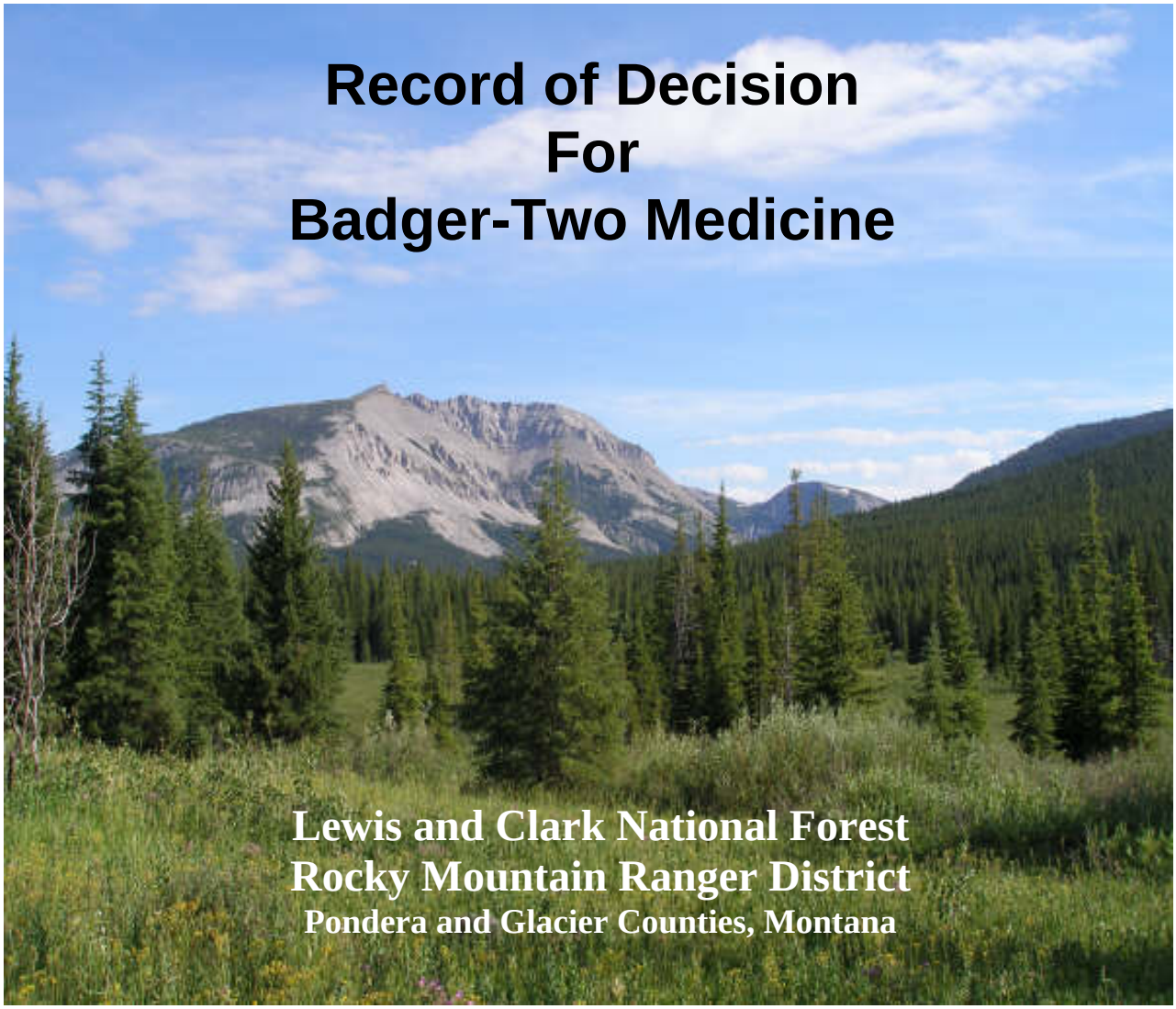
# Rocky Mountain Ranger District
# Travel Management Plan

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# *Badger-Two Medicine -- Travel Management Plan*
## Record of Decision

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# I. INTRODUCTION

Motorized and non-motorized travel on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District has been managed for the past 20 years under regulations described on the 1988 Lewis and Clark Forest Travel Plan map for the Rocky Mountain Division. In 2005, the Lewis and Clark National Forest proposed to revise and update the travel management plan for the Rocky Mountain Ranger District. In doing so, the Lewis and Clark National Forest proposed to designate roads, trails, and airfields that would be managed as system routes and comprise part of the Forest transportation system.

The analysis area encompassed approximately 391,700 acres (the entire non-wilderness portion of the Rocky Mountain Division) of the 777,600 total acres that comprise the Rocky Mountain Ranger District. Approximately 385,900 acres of designated Wilderness in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex (BMWC) were not addressed in an Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) prepared for the project.

Of the 391,700 acres analyzed in the FEIS, about one-third (129,520 acres) are located in the Badger-Two Medicine area, and about two-thirds (262,180 acres) are located south of there in the Birch-Teton-South Fork Sun-Dearborn-Elk Creek area (Birch Creek South Area).

# II. DECISION

This decision covers the northern portion of the Rocky Mountain Ranger District, referred to as the Badger-Two Medicine (BTM) area. It encompasses approximately 130,000 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands that are located north of Birch Creek (that flows into Swift Reservoir). The project area extends from Birch Creek which is situated about 17 miles west of the town of Dupuyer, Montana, north about 20 miles to Glacier National Park near Highway 2 and west to Marias Pass and the Continental Divide.

It is important to note that this decision **does not** include NFS lands commonly referred to as the Birch Creek South area. A separate decision was made in October of 2007 for travel management in the Birch Creek South area.

After careful consideration of the potential impacts of the alternatives analyzed and documented in the Rocky Mountain Ranger District Travel Management Plan FEIS (Travel Plan) issued in October 2007, **I have decided to implement Alternative 5 for the Badger-Two Medicine Area with minor modifications as follows:** Roads 8958 (Pike Creek), 9223 (Ridge Road ), and 8960 (Lubec Lake) will be open to licensed road vehicles when suitable for vehicle travel (generally May-November). Roads 9204 (Mowitch Basin) and 8987 (Whitetail) will be open to licensed road vehicles[1] July 1-November 30 (Refer to attached decision map). I have decided to leave these roads open so the public has access to some trailheads and limited opportunities to gather firewood.

[1] **Road vehicle** – *(or highway vehicle) a self-propelled motor vehicle that meets the requirements of appropriate State law for registration and licensing in order to travel on public highways and Forest*

*development roads. The definition does not include devices moved by animal power or used exclusively upon stationary rails or tracks but may include All-Terrain Vehicles (ATV)- A type of off-highway vehicle that travels on three or more low-pressure tires; has handle-bar steering; is less than or equal to 50 inches in width; and has a seat designed to be straddled by the operator and Motorcycles - A two-wheeled motor vehicle on which the two wheels are not side-by-side but in line.*

These open roads will also provide Blackfeet Tribal Members access to the area to exercise their Treaty Rights and utilize the area for cultural and spiritual pursuits. The entire BTM area will be closed to snowmobiling. Refer to Table 1.

Mitigation measures as described in the FEIS at Appendix D for this project will be implemented to minimize, reduce, rectify, avoid, eliminate, and/or compensate the potential impacts to resources identified in Chapter III (40 CFR 1508.20).

The detail of specific actions related to every segment of roads and trails is captured in an electronic database that corresponds to an electronic GIS map of the selected action. Tabular reports were inserted in appendices to this document or the project file. Most people, including Forest Service employees, will find it time consuming to read these tabular lists and locate all segments of a particular road or trail of interest to them. We published lists of the most commonly asked categories, but we may not have listed everything that is of interest to you. Copies of the datatable and GIS map are in the project files, and electronic copies are available upon request.

**ROD Table 1. Summary of Miles by Route Restriction for the BTM Decision**

| Route Restriction | Miles |
|---|---|
| Open to Licensed Road Vehicles | 6 |
| Open Seasonally to Motorized Use | 2 |
| Open Seasonally to Licensed Road Vehicles | .6 |
| Closed to All Wheeled Motorized use | 182 |

# MANAGEMENT ACTIONS SPECIFIC TO DECISION:

### 1. Designate Routes for Hiking, Stock, and Bicycle[2] Travel Only (non-motorized):

All trails (Map 1), totaling about 182 miles would allow hiking, stock, and bicycle[2] travel yearlong. The use of motorized wheeled vehicles would be restricted yearlong on all of these trails.

[2] **Bicycles**- *A generic term that includes all forms of pedal/gear-driven mechanized transportation powered by human muscles, such as mountain bicycles*.

### 2. Adopt some Previously Undetermined Routes. Designate and Manage them as System Routes.

Prior to the analysis we inventoried as many undetermined (non-system) roads and trails as we could locate on the ground. Our analysis indicated that some undetermined routes were desirable for public use and were feasible to manage as part of the designated

transportation system. Appendix A identifies the routes that will be adopted and managed as part of the official road and trail transportation network and associated mileage. A very limited amount of spur roads would be adopted for passenger road vehicles to access existing dispersed campsites adjacent to the open road system. These few roads will be signed as open on the ground and identified as open on the Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM).

**ROD-Table 2. Routes to be Adopted as System Routes**

| Type of Route to be added to System | Mileages (Approximate) |
|---|---|
| Undetermined Roads to be added to system | **1.5** |
| Undetermined Trails to be added to system | **5.2** |
| **Total Miles** | **6.7** |

**3 Eliminate Unneeded Roads and Trails.**

During the analysis process several roads and trails (both system and undetermined routes) were deemed unnecessary for public use and/or were contributing to undesirable resource degradation. Appendix B to this ROD lists all identified routes including user created routes that would be eliminated (decommissioned) and not managed as part of the transportation system. These routes would be closed to motorized travel yearlong under this decision. They would remain legally open to the public for hiking, stock, bicycle travel, and other non-motorized uses, but the agency would not encourage nor maintain the routes for such use. The simple action of prohibiting motorized traffic yearlong may be sufficient to allow some unneeded routes to naturally fade away. Other routes may take additional action to hasten re-growth of vegetation, stabilize or repair resource degradation. The need for further actions to decommission some routes is expected to be done after additional field review on a site specific basis and addressed in separate analyses as deemed necessary by the Ranger District and resource specialists. Overall, a total of about 1.6 miles of road will be decommissioned and about 5 miles of road would be converted to trails and over 24 miles of trails would be decommissioned (Appendix B).

**ROD Table 3. Roads Decommissioned/Converted to Trails and Trails Decommissioned**

| Type of Route to be converted or decommissioned | Mileages Approximate) |
|---|---|
| Roads to be decommissioned | **1.6** |
| Roads to be converted to Trail | **4.8** |
| Trails to be decommissioned | **24.1** |
| **Total Miles** | **30.5** |

**4. Allow travel off Designated Motorized Routes for parking/passing/turning around.**

Restricting motorized vehicles to designated routes has an inherent problem related to the constructed width of the travelway. Long segments of constructed roads are not wide enough to accommodate two vehicles passing one another, and most routes do not have constructed wide spots for parking or turning around. Some leeway needs to be allowed for two-way traffic to be safely and reasonably accommodated on designated motorized vehicle routes. I have decided that motorized travel off all designated motorized roads would be allowed for parking, passing, or turning around under the following criteria.

**Wheeled vehicle off-road / off-trail travel exceptions** - Motorized wheeled vehicle travel off the traveled way of designated system roads and off the constructed tread of designated system trails for **parking, passing, or turning around is allowed within the length of the vehicle and attached trailer** (unless signed otherwise) as long as:

1) parking/passing/turning around is accomplished within a minimum distance,
   -can be either perpendicular or parallel to the main travel-way
2) parked vehicles and trailers do not impede traffic on the main traveled-way,
   -parked vehicles are off the edge of the road
   -people exiting/entering parked vehicles can safely do so without stepping into traffic
   -animals/OHVs/equipment can be safely unloaded/loaded without obstructing traffic
3) no new permanent routes are created by this activity,
4) existing vegetation is not killed or removed,
5) no damage to soil or water resources occurs,
6) travel off route does not cross streams
7) travel off route does not traverse riparian or wet areas.

**5. Snowmobiling or Winter Area Restrictions within the Badger-Two Medicine Decision area:**

**Yearlong Restriction to Snowmobiling**: All National Forest System lands within the Badger-Two Medicine geographic area closed yearlong to snowmobiling under my decision. No trails or roads will be open to snowmobiling or other motorized over-snow use.

## III. RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

I have determined that my decision to select Alternative 5 with the specific modifications listed in Appendices A, B and ROD Tables 1-3 are consistent with all laws, regulations, and agency policy. I have considered reasonably foreseeable activities and potential cumulative effects. I believe that my decision provides for management activities that respond to the purpose and need and issues. I have attempted to address the competing interests in my decision, such as the interest for unrestricted motorized recreation and wildlife habitat protection and enhancement.

The factors I used to make my decision on this project included:

- Achievement of the project's purpose and need (FEIS, pages 3-5)
- Relationship to environmental and social issues (FEIS, pages 36 - 310)
- Public comments (FEIS, pages 313 - 388)

The analysis and decision processes for this project are based on the consideration of the best available science. The manner in which best available science is addressed can be found throughout the disclosure of rationale found within the ROD, DEIS, FEIS, Response to Comments, Biological Assessments, and the project file.

### A. Meeting the Purpose and Need

The purpose and need for action in regard to travel management on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District – Badger-Two Medicine area are based on Forest Plan goals, objectives, and standards. More specifically, this project addresses the following purpose and needs.

The purpose for this Badger-Two Medicine decision is to:

1. Provide for public access and recreation travel in the Badger-Two Medicine area that considers both the quantity and quality of recreation opportunities the area offers as well as public wants and needs.
2. Bring the area, road, and trail use into compliance with laws, regulations, and other higher level management direction.
3. Provide for public understanding of the types of use and season of use allowed for each road and trail.

A comprehensive evaluation of recreational travel management has not been done since 1988. Due to recent trends in recreation use on the District, and the many resource and environmental protection issues that have emerged in the past decade, it is timely and appropriate to develop an updated travel management plan.

In general, the present road and trail system evolved incrementally over many decades based on site-specific demands for various recreational activities, and capabilities of the land to accommodate those activities. Use of roads and trails has changed substantially since the last Travel Plan was signed in 1988. ATVs, while rare in 1988, have become common on many roads and trails. Use of snowmobiles has grown in popularity, as has the demand for cross-country skiing. Advances in technology now allow motorized vehicles to travel on terrain that they could not traverse in 1988. Demand for access by people with disabilities has increased. The Travel Plan and my decision considers these changes in recreational demand and extent.

The 24 types of travel restrictions shown on the 1988 Travel Plan map for the Rocky Mountain Division are confusing. Many visitors are unable to correctly interpret the map, and the 1988 map has errors. Non-system roads and trails exist on the landscape but are not shown on the map; hence visitors don't know what rules apply to traveling on them. Visitors are also confused when they encounter different travel restrictions as they cross from one National Forest to another. A new Travel Plan is needed that is simpler with fewer categories of restrictions. A new Travel Plan is also needed to comply with National standards for mapping, and to consider consistency with adjoining National Forests.

Conflicts between different uses generally occur on trails and roads that are not designed to accommodate the types of uses allowed, or on trails and roads not designed for the level of use occurring. Also, conflicts can occur when visitors encounter other types of uses that they had not expected. A new Travel Plan is needed on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District so that the road and trail system provides safe travel routes for an appropriate mix of uses.

