

USFS Management Area Descriptions Synopsis

The following is a compilation of Bitterroot and Lolo National Forest Plan evolution and excerpts from current Forest Plans and Management Area descriptions used to develop the Bitterroot Resort SUP submittal:

Bitterroot National Forest:

3a 1. Description: Visually sensitive fore-ground and middle ground viewing areas along U.S. Highway 93...About 68% is suitable for timber management...Most of the area is elk winter range. Parts of 24 range allotments are in this management area. This area provides the road and trail access for most recreation uses on the Forest;

2. Goals: Maintain the partial retention visual quality objective and manage timber. Emphasize roaded dispersed recreation activities, old growth, and big-game cover. 3. Standards; a. Recreation (1) Manage to provide recreation opportunities associated with main access roads... b. (2) The visual quality objective is partial retention...e. (6) Openings created by timber harvest should be designed to blend with natural-sized openings. They will normally be 5 to 15 acres but could be larger to blend with natural landscape patterns and to control insects and disease...j. Corridors (1) ...utilities that meet the visual quality objective will be permitted. [Note: A gondola lift, similar to an electric transmission line, that respected visual quality would appear to be permissible.]

5 1) Description: ...The semi-primitive recreation areas include the inventoried roadless acres plus some adjacent roaded lands... Emphasize motorized and non-motorized semi-primitive recreation activities and elk security. Manage big game winter range to maintain or enhance big game habitat...Partial Retention...Manage for recreation activities...motor-biking and snowmobiling.
[Note: In regards to the un-forested portions of MA 5: Due to the McClain Creek Landslide and resultant elimination of access this once popular winter and summer off-road vehicle area is now unused. This is an area where snowmobiles legally went to the top of Lolo Peak. The potential utilization of the Carlton Basin for ski lifts and skiing appears to be in keeping with the long term mechanized nature of use in the area-one that started with the ore carts used to build the Carlton Lake Reservoirs in 1889, pre-USFS. In the timbered portions of this management area glading and 'pocket clear cuts' per the Carlton-One Horse Logging Sale EA appear to satisfy that objective of reducing the risk of a major wildfire; And at the same time create additional big game habitat in terms of food, near forest cover. Per the logging sale these small clear cuts created a mosaic that satisfied the visual requirement for partial retention, while reducing the heavy fuel loads that required the logging. Due to the unfortunate death of the logger on this contract, resultant time delays, and the landslide failure of McClain Creek Road eliminating the hauling of timber, it appears this logging was never completed. This leaves an

opportunity for the mosaic of logging to be completed, in a way that is compatible with skiing.]

Lolo Forest Plan:

Preliminary Investigation of Lolo Peak Vicinity for Winter Sports, May 18, 1965, Ed Slusher, Chief, Primitive and Natural Environment Recreation Branch:

Part of the reason it is not a developed ski area is the past lack of a road to the elevation where early and dependable snow occurs.

Two of the key factors in planning are the elevations at which Thanksgiving skiing could begin and when the entire slope down... could be skied.

On April 5, Bob Brandenberger and I flew over the area and took photographs from a helicopter which landed... [on Carlton Ridge adjacent to the Wilderness] proposed upper terminal for some of the lifts...

Lolo Peak Recreation Area; Multiple Use Survey Report, by Roger Lund, on reconnaissance completed the week of July 11, 1966 with Jack Fisher.

The skiable terrain lies on the north slopes of Lolo Peak in the drainages of Mormon, Mill and Cedar Creeks...

2., A. Most of the Lolo area falls in Management Unit 3 of the general forest zone of the Ranger District multiple use plan. Management Unit 3 provides that the area be managed primarily for recreation with other uses restricted somewhat so they create the least possible conflict.

3. A. Most of the Lolo Peak area has been placed in Management Unit 3 in anticipation of the development of a recreation area. The area borders on the Bitterroot-Selway Wilderness to the south of Carlton Ridge.

