile use, desired attributes and visitor perceptions as a foundation for good decisions.

Agency Response: The Forest will continue to examine opportunities for all types of uses across the Forest as appropriate, the travel planning process is ongoing. The Final Rule recognizes that designations of areas for motor vehicle use are not permanent and responsible officials may consider revising designations with new additional site specific NEPA. The Council Ranger District area has multiple snowmobile opportunities that have not yet been fully realized by the snowmobiling community and is an area that is ripe for dispersal of use. The Forest does not believe additional information is needed prior to the decision maker signing the ROD and implementing this travel plan.

50. It is not appropriate to exclude the FC-RONR wilderness when stating figures concerning existing areas of the PNF closed to motorized recreation and therefore available exclusively for non-motorized winter recreation. Further, we question the PNF's assertion that the FC-RONR is considered in the cumulative recreation effects analyses since the acreage values of the FC-RONR are not included in any of the recreation summary tables nor in the tables and analysis in chapter 3.

Agency Response: One of the primary purposes of this travel plan was to designate a system of motorized roads and trails. Since the Wilderness does not allow for motorized or mechanized use, it was deemed to be outside the project area. The Wilderness was recognized for its ability to provide for non-motorized opportunities in the FEIS.

51. Skiable terrain is mentioned multiple times, but none of these areas fall under the definition of "Attainable Terrain" based on the Winter Recreation Forum's portal requirements. Because "Attainable Terrain" is not considered during the FEIS, the pretext of "quality" as applied to various aforementioned areas is impossible to quantify. How can an area be "skiable" if they cannot get to it without the help of a snowmobile? A truly non-motorized experience cannot be attained.

Agency Response: The EIS did use attainable terrain as an indicator, "Proximity of non-motorized areas to parking and access points" and "Approximate acres of skiable terrain in non-motorized areas" for each alternative on FEIS pages 3-30, 3-31, 3-38, 3-44, 3-45, 3-52, 3-60, 3-61.

52. The travel plan lacks adequate documentation of the existing conditions related to winter use.

Agency Response: Chapter 3 (specifically pages 3-6 through 3-63 of the FEIS) describes existing conditions related to winter use for each management area 1-13 across the forest using existing information gathered from recreation specialists at each district on the Forest, District Rangers, and the Forest Recreation Specialist. Information was also solicited from Forest employees other than recreation specialists, who use the Forest for winter recreation sports, both motorized and non-motorized, to develop the existing condition information. In addition, the 2003 National Visitor Use survey figures for the Payette National Forest (contained in the Project record) were used, along with information supplied by Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation regarding winter use (contained in the project record).

53. Why is the area surrounding the Lick Creek Lookout on New Meadows Ranger District no longer closed to over-snow motorized use?

Agency Response: This area has been closed to motorized cross-country travel during the non-snow season for many years, but the area has not been closed to over-snow use for many years. The old 1995 visitor map did show it closed to over-snow use, but the map was revised in the 2001 Backroads version and has showed as open to over-snow motorized use since 2001. One reason for the closure had been the vandalism that had occurred to the lookout, which has been minimized by help and education from the Idaho State Snowmobile Association. The Rapid River Wild and Scenic River corridor, located in the same general area, is closed to both over-snow and non-snow motor vehicle use (See ROD page 8).

Groomed Snowmobile Trails

54. You are closing all groomed snowmobile routes to standard wheel vehicles designed for snow-free travel-ways. I do not think the USFS has jurisdiction over travel on Warren Wagon Road. The EIS implies that they do and can restrict travel on all groomed snowmobile trails, even those that do not lie on the PNF.

Agency Response: The Forest recognized that Valley County has jurisdiction on its portion of the Warren Wagon Road. The Forest works closely with both Valley and Idaho Counties on the management of the Warren Wagon Road. Designations and prohibitions under the Final Rule do not apply to legally documented rights-of-way held by States, counties, or other local public road authorities. Only National Forest System (NFS) roads and trails may be designated for motor vehicle use under the Final Rule and in this Payette National Forest Over-snow Vehicle Use Plan.

In 2009 the Idaho State legislature enacted new legislation regarding the use of groomed snowmobile trails. It stated: "Any all-terrain vehicle operating on groomed snowmobile trails during the winter snowmobiling season when the trails are groomed shall be registered as a snowmobile under the provisions of section 67-7103, Idaho Code. Counties shall have the option to allow all-terrain vehicles, if registered, to use snowmobile trails in the county. No other vehicles shall operate on groomed snowmobile trails unless specifically allowed by the county. Violation of the provisions of this section shall be an infraction."