In 2001, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management issued a joint decision to prohibit motorized cross-country travel on all National Forest System and BLM public lands in a three state area including Montana. This decision did not address winter travel. The decision also directed all National Forests to set up a schedule for completing site-specific planning that would designate appropriate uses on all system and non-system roads and trails. The Lewis and Clark National Forest determined that the Rocky Mountain Ranger District was a high priority for completing a detailed site-specific travel management plan.

Ever since the 1988 Travel Plan was issued there have been questions about its legality. There is a need to complete an analysis of the effects of current travel management to comply with direction issued following appeal of the 1988 Travel Plan.

Since the publication of the Rocky Mountain Ranger District Travel Management Plan DEIS, the Forest Service promulgated new regulations governing OHV use throughout the National Forest System. These 2005 regulations mandate individual National Forests to complete travel plan analysis within 4 years, and designate the roads and trails where motorized vehicle use will be allowed. The Lewis and Clark National Forest expects the results of this travel planning decision to be in full compliance with the new regulations.

### B. Consideration of Public Comments

The Interdisciplinary Team developed a Response to Comments for the project file, and these responses are summarized in the Final EIS. In addition, I have reviewed all the public comments made on the project, and met with many groups and individuals.

One recurring theme of public comment was the value people placed on the wild, remote setting offered by the front country of the Rocky Mountain Ranger District. The Blackfeet Tribal Business Council provided a resolution emphasizing the cultural and spiritual significance of the Badger-Two Medicine area to them and requested the area be non-motorized. Many commentors emphasized the diversity of wildlife species, the presence of the grizzly bear and wolf, and asked that my decision maintain the undeveloped character of the Badger-Two Medicine area. The vast majority of public comments we received favored emphasizing traditional non-motorized modes of travel in the Badger-Two Medicine area. However, I did receive comments from individuals and community members which indicate that this area receives some motorized use in summer and winter. Nearby residents and visitors have come to ride motorcycles, ATV's and snowmobiles while hunting, camping, or sightseeing. This use is important to some who live in communities along the front and to those who occasionally visit the area.

After consultation with the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council, the Blackfeet Badger-Two Medicine Committee, reviewing the information contained in the analysis and reviewing

public comments, my conclusion is that area is very significant culturally and spiritually to the Blackfeet Tribe; it provides high quality and diverse wildlife habitat and provides excellent opportunities for non-motorized types of outdoor recreation. The Badger-Two Medicine area is adjacent to Glacier National Park on the northwest boundary and borders both the Great Bear Wilderness and the Bob Marshall Wilderness on the south. For these reasons, I have decided to emphasize non-motorized uses in the Badger-Two Medicine area. It is a magnificent area to enjoy solitude, wildlife viewing, hiking, hunting, fishing, stock use, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. There will be a very limited number of open road segments to provide access to trailheads, wood cutting and for tribal members to exercise their treaty rights.

Public comment is reflected in the issues identified and addressed in the environmental analysis. Below, I outline how I considered these issues and public comments related to them.

### C. Consideration of the Issues

Significant issues, as defined under 40 CFR 1501.7(a)(2), guided the range of alternatives and development of mitigation measures, and were used to incorporate into the analysis the measured effects of the alternatives. The issues focused the environmental disclosure on site-specific, direct, indirect, and cumulative effects that may occur under the alternatives. Other impacts and concerns were also analyzed and summarized as they related to the proposal as directed under 40 CFR 1501.7(a)(3). Issues identified in public scoping were similar to those identified by the Interdisciplinary Team. Similar issues were combined into one statement where appropriate. The team determined the following issues were significant issues. The following section addresses how my decision responds to these issues.

**AIR QUALITY / WATER QUALITY / SOILS:**

**Effects on air quality due to motorized OHV travel.** There was nothing in the analysis to indicate a significant impact on air quality as a result of the current level and extent of OHV use. The analysis indicated that all of the action alternatives may reduce the potential for effects on air quality, because all of the action alternatives reduce the mileage of roads and trails open to motorized travel. This is based on an assumption that fewer miles of motorized roads and trails equate to lower amounts of dust particles being lifted into the air. My decision reduces the mileage of roads and trails open to motorized travel.

**Effects on water quality from existing road and trail system under current levels of maintenance.** As stated in the analysis, the risks of impacts to water quality are greater at stream crossings and when roads and trails are within 100 feet of perennial streams. Research indicates impacts to water quality are caused by OHVs, livestock, hikers to a limited extent, using trails in riparian areas. Other factors such as inadequate maintenance, poor route location, and high use levels exacerbate (or aggravate) erosion problems and increase sediment delivery to streams from roads and trails. Water quality is important along the Rocky Mountain Front. My decision will change the type and

season of use allowed on many roads and trails, and should allow limited maintenance funds to be prioritized on trails causing impacts to water quality.

**Effects on water quality if human use levels or road/trail mileages increase.** My rationale for selecting a particular travel management action is based on public comments favoring non-motorized modes of transportation, my desire to maintain the undeveloped character of the Badger-Two Medicine area, to recognize the significance of the area to the Blackfeet Tribe and to better protect and enhance wildlife and fish habitats. My decision is expected to significantly decrease the amount of OHV use in the area. If there are livestock or other uses that result in detrimental effects to water quality the District Ranger may take further actions, on a site specific basis, to change route locations, eliminate stream crossings, construct bridges, or increase maintenance levels to protect water quality and aquatic habitats.

**Effects on soil quality due to motorized OHV travel.** There is very little difference between alternatives in regard to the miles of roads and trails on sensitive soil types. Cross-country travel by motorized modes of travel is prohibited under all alternatives, including the no-action alternative. The District Ranger may take actions, on a site specific basis, to change route locations or increase maintenance levels to protect soil quality

## HERITAGE RESOURCES:

**Potential effects on the Blackfeet Traditional Cultural District.** This issue was analyzed in the FEIS. Consultation with the Blackfeet Tribe occurred throughout the process and two additional ethnographic studies have been completed during the environmental analysis process. This area was once part of the Blackfeet Reservation and is very important spiritually and culturally to the tribe. A large portion (93,000 acres) is currently identified as a Traditional Cultural District (TCD) and the two ethnographic studies recently completed recommend the remaining portion of the area be added to the TCD. The information provided in the analysis, the ethnographic studies, and the information provided by the Blackfeet Tribe during consultation is one of the reasons for my decision about travel management for the Badger-Two Medicine area. My decision has no effect to the eligibility for listing on the Register of Historic Places.

**Potential for effects on other identified and unidentified archaeological and historical sites.** As indicated in the FEIS, I have further considered cultural resources through the National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 process in order to avoid, minimize, or mitigate effects to cultural resources. The Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has concurred with our procedures. I have chosen a stepped process. The first step was identification of properties through initial field inventory and documentation in the environmental analysis. This resulted in a finding of "no effect" for two cultural sites. These sites coexist with existing travel routes and are compatible with travel methods allowable under my decision. No mitigation is required, except for periodic monitoring in accordance with the Lewis and Clark Forest Plan. The second

step is completion of the 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act prior to any ground-disturbing activities that may be associated with route decommissioning.

## RECREATION:

**Opportunities for solitude/quiet trails.** The analysis displayed the opportunities for solitude by comparing the acreages within different "Recreation Opportunity Spectrum"(ROS) classifications. ROS is a useful means by which to compare and discuss non-motorized and motorized recreational opportunities. The following tables display acreages by ROS class for my selected action versus all of the alternatives. My decision places about 92% of the Badger-Two Medicine area in a primitive (which is non-motorized) or semi-primitive non-motorized setting, which is a significant increase over the existing condition (Alt. 1 = 51%), and a slight increase over Alternative 4 (70%). During my deliberations, I modified Alt. 5 (see ROD Table 1) by making 8.6 miles of road open either yearlong or seasonally to road vehicles. My primary reason to make these roads motorized was to provide access to trailheads, provide opportunities for cutting firewood, and to provide access by tribal members to exercise their treaty rights. Overall, my decision provides significant opportunities for someone to find solitude on a "quiet" trail, protects wildlife and fish habitat and addresses the significance of the area to the Blackfeet tribe. In addition it adds to the undeveloped character of the Rocky Mountain Front.

The ROS for the decision is very close to the ROS for either Alt 3 or Alt 5. Below is the ROS breakdown from the FEIS (page 114).

**ROD Table 4. Summer ROS Acreage**

| ROS Class | Acres |
|---|---|
| Primitive | 73,300 |
| Roaded Natural | 10,780 |
| Rural | 30 |
| Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized | 45,410 |
| Semi-Primitive Motorized | 90 |

My decision results in about 6.8 miles of "undetermined" routes being adopted as system roads or trails as detailed in Appendix A. Of the total, 5.3 miles of adopted trails would be for non-motorized travel by hikers, stock users, and bicyclists, and 1.5 miles of road would be added to the system. As shown in the analysis, these routes serve a useful purpose in accommodating public travel for recreational purposes, and can be managed by the agency as system routes. Allowing and managing designated access routes to dispersed campsites is an important step in minimizing the proliferation of new routes, and in accommodating public enjoyment of the area. My decision to designate a very limited amount of spur roads to dispersed campsites prohibits indiscriminate motorized travel to create new dispersed campsites, and allows the public ample opportunity to enjoy the dispersed campsites that have been in use for many years. This decision does

not change existing dispersed camping regulations when accessed by non-motorized means.

My decision also results in about 1.6 miles of unneeded roads and 24.1 miles of unneeded trails being closed to use under this decision. There would also be 4.9 miles of road converted to non-motorized trails. Further analysis of these unneeded routes would be accomplished at some future date to determine more specific needs to fully decommission them. My objective is to prevent any further resource degradation on these routes, and begin the process of restoration and re-vegetation to a natural landscape.

Restricting motorized vehicles to designated routes has an inherent problem related to the constructed width of the traveled-way. Long segments of constructed roads and trails are not wide enough to accommodate two vehicles passing one another, and most routes do not have constructed wide spots for parking or turning around. We received comments concerned about the provision in the 3-State OHV Decision to allow motorized travel off road 300 feet to camp. However, public comments did not advocate that vehicles, stock trailers, campers, equipment trailers, etc. only be parked within constructed road turnouts or in designated parking lots. Most people agreed with the concept of being able to choose their own parking spot alongside designated routes, and to choose their own spot to turn around. The issue is defining a "reasonable" distance to allow people to pull their vehicles off a designated travel-way in order to park or turn around. It is illegal under current law for people to park and leave their vehicle or OHV as an obstruction on the traveled-way of a trail or road. We must allow visitors the reasonable opportunity to park their car, 4x4, ATV, or motorcycle a short distance off a designated route so that they are not a hazard to other traffic, and so that they can safely stop and go about enjoying other activities. The 2005 National OHV regulations (36 CFR 212.51(b)) provides leeway to designate limited use of motor vehicles within a specified distance of certain designated routes. Consistent with the National OHV regulations, I have decided that motorized travel off all designated motorized roads and trails would be allowed for parking, passing, or turning around under the criteria specified in my decision. This allows people an opportunity to make reasonable decisions about how to best pull off the travel-way to park in a safe manner. This decision conforms to standard practice that the public has been doing for many years. We do not have any evidence that parking or turning around adjacent to main travel-ways has resulted in undue resource damage in this area. The allowance for motorized off-route travel to park and turn-around assures that visitors have an opportunity to recreate and enjoy their National Forest.

**Opportunities for diverse winter recreation.** For winter recreation, my decision places the entire area in a non-motorized setting. My decision provides 182 miles of non-motorized routes being reasonably available for day-use or extended overnight trips on cross-country skis or snowshoes. This is a substantial increase in the number of opportunities for quiet trips into the backcountry. In particular there is a substantial increase for non-motorized excursions. My decision continues to emphasize the Rocky Mountain Ranger District as the best area on the forest to provide various forms of non-motorized recreation opportunities as documented in the FEIS and the decision for the South Birch Creek Area. As I evaluated the travel management information for the entire forest, I concluded the Little Belts, Castles and Crazy Mountain Ranges provide the best opportunities for motorized recreation. However, we did identify limited motorized

recreation opportunities in the South Birch Creek Record of Decision. You may also refer to the Record of Decision for the Little Belts, Castles and Crazy Mountain Ranges for information on additional motorized recreation opportunities on the Lewis and Clark National Forest.

My decision to restrict snowmobiling is heavily influenced by public comments and consultation with the Blackfeet Tribe and the significance of the area to their culture. This area was once part of the Blackfeet reservation and they retain certain ceded rights. In addition, two recent ethnographic studies indicate the entire Badger-Two Medicine Area may be eligible for expanding the existing Tribal Cultural District. Our analysis and consultation with the Blackfeet Tribe indicate that motorized use is adversely affecting the Blackfeet Tribes traditional use of the area. In reaching my decision to emphasize non-motorized use in the winter in the Badger-Two Medicine Area, I also considered the close proximity for snowmobiling on the Flathead National Forest. There is a snowmobiling access point in the Skyland Area approximately two miles southwest of the trailhead on the Lewis and Clark National Forest at Summit. During consultation with the Blackfeet Tribe, they have offered to help offset the loss of snowmobiling in this area by permitting snowmobiling within the reservation on approximately 30 miles of trail in the Divide Mountain Area. I based my decision on all of these considerations.

**Current and potential use levels by activity.** Projected use levels did not vary by alternative. Use levels are a reflection of national and regional trends and are not likely to change because of a travel management decision.

**Opportunities for disabled access.** As stated in the analysis, about 16% of Montana's population has some type of disability. It is important that outdoor recreation opportunities on public lands be available to them. At present there is only one handicapped accessible trail on the Ranger District located at Wood Lake. My decision on the Birch Creek South area was to proceed with construction of some fully accessible trails (See Birch Creek South Decision). The district ranger may also allow disabled hunter access on some trails during hunting season as outlined in manual direction (FSM 2350, R1 Supplement 2300-2003-2).

**Cumulative effects of past closures on opportunities for motorized recreation.** Prior to the 1950's there was very limited travel by motorized recreational vehicles. As stated in the FEIS, in the early 1960s there were no management restrictions on where motorized vehicles could be driven on the Rocky Mountain Front. But as the population of our country has grown, and as technology has allowed motorized vehicles to travel over more difficult terrain, it has become necessary, because of resource impacts and user conflicts, to manage the use of motorized vehicles on National Forests. The 2001 3 State OHV Decision reduced the opportunities to drive motorized vehicles off roads and trails in the Northern Region of the Forest Service and on BLM lands in those states. The Chief of the Forest Service at the time identified unmanaged recreation as one of the four threats to our National Forests. The 2005 OHV rule directed each National Forest to designate which roads and trails are appropriate for motorized use. In addition, many private land owners and most state agencies prohibit OHV use on their lands. The result has been a reduction in the number of miles of roads and trails open to motorized use on National Forest system lands. Our challenge is to protect forest resources while allowing

motorized uses in appropriate areas. My decision will have a cumulative effect in reducing the total miles of roads and trails available to motorized travel.

## ROADLESS/WILDERNESS:

**Effects on roadless characteristics.** The FEIS displayed the effects on the two inventoried roadless areas (IRAs) on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District. The following table displays miles of roads and trails in the Bear-Marshall-Scapegoat IRA.

For the Bear-Marshall-Scapegoat-Swan IRA, my decision continues to allow motorized travel on approximately 2.5 miles of existing roads within the roadless area. The change in travel management will increase the opportunity for solitude and the opportunity for a primitive recreation experience.