E. F. Barry, Assistant Regional Forester; Development Report Memo, December 1, 1966; Lolo Peak Winter Sports Area (Proposed):

Roger Lund has made a good analysis and wrap-up of our current information and plans for Lolo Peak. Here are our comments on the multiple use survey report:

Under the section dealing with coordination of the ski area and timber management, it should be made very plain that the importance of the use of the land for skiing is of such predominance that timber will be managed primarily for the benefit of skiing. For example, a clear-cut block with a system of jammer roads would almost preclude skiing use. All access roads should be located so that they do not cross ski trails or terrain. This is a major restriction on the timber harvest.

Under “Grazing” we would question the value of roads for the dispersion of cattle. This implies that there might be a network of roads on the mountain. It is my thought that the work roads should be minimal in the first place...

Lolo Ranger Donald G. Stevenson, Lolo Peak Winter Sports Site Memo, February 1971
“Lolo peak definitely is a unique area that has a value for recreational public use that overshadows all other uses.

Other land uses such as timber cutting...etc., will be deferred until the area is developed for recreational use. This decision is made in the Missoula District Multiple Use Plan.”

Jack Large, Lolo Forest Supervisor, September 27, 1971

“...recommended designation of winter sports and recreation as the key values in this area

Further, we need to determine the specific area where timber harvest must be deferred to protect recreation values”.

USFS Policy Statement to Resolve Recreation Issue No. 4, September 25, 1979

The Forest’s role in meeting demands for developed recreation ...Potential also exists for the construction of a new major ski area on the north slopes of Carlton Ridge and Lolo Peak. The Northern Region Ski Area inventory conducted in 1965 recognized this area as one of the best remaining ski development opportunities.

February 1986 LNF Plan-

Lolo National Forest management under this Forest plan does not create abrupt changes or sudden shifts from current direction. People can expect similar levels of goods and services from the Forest, and minimal change in land use patterns....The rich variant of recreation experiences available on the Forest will continue.

B. Objectives; 1. Resources/Activity Summaries; II-1

Except for Congressionally established or special administrative boundaries, the management area boundaries are not firm lines and do not always follow easily found topographic features, such as major ridges. The boundaries represent a transition from one set of opportunities and constraints to another with management direction established for each. The boundaries are flexible to assure that the values identified are protected and to incorporate additional information gained from further on-the-ground reconnaissance and project level planning.

III. Management Area Direction; III-1

Management Area (MA) Descriptions-

- 1) Scattered parcels of non-Forest or noncommercial forest land maintained in near-natural conditions with roads allowed to cross to provide access to other management areas; classified as unsuitable for timber production.

- 6) * Proposed Research Natural Areas (RNA) and botanical area identified as examples of major Forest ecosystems or unique plant communities in western Montana; managed to maintain their values pending their establishment.
 - The Lolo Peak-Carlton Ridge area has the potential for a ski area of national class. The location appears to contain sufficient room for both opportunities. Researchers have indicated that the area for research need not be in one solid block.
 - The Management Area is classified as unsuitable for timber production.
 - Road construction is permitted to meet area objectives.
 - Improvements such as fences or buildings are generally not permitted except where needed to meet Research Natural Area objectives. The Carlton Ridge RNA proposal should not preclude the development of the potential ski area on the north slopes of Lolo Peak and Carlton Ridge. The establishment report for this RNA must discuss alternatives available for making the RNA compatible with the potential ski area development while ensuring retention of the principal research opportunities (e.g., alpine larch/western larch hybridization studies). Page III-19

 - Roger Lund-Lolo Peak Recreation Area, March 13, 1973
*On March 11 I went to Mormon Saddle...to check on snow conditions...at about 6100 feet elevation, there was three to four feet of snow.
I then went to the inventoried Mormon Creek base area... [this base area is below what is now MA 6 which includes the RNA; The Lolo Peak Recreation Area Plan developed by Mr. Lund has ski lifts & trails in what is now the RNA area]*

- 8) Portions of 3 local ski areas containing ski runs, ski lifts, and lodges under special use permits issued to private operators.
...the Lolo Peak-Carlton Ridge area has the potential to be developed as a national-class ski area.