55. The trail to Fall Creek (MA 3) is a part of the groomed snowmobile trail route under the MOU. It passes through an area that is labeled as closed to motorized over-snow use. It should be open to motorized use. This route is under Adams County FRTA easement.

Agency Response: The groomed route would remain open to over-snow motorized use, but off trail motorized use is not allowed in that area.

56. Pearl Creek and the 20 mile area would be great examples of expanding use for multiple users by grooming a small additional area.

Agency Response: Any new trail grooming opportunities would be addressed under the Cost Agreement between the Payette National Forest, the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, and Valley County. The Agreement is under a separate site-specific analysis done every five years. When redoing the agreement in the future, new routes could be analyzed, provided such adjustments continue to meet direction in the Forest Plan and consultation for listed species for "no net increase in groomed or designated over-the-snow routes" (TEST34). At present, the cost agreement authorizes more miles of trail to be groomed than are currently groomed. The Forest Service may allow grooming on up to 234 miles of trail (on National Forest System land). The budget for grooming including how the funds are allocated for grooming, how often the trails are groomed and day to day management of the groomed trails are the responsibility of Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation. Actual miles groomed annually are determined by many factors, including weather, snow depth and the budget for the program. Currently, approximately 214 miles of trail (on National Forest System land) are groomed. Any new trail grooming opportunities would be addressed under the Cost Agreement, but would need to fall within the allowed and authorized trail mileage amount.

57. An increase in groomed trails should be considered.

Agency Response: See Response to #56.

58. We would like to see the Lick Creek Road from the Little Lake Parking Area to Lick Creek Summit added to the groomed system.

Agency Response: See Response to #56 above.

59. There is no description of the changes to the groomed snowmobile trails on the maps nor are they described in the alternatives in the FEIS. It is impossible to provide comments relating to groomed snowmobile trails.

Agency Response: See response to #56 above.

60. Apparently the PNF is unilaterally breaching the Snowmobile Grooming MOU with the Counties without even the slightest discussion.

Agency Response: See response to #56.

61. The travel plan lacks adequate range of alternatives for motorized winter recreation.

Agency Response: See responses to #11, #16, #18, and #200 in the DEIS.

Winter recreation effects to wildlife

62. The Forest Service should consider that addressing wolverine and lynx habitat doesn't help the credibility of the travel plan.

The Forest Service should consider that roads and areas should not be closed because they "might" affect wolverines.

The Forest Service should consider that PNF wildlife biologists have little research information for lynx and wolverine and that existing research does not indicate the need for the vast wildlife closures in Alternatives D and E.

Agency Response: Assessment of the habitat needs for wolverine and lynx are required by direction in the Forest Plan (USDA 2003a) and supported by agency biologists and Idaho Department of Fish and Game. The Forest Plan contains specific standards and guidelines for conservation of wolverine and lynx habitat, which the Travel Plan analysis addressed. In addition, the lynx is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act and effects to the species must be disclosed in a Biological Assessment and consulted upon with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The wolverine is listed as a "sensitive" species by the Intermountain Region of the Forest Service. It also is being considered for listing under the ESA. The sensitive species program is designed to conserve or restore habitat conditions (including corridors) for sensitive species to prevent them from becoming federally listed under ESA (Forest Plan 2003; Appendix E-2). The primary management concern for wolverine is vulnerability during denning. Areas where wolverines live, historically, have not been subject to human activities due to their

remote, steep, and harsh environments. Whether increased human activities in these environments are causing affects to wolverine is not well understood. For that reason, the PNF in partnership with the Rocky Mountain Research Station (RMRS) and other groups have launched a study of the possible effects. Currently, the PNF has a number of areas closed to over-snow motorized use for other reasons. Until we determine if winter recreation may impact wolverines, we believe that the existing closures provide sufficient "quiet" areas until better scientific information can inform future decisions.

Consider effects of motorized and non-motorized winter recreation

63. The Forest Service should consider effects of both snowmobiling and skiing, on wolverine denning refugia and movement.

The Forest Service should consider closing areas to protect wolverine and lynx equally to snowmobiles, snow cats, skiers, and ski resorts, since they probably have the same effects on wildlife.

The Forest Service should consider that skiing and snowshoeing are consistently treated in alternatives as impact neutral uses with respect to wildlife, while snowmobile use is condemned for its unquantified and speculative impacts to wildlife.