**ROD Table 5. - Miles of Routes in The Bear-Marshall-Scapegoat-Swan Roadless Area**

| Routes | Miles in Roadless* |
|---|---|
| System Road Closed to Motorize Use Yearlong | 0.53 |
| System Road Closed to Motorized Use Seasonally | 1.98 |
| Road miles to be decommissioned | 0.26 |
| Road miles to be converted to non-motorized system trails | 3.74 |
| Trail Miles to be Decommissioned | 3.59 |
| System Non-Motorized Trails | 123.99 |

*Please note: mileages and acreages are ArcGIS approximations; GIS edits to the alignments on roads and trails in the BTM between the FEIS and ROD could account for slight discrepancies in route mileages.

During the winter recreation season, my decision for the Bear-Marshall-Scapegoat-Swan IRA does not allow motorized over-snow travel in the area. This is a significant reduction from the current situation that allows motorized over-snow travel in the IRA.

**Consistency with adjacent National Forest management.** The Badger Two-Medicine area adjoins the Flathead National Forest. Consistent with this decision, no summer motorized wheeled vehicle travel is authorized on routes or areas on the Flathead Forest in areas adjoining the Lewis and Clark Forest. The Flathead Forest manages a small portion of the adjoining area for snowmobile use in the winter. The area around Badger Pass (near the head of Pool Creek) is open seasonally to snowmobiles up to the Continental Divide on the Flathead Forest, as is an area near Elk Calf Mountain. The Lewis and Clark National Forest side of the Continental Divide would be managed for non-motorized use yearlong; no snowmobile use is authorized. Compliance will be achieved through better maps and visitor contact in conjunction with law enforcement.

**Effects on Recommended Wilderness Areas.** There are no areas within the Badger-Two Medicine Area currently considered for Congressional wilderness designation. No

areas for inclusion in the wilderness preservation system have been recommended in the Forest Plan and there are currently no wilderness study areas in the BTM.

## SOCIAL-ECONOMICS

**Effect on the "western heritage" social value of the Rocky Mountain Division.** As stated in the Final EIS, all of the action alternatives maintain the features that are most valued in this premier landscape. My decision enhances these features by emphasizing the Rocky Mountain Ranger District, and the Badger-Two Medicine area in particular, as a primary place to enjoy hiking, horseback riding, pack trips, hunting, fishing, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and wildlife viewing. The trail system will provide non-motorized access to the Wilderness via existing access points. Likewise, my decision provides about 182 miles of non-motorized trails in the Badger-Two Medicine to enjoy hiking, stock use, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, bicycling and other forms of non-motorized use. That is an increase of over 165 miles from the existing condition.

**Social conflict between motorized and non-motorized activities.** The vast majority of commentors discussed the need for quiet trails to reduce the conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users. Many favored Alternative 3 and felt motorized use should be reduced or eliminated on the RMF. Motorized users and non-motorized users have opposing view points on whether or not quality experiences are possible while sharing the same trail at the same time. Each person's perspective determines if they enjoy their particular activity while sharing trails with others. My decision emphasizes non-motorized travel in the Badger Two Medicine Area.

To reduce conflicts, it is important to direct visitors to the type of experience they are seeking, and to forewarn visitors as to other types of people they may encounter along the trail. Most of the conflict between motorized and non-motorized recreation could be eliminated by informing people at the trailhead what they may encounter on the trail. Information goes a long way in meeting people's expectations, and preventing surprises. Potential conflicts could be reduced by applying mitigation measures listed in the FEIS, including: (1) trailhead signing about types of uses that one may encounter on multiple-use trails, and (2) recreational maps and information emphasizing areas for non-motorized activities, and motorized activities.

Many commentors favored Alternative 3 (non-motorized Alternative), and some may be unhappy if any trails remain open to motorized travel. The Blackfeet Tribe favored Alternative 5 with some minor modifications. My decision responds to the interests expressed by many in having a predominately non-motorized area with access to 182 miles of trail to hike, ride horseback, or pedal a bicycle. Should safety conflicts arise on trails open to both bicycles and other uses, the District Ranger may determine an appropriate action to address the situation. There will be 182 miles of trail that are open only to hikers, stock travel and bicycles.

**Effects on grazing and Special Use permits.** Grazing permittees, outfitters, and other special use permit holders in the area would be granted access to the Badger-Two Medicine area under the terms of their permits. Access to private-land would be granted based on existing laws.

**Benefits to the local and State economy.** The analysis in the Final EIS indicated that none of the action alternatives would affect the local or State economy to any noticeable extent. My decision to emphasize non-motorized modes of travel and restrict motorized travel is expected to have very little influence on the local economy. It is unlikely that there will be a noticeable change in visitor use levels as a result of this decision for the Badger-Two Medicine area. There will be some displacement of snowmobile users as they will need to access the Flathead snowmobile trail system two miles to the west of the trailhead located on the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Snowmobile users may also have access to the Divide Mountain area on the Blackfeet Reservation. Motorcycle or ATV users will need to utilize other areas on the forest, such as, open trails designated in the South Birch Creek ROD or in the Little Belts. Visitors who come to hunt, fish, hike, pack or ride stock, bicycle, snowshoe, or cross-country ski will have more opportunities for non-motorized recreation but their use levels are not expected to dramatically increase

## TRANSPORTATION:

**Effect on management of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail(CDNST).** As disclosed in the FEIS, a total of 41 miles of the CDNST were analyzed. 34 miles of the CDNST are located within the Badger–Two Medicine area. My decision places a yearlong restriction on motorized travel for all miles of the CDNST in the BTM area. This decision is consistent with the Birch Creek South ROD, in full compliance with the 1985 Comprehensive Plan for the CDNST, and complies with a policy memo dated July 3, 1997, from the Deputy Chief of the Forest Service emphasizing non-motorized recreation.

## VEGETATION:

**Potential for spread of noxious weeds.** The analysis showed no correlation between the mode of recreational travel and the spread of noxious weeds. From the analysis, horse and foot traffic are just as likely to spread weeds as motorized OHVs. It appears that the potential for spread of noxious weeds is closely connected to the amount of infestation at the trailhead and the amount of use on the trails leading from the trailhead. If there is a large infestation of weeds at the trailhead, and there are a lot of people using the trails from the trailhead, then there is a higher potential for weeds to be spread along the trail. Management of the type of travel allowed on the trail has no relationship to the extent of weed spread. Use levels, not type of use, has the greatest potential impact on the spread of weeds. Because of this finding the potential for the spread of noxious weeds was not an influence in my decision about modes of travel allowed on roads and trails.

**Effects on sensitive plant species.** The analysis shows that none of the alternatives would affect sensitive plant species because this decision only applies to management of road and trail surfaces, an area where sensitive plant species typically do not grow. Off-road and off-trail travel is restricted by this decision, thereby eliminating the potential for motorized vehicles to affect sensitive plant populations. A separate analysis would be made before any ground disturbing activity (such as blocking, ripping, seeding, drainage control, etc.) took place to decommission and stabilize a road or trail. Mitigation measures described in the FEIS would be incorporated.

## WILDLIFE / FISH:

**Effects on Seasonally Important Habitats for Wildlife / Potential for Disturbance and Displacement – Wheeled Travel.** My decision will reduce the miles of open motorized routes within important seasonal habitats, will increase the acreage of spring habitats that are potentially secure from disturbance by motorized travel, and will increase the overall acreage of wildlife summer and fall habitat potentially secure from motorized travel in the Badger-Two Medicine area (see tables below). My decision will retain motorized travel in a few specific areas leaving some large areas free from motorized travel, unlike in the existing situation. This change in pattern is likely to benefit wildlife.

**ROD Table 6. Miles of Open Motorized Routes Within Seasonal Habitats on NFS Lands for Badger-Two Medicine Area**

| Seasonal Habitat | DECISION | Alt. 1 | Alt. 2 | Alt. 3 | Alt. 4 | Alt. 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Grizzly Bear Spring** | 5 | 44 | 21 | 5 | 9 | 1 |
| **Grizzly Bear Denning** | 0 | 5 | 7 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| **Elk Calving** | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Elk Winter** | 1 | 24 | 23 | 1 | 4 | <1 |
| **Bighorn Sheep Lambing** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Bighorn Sheep Winter** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Mountain Goat Kidding** | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Mountain Goat Yearlong** | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | <1 | 0 |

**ROD Table 7. Total Acreage and % Beyond 500m of Open Motorized Routes in key Spring Wildlife Habitats on NFS Land within Badger-Two Medicine Area**

| Spring Wildlife Habitat | DECISION | Alt. 1 | Alt. 2 | Alt. 3 | Alt. 4 | Alt. 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Grizzly Bear Spring** | 44,320 (95%) | 36,730 (79%) | 40,490 (87%) | 44,320 (95%) | 43,330 (93%) | 45,290 (97%) |
| **Elk Calving** | 9,580 (100%) | 8,660 (90%) | 9,540 (>99%) | 9,580 (100%) | 9,540 (>99%) | 9,580 (100%) |
| **Bighorn Sheep Lambing** | na | na** | na | na | na | na |
| **Mountain Goat Kidding** | 23,560 (100%) | 23,560 (100%) | 23,560 (100%) | 23,560 (100%) | 23,560 (100%) | 23,560 (100%) |

* Figures are rounded to the nearest 10 acres

** Percents are the portion of seasonal habitat within the NF boundary in the BTM area that is outside a 500m buffer.

**ROD Table 8. Percent of NF Portion of Bear Management Unit (BMU) Subunits Outside 500m Buffer in Summer and Fall – Simple Buffer Method; Badger-Two Medicine Area (Table III-90 in FEIS)**

| BMU Subunit | DECISION | Alt. 1 | Alt. 2 | Alt. 3 | Alt. 4 | | Alt. 5 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | Fall only | Summer only | Fall only | Summer only |
| Badger | 99% | 58% | 63% | 100% | 92% | 92% | 99% | 99% |
| Heart Butte | 95% | 84% | 93% | 100% | 95% | 95% | 100% | 100% |
| Two Medicine | 96% | 42% | 54% | 96% | 66% | 66% | 98% | 98% |

The table above, although displaying results in terms of Bear Management Unit Subunits, serves as a means to estimate in general the amount of summer/fall wildlife habitat that would potentially be secure from impacts of motorized recreation.

Whether the reduction in potential disturbance from motorized travel displayed in these analyses would result in any measurable impacts to wildlife populations in terms of survival or reproduction is impossible to determine. It is important to understand that non-motorized travel may also cause disturbance and/or displacement of wildlife. The potential impacts of non-motorized travel on wildlife have not been analyzed for this Decision, and are assumed to be similar across all alternatives.

**Effects on Wildlife Habitat Connectivity.** Habitat connectivity, the term used to describe the maintenance of connections between seasonal habitats (east-west connectivity on the RMRD) and between larger areas with potentially distinct wildlife populations (north-south connectivity on the RMRD), was analyzed for Alternatives 1-5 in the FEIS. The analysis looked at the number and size of habitat 'patches', or areas >10 acres in size that were >500 meters from an open motorized trail or road open during the summer season (the season during which the most roads and trails would be open to motors). In general, fewer, larger patches maintain connectivity more effectively than more, smaller patches.

My decision was not numerically analyzed, but visual inspection shows that for the BTM area it will strongly resemble Alternative 3 in the size, location, and number of patches. Alternative 3 (as displayed in Table III-97 and Map 8 in the FEIS) would reduce the proportion of small patches and increase the proportion of large patches as compared to the existing situation.

My decision will provide large areas in which no motorized trails will potentially impact east-west or north-south movements of wildlife

**Effects to Threatened and Endangered Species.** Effects of Alternatives 1-5 on Canada lynx and grizzly bear were analyzed in the FEIS and in a Biological Assessment (BA) submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Impacts to grizzly bear that were analyzed in the FEIS are reviewed above in the sections on disturbance and displacement from seasonal habitats. Additional analysis carried out for the BA is

summarized below. The FEIS analysis for lynx parallels the analysis in the BA, and is summarized below. Impacts to gray wolf were not specifically analyzed in the FEIS. The analysis done for the BA is summarized below.

Consultation.

Effects of my decision on the three federally listed species occurring on the RMRD were analyzed in a BA that was sent to the FWS for informal consultation on November 10, 2008. On December 15, 2008 the FWS concurred with the determinations in the BA and Supplement that the Decision "May Affect, But is Not Likely to Adversely Affect" the Threatened Canada Lynx, and Grizzly Bear and the Endangered Gray Wolf[3]. The FWS based its concurrence on the findings of the analysis in the BA as summarized below for each species.

[3] *Currently proposed for delisting by the FWS under ESA*

Gray Wolf

The pack nearest to the BTM area is the Marias pack of about 6 animals (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service et al. 2008), established on the BIR to the northeast of the BTM area. Occasional track and visual observations of wolves in the northern half of the BTM are likely to be from this pack (D. Carney, Blackfeet Tribal Fish and Wildlife, pers. commun.). The Great Bear pack, of about 4 animals to the south and west on the FNF (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service et al. 2008) may also occasionally use the BTM. Other known packs in the larger area are the Livermore pack (about 10 animals, over 10 miles to the northeast), Red Shale pack (about 7 animals, over 20 miles south), and the Bennie Hill pack (possibly 4 animals, over 10 miles to the southeast). The project area does not include any known den or rendezvous sites that will be affected. My decision will not result in any impacts to the wolf prey base, and will not increase mortality risk to wolves. My decision will not affect current livestock management in the area. Because the decision covers a large area and is expected to be in place for a minimum of 10-15 years, however, impacts to individual wolves from encounters with humans could potentially occur during the life of the plan.

Grizzly Bear

*Motorized Access Management*

Potential impacts to grizzly bears were analyzed in the BA by looking at route density and core area as outlined in the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) Taskforce Report on Grizzly Bear/Motorized Access Management and the Interim Motorized Access Management Direction (Interim Guidelines) for the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE), applied using the Flathead National Forest (FNF) Amendment-19 (A-19) protocol. Values from the Interim Guidelines for motorized route densities and for core area, based on percent federal ownership of BMU Subunits, were applied as reference guidelines to the RMRD analysis. All three Subunits in the BTM area have less than 75% of their total area on NFS lands managed by the USDA Forest Service. Under the FNF A-19 protocol, numeric values for motorized access route density would not apply to these Subunits. Instead, objectives would be to maintain or decrease motorized

route density from existing levels. Specific numbers, definitions, and other analysis information can be found in the BA.

My decision will greatly reduce both total and open motorized route densities and increase Core area on National Forest lands in all Subunits. If the Interim Guideline or A-19 numeric values were to be applied, all three subunits would meet the numeric objectives under the Decision. My decision will not affect enforcement of the Food Storage Order or current livestock management. Because hunting and other human activity will continue to occur in the BTM area over the life of the plan, impacts to individual bears resulting from encounters with humans traveling in the area may occur.

Canada Lynx

The Canada lynx is listed as Threatened throughout the contiguous Unites States. Management of lynx on lands managed by the LCNF is directed by the Northern Rockies Lynx Amendment (NRLA; USDA Forest Service 2007b), which adds specific management direction to Forest Plans, including the LCNF Forest, in the form of the Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction (NRLMD). Additional recommendations and guidelines for lynx management can be found in the Lynx Conservation and Assessment Strategy (LCAS; Reudiger et al. 2000).
Objective HU 01 in the NRLMD is to reduce the potential for competition with generalist predators in winter "by discouraging the expansion of snow-compacting activities in lynx habitat" (USDA Forest Service 2007). My decision will remove snowmobiling entirely from lynx habitat in the Badger-Two Medicine area. This will reduce snowmobile trails from approximately 10 miles currently to 0 miles. This decision represents a large decrease in potential impacts to lynx from snowmobile travel. There are no designated snowmobile play areas on the RMRD and none will be created by the decision. The table below shows the snowmobile acres in Lynx Habitat for my decision and for the range of alternatives analyzed in the FEIS.

