



File Code: 1950

Date: March 29, 2012

Dear Planning Partner:

The Beartooth Ranger District, Custer National Forest is seeking public input and comment for the Pryor Mountain Road Access Project. Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), this letter initiates the project scoping period and opportunity for public comment. This is intended to be an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying significant issues related to the proposed action.

Project Location

Pryor Mountain Road heads in a southeasterly direction from Highway 310 about two miles south of Bridger, Montana. It crosses a mosaic of private and BLM lands in Carbon County for about 11 miles before entering the Crow Indian Reservation in Big Horn County. It extends about seven miles through the Reservation before dropping back down into Carbon County and entering National Forest System (NFS) lands near Sage Creek Work Center and Sage Creek Campground. Pryor Mountain Road (Route # 2308) is currently the primary road access into the northern portion of the Pryor Mountains on the Custer National Forest.

Powerline Road (Route #2500) is an alternative access route which generally goes around the southwestern corner of the Reservation. The Powerline Road is accessed via the Pryor Mountain, S Pryor Mountain, and Rail Bed Roads. These roads cross a mosaic of private and BLM lands within Carbon County. The Powerline Road enters NFS lands near Sage Creek Work Center and Sage Creek Campground. See Vicinity Map.

Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The purpose of the project is to provide legal and permanent access to NFS lands within the Pryor Mountains, which can be improved and/or maintained.

Pryor Mountain Road is a maintained, 2 lane gravel road outside the Reservation. Within the Reservation, the road is a two lane native surfaced road that is seldom maintained, highly entrenched in places, prone to erosion and excessive rutting, and is impassible when wet. There are no known recorded easements on most of the road across the Reservation. The road crosses multiple land parcels. Many of the land parcels have multiple owners with undivided interests in the land making right-of-way acquisition extremely difficult. The Forest Service has only obtained easement on 2 short segments of the road since 1988. Without legal jurisdiction the Forest Service is unable to pursue maintenance or improvements along the road.



Powerline Road is essentially a 2-track road which generally parallels a high voltage transmission line on BLM and NFS lands. In addition to providing administrative and public access to BLM and NFS lands, the 2-track road provides access to PaciCorps high voltage OH transmission line. The Forest Service would work with BLM on acquiring an easement across BLM lands.

Proposed Action

The Forest Service proposes to pursue the Powerline Road as the primary legal permanent access into the northern portion of the Pryor Mountains. See Vicinity Map. The Pryor Mountain road would serve as a secondary means of access until improvements could be made to the Powerline Road.

Access to the Powerline Road is provided by the Pryor Mountain, S Pryor Mountain, and Rail Bed Roads. Pryor Mountain Road, S Pryor Mountain Road, and the majority of the Rail Bed Road are currently County Roads. Although Carbon County has performed minimal maintenance on that portion of the Rail Bed Road within Sections 21, 28, 29, and 32, T 7 South, R 25 East for a number of years, the road is not currently on Carbon County's road inventory as a County Road. The Forest Service would work with Carbon County and BLM to verify that the County has jurisdiction of this segment of the Rail Bed Road.

The Forest Service would acquire a 60-foot width easement along the Powerline Road across approximately 1.5 miles of BLM lands. The easement would generally follow the alignment of the existing 2-track road. This alignment would allow continued access to the OH transmission line and range improvements along the road.

The Forest Service would make improvements to the Powerline Road as funding permitted. Road improvements would include the following:

- Reconstructing the existing 2-track road to provide a crowned single-lane road with ditches and intervisible turnouts.
- Realigning segments of the road to improve the horizontal and vertical alignments (see vicinity map). Realigned segments would address continued access to the OH transmission line and range improvements along the corridor. A minimum of 25 foot clearance from edge of road to OH transmission poles is required. A 50 foot plus clearance is desired.
- Furnishing and installing culverts in drainages and for ditch relief.
- Furnishing, hauling, and placing aggregate surfacing. A rock crusher may be used on NFS lands to produce roadway aggregate from previously utilized pits.
- Clearing of roadside vegetation along the roadway. Slash disposal may include piling and burning slash, burying stumps, and decking logs for firewood
- Furnishing and installing new signs
- Replace existing barbed wire gates with cattle guards.
- Reseeding disturbed areas with a native seed mix after the project is completed

Custer National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan

Pryor Mountain Road crosses NFS lands designated as Management Area (MA) B. The goal of MA B is to provide for the continuation of livestock grazing, implementation of intensive range management systems, and the facilitation of minerals and energy development with consideration of other resource needs (Forest Plan, p.45). A management area standard requires that semi-primitive motorized, and roaded natural recreation opportunities will be provided.

Public Involvement Opportunity

The Forest Service is interested in issues or concerns you may have with Pryor Mountain Road Project. In accordance with NEPA, potential environmental impacts will be considered, analyzed, and disclosed before a decision is made regarding project implementation. This request for comment and input is an attempt to collaboratively involve the public and other agencies in identifying concerns and issues associated with proposed activities.

Comments should be within the scope of the proposed action, specific to the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action and include supporting reasons for the Responsible Official to consider. Please list specific treatment types or geographic areas where you have concerns. Issues identified from public comment may be used to modify or add project design features and mitigations. Issues and concerns will also be utilized to determine the appropriate level of environmental analysis and documentation required by NEPA.

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments will be accepted during the scoping comment period, which ends April 30, 2012.

Please contact the Beartooth Ranger District if you would like to continue to receive information about the Pryor Mountain Road Project. Your name will be removed from the mailing list for this project if you do not provide comment or specifically request to remain on the list.

You may submit written, hand-delivered, or oral comments. Office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered or oral comments are 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. For further information, to provide comment, or to remain on the project mailing list, please contact:

District Ranger
Beartooth Ranger District
6811 Hwy 212 South
Red Lodge, MT 59068
Phone (406) 446-2103

In addition you may submit comments via FAX to 406-446-3918. Electronic comments via email must be submitted in one of the following formats: an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to: comments-northern-custer-beartooth@fs.fed.us. Use the name of the project as the subject line of your email (Pryor Mountain Road). Please provide your name, postal address, and telephone number. Comments received in response to this solicitation,

including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection.

Information on the Pryor Mountain Road Project is also available for viewing and downloading on the Custer NF website at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/custer-usda.gov/custer>.

For further information about the Pryor Mountain Road Project, please contact Amy Waring at 406-255-1451.

Sincerely,


for TRAUTE PARRIE
District Ranger

Enclosures

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