The Forest Service should consider restricting non-motorized use as well as motorized use in winter wildlife closure areas.

"It appears possible that any oversnow recreation activity could cause a female to move her kits to another den if the activity took place in the immediate area of the den. Therefore, if any winter use is to be prohibited during the natal or maternal denning period, the prohibition should include all winter users, motorized and non-motorized."

The Forest Service should consider the behavioral responses of wildlife to snowmobiles vs. people walking or on skis.

The Forest Service should consider how snow compaction from snowmobiles and from skiers affects wildlife.

The Forest Service should consider that there is no science indicating that snowmobiling or backcountry skiing has any negative impact on wolverine movement between areas of suitable habitat or within the habitat itself.

Agency Response: Human intrusion into wolverine denning habitat during the winter is the primary area of concern when considering possible impacts to wolverine (J. Copeland pers. commun. 2009). Recent technological advances in snowmobile capabilities have raised concerns about intrusion in previously isolated areas where natal dens occur.

(Wisdom et al. 2000) Female wolverines studied in Idaho moved their young to new maternal dens sites following disturbance by researchers. Risk of wolverine litter loss is potentially high if den relocation occurs (Magoun and Copeland 1998).

The analysis considered effects from both motorized and non-motorized human access on winter wolverine denning sites in Chapter 3. The analysis noted that "Backcountry skiers may occasionally enter potential wolverine denning habitat but since these areas tend to be remote, use would likely be minimal and negligible when compared to use associated with motorized over-snow travel." (p. 3-226). Since the analysis was completed, the PNF recognizing that the potential effects of motorized and non-motorized recreation on wolverines is not well understood, has launched a study to investigate effects of a variety of winter recreation activities. Any future decisions to protect wildlife would consider the need for closures to non-motorized, as well as motorized activities.

Compliance with Forest Plan direction for lynx

64. The Forest Service should consider using data from the Seeley Lake lynx study which found no adverse impact to lynx from winter snowmobile use.

Agency Response: The proposed winter Travel Plan followed direction in Forest Plan (Forest Plan 2003: III-265) which incorporated direction from the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy (LCAS) (Ruedigar et. al. 2000) for the conservation of Canada lynx habitat and populations. This direction states that there is a concern that compacted snow routes allow other predators (such as coyotes) access into areas that are normally the exclusive winter range of the lynx. The Seeley Lake lynx study assessed snowmobile use on designated trails only, not dispersed snowmobile use and play areas where greater amounts of lynx habitat could be impacted. Refer to page 3-205 of the FEIS for discussion on the potential effects of snow compaction on lynx.

65. The Forest Service should consider that, although the PNF is not a participating Forest in the "Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction EIS"(March 2007), the PNF should adopt its language and change the "no net increase in groomed trails in winter" from a standard to a guideline, thus relaxing recreation use restrictions in lynx habitat.

Agency Response: Refer to page 3-205 of the FEIS for discussion on the potential effects of snow compaction on lynx. If the "no net increase" was changed from a standard to a guideline, there would still be a requirement to follow this direction. Although direction in a guideline may not be followed with specific rationale, a standard may also not be followed in specific situations with a non-significant Forest Plan amendment. During the winter Travel Plan analysis there was no request for a net increase in groomed trails, so there was no pressing reason to consider changing the direction from a standard to a guideline, or for looking at a non-significant amendment.

66. The Forest Service should consider that the PNF has advanced snowmobile closures for lynx due to a hypothetical threat from snow compaction.

The Forest Service should rely on accurate and up-to-date information to develop management direction for lynx.

Agency Response: Refer to page 3-205 of the FEIS for discussion on the potential effects of snow compaction on lynx. The Forest Plan and consultation with FWS provides current direction for protection of lynx and lynx habitat. Forest Plan direction TEOB28 and TEOB30 state: "During travel planning, identify areas of concentrated snow compaction activities (designated trails, snow play areas) in lynx habitat within LAUs, and minimize snow compaction in those areas to reduce potential conflicts"; and "Manage recreational activities to maintain lynx habitat and connectivity." To comply with the Endangered Species Act, the Forest discussed removing or altering Forest Plan direction for lynx with FWS. Specifically discussed was the standard that states "Allow no net increase in groomed or designated over-the-snow routes or play areas, outside of baseline areas of consistent snow compaction, by LAU or in combination with immediately adjacent LAUs unless the Biological Assessment demonstrates the grooming or designation serves to consolidate use and improve lynx habitat" (Table 2-27, TEST34). These discussions found that the Forest lacks the data to support substantial changes to lynx management direction as contained in the Forest Plan.