ROD Table 9. Snowmobile Acres in Lynx Habitat and Percent of Total Lynx Habitat

| Area | Decision | Alt. 1 | Alt. 2 | Alt. 3 | Alt. 4 | Alt. 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Badger-Two Medicine Area** | **0** | **20,704 (55%)** | **13,870 (37%)** | **0** | **13,130 (35%)** | **0** |

A minimal amount of snow compaction from cross-country skiing or snowshoeing may occur, generally at the periphery of the BTM area, during the life of the plan.

**Bald Eagle**

The Bald Eagle has been removed from the Endangered Species list and my decision will have no effect on Bald Eagles or their habitat.

**Effects on Sensitive Species.** Impacts to Sensitive Species are summarized in Table III-84A of the FEIS. Wolverine are the only Sensitive Species that received detailed analysis. The results displayed in the FEIS showed potential impacts of snowmobiles on key wildlife habitats; no snowmobiling is allowed under this decision. Fisher have not been documented on the RMRD, but potential impacts to fisher will be similar to those described above and in the FEIS for grizzly bear, lynx, and elk. My decision will have no

impact on the remaining sensitive species due to the nature of the decision being made, the scale at which their habitat requirements occur, or the location or type of the specific habitats used.

**Potential for sedimentation of fish habitat from existing roads and trails.** Although none of the alternatives will significantly reduce the total miles of roads and trails within 100 feet of streams in the Badger-Two Medicine analysis area, my decision will result in fewer stream crossings after unneeded routes are decommissioned. Additionally, the decrease in motorized travel on some routes is expected to reduce sediment delivery to perennial streams.

**Effects on westslope cutthroat trout.** Many miles of westslope cutthroat trout habitat occurs in the Badger Two Medicine area and will not be affected by my decision. My decision is expected to reduce motorized use and associated effects on westslope cutthroat trout streams.

## IV. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

In 2000, the Lewis and Clark National Forest asked the public about the need to update and revise travel management across the entire Forest. A total of 211 people attended 10 open house meetings, and 90 letters were received from the public. In 2002, a Forest Service Interdisciplinary Team began developing a proposed action for travel management on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District. This proposed action was released to the public for comment beginning August 22, 2002. The 30-day comment period was extended to mid-December 2002. Meetings with the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council in October resulted in additional open house meetings being held in December, and the comment period was extended to late January 2003. Seven open house meetings were attended by 192 people during the scoping period. About 6,300 comments were received from the public as a result of this process.

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement was released for public comment beginning June 16, 2005. Eight open house meetings were attended by 357 people. About 35,500 comments were received as a result of this process. Comments were received from individuals, organizations, A content analysis of public comments is contained in the project file.

## V. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

The Interdisciplinary Team developed five alternatives (including the No Action Alternative) that were studied in detail. The alternatives are site specific to road and trail location and vary primarily in the mode of travel restricted and season of travel restricted.

## *No Action Alternative*

### *ALTERNATIVE 1*

The No Action alternative provides a baseline for estimating the effects of other alternatives and therefore must be considered in detail (FSH 1909.15, part 14.1; 40 CFR

1502.14(d)). In cases such as this, where ongoing programs or management described within an existing plan continue as new plans are being developed, the No Action alternative means no change from current management direction (FSH 1909.15, part 14.1; CEQ's 40 Most Asked Questions, section 65.12, question 3). The 1988 Travel Plan and the 2001 Three-State OHV Decision define travel management that is currently enforced on the ground. This is the existing condition, and it would be carried forward if there were no decision made to change travel management. Therefore it is appropriately considered the No Action alternative. Analysis of current travel management also fulfills a 1989 directive by the Regional Forester to complete additional analysis of the 1988 Travel Plan.

## ***Action Alternatives***

### *ALTERNATIVE 2*

In 2002, an interdisciplinary team (IDT) of resource specialists began developing a proposal for travel management on the RMRD, based on the need for change identified through an early scoping effort conducted in late 2000 and through detailed review of all roads and non-wilderness trails on the RMRD. The IDT considered seven criteria on which to assess the need for change on roads and trails throughout the non-wilderness portion of the RMRD: wildlife and fish habitat protection, conflict between uses, erosion control, safety, facility/resource protection, wilderness protection, and noxious weed spread. The IDT also identified and proposed corrections to travel management restrictions and ownership that were shown erroneously on the existing 1988 Travel Plan Map.

Based on field visits and knowledge of on-site conditions acquired during 2002/2003, the IDT determined that some modifications were needed to correct errors in and improve the Proposed Action. Because the majority of these modifications were minor corrections or changes that did not alter the basic characteristics of the Proposed Action, the decision was made to carry the new, modified alternative forward for detailed analysis in place of the Proposed Action. This modified alternative is now referred to only as Alternative 2, in accordance with my direction as described above. The original "Proposed Action" that was provided to the public for comment is retained in the Alternatives Not Considered in Detail section of the DEIS, along with the rationale for not carrying it forward for detailed analysis.

### *ALTERNATIVE 3*

Alternative 3 is based largely on comments submitted by the public requesting that travel management on the RMRD emphasize traditional foot and horse travel and eliminate motorized travel on trails.

### *ALTERNATIVE 4*

Alternative 4 is based both on comments submitted by the public requesting greater separation of motorized and non-motorized travel, and on efforts by the IDT to identify areas in which to focus motorized loop opportunities and other areas in which to

emphasize enhancement of other resources. In identifying areas in which to restrict motorized travel, the IDT attempted to choose areas in which more than one resource (e.g. wildlife habitat, wilderness/roadless characteristics, traditional travel, etc.) might benefit. In identifying areas in which to focus motorized loop opportunities, the IDT looked for areas in which the existing infrastructure could support a specific type of motorized use, in which loops existed or trail mileages were sufficient to create a reasonable motorized recreational opportunity, and in which other resources could be appropriately protected or impacts of motorized travel mitigated. The IDT also attempted to provide a mix of recreational opportunities throughout various geographic areas of the RMRD.

### *ALTERNATIVE 5*

Alternative 5 was developed by the IDT in response to consultation with the Blackfeet tribal government and to address cultural issues in the Badger-Two Medicine area. The National Forest and the Blackfeet Indian Reservation share a common boundary in this area, and the Blackfeet retain specific reserved rights in the area in accordance with the 1895-96 Agreement with the U.S. Government. Much of the Badger-Two Medicine area has been determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a Traditional Cultural District.

## VI. FINDINGS REQUIRED BY LAWS, REGULATIONS, AND POLICIES

**National Forest Management Act.** The Lewis and Clark National Forest Plan was approved in 1986 and provides integrated guidance for all natural resource management activities as required by the National Forest Management Act of 1976. The Forest Plan established goals and management direction for the entire Forest and identified standards for resource protection. I have determined, through the Interdisciplinary Team process, the project is responsive to applicable current laws and regulations guiding the planning and management of National Forest System lands (FEIS, Chapter I, pages 6-11).

**National Environmental Policy Act.** The NEPA provisions have been followed as required under 40 CFR 1500. The Final EIS and this ROD comply with the intent and requirements of the NEPA. The Final EIS analyzes a reasonable range of alternatives, including the No Action alternative. It also discloses the expected impacts of each alternative, and discusses the identified issues and concerns. This ROD describes the decisions I have made and the rationale for making the decisions.

**Endangered Species Act.** The project area contains 3 threatened or endangered species. A Biological Assessment concludes implementation of this decision "May Affect, But is Not Likely to Adversely Affect" the threatened Canada lynx and Grizzly Bear, and for the endangered Gray Wolf. The US Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with this determination (Appendix D).

**Sensitive Species** – Primary concerns for wolverine, a Forest sensitive species, was snowmobiling impacts to alpine denning areas and overall habitat connectivity. My

decision does not allow snowmobiling in the Badger-Two Medicine area, thereby eliminating that concern. My decision will have no impact to other sensitive species.

**National Historic Preservation Act**. Decommissioning that includes ground-disturbance will require field review as part of the NHPA Section 106 review. The FEIS (Chapter III, page 107) states that two unevaluated prehistoric sites are located within existing "at risk" zones in the Badger-Two Medicine; one of those sites has been mitigated by re-routing the trail. Elimination of motorized use is likely to reduce potential impacts to the other site.

**Additional Laws and Regulations.** My decision is in compliance with other laws and regulations. State water and air quality standards will be met. Floodplains and wetlands within the project area will be protected from adverse impacts.

## VII. ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

Council on Environmental Quality regulations direct the decision-maker to identify the environmentally preferable alternative. The environmentally preferred alternative is not necessarily the alternative that will be implemented and it does not have to meet the underlying need of the project. It does, however, have to cause the least damage to the biological, and physical environment and best protect, preserve, and enhance historical cultural, and natural resources (Section 101 NEPA: 40 CFR 1505.2(b)).

The Forest Service did not identify an environmentally preferred alternative in either the "Draft" or "Final" Environmental Impact Statement. On environmental issues like water quality and air quality the analysis does not indicate great differences between the alternatives. Based on the assumptions used in the analysis Alternative 3 would have slightly less negative impact on water and air quality. The effects on wildlife are similar to those of Alternative 3, which had the least negative effects on wildlife habitat and is the environmentally preferred alternative. Refer to ROD Tables 6,7,8,9. My decision has almost identical impacts to the environmentally preferred alternative.

## VIII. APPEAL PROVISIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. A written appeal must be submitted within 45 days following the publication date of the legal notice of this decision in the *Great Falls Tribune*, the newspaper of record. It is the responsibility of the appellant to ensure their appeal is received in a timely manner. The publication date of the legal notice of the decision in the newspaper of record is the *exclusive* means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Appellants should not rely on date or timeframe information provided by any other source.

**Paper appeals must be submitted to:**

USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
ATTN: Appeal Deciding Officer
P.O. Box 7669
Missoula, MT 59807

Or

USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
ATTN: Appeal Deciding Officer
200 East Broadway
Missoula, MT 59802
Office hours: 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

**Electronic appeals must be submitted to:** appeals-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us

In electronic appeals, the subject line should contain the name of the project being appealed. An automated response will confirm your electronic appeal has been received. Electronic appeals must be submitted in MS Word, Word Perfect, or Rich Text Format (RTF).

It is the appellant's responsibility to provide sufficient project- or activity-specific evidence and rationale, focusing on the decision, to show why my decision should be reversed. The appeal must be filed with the Appeal Deciding Officer in writing. At a minimum, the appeal must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14, and include the following information:

- The appellant's name and address, with a telephone number, if available;
- A signature, or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for electronic mail may be filed with the appeal);
- When multiple names are listed on an appeal, identification of the lead appellant and verification of the identity of the lead appellant upon request;
- The name of the project or activity for which the decision was made, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the date of the decision;
- The regulation under which the appeal is being filed, when there is an option to appeal under either 36 CFR 215 or 36 CFR 251, subpart C;
- Any specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks and rationale for those changes;
- Any portion(s) of the decision with which the appellant disagrees, and explanation for the disagreement;
- Why the appellant believes the Responsible Official's decision failed to consider the substantive comments; and
- How the appellant believes the decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy

The decisions identified in this ROD shall be implemented as soon as allowable following opportunity for review and appeal.

## IX. PLANNING RECORDS/CONTACT PERSON

The planning records contain detailed information and data used in preparation of the Rocky Mountain Ranger District Travel Management Plan EIS and in selecting Alternative 5 with modifications for implementation in the Badger-Two Medicine area.

Documents are available at:

Lewis and Clark National Forest
1101 15th Street North, Box 869
Great Falls, MT 59403
For additional information concerning this decision please contact Robin Strathy, Lewis and Clark National Forest, Great Falls, Montana, (406) 791-7700.

Lesley W. Thompson March 16, 2009

**LESLEY W. THOMPSON** **Date**
**Forest Supervisor**

# Appendices

| | |
|---|---|
| **Appendix A** | Disposition of "Undetermined" Routes |
| **Appendix B** | Decommissioned and Converted Routes |
| **Appendix C** | Biological Assessment (BA) |
| **Appendix D** | US Fish and Wildlife Service- Letter of Concurrence |
| **Appendix E** | Blackfeet Tribal Historic Preservation Office-Letter of Concurrence |
| **MAP 1** | Record Of Decision – 11"x17" |

# Appendix A

## Disposition of "Undetermined" Routes

The following "undetermined" roads including user created routes have been identified as needed for providing a level of access for recreation or administrative use. These routes will be adopted and managed as part of the National Forest Transportation System.

| ROUTE # | GENERAL LOCATION | MILEAGE (approx.) |
|---|---|---|
| 8958001 | Pike Creek Road - spur | 0.05 |
| 8958002 | Pike Creek Road - spur | 0.18 |
| 8958003 | Pike Creek Road - spur | 0.05 |
| 8958004 | Pike Creek Road - spur | 0.05 |
| 8958005 | Pike Creek Road - spur | 0.10 |
| 8958006 | Pike Creek Road - spur | 0.07 |
| 8958008 | Pike Creek Road - spur | 0.36 |
| 8958009 | Pike Creek Road - spur | 0.05 |
| 8958010 | Pike Creek Road - spur | 0.02 |
| 8958011 | Pike Creek Road - spur | 0.08 |
| 8958012 | Pike Creek Road - spur | 0.17 |
| 9218003 | Road to corrals at Palookaville | 0.32 |
| | **TOTAL** | **1.5** |

The following "undetermined" trails including user created routes have been identified as needed for providing a level of access for recreation or administrative use. These trail routes will be adopted and managed as part of the National Forest Trail System.

| ROUTE # | GENERAL LOCATION | MILEAGE (approx.) |
|---|---|---|
| utrl11 | Two Medicine Connector- between Trls 159 & 138 | 0.16 |
| utrl13 | Badger Area | 0.50 |
| utrl2 | Access trail to Buffalo Lakes | 1.4 |
| utrl24 | Connector trail by Palookaville | 0.08 |
| utrl26 | Access trail to Kiyo Crag Lake | 0.32 |
| utrl27 | Trail by Badger Cabin | 0.52 |
| utrl3 | Ridge trail to Buffalo Lakes | 0.54 |
| utrl31 | Mowitch Basin | 0.63 |
| utrl9 | Rising Wolf Access | 0.87 |
| Utrl28 | Badger Cabin - cutacross between Trls144 & 103 | 0.24 |
| | **TOTAL** | **5.2** |

# Appendix B

## DECOMMISSIONED AND CONVERTED ROUTES

### UNNEEDED ROADS AND TRAILS

During the analysis process, some roads and trails were determined to be unnecessary for public use, and provided no benefit for future resource management of the area. As part of the Badger-Two Medicine Decision on the RMRD Travel Management Plan, the following lists of unneeded trails and roads are restricted yearlong to motorized wheeled vehicle travel as the first step in decommissioning them.