The exchange of letters between Lolo Forest Supervisor, Orville Daniels, and Missoula County Planner, Pat O’Herren, appears instructive. Orville states, “Management Area 8 discusses National Forest land with potential for ski area development and specifically recognizes Lolo Peak-Carlton Ridge area as having potential to be developed as a national-class ski area”, In a March 1 1988 letter.

In an April 13, 1988 letter to O’Herren, Daniels clarified, “Although the Forest Plan recognized Lolo Peak as having potential for alpine ski development, the area was allocated to other uses... [Particularly MA 11] Since development of a

ski area was speculative, it was not appropriate to allocate lands for this purpose...This plan is dynamic and can be amended to accommodate a specific development proposal”.

- 11) Large, roadless blocks of land distinguished primarily by their natural environmental character managed to provide for a wide variety of dispersed recreation activities in a near-natural setting and old-growth dependent wildlife species; classified as unsuitable for timber production.

C. Standards

2. Developed recreation facilities, like campgrounds or picnic grounds, will not be constructed. [Note: This is consistent with reserving the area for ski area development since according to the Lolo Peak Recreation Area, Multiple Use Survey Report, by Roger Lund, on reconnaissance completed the week of July 11, 1966: *Most of the Lolo Peak area has been placed in Management Unit 3 in anticipation of the development of a recreation area. The area borders on the Bitterroot-Selway Wilderness to the south of Carlton Ridge.*]
4. Tree cutting will be limited to that required to permit trail construction, (and 12.) Roads will not be constructed for surface land management purposes. [Note: This management area is the biggest part of the acreage long reserved for skiing and protected from road building and logging that would be complicate ski trail development. As explained in the E.F. Barry Dec. 1, 1966, Lolo Peak Winter Sports Area memo, *For example, a clear-cut block with a system of jammer roads would almost preclude skiing use. All access roads should be located so that they do not cross ski trails or terrain. This is a major restriction on the timber harvest.*]
8. Management practices will follow guidelines for the Retention visual quality objective. [Note: The USFS discussion on this point has focused around a ski trail layout that utilized the uneven angles and slopes of the mountain rather than a linear alignment that did not blend in to the landscape as outlined below in the October 21, 1988, USFS Lolo Peak Ski Area Preliminary Review of the Project.]

Visuals-

- Ski runs would have great potential to contrast vividly with the dark textural landscape surrounding them. The dissected nature of the terrain will help offset that contrast, because it would be difficult to see all the runs from only one viewpoint.

- The Lolo Forest Plan would allow a ski area to visually dominate the landscape but would require it to borrow from existing form, line color and texture. A ski area designed to meet these requirements would avoid straight linear patterns. Lift towers and related clearing should be located so that clearings are varied or so that trees screen the clearings. Towers and chairs could be painted colors that blend with the surroundings.

- 16) * Lands of varying physical environments which are classified as suitable for timber production; management provides for healthy stands of timber and optimizing growing potential and sustained timber production.
- 24) * Lands with high visual sensitivity, visible from or adjacent to major roads, trails, communities, and other high use areas; classified as suitable for timber production with a visual quality objective of Retention. [Note: See MA 11) 8. above]

Natural Area evaluation initiated 1980, conducted by RNA committee 1980-1983.

Lolo National Forest Plan, Robert O. Brandenberger, April 30, 1980

There is no need to decide on whether or not to develop the Carlton ski potential in the current planning effort, but the option for future development should not be closed either. ...the establishment of the RNA (if needed) should be deferred until the ski area potential is studied in more detail.

Lolo Forest Plan (Lolo-Carlton Ski Area Potential), Wm. A Worf/ROB, May 29, 1981

We agreed that establishment of an RNA, as proposed would preclude future consideration of the RNA for ski area development. At this time we cannot say how much, if any, of the proposed RNA would be needed or desirable for a ski area; but a 11/2/1966 "Lolo Peak Plan" we have on hand shows ski runs and lifts within the proposed RNA. We believe establishment of the RNA should be deferred until the ski area issue is resolved. A viable alternative would be to establish the RNA in similar habitat types in the adjacent wilderness.

Management prescriptions such as, [MA-6, 11, 16, 21, 24, 25], will be interpreted by many as precluding ski area development. The question isn't one of procedure or intent, but rather the public's perception. Management prescriptions for these units should specifically state that development of the ski area potential on Lolo-Carlton will be an alternative if a study determines ski area development is feasible.