Effects to wildlife habitat connectivity

67. The Forest Service should consider that the PNF has a lack of adequate scientific data on whether a decrease in habitat linkages would cause a decline in wolverine populations.
The Forest Service should consider that there is no documentation or data to support closure of any motorized routes in the project area to improve wildlife connectivity.
The Forest Service should consider recommended changes by IDPR that will provide for wildlife connectivity and still provide for recreation use.

Agency Response: The Forest Plan provides direction to conserve wolverine habitat, including protecting travel corridors, by reducing disturbance. Direction also exists to "manage recreational activities to maintain lynx habitat and connectivity" (see FEIS Chapter 2, Table 2-27). For these reasons, and because connectivity was raised as an issue during scoping, the effects of various disturbances to wildlife habitat connectivity are discussed in Chapter 3. Human winter intrusion (i.e., noise, disturbance) into high elevation terrain may affect dispersal corridors. High elevation ridgelines on the PNF may provide a corridor for wolverine or lynx dispersing between northern and southern Idaho and northeastern Oregon. Researchers have suggested that human encroachment into existing refugia may threaten the wolverine's ability to maintain basic life history requirements (Copeland and Hudak 1995) and may cause habitat fragmentation that

could preclude subpopulation interspersion and lead to population isolation (Copland 1996). Since there is little scientific data on the effects of disturbances on wolverine, including potential effects to habitat connectivity, the PNF has chosen to postpone any additional closures until research on those potential effects is completed (see response to comment #62).

68. The Forest Service should consider that wolverine combat the scarcity of food in the winter by increasing their range, and that Alt E leaves critical gaps in the corridors needed to provide connectivity of habitats for wolverine… consider that Alt E would protect only 35% of the identified potential wolverine denning sites – about 2/3rds of the population would be in unprotected areas. Alternative D protects 62% of the identified denning habitat. Alternatives A, B, C, and E fail to protect denning and refugia areas, and the maintenance of reasonable corridors for habitat connectivity is not achieved.

Agency Response: Alternative E does not protect the Bruin Mountain area (MA 6) which has been used by wolverine in the past. Although Alternative E does not close as many areas to over-snow motorized use as Alternative D, it is unknown whether this would result in measurable effects to wolverine on the PNF. Wolverines travel long distances and have large home ranges. Under Alternative E, potential denning habitat is no more than six miles from recent known wolverine locations. By including the closure on Bruin Mountain in Alternative D, potential denning habitat is no more than three miles from each known location (p. 3-230). See response to comment #62 for more information.

69. The Forest Service should consider that the adjacent FCRONR and Selway-Bitterroot Wildernesses provide vast areas with uninterrupted connectivity and denning opportunities for wolverine, so it would be difficult to make any case that winter recreation activities on the balance of the Payette NF would bring about a measurable impact, let alone place the survival of the species at risk.

Agency Response: The wolverine is a wide-ranging carnivore that is suited to extensive, remote, often high-elevation areas. In central Idaho, male wolverine home ranges have been documented as large as 800 square miles. Habitat or landscape connectivity can contribute to long-term species survival (Noss et al. 1996). Connectivity allows for population persistence through maintenance of population size and interchange and repopulation of unoccupied areas. Reduced movement results in empty habitats or habitats with smaller populations than they can actually support. This increases the risk of local extinction and subsequently results in a lower regional population and low long-term population persistence (Forman et al. 2003: 120-133). A summary of general effects on habitat connectivity is located in Chapter 3. Forest Plan direction for the Travel Plan is to "identify and prioritize opportunities for restoration of habitat linkage zones to promote genetic integrity and species distribution" (TEOB14, p.III-9) and "to provide well-distributed habitat and connective corridors important to sustaining wildlife species" (WIGO06, p. III-5).

Wildlife monitoring

70. The Forest Service should consider collecting sufficient data about existing conditions in relation to wildlife, then, if a motorized closure is enacted, the Forest Service should collect data demonstrating effects of the closure, including significant measurable improvements.