At some future date, the Forest Service will strive to re-evaluate each route on the ground to determine what other actions (stabilization measures) may be necessary to reduce any resource degradation and fully decommission them.

| ROUTE # | ROAD NAME-GENERAL LOCATION | MILEAGE (approx.) |
|---|---|---|
| 3329 | Sawmill Creek Spur | 0.12 |
| 8958013 | Pipeline Rd off Pike Creek | 0.19 |
| 8960001 | Spur | 0.12 |
| 8960002 | Spur off Rd 8960 | 0.25 |
| 9204001 | ns (Mowitch area) | 0.14 |
| 9218002 | ns (White Rock area) | 0.63 |
| 9218004 | Spur ( White Rock area) | 0.16 |
| | **TOTAL** | **1.6** |

.

| ROUTE # | TRAIL NAME | MILEAGE (approx.) |
|---|---|---|
| 101 | Two Medicine-Heart Butte | 0.42 |
| 120 | Lower Badger | 0.63 |
| 140 | Woods Creek | 1.75 |
| 172 | Mettler Coulee | 1.39 |
| 172.2 | 172 Alt | 0.18 |
| 183 | Slippery Hoof | 0.66 |
| 120.1 | Woods Connector | 0.41 |
| Utrl1 | BKFT (Buffalo Lake area) | 1.34 |
| Utrl10 | Cow Trail | 0.89 |
| Utrl12 | ns-Badger area | 0.30 |
| Utrl14 | Hall Creek | 2.56 |
| Utrl15 | ns-Badger area | 0.44 |
| Utrl16 | ns-Badger area | 1.28 |
| Utrl17 | ns-Badger area | 0.95 |
| Utrl18 | ns-Badger area | 0.50 |

| ROUTE # | TRAIL NAME | MILEAGE (approx.) |
|---|---|---|
| Utrl19 | ns-Badger area | 0.88 |
| Utrl20 | ns-Badger area | 0.98 |
| Utrl21 | ns- Mettler area (permitee trail) | 1.22 |
| Utrl22 | ns- Mettler area | 0.50 |
| Utrl25 | 120 ns | 0.24 |
| Utrl28 | ns- Badger Cabin | 0.22 |
| Utrl29 | ns- Badger Cabin | 0.50 |
| Utrl3 | Lubec Ridge | 0.35 |
| Utrl31 | ns-Mowitch Basin | 1.04 |
| Utrl4 | ns-Badger area | 0.06 |
| Utrl5 | Pipeline Access | 0.10 |
| Utrl6 | Lubec Spur | 0.01 |
| Utrl63 | Shortcut (Lower Two-Medicine ) | 0.63 |
| Utrl64 | Shortcut (Mettler coulee) | 0.50 |
| Utrl68 | Rising (gated access) | 0.20 |
| Utrl69 | Summit Access | 0.34 |
| Utrl7 | ns-Badger area | 0.33 |
| Utrl8 | ns-Badger area | 2.33 |
| | **TOTAL** | **24.1** |
| | | |

## ROADS CONVERTED TO TRAILS

The analysis process identified several road segments that will be converted to trails and added to the trail system for recreational use by the public.

| ROUTE # | ROUTE NAME-DESCRIPTION | MILEAGE (approx.) |
|---|---|---|
| 3329 | Sawmill Cr.Spur - portion to Trail 183 | 2.39 |
| 8958007 | ns-portion to Trail 134 | 0.32 |
| 8958013 | ns- portion to Trail 133 | 0.27 |
| 9204 | Mowitch Basin-end of Trail 101 | 1.37 |
| 9218001 | Kiyo Lake-user created | 0.53 |
| | **TOTAL** | **4.8** |

# Appendix C

## Biological Assessment

Biological Assessment for Terrestrial Wildlife Species:

# BIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

# FOR

# TERRESTRIAL WILDLIFE SPECIES

## Rocky Mountain Ranger District Travel Management Plan
## Badger-Two Medicine Area

Rocky Mountain Ranger District
Lewis and Clark National Forest

Prepared By: Wendy C Maples, District Biologist, Rocky Mountain RD

/Wendy C Maples
Name

11/6/08
Date

REVIEWED BY: Laura Conway, Forest Biologist, Lewis and Clark NF

Laura Conway
Name

11/10/08
Date

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## SUMMARY

The Lewis and Clark National Forest (LCNF) proposes to revise Travel Management on the non-wilderness portion of the Rocky Mountain Ranger District (RMRD) north of Birch Creek in the area commonly known as the Badger-Two Medicine (BTM) Area. This Biological Assessment analyzes the potential impacts of the Proposed Plan on three species listed under the Endangered Species Act: gray wolf (Endangered), grizzly bear (Threatened), and Canada lynx (Threatened). This assessment also analyzes potential impacts to proposed critical habitat for Canada lynx.

Gray wolves inhabit a portion of the project area, and could potentially inhabit the entire area in the future. There are no known den or rendezvous sites in the BTM area. The Proposed Plan would not affect the wolf prey base, and would not increase mortality risk to wolves. Although the Proposed Plan would eliminate motorized use on all but a very limited mileage of short access roads and eliminate snowmobile use throughout the area, non-motorized use would continue throughout the area. The potential for disturbance, displacement, or mortality caused by humans would continue to exist. Therefore the Proposed Plan *may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect* gray wolves or their habitat.

The Proposed Plan would eliminate motorized travel on all but a few key access roads along the perimeter of the BTM area. Resulting motorized route densities would be well below threshold levels recommended by the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) Interim Access Management Direction for grizzly bears and levels recommended in the Flathead National Forest A-19 Amendment regarding motorized access and grizzly bears. The Proposed Plan would also result in security core areas well above levels recommended in the those guidelines. The LCNF Forest Plan standards would provide additional protection from future increases in motorized access. Non-motorized use would continue throughout the area. The potential for disturbance, displacement, or mortality caused by humans would continue to exist. Therefore the Proposed Plan *may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect* grizzly bears or their habitat.

The Proposed Plan would eliminate snowmobile travel in winter, thus reducing the potential for dispersed snow compaction and for fragmentation of Canada lynx travel and foraging habitat. The proposed removal of wheeled vehicle travel except on a few limited access roads near the area perimeter would further reduce the potential for fragmentation of Canada lynx habitat. Non-motorized over-snow travel such as cross-country skiing would continue, providing some potential for snow compaction in limited areas. The Proposed Plan therefore *may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect* Canada lynx or their habitat. The entire project area is within proposed critical habitat for Canada lynx, but the Proposed Plan would not result in any changes to vegetation or increases in traffic between existing areas of lynx habitat. Therefore, the Proposed Plan *would not result in destruction or adverse modification of proposed critical habitat.*

## DETERMINATION OF EFFECTS

Implementation of the proposed Federal action **MAY AFFECT, BUT IS NOT LIKELY TO ADVERSELY AFFECT** the Endangered gray wolf, the Threatened grizzly bear, and the Threatened Canada lynx. Implementation of the proposed Federal action **WOULD NOT RESULT IN DESTRUCTION OR ADVERSE MODIFICATION OF PROPOSED CRITICAL HABITAT** for Canada lynx.

## ARTICLE I. CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS

In accordance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), its implementation regulations, and FSM 2671.4, the Lewis and Clark National Forest is required to request written concurrence from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) with respect to determinations of potential effects on Endangered gray wolf and Threatened Canada lynx and grizzly bear. The Lewis and Clark National Forest is also required to conference with the FWS with respect to determinations of potential effect to proposed critical habitat for Canada lynx.

## NEED FOR RE-ASSESSMENT BASED ON CHANGED CONDITIONS

The Biological Assessment findings are based on the best current data and scientific information available. A revised Biological Assessment must be prepared if: (1) new information reveals affects, which may impact threatened, endangered, and proposed species or their habitats in a manner or to an extent not considered in this assessment; (2) the Proposed Plan is subsequently modified in a manner that causes an affect, which was not considered in this assessment; or (3) a new species is listed or habitat identified, which may be affected by the action.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Biological Assessment is to review the possible effects of a proposed federal action (revising the travel management plan for the Badger-Two Medicine portion of the Rocky Mountain Ranger District of the Lewis and Clark National Forest on threatened, endangered, and proposed species and their habitats. Threatened, endangered, and proposed species are managed under the authority of the Federal Endangered Species Act (PL 93-205, as amended) and the National Forest Management Act (PL 94-588). Under provisions of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), Federal agencies shall use their authorities to carry out programs for the conservation of listed species, and shall insure any action authorized, funded, or implemented by the agency is not likely to: (1) adversely affect listed species or designated critical habitat; (2) jeopardize the continued existence of proposed species; or (3) adversely modify proposed critical habitat (16 USC 1536).

This Biological Assessment analyzes the potential effects of the proposed federal action on all threatened, endangered, and proposed species and proposed critical habitat known or suspected to occur in the Proposed Plan influence area (Table 1). This species list was confirmed on 22 October 2008 by referencing the FWS website: http://montanafieldoffice.fws.gov/Endangered_Species/Listed_Species/Forests/L&C_sp_list.pdf. The list for the Rocky Mountain Division of the Lewis and Clark National Forest was most recently updated on the website on 17 September 2008. Life history information on these species can be found in the reference document "The Distribution, Life History, and Recovery Objectives For Region One Threatened, Endangered, and Proposed Terrestrial Wildlife Species" (2001) and is incorporated by reference in this Biological Assessment.

**Table 1. Threatened, Endangered And Proposed Species and Habitats Known Or Suspected To Occur Within The Influence Area Of The Proposed Plan**.

| Species/Habitat | Status | Occurrence |
|---|---|---|
| Gray Wolf *(Canis lupus)* | Endangered | Established pack immediately northeast of project area; other known packs 10+ miles south and west of project area; limited documented use of project area |
| Grizzly Bear (*Ursus arctos*) | Threatened | Known to occur throughout Rocky Mountain RD |
| Canada Lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) | Threatened | Known to occur throughout Rocky Mountain RD |
| Canada Lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) Critical Habitat | Proposed | Entire RMRD included in Unit 3 of Proposed critical habitat |

## *Section 1.01 PROPOSED PROJECT*

### Article II. Project Area

The project area is the Badger-Two Medicine (BTM) portion of the Rocky Mountain Ranger District (RMRD) of the Lewis and Clark National Forest (LCNF). This area extends north of the North Fork of Birch Creek (Map 1). It encompasses approximately 133,000 acres, or about 17% of the 777,600 total acres that comprise the RMRD. The vicinity map (Map 2) shows the location of the RMRD in relation to other locations in Montana.

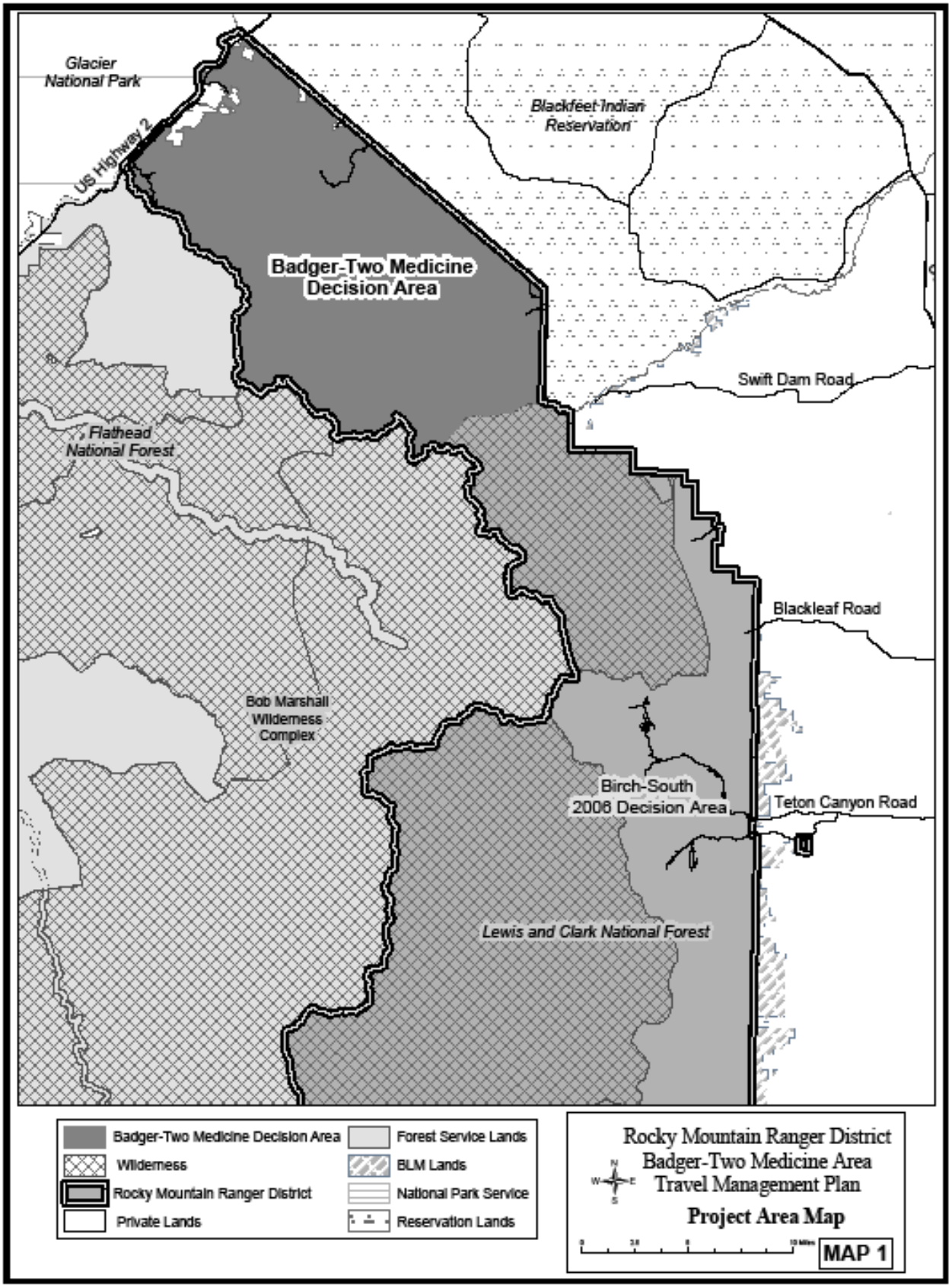
The project area does not include any land within the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex that adjoins the project area to the west and south. Travel management in designated Wilderness will continue to occur in accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964 and Recreation Management Direction for the Bob Marshall Complex (USDA Forest Service 1987). Approximately 102,000 acres of the BTM area, or about 76% of the area that would be affected by the Proposed Plan, is in the Bear-Marshall-Scapegoat-Swan Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA). Regulations regarding management of IRAs is currently under litigation but are likely to either heavily restrict or completely prohibit construction of new roads in IRAs.