The plan should point out that the Lolo-Carlton ski area potential is for a major-national class development...

Lolo-Carlton Ridge Ski Area/Carlton Ridge Coordinating Meeting, H. Bowles, Charles Tribe, Program Officer, Long Range Planning, July 3, 1981:

...meeting was held to discuss the compatibility of managing the Carlton Ridge-Lolo Peak area to provide for both a potential ski area development and a Research Natural Area. The purpose of the meeting was to reach a decision on how each of these proposals should be addressed in the Lolo Forest Plan.

1. The Carlton Ridge-Lolo Peak area is one of the best potential major-national class ski areas within the Northern Region of the National Forest System. Assets include a good balance of slopes (beginner, intermediate and expert), excellent vertical drop, north aspect, and proximity to Missoula and a commercial airport.

3. The two areas are not mutually exclusive. Approximately 900 acres are wanted for research, but not necessarily in one block. Three blocks of 300 acres would be acceptable to researchers.

6. RNA designations are made by the Chief of the FS, not Congress. Boundary adjustments could be made if necessary within Service. In some instances, roads have been constructed through RNA's.

7. RNA's sometimes require up to 10 years for establishment. The ski area would likely be at least 10 years off as well.

Decision: Language should be placed in the Lolo Forest Plan and in the RNA establishment report specifying that neither proposal will exclude the other. Both an RNA and an alpine ski area can be compatible with each other in the Carlton Ridge area. Researchers will work with the ski area planners to work out a location for the RNA units which is mutually acceptable.

Lolo National Forest Plan, National Environmental Policy Act, Beardsley, May 18, 1982
The RNA was presented as being needed to meet a Regional quota for 920 acres of cold, subalpine fir site. There are, however many acres of similar habitat types in the adjacent Selway Bitterroot Wilderness. The principal research values on Carlton Ridge are on alpine larch stand growing on deep, well-developed soils and being the only presently known place where hybridization between alpine larch and western larch is occurring naturally. [There is a question of whether this is true hybridization, or genetic plasticity.]

The RNA was designated in July of 1987, 2 years after the 'Big Landslide' was activated.

Bowles to Stack, 1988: *...any boundary changes would have to be approved by the Chief.*

The average size of 5 other RNA's in LNF is 298 acres, ranging in size from 105-520 acres-1988 National Update

Lolo Peak-Carlton Ridge Ski Area Compatibility with RNA

Here are excerpts from the current Lolo National Forest Plan, effective since 1986, showing the commitment for the opportunity of a ski area of national class and a Research Natural Area to both be established on Carlton Ridge.

A key statement in section MA 6 regarding the creation of a RNA reads,
Management Area 6-Research Natural Areas:

1. *The Lolo Peak-Carlton Ridge area has the potential for a ski area of national class. The location appears to contain sufficient room for both opportunities. Researchers have indicated that the area for research need not be in one solid block. Page III-17*

Furthermore, Section C. Standards, Item 7 on Page III-19 states: *Road construction is permitted as necessary to meet the area objectives.*

And item 10. *The Carlton Ridge RNA proposal should not preclude the development of the potential ski area on the north slopes of Lolo Peak and Carlton Ridge. The establishment report for this RNA must discuss alternatives available for making the RNA compatible with the potential ski area development while ensuring retention of the principal research opportunities (e.g., alpine larch/western larch hybridization studies).* Page III-19

Management Area 8-Ski Areas:

2. A. Description ...*areas on the Forest have some potential for new development. For example, the Lolo Peak-Carlton Ridge area has the potential to be developed as a national-class ski area.* Page III-24
3. B. Goals *Provide opportunities for developed facilities to accommodate downhill skiing.* Page III-24
4. C. Standards Ski Area Practices: 12. *Ski area planners will coordinate with researchers to insure the potential development of a ski area on Lolo Peak-Carlton Ridge is compatible with the principal research opportunities (e.g., alpine larch/western larch hybridization studies) of the proposed Research Natural Area.*