The Forest Service should consider forest-wide track monitoring for wolverine, as opposed to the Alternative E proposed monitoring program in mainly non-motorized areas. In Alt E, wolverines have a 35% chance that they will be in the protected sites and a 65% chance that they will not. Alt D protects 62% of identified denning habitat is more likely to minimize the impact to wolverines. Monitoring of an area this size would provide a better estimate of wolverine activity.

Agency Response: The Forest is committed to implementation and effectiveness monitoring for wildlife. Project Design Features in Chapter 2 are designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the route and area designation made with the travel management plan decision. Monitoring and evaluation plans for wildlife are located in Appendix E. In addition, the PNF has instigated a study on winter recreation and potential effects to wolverine. This study is gathering extensive information on winter recreation use areas.
Boundary enforcement

71. The Forest Service should consider using winter wildlife closure areas with clear boundary designations.

The Forest Service should consider its ability to adequately enforce the selected alternative.

Agency Response: Proposed winter closure areas were identified with terrain features in mind such as ridgelines separating watersheds. These features were assessed for ease of recognition to prevent incursions into the closed areas.
Winter wildlife closures by Management Areas
A large number of comments were received that commented on specific proposed closures for wildlife. Since the PNF is not deciding at this time to close any additional areas for wildlife protection, those Management Area comments are not included here, but can be viewed in the project record.

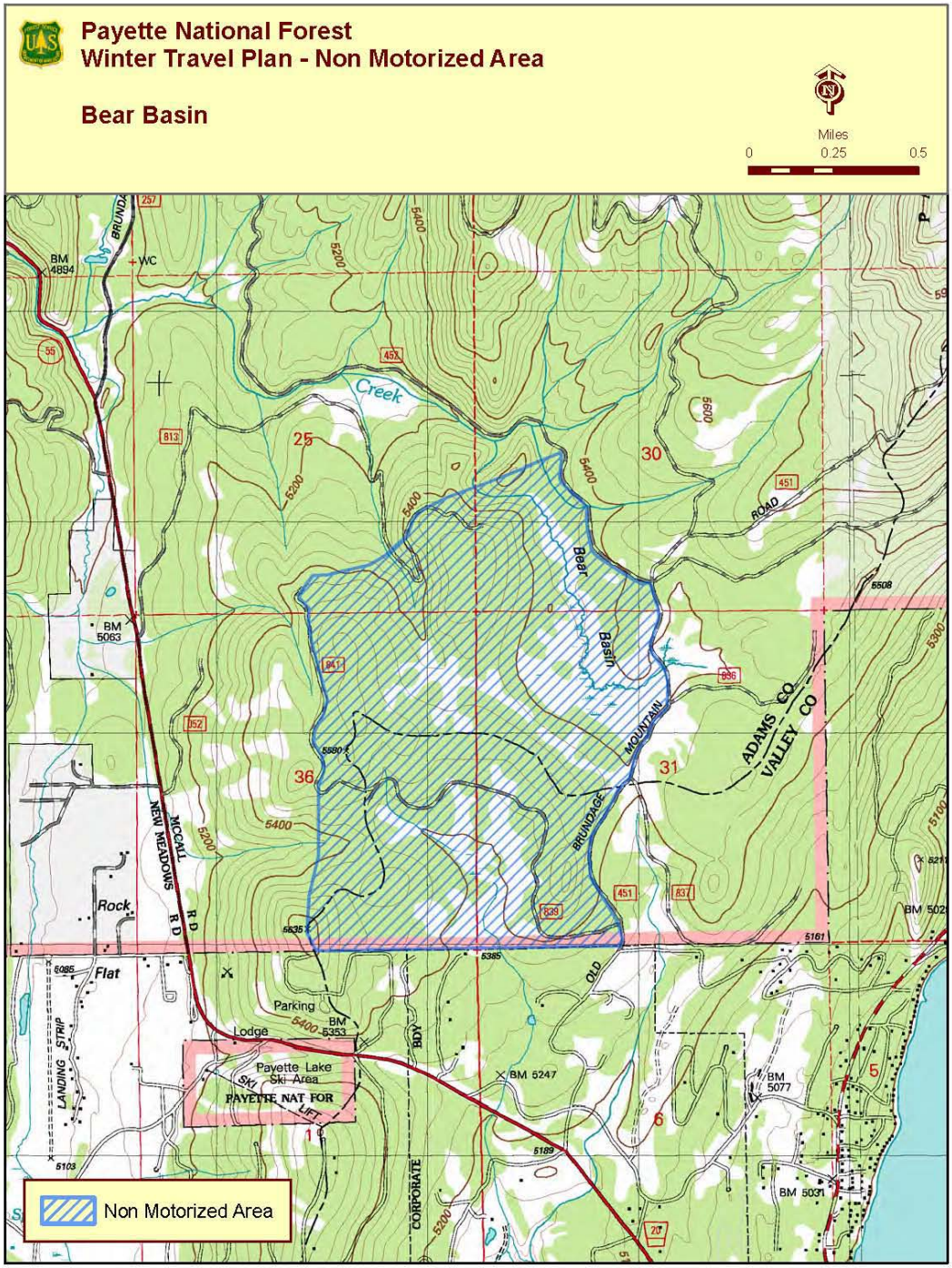
Appendix C – Maps Displaying the Selected Alternative