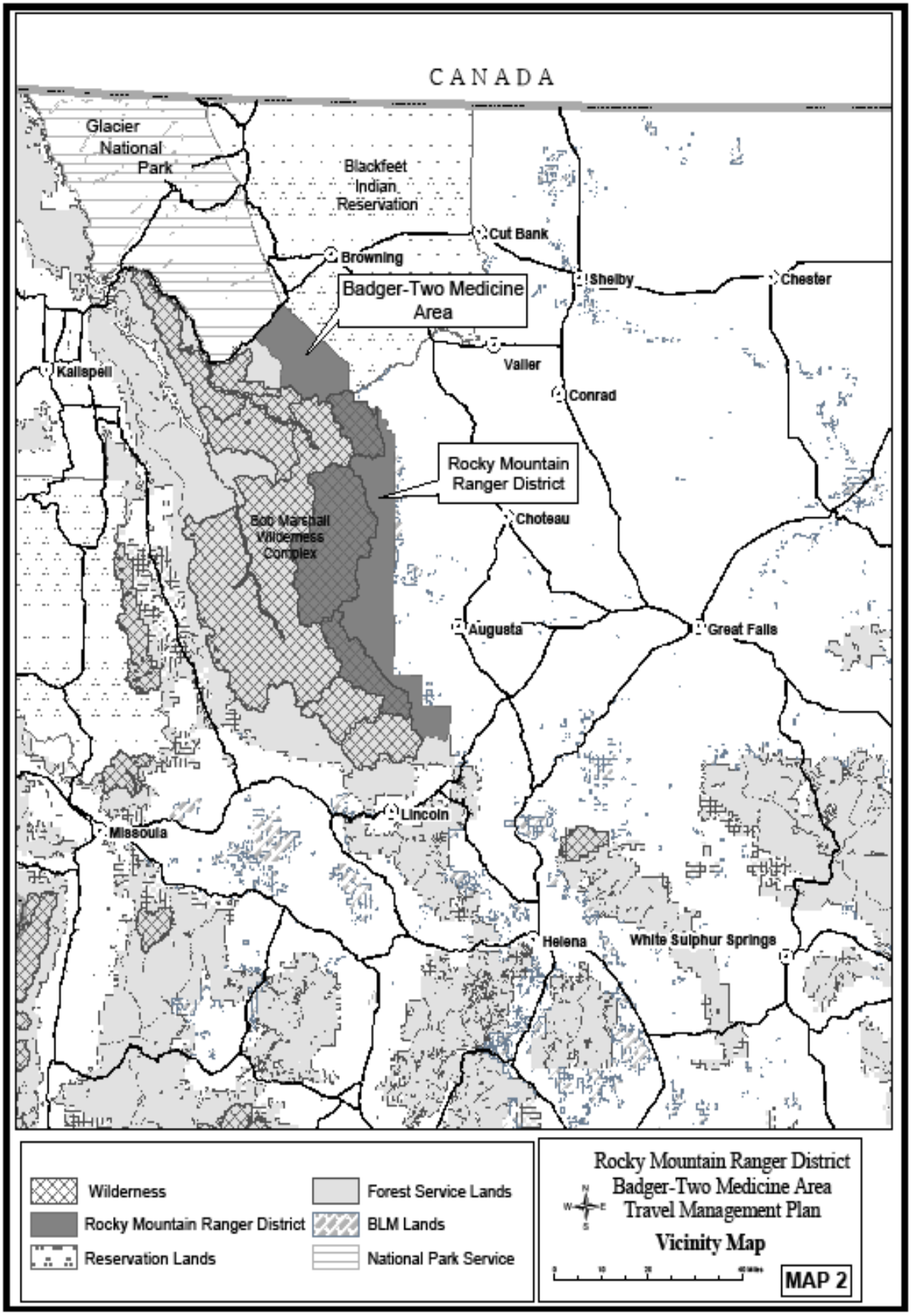
A travel plan (USDA Forest Service 2007a) was released in October 2007 for roughly 264,000 non-wilderness acres in the Birch-South area, or approximately 34% of the total RMRD. That plan is being implemented as of summer 2008.

### Project Purpose and Need

The purpose of travel management is to provide the public with opportunities to use both non-motorized and motorized modes of transportation to access public lands and travel on National Forest System (NFS) lands, roads, and trails. Motorized and non-motorized travel on the RMRD has been managed for the past 20 years under regulations described on the 1988 Lewis and Clark Forest Travel Plan map for the Rocky Mountain Division. In recent years several concerns regarding the Travel Plan have been identified and need resolution. Revision of the current Travel Plan is needed to:

- Simplify the number and type of restrictions and their display on the map, both to reduce confusion by the public and to increase enforceability on the ground
- Improve consistency in travel types and restriction dates with adjoining National Forests and state and BLM managed lands
- Reduce conflicts among different user groups
- Reduce any negative impacts to resources that may be occurring as a result of current travel management
- Evaluate the impacts of recreational ATV use, which was in its infancy in 1988, and decide where and when this type of travel is appropriate
- Evaluate a number of non-system routes and determine whether they should be retained as system routes or decommissioned
- Address the impacts of changes in snowmobile technology and identify appropriate areas and seasons for snowmobile use


Glacier
National Park
US Highway 2
Blackfeet Indian
Reservation
Badger-Two Medicine
Decision Area
Swift Dam Road
Flathead
National Forest
Blackleaf Road
Bob Marshall
Wilderness
Complex
Birch-South
2006 Decision Area
Teton Canyon Road
Lewis and Clark National Forest
Badger-Two Medicine Decision Area
Wilderness
Rocky Mountain Ranger District
Private Lands
Forest Service Lands
BLM Lands
National Park Service
Reservation Lands
Rocky Mountain Ranger District
Badger-Two Medicine Area
Travel Management Plan
Project Area Map
MAP 1


CANADA
Glacier National Park
Blackfeet Indian Reservation
Cut Bank
Browning
Shelby
Chester
Badger-Two Medicine Area
Kalispell
Valier
Conrad
Rocky Mountain Ranger District
Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex
Choteau
Augusta
Great Falls
Lincoln
Missoula
Helena
White Sulphur Springs
Wilderness
Rocky Mountain Ranger District
Reservation Lands
Forest Service Lands
BLM Lands
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Ranger District
Badger-Two Medicine Area
Travel Management Plan
Vicinity Map
MAP 2

- Assess opportunities for disabled access
- Respond to an outstanding appeal to the 1988 Travel Plan that directed the Forest Service to conduct additional analysis on that plan
- Fully implement the provisions of the 2001 three-state OHV decision that was signed by the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Implement Forest Service regulations that were passed in November 2005 regarding management of motorized travel on NFS lands

**Article III.**

**Proposed Action (Proposed Plan)**

The Lewis and Clark National Forest proposes to implement revised travel management on the portion of the RMRD north of the North Fork of Birch Creek in the area commonly known as the Badger-Two Medicine (BTM) Area. Although alternatives were considered and analyzed for the entire District in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) released in June 2005, and in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) released in October 2007, a decision on travel management for the Badger-Two Medicine area was deferred until further analysis and consultation with the Blackfeet Tribe could occur. A decision was signed for the Birch-South portion of the RMRD in October 2007 and implementation of the new plan for that area began in early 2008. This Biological Assessment addresses the Proposed Plan selected for the Badger-Two Medicine (BTM) area (also referred to in this document as the Project area).

The alternative selected as the Proposed Plan is based on comments submitted by the public, analysis carried out by resource specialists, and on extensive consultation and discussion with the Blackfeet Tribe.

The Proposed Plan developed by the IDT consists of a map and accompanying data tables containing information on how each road, trail, and area would be managed for motorized and non-motorized travel, including seasons of allowed use. Maps displaying the Proposed Plan and the Existing Condition (for comparison) are included as attachments (Appendices A and B) to this document, and the information contained in the data tables is summarized below in Table 2.

In summary, the Proposed Plan would restrict wheeled motorized travel to limited miles of existing roads along the periphery of the BTM area. These roads access campgrounds, trailheads, and firewood cutting areas. One road (Whiterock Pass Road) of approximately 3.7 miles near the eastern boundary of the area would be open only for very occasional travel by permittees to access communication sites for maintenance or emergency repairs. This road would not be open at any time to the public or for routine administrative travel. No trails would be open to motorized travel of any kind. Snowmobile travel would not be allowed anywhere in the BTM area.

**Table 2. Miles of Roads and Trails In the Badger-Two Medicine area by Type of Wheeled Vehicle Management**

| *a.* | EXISTING SITUATION | PROPOSED PLAN |
|---|---|---|
| Roads (open yearlong or seasonally to motorized travel) | 17 | 9 |
| Trails (open seasonally to ATV travel) | 96 | 0 |
| Trails (open seasonally to motorcycle travel) | 90 | 0 |
| Subtotal -- **motorized** | **203** | **9** |
| Roads (closed yearlong to motorized travel) | 0 | 7 |
| Trails (closed yearlong to motorized travel) | 17 | 175 |
| Subtotal--**non-motorized** | **17** | **182** |

**NOTE:** The 2 columns above do not add up to the same grand total because of some roads and trails that would be abandoned (decommissioned) under the Proposed Plan.

In addition to the travel management detailed in the map and summarized in the table above, the Proposed Plan would incorporate provisions of the 2001 three-state OHV decision signed by the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. This decision prohibits motorized cross-country travel on all National Forest System and BLM public lands in a three state area, including the entire Lewis and Clark National Forest. Motorized cross-country travel could occur within a limited, designated distance from an open motorized route for the purposes of parking and turning. The 2001 decision did not address winter travel, but winter travel has been thoroughly considered and incorporated in the travel management DEIS, FEIS and the Proposed Plan.

## SPECIES ASSESSMENTS
## *GRAY WOLF (Canis lupus)*

### Legal Status

The BTM area is within the Northwest Montana Recovery Area for the gray wolf (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1987). Wolves within this area are classified as Endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), under the Endangered Species Act. Wolves in the Northwest Montana Recovery area are considered a part of the Northern Rocky Mountains Distinct Population Segment, which includes wolves in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming. Wolves in the Northern Rockies were removed from the Endangered Species list in March 2008, but as of completion of this assessment in October 2008, they have been reinstated.

### Local Population and Habitat Status

According to the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MFWP) wolf information website (http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/population.html), at the end of 2007, in the Northwest Montana Recovery Area there were 36 packs of which 23 met the criteria for breeding

pairs, for an estimated total of 213 wolves (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service et al. 2008). The wolf population in Montana is considered secure (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service et al. 2008).

Gray wolves are resident on the RMRD south of the project area, in Glacier National Park (GNP) to the north, on the Flathead National Forest (FNF) to the west and on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation (BIR) to the northeast. There are no known den or rendezvous sites in the BTM, although it is likely that wolves from one or more packs may use portions of the area. The nearest pack is the Marias pack of about 6 animals (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service et al. 2008), established on the BIR to the northeast of the BTM area. Occasional track and visual observations of wolves in the northern half of the BTM are likely to be from this pack (D. Carney, Blackfeet Tribal Fish and Wildlife, pers. commun.). The Great Bear pack, of about 4 animals to the south and west on the FNF (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service et al. 2008) may also occasionally use the BTM. Other known packs in the larger area are the Livermore pack (about 10 animals, over 10 miles to the northeast), Red Shale pack (about 7 animals, over 20 miles south), and the Bennie Hill pack (possibly 4 animals, over 10 miles to the southeast).

Habitat requirements for the gray wolf are extremely general. Wolves require only 2 key habitat components: 1) an adequate year-round supply of wild ungulate prey, and 2) freedom from excessive persecution by humans (Fritts et al. 1994, Fritts and Carbyn 1995 *in* Claar et al. 1999). Habitat used by wolves in the northern Rocky Mountains has been correlated with ungulate distribution and abundance (Carbyn 1974, Huggard 1993, Weaver 1994, Kunkel 1997, Boyd-Heger 1997 *in* Claar et al. 1999). In Montana, lower-elevation landscapes that tend to contain productive riparian areas and higher year-round concentrations of wild ungulates also frequently contain livestock, recreationists, and human development (Claar et al. 1999).

A significant elk winter and calving range occurs in the northeastern portion of the BTM area, not far from the boundary between NFS lands and BIR and private lands to the east. Additional mapped elk winter range occurs along Badger Creek in the east-central portion of the BTM, and in the vicinity of Mowitch Basin in the southeastern portion of the BTM. Ungulate winter range may have expanded beyond these areas, particularly in the northern half of the BTM, as a result of the 2007 Skyland Fire. Potential winter use of recently burned areas has not yet been documented, however.

**Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects Analysis**

***Direct and Indirect Effects***

Humans are responsible for the majority of mortalities of wolves through shooting and trapping both illegally and for management purposes, through vehicle collisions, and potentially by den abandonment or displacement of packs due to disturbance (Claar et al. 1999). Because wolves are highly intelligent and depend on learning and behavioral plasticity as a survival strategy, they exhibit a wide variety of individual behaviors with respect to humans. Some individuals within a pack may be extremely sensitive to human disturbance, while others may be extremely tolerant (Claar et al. 1999). Humans may also impact wolves by altering distribution or abundance of their prey.

The Proposed Plan would nearly eliminate motorized wheeled travel in the Project area, reducing it to a total of 9 miles of main access roads along the north and east boundaries. Snowmobile travel would be eliminated entirely from the area. Non-motorized recreation would continue to occur throughout the project area. Whether these changes would have any impact on recreation use patterns or levels is unknown.

The impacts of motorized vs. non-motorized travel on wolves likely depends on the type, location, amount, and predictability of each type of travel as well as on characteristics of individual wolves. Claar et al. (1999) noted that all linear travel routes may provide easy travelways for wolves, but that there is a trade-off between easier travel and increased potential for mortality resulting from increased risk of human encounters. Non-motorized travel would continue to occur throughout the BTM area under the Proposed Plan. The possibility would continue that individual wolves could encounter humans traveling by foot or other non-motorized means in the BTM and suffer displacement or illegal mortality.

The proposed removal of motorized travel from the project area is unlikely to have any measurable impact on the known wolf packs or transient individuals that may use the BTM. The Proposed Plan is also unlikely to affect wolf prey abundance or distribution.

Compliance with the LCNF Forest Plan

The LCNF Forest Plan standard states that the gray wolf will be managed "primarily by maintaining a suitable prey base and important habitat components such as rendezvous sites", and that management for wolf prey species will follow recommendations for big game in the Rocky Mountain Front Interagency Wildlife Guidelines (USDI Bureau of Land Management 1987), hereafter referred to as the RMF Guidelines (Forest Plan Standard C-2-9). All wolf sightings, sign, or other activities are to be documented to maintain knowledge of present distribution and population levels (Forest Plan Standard C-2-10).

As noted above, under the Proposed Plan prey would continue to be available to wolves. Wolf sightings continue to be documented and coordination continues with MFWP to maintain knowledge of wolf pack presence, numbers, distribution, etc. General measures for protection of Threatened and Endangered species and their habitats in the Forest Plan are included in the Table 7 below, in the grizzly bear analysis section.

***Cumulative Effects***

A number of factors could potentially result in impacts to wolves cumulative to those of the Proposed Travel Plan. These factors are: prescribed burning/wildfire, timber harvest, wildlife habitat on adjacent lands, and livestock grazing.

One large wildfire burned in the BTM area in 2007. The Skyland Fire burned approximately 46,000 acres on the Flathead National Forest, LCNF, and Blackfeet Indian Reservation, with the majority of acres on the LCNF in the BTM area (roughly 31,000, or about 23% of the total BTM area). This fire burned with mixed severity although about

41% of the fire area in the BTM burned at relatively high intensity, with stand-replacement fire or other similar impacts to vegetation. About one-quarter of the fire area burned at moderate intensity, and one-quarter at low intensity, including areas that did not experience fire at all. The remaining area within the fire perimeter was grassland that burned (Green and Shovic 2007). Any impacts the Skyland Fire may have on ungulate abundance or distribution remains to be seen. It is likely that additional elk winter range has been created while forage production and quality may be enhanced, and that a certain quantity of hiding cover has likely been lost. The general location of elk winter range will likely remain roughly the same, and possibly be expanded. If ungulate winter range is increased or enhanced, wolves could benefit. Any potential impacts to wolves, however, are very difficult to estimate. Additional natural and prescribed fires may occur throughout the RMRD, including the BTM, and adjoining lands in future years. Impacts on habitat will vary depending on the location and severity of the fires and on other factors. Generally, however, fires result in improved forage for ungulates (i.e. wolf prey) within 1-5 years of their occurrence.

Very little timber harvest has occurred on the RMRD since 1988, all of it more than 20 miles south of the BTM area. Some firewood cutting for individual and family use occurs in specific areas near the NF boundary in the BTM area. This activity generally occurs within a very short distance of existing roads, because motor vehicle travel has not been allowed off designated roads and trails since 2001. Personal-use firewood cutting would continue to occur in these areas. Because the areas are limited in number and extent, are associated with existing roads, and occur near the NF boundary, it is unlikely that this activity has had or will have any impact on wolves or their prey.