New Recreation Non-motorized Over-Snow Areas

Map 1 – Bear Basin
Map 2 – Granite Mountain/Slab Butte
Map 3 – Lick Creek
Map 4 – Winter ROS map for Forest-wide Over-snow Vehicle Use

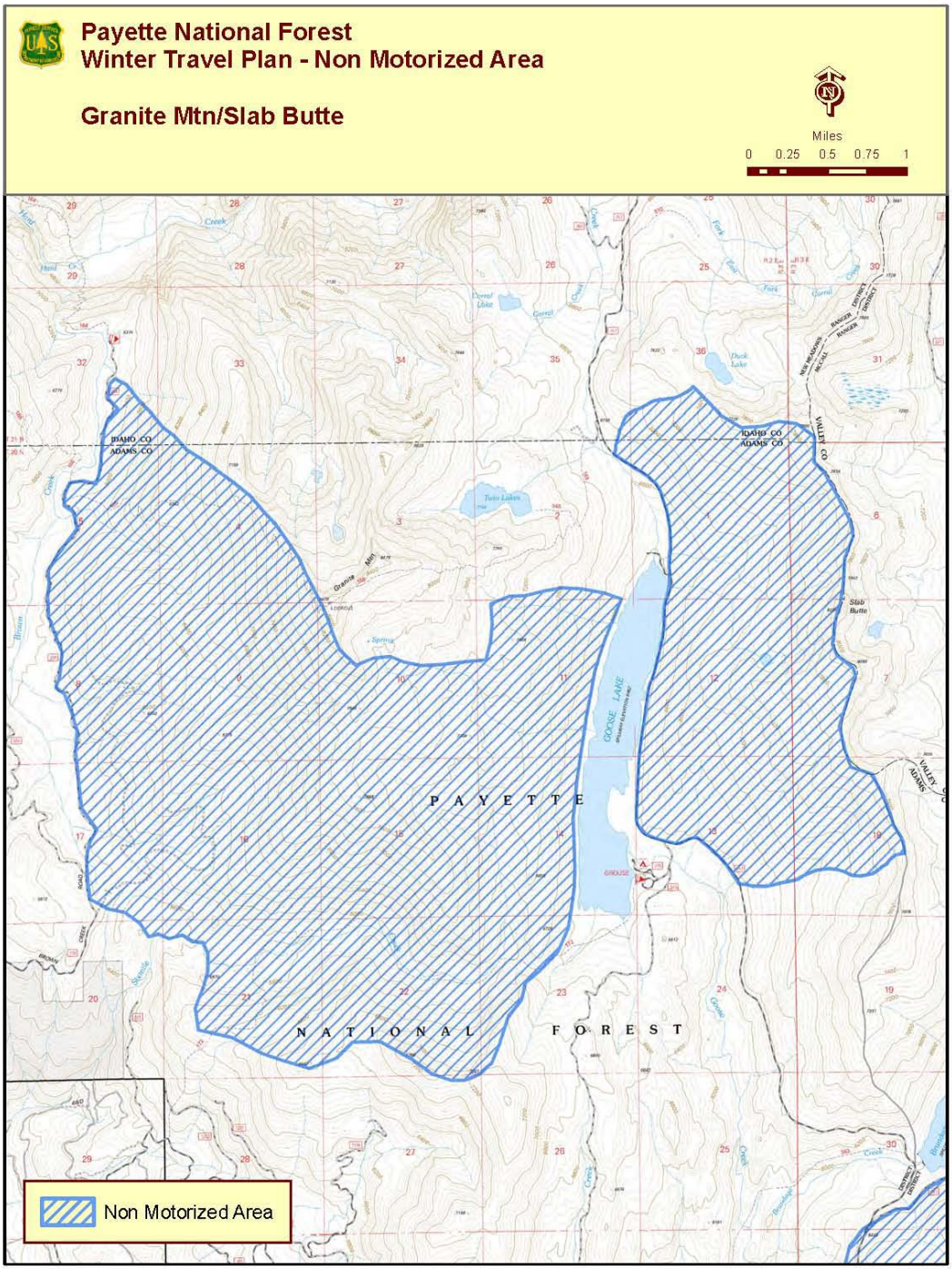
Forest-wide Over-Snow Map for the Selected Alternative

Map 5 (Separate map packet) – Forest-wide Over-Snow Vehicle Use Map

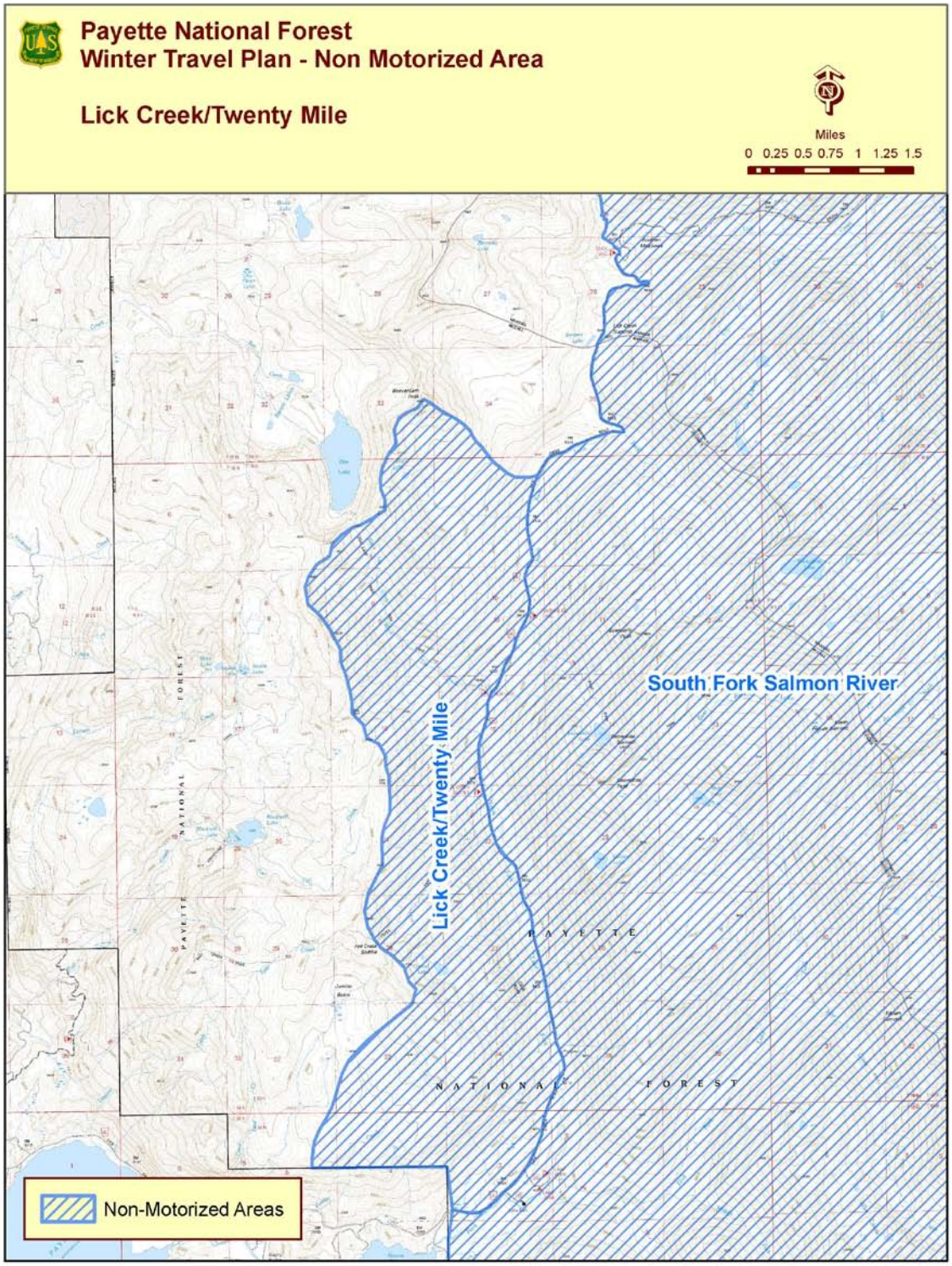


Map 1 – Bear Basin

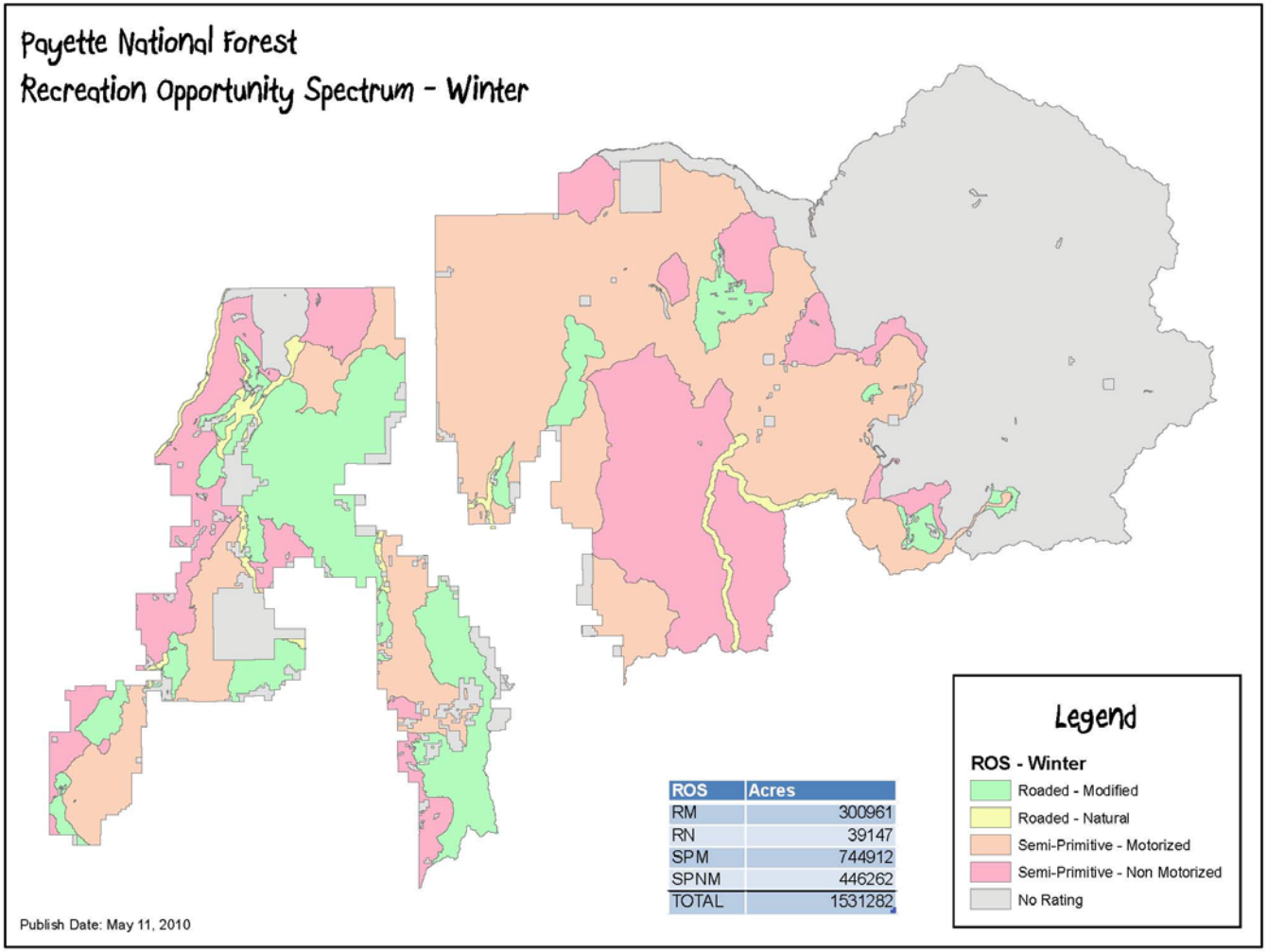
Map 2 – Granite/Slab Butte



Map 3 – Lick Creek



Map 4 – Winter ROS map for Forest-wide Over Snow Travel



ROS	Acres
RM	300961
RN	39147
SPM	744912
SPNM	446262
TOTAL	1531282