The area to the south and southwest of the project area includes the Great Bear and Bob Marshall Wildernesses, both part of the larger Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. Wildlife habitats there are subject almost exclusively to natural forces, such as climate and fire, and receive only minimal influence from human activity. About half of the western boundary of the BTM adjoins non-wilderness lands on the Flathead National Forest, where maintenance of wildlife habitat is a required management concern. Across U.S. Highway 2 on the northern boundary is Glacier National Park, where management generally favors wolves and other wildlife habitat. The entire eastern boundary of the BTM area abuts the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, where livestock husbandry is an important activity. Wolf-livestock conflicts have occurred and will continue to occur on the BIR and on private lands encompassed by the BIR, posing an ongoing source of mortality for wolves in the area.

Livestock grazing currently occurs within the project area on three permitted cattle grazing allotments. One additional cattle grazing allotment has been inactive for several years but may be used again in the future. The LCNF Forest Plan states that “the Interagency Wildlife Guidelines [will be used] to avoid or mitigate conflicts between livestock razing [sic] and T&E Species”. The RMF Guidelines do not specifically address wolves, but guidelines for grizzly bear/livestock conflict would likely be used as a basis by which to manage wolf/livestock conflicts. The Guidelines stress that any actions taken as a result of conflict should minimize disturbance to bears, and that in general,

management of multiple-use activities on the RMRD should favor bears. It is likely that this approach would be applied in any instances of conflict with wolves, as well.

**Determination of Effects**

I have determined implementation of the proposed Federal Action MAY AFFECT, but is NOT LIKELY TO ADVERSELY AFFECT the Endangered gray wolf. My determination is based on the following rationale:

1. The project area does not include any known den or rendezvous sites, and the Proposed Plan would not affect den/rendezvous sites of packs in adjoining areas.
2. The Proposed Plan would not affect the wolf prey base, and would not increase mortality risk to wolves.
3. Although livestock grazing occurs within the project area, the Proposed Plan would not result in any changes to existing grazing practices. The LCNF Forest Plan includes measures to protect Threatened and Endangered Species where conflicts with livestock may occur.
4. The Proposed Plan is expected to be in place for a minimum of 10-15 years. The possibility would continue that individual wolves could encounter humans traveling by foot or other non-motorized means in the BTM and suffer displacement or illegal mortality.

**Recommendations For Removing, Avoiding, or Compensating Adverse Effects**

No adverse effects are anticipated.

## ***GRIZZLY BEAR*** *(Ursus arctos)*

**Legal Status**

The grizzly bear is currently listed as a Threatened species throughout the conterminous United States. The Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan identifies 5 recovery zones, based on ecosystem characteristics, in which grizzly bear populations could be self-sustaining (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1993). The RMRD is entirely within the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) Recovery Zone, which extends approximately 20 miles eastward from the NF boundary to U.S. Highway 89, northward across U.S. Highway 2 into Glacier National Park, west of the RMRD into the Flathead and Lolo National Forests, and south of the RMRD into the Helena National Forest. Recovery of grizzly bears in the NCDE is contingent on (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1993):

- presence of 10 females with cubs inside GNP and 12 females with cubs outside GNP over a running six-year average both inside and outside the Recovery Zone (excluding Canada)
- occupation of 21 out of 23 Bear Management Units (BMUs) by females with young from a running 6-year sum of verified sightings and evidence, with no 2 adjacent BMUs unoccupied

- known human-caused mortality not to exceed 4%, during any 2 consecutive years, of the population estimate based on the most recent 3-year sum of females with cubs; no more than 30% of this mortality limit shall be females
- occupation of the Mission Mountains portion of the ecosystem

**Local Population and Habitat Status**

According to recent work by the United States Geological Survey (USGS; http://www.nrmsc.usgs.gov/files/norock/products/USGSGrizzlyBearProjectNewsRelease.pdf), approximately 765 grizzly bears inhabit the entire NCDE. Results of that work also indicate that grizzly bear numbers appear to have increased in the NCDE over the past 10 years, females appear to be well distributed throughout the area, and the population has expanded beyond the original 1993 Recovery Area boundary. An effort is currently underway to more specifically analyze grizzly bear population trend in the NCDE.

An updated population estimate specific to the RMRD and based on the work referenced above will likely be available in early 2009. The Badger-Two Medicine area has frequently been one of the most productive portions of the RMRD with respect to grizzly bears, with generally more sightings of females with cubs than other areas to the south. Grizzly bear mortality, particularly along the Highway 2 corridor and on private lands within the NCDE continues to be an issue with respect to recovery.

Grizzly bears are opportunistic and adaptable omnivores. Habitat use varies between areas, seasons, local populations, and individuals (Servheen 1983, Craighead and Mitchell 1982 *in* Claar et al. 1999). In Montana, important grizzly bear habitats include coniferous forest for thermal and security cover, and meadows, riparian zones, shrubs, parks, avalanche chutes, and alpine areas for foraging. Grizzly bears frequently exhibit wide-ranging seasonal movements in search of widely dispersed and varying food sources.

On the RMRD, grizzly bears generally den in the higher elevation areas well within the NF boundary (Aune and Kasworm 1989). Many grizzly bears then move to low-elevation foothill habitat along the eastern NF boundary as well as to adjacent non-NFS lands in spring to forage on greening vegetation and winter-killed carcasses on ungulate winter ranges. Spring habitats are generally used between April 1 and June 30 in this area (USDI Bureau of Land Management et al. 1987).

Summer grizzly bear habitat is primarily on the RMRD, although a few grizzly bears remain on non-NFS lands throughout the non-winter months. Bears generally use higher elevation forests and meadows during the summer, although they may be found throughout the RMRD during this time. Many grizzly bears return to lower elevations, including non-NFS lands, in late summer and fall to take advantage of ripening berries. During fall, some bears may shift to areas with concentrations of hunters throughout the RMRD and lands to the east to capitalize on gut piles and carcasses left by big-game hunters. Summer habitats are generally used between July 1 and August 31, while fall habitats are used between September 1 and November 30 (USDI Bureau of Land Management et al. 1987).

Potential grizzly bear spring and denning habitats have been mapped for the RMRD based on general habitat and landscape characteristics and information derived from studies of radio-collared bears. Table 3 shows the amount of mapped grizzly bear habitat in and adjacent to the RMRD, as well as the amount and percent on NFS lands and within the project area. For completeness, this table includes figures for the Birch-South portion of the RMRD, for which a travel management decision was made in fall 2006. Nearly all denning habitat in the area occurs on NFS lands, while a large majority of the spring habitat occurs on non-NFS lands east of the boundary. A sizeable area of mapped spring habitat occurs on NFS lands in the northeast corner of the Badger-Two Medicine area.

**Table 3. Total Acreage of Grizzly Bear Denning and Spring Habitats, and Acreage and Percent of each Habitat within National Forest Boundary and within Badger-Two Medicine and Birch-South Areas**

| Habitat | Total Acreage | Acreage Within NF Boundary | % of Total Habitat Within NF Boundary | Acreage of Habitat in Badger-Two Medicine | % of NF Habitat in Badger-Two Medicine | Acreage of Habitat in Birch-South[1] | % of NF Habitat in Birch-South[1] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Grizzly Bear Denning** | 340,840 | 333,200 | 98% | 45,270 | 14% | 287,930 | 86% |
| **Grizzly Bear Spring[2]** | 632,870 | 205,410 | 32% | 46,720 | 23% | 158,680 | 77% |

[1] Acreage and percent of habitats in Birch-South portion includes habitat within designated Wilderness
[2]Acreage and percent of spring habitat within NF boundary includes approximately 1% of total spring habitat that occurs on private inholdings inside the NF boundary

The BTM area, like the rest of the RMRD, has been divided into Bear Management Units (BMUs) and Subunits to facilitate analysis of project effects and to evaluate recovery goals. Each BMU Subunit approximates the size of an adult female grizzly bear's annual home range. The project area includes the NFS lands portions of 3 BMU Subunits out of a total of 13 on the RMRD (Map 3). Table 4 displays the acreage of each BMU subunit and the portion of each that is on NFS lands in the BTM area. The proposed travel management decision for the Badger-Two Medicine area includes only NFS lands land north of the North Fork of Birch Creek. The Heart Butte Subunit, however, extends south to the divide between the North and Middle Forks of Birch Creek, and therefore encompasses some area not included in the decision (Map 3). Nevertheless, most of the analysis with respect to grizzly bears occurs at the level of the Subunit and will therefore incorporate non-NFS lands and that portion of the Heart Butte Subunit unaffected by the decision.

**Table 4. Total Acreage of BMU Subunits, and Acreage and Percent of each BMU within National Forest Boundary and within Designated Wilderness**

| Subunit | Total Acreage in Subunit | Acreage Within NF Boundary | % of Subunit Within NF Boundary | Acreage in Wilderness | % of Subunit Within NF Boundary in Wilderness | % of Subunit in Wilderness |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Badger Two Medicine Area:* | | | | | | |
| **Two Medicine** | 62,780 | 47,520 | 76%[1] | 0 | -- | -- |
| **Badger** | 82,430 | 56,660 | 69% | 0 | -- | -- |
| **Heart Butte** | 71,020 | 33,380 | 47% | 5,620[2] | 17% | 8% |

[1]When private inholdings within the NF boundary are excluded, only 71% of the Two Medicine Subunit is on NFS land, managed by the USDA Forest Service

[2]The portion of the Heart Butte Subunit within Wilderness is south of the North Fork of Birch Creek, and therefore outside of the area that would be affected by the current decision.

Following direction in the Interagency Grizzly Bear Management Guidelines (Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee 1986), the RMRD has been stratified into Management Situations (MS) to prioritize habitat and multiple-use management in relation to grizzly bear recovery. Nearly all (98%, or over 760,000 acres) of the RMRD, and over 99% (over 129,000 acres) of the NF system lands in the BTM area is classified as MS-1, which contains grizzly bear population centers and habitat key to species survival and recovery. Management priorities in MS-1 are to maintain/improve grizzly bear habitat, minimize grizzly-human conflicts, and to make management decisions that favor the needs of the grizzly bear when grizzly habitat and other land use values compete. A small portion (2%, or roughly 14,000 acres) of the RMRD is designated MS-3. Less than one-half of one percent of the BTM area (approximately 390 acres) is classified as MS-3 habitat, centered around the Summit Campground and Marias Pass rest area along Highway 2. Management priorities in MS-3 habitat are to manage grizzly-human conflicts and to discourage grizzly bear presence and factors contributing to their presence. An additional roughly 5,000 acres that fall within the boundary of the RMRD are privately owned; over half (> 3300 acres) of this private inholding acreage is at the north end of the Badger-Two Medicine area immediately adjacent to U.S. Highway 2 and along the northeastern boundary.

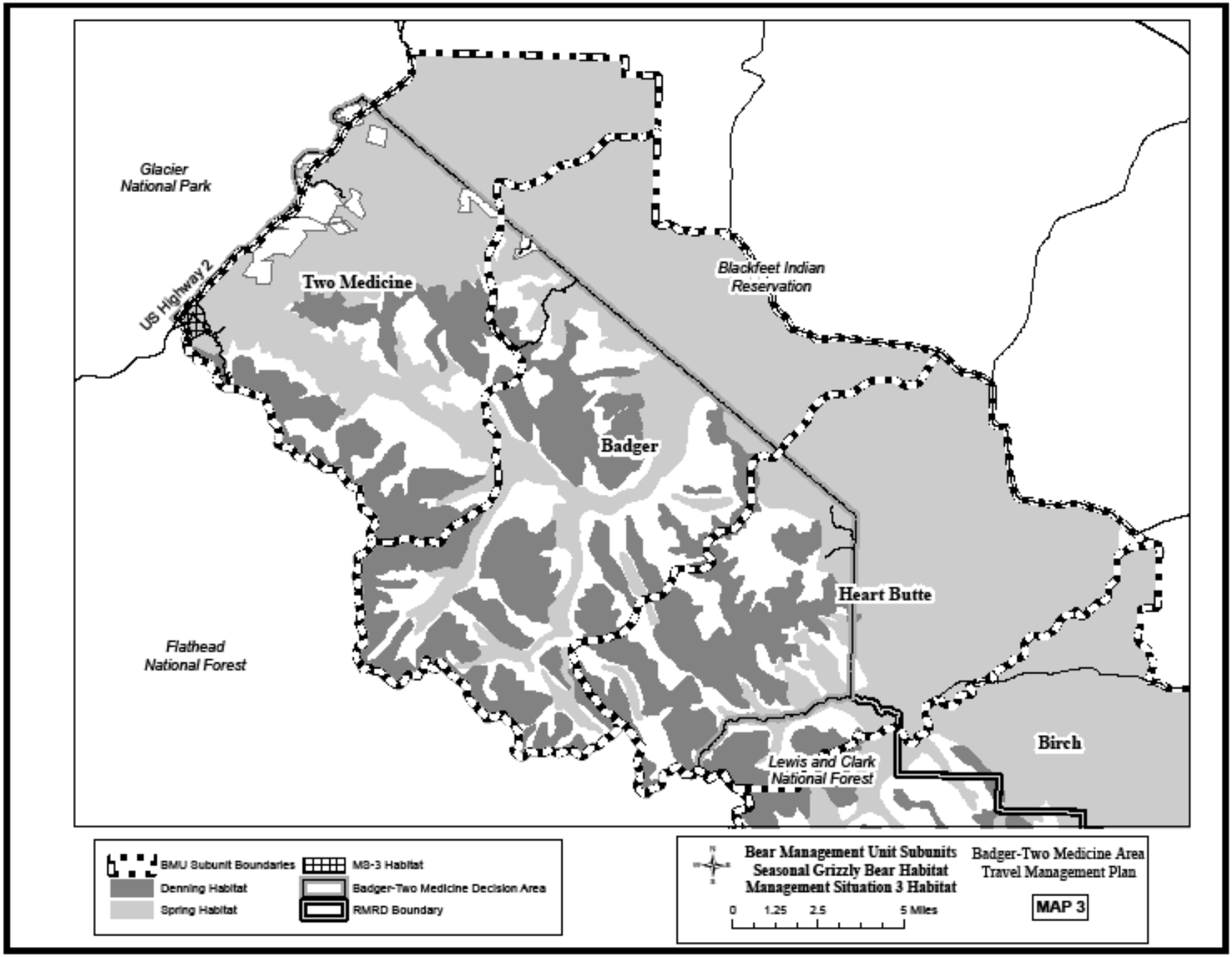
## Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects Analysis

### *Direct and Indirect Effects*

Access Management

*Overview*

To protect important seasonal grizzly bear habitat from disturbance, the Lewis and Clark National Forest has relied primarily upon the dates recommended in the RMF Guidelines (USDI Bureau of Land Management et al. 1987) to restrict motorized access in those habitats. Adherence to the RMF Guidelines is incorporated as a Forest-Wide Wildlife Management Standard (C-1) in the LCNF Forest Plan. Restriction dates recommended by


Glacier
National Park
US Highway 2
Two Medicine
Blackfeet Indian
Reservation
Badger
Heart Butte
Flathead
National Forest
Birch
Lewis and Clark
National Forest
BMU Subunit Boundaries
Denning Habitat
Spring Habitat
MS-3 Habitat
Badger-Two Medicine Decision Area
RMRD Boundary
Bear Management Unit Subunits
Seasonal Grizzly Bear Habitat
Management Situation 3 Habitat
0 1.25 2.5 5 Miles
Badger-Two Medicine Area
Travel Management Plan
MAP 3

the RMF Guidelines were incorporated into the 1988 Travel Plan, and were included as key factors in developing the Proposed Plan. Thus LCNF has not adopted formal motorized access route density objectives as have some other national forests in the NCDE and other ecosystems where grizzly bears are present.

The IGBC Access Management Taskforce Report on Grizzly Bear/Motorized Access Management (Taskforce Report) published in 1994 provided the basis for development in 1995 of the Interim Motorized Access Management Direction for the NCDE (Interim Direction). The Interim Direction calls for calculating total motorized access route density (TOTMARD), to include all routes that are designated as motorized regardless of seasonal or year-round restrictions, and open motorized access route density (OPMARD), to include all routes that are open to motorized travel at any time during the non-denning season (1 April – 30 November). Core, consisting of blocks of habitat that are $\geq$ 2500 acres in size and more than 500m from an open motorized or high-use non-motorized road or trail, is also to be calculated. According to the Interim Direction TOTMARD, OPMARD and Core are to be calculated for each BMU Subunit regardless of ownership pattern, for the entire non-denning season. Guideline values for the % of each Subunit at a certain density of TOTMARD and OPMARD or in Core are to be applied only to federal lands within the Subunit. The Interim Direction recommendations are as follows:

- TOTMARD: No increase; move toward $\leq$19% of Subunit in $\geq$2 mi/mi$^2$ density category on federal lands
- OPMARD: No increase; move toward $\leq$19% of Subunit in $\geq$1 mi/mi$^2$ density category on federal lands
- Core: No decrease in % of analysis area in Core. Move toward $\geq$ 68% of Subunit in Core on federal lands.

The Taskforce Report was updated in 1998, noting that OPMARD and Core may be calculated or identified by season, and recommending that each ecosystem subcommittee of the IGBC develop or update their access management direction based on relevant ecosystem-specific information. The NCDE Access Management Rule Set Proposed Direction (Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee 2001) was subsequently developed. The Proposed Direction incorporated important differences between grizzly bear habitats and land ownership and management east of the Continental Divide versus west of it, included consideration of percent federal ownership of subunits, attempted to address seasonal changes in grizzly bear habitat needs, and used metric measures to be in line with units used in scientific research. The Proposed Direction has not yet been formally accepted by the IGBC.

Meanwhile, in 1995 the Flathead National Forest adopted Amendment 19 (A-19), amending their Forest Plan to incorporate access management standards. These standards are based on the 1995 NCDE Interim Direction but include more specific application of density standards based on percent federal ownership in a Subunit (USDA Forest Service 2002). A protocol was developed to calculate TOTMARD, OPMARD, and Core for all projects to evaluate compliance with A-19. The A-19 standards are as follows:

- TOTMARD
  - Subunits ≥ 75% NFS lands: ≤19% of Subunit in ≥2 mi/mi$^2$ density category
  - Subunits < 75% NFS lands: no net increase in % of Subunit in ≥2 mi/mi$^2$ density category
- OPMARD
  - Subunits ≥ 75% NFS lands: ≤19% of Subunit in ≥1 mi/mi$^2$ density category
  - Subunits < 75% NFS lands: no net increase in % of Subunit in ≥ 1 mi/mi$^2$ density category
- CORE
  - Subunits ≥ 75% NFS lands: ≤ 68% of Subunit in core areas ≥ 2500 acres
  - Subunits < 75% NFS lands: no net decrease in % of Subunit in core areas ≥ 2500 acres.

Despite not having adopted access management standards based on the NCDE Interim or Proposed Direction, the LCNF has conducted an access management analysis to evaluate motorized access in the BTM area under the existing (1988) Travel Plan and under the Proposed Plan. The FNF A-19 standards provide a useful and familiar point of reference because they have been formally established in a Forest Plan Amendment and applied to a number of land management projects on the FNF. Therefore the A-19 protocol used by the Flathead National Forest, modified slightly to account for some minor differences in available type and quantity of data, was used to carry out the analysis for the BTM travel plan. Specific information regarding those modifications as well as other details on application of the access management analysis to the BTM area is available in the project file. Results are compared to A-19 standards for a point of reference, as well as to the NCDE Interim Direction.

In addition to calculations made for the entire non-denning season OPMA and Core were calculated by season, as suggested in the 1998 IGBC Taskforce Report and in the NCDE Proposed Direction. Calculating these values by season better reflects specific concerns about impacts to important grizzly bear habitats, and allows better evaluation of the effectiveness of adhering to the RMF Wildlife Guideline recommendations for seasonal restrictions on motorized access. The results for the BTM area are displayed by analysis category in Tables 5 and 6 below. The tables do not include the Birch-South portion of the RMRD, for which a travel management decision has already been made. The tables include figures only for the NFS portion of the affected Subunits; travel management and therefore access management values for lands outside the NF boundary would be unaffected by the proposed decision and are expected to be the same under the Proposed Plan as under the existing situation. Small private lands (inholdings) are excluded from calculations of total Subunit area as well as density and core calculations, per the FNF A-19 protocol (USDA Forest Service 2002). Therefore all 3 Subunits have less than 75% of their total area on NFS lands managed by the USDA Forest Service. MS-3 habitat, and large (>320 acre) lakes are also excluded from the area included in route density and core calculations, per the A-19 protocol (USDA Forest Service 2002).

*Total Motorized Access Route Density (TOTMARD) and Open Motorized Access Route Density (OPMARD)*

TOTMARD calculations include all roads and trails that are designated for motorized travel, regardless of whether or not there are seasonal or yearlong restrictions present.

OPMARD calculations included all routes that are open for motorized travel during the season for which the calculation was made. Routes are included regardless of the estimated use level; i.e. some routes may be open during all or part of the non-denning season, and therefore included in OPMARD calculations, but they may receive little or no use all or part of that time. Development of OPMARD for this analysis differs from the A-19 protocol as follows: under A-19, the method of closure (e.g. berm vs. gate) determines inclusion or exclusion from OPMARD, and that determination differs for roads and trails. For the BTM calculation, method of closure was not considered, and all motorized routes were treated the same.

The Proposed Direction (Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee 2001) stresses that the benefits of the proposed access management "depend heavily on effective implementation of a 'gated' *road* management system" (emphasis added). The RMRD, however, has a total of only 135 miles of road within an area of over 776,000 acres, with less than 20 road miles on roughly 133,000 acres in the BTM area under consideration in the current travel management decision. The 20 miles of roads in the BTM are largely tied to major public access points such as trailheads or campgrounds, associated with access to private inholdings, or provide access to communication sites. Many of these roads are therefore considered "uncloseable". Thus very few roads are involved in the access management issue and in TOTMARD calculations in the BTM area. Roads may be a more critical issue both on the west side and with respect to requirements for gates or other physical closure devices. The RMRD, and specifically the BTM access issue revolves primarily around motorized trails. Very few physical closure devices are used to implement seasonal or other restrictions on trails. The majority of ATV trails are in the north half of the BTM, while the south half currently has a limited number of single-track motorcycle trails that receive almost no use at any time of year due to a combination of terrain, trail structure, and lack of a significant motorcycle user group. Most of these single-track trails are also relatively inaccessible during the spring due to snow, high water, or wet and muddy conditions

OPMARD calculations were carried out for the entire non-denning season (1 April – 30 November), as well as for spring (1April – 30 June), and summer/fall (1 July – 30 November). Seasonal calculations were done to examine the effectiveness of seasonal restrictions on motorized routes based on the RMF Guidelines.

Summer and/or fall include the maximum number of routes that might be open at any time during the non-denning season, because most seasonal closures are in place either in spring to protect grizzly bear spring or elk calving habitats, or in fall to protect elk and other big game habitats during general rifle hunting season. Most of the motorized routes in the south half of the BTM are currently closed to motorized access between 15

October and 1 December (general rifle hunting season). These routes were included in fall OPMARD totals, however, because the fall season for bears is considered to begin 1 September, fully 6 weeks before hunting season restrictions begin. It should be noted, however, that OPMARD is further reduced for half the bear fall season, at a time when motorized use likely increases on many unrestricted routes and human activity overall likely increases as well. Hunting season restrictions on motorized access likely provide additional security for bears that have not yet entered hibernation. As explained above, summer and fall OPMARD is the same as OPMARD for the entire non-denning season, and is therefore only presented once in the table below.

In Table 5 below, numbers in **bold** indicate Subunits in which the A-19 and Interim Direction numeric goal would not be met if applied under the Existing Condition.

**Table 5. Percent of NFS lands in each Subunit in >2mi/mi$^2$ density class (TOTMARD) and >1mi/mi$^2$ density class (OPMARD).**

| | ***TOTMARD* (>2mi/mi$^2$)** | | ***OPMARD* (>1mi/mi$^2$)** | | ***OPMARD – SPRING* (>1mi/mi$^2$)** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ***Existing*** | ***Proposed*** | ***Existing*** | ***Proposed*** | ***Existing*** | ***Proposed*** |
| ***Two Medicine*** | **27.5** | 2.62 | **61.82** | 6.59 | 13.43 | 6.59 |
| ***Badger*** | 10.22 | 0.02 | **42.26** | 1.11 | 10.36 | 1.11 |
| ***Heart Butte*** | 1.88 | 0.57 | 11.20 | 2.24 | 1.28 | 1.86[1] |

[1] The Heart Butte subunit appears to increase in OPMARD under the Proposed Action due to an error in the database for one field for one trail on non-NFS land in the North Fork Birch Creek area. This is outside the BTM Decision Area; the entire Decision Area was checked for errors and none were found. Visual inspection of mapped outputs revealed that Spring OPMARD in the Decision Area would decrease under the Proposed Action as compared to the existing situation. Therefore we decided not to re-run the moving windows analysis. (See maps in project file)

In the existing situation, the Two Medicine Subunit does not meet the A-19 and Interim Direction numeric goals for TOTMARD, and it and the Badger Subunit do not meet the numeric goal for overall OPMARD in the existing situation. When OPMARD is calculated by season, however, all 3 subunits meet the numeric goal in spring, illustrating the effectiveness of existing seasonal closures in protecting important spring habitat.

Under the Proposed Plan, all 3 Subunits would meet the A-19 direction for Subunits with <75% federal ownership: in all 3, the portion of the Subunit in the applicable density category would decrease (see Table 5 footnote regarding Spring OPMARD in the Heart Butte subunit). The Interim Direction calls for moving all subunits toward $\leq$ 19% of the subunit in the applicable density category. Therefore the Interim Direction would also be met under the Proposed Action.

*Core Area (Core)*

The analysis of Core Area involves buffering all open motorized roads and trails as well as all high-use non-motorized trails by 500 m. Remaining blocks of habitat ≥2500 acres are then identified and assigned status as secure areas, or Core. Many large blocks of Core are bisected by >1 Subunit boundary. The percentage of each subunit in Core reflects the portion of each Subunit that contains entire blocks of Core or portions of blocks of Core.

Core calculations were carried out for the entire non-denning season (1 April – 30 November), as well as for spring (1 April – 30 June), summer, (1 July – 30 August) and fall (1 September – 30 November). Seasonal calculations were done to examine the effectiveness of seasonal restrictions on motorized routes based on the RMF Guidelines. Unlike OPMARD, Core differs between summer and fall as well as between those seasons and the entire non-denning season due to differences in high-use non-motorized trails. Non-motorized trails receive different levels of use in summer vs. fall because of seasonal changes in recreational pursuits (e.g. hiking/camping vs. hunting) as well as differences in weather and trail condition.

Although a rule exists for determining whether a non-motorized trail is considered high use (>20 parties per week; see NCDE Cumulative Effects Model Manual - 2005), actual data do not exist with which to determine whether a particular trail should be considered high use or not. Use levels were assigned to all trails after discussion with trails and recreation managers and other FS personnel familiar with those trails and the use they receive in each season. Where there was doubt between 2 use levels, the higher level was assigned in order to arrive at the most conservative estimate of secure grizzly bear habitat.

As noted above under the OPMARD discussion, many trails included in OPMARD and Core calculations, particularly single-track motorcycle trails, may receive little if any actual use during all or part of the non-denning season. Considering this and the manner in which use levels were assigned to non-motorized trails, the results presented in Table 6 below are more likely to underestimate Core than to overestimate it. Both the Interim Direction guideline and the A-19 direction state that the amount of Core in subunits should not decrease (Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee 1995; USDA Forest Service 2002), and the Interim Direction recommends moving toward the numeric objective of ≥68% of Subunit in Core on federal lands (Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee 1995).

In Table 6 below, numbers in **bold** indicate Subunits in which the A-19 and Interim Direction numeric goal would not be met if applied under the Existing Condition.

**Table 6. Core for Entire Non-Denning Season (1 April – 30 November) and for Spring (1 April – 30 June), Summer (1 July – 31 August), and Fall (1 September – 30 November): Percent of each Subunit in Core**

| | *TOTAL CORE* | | *SPRING CORE* | | *SUMMER CORE* | | *FALL CORE* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ***Existing*** | ***Proposed*** | ***Existing*** | ***Proposed*** | ***Existing*** | ***Proposed*** | ***Existing*** | ***Proposed*** |
| ***Two Medicine*** | **27.19** | 76.99 | 83.91 | 91.09 | **27.19** | 76.65 | **27.19** | 91.09 |
| ***Badger*** | **50.25** | 97.05 | 86.59 | 97.81 | **50.25** | 97.05 | **50.25** | 97.81 |
| ***Heart Butte*** | 72.40 | 96.62 | 98.26 | 97.75[1] | 72.40 | 96.62 | 72.40 | 96.62 |

[1] The Heart Butte subunit appears to decrease in Spring Core under the Proposed Action due to an error in the database for one field for one trail on non-NFS land in the North Fork Birch Creek area. The trail in error is outside the Decision Area and travel management on that trail would not change under the Proposed Action. The entire Decision Area was checked for errors and none were found. Visual inspection of mapped outputs revealed that Spring Core in the Decision Area of the Heart Butte Subunit would remain the same under the Proposed Action as compared to the existing situation. Therefore we decided not to re-run the moving windows analysis. (See maps in project file)

In the existing situation, the Two Medicine and Badger Subunits do not meet the A-19 and Interim Direction numeric goals for Core except in spring when Core is calculated by season. This illustrates the effectiveness of existing seasonal closures in protecting important spring habitat.

Under the Proposed Plan, all 3 Subunits would meet the A-19 direction for Subunits with <75% federal ownership: in all 3, under the Proposed Action CORE would increase. The Interim Direction calls for moving all subunits toward ≥ 68% of the subunit in CORE. Under the Proposed Plan, the NFS lands portion of all 3 Subunits would meet that goal. Note that CORE would continue to be highest in spring, reflecting ongoing use of seasonal closures designed to protect grizzly bear spring habitat. CORE in the Two Medicine Subunit is lowest in the summer, reflecting the assumption that the main Two-Medicine Trail (#101) would receive high use by non-motorized recreationists during that time. Because it is not clear how or whether non-motorized travel patterns might change under the Proposed Plan, this result could be inaccurate. Nevertheless, it represents a conservative estimate of CORE that is still well above the A-19 and Interim Direction guidelines.

Cumulative Effects Model

Efforts have been made since the late 1980's to develop both unified and area-specific models with which to analyze the cumulative effects of human activity on grizzly bears. In the NCDE a Cumulative Effects Model (CEM) was developed that uses multivariate analysis of data from field studies on grizzly bears to predict seasonal grizzly bear habitat preference (USDA Forest Service et al. 2005), and that adjusts the predicted value of grizzly bear habitats based on human activity occurring within them. East- and west-side versions were then created, recognizing that habitats and grizzly bear use of them appear to differ substantially east versus west of the Continental Divide. Development of the

various CEMs was intended to provide an objective, repeatable, and quantifiable measure of the accumulated impact of individual human activities on grizzly bear habitat.

The East-Side CEM was run for the Biological Assessment of the 2007 Birch-South travel management decision. Because a variety of changes to travel management were made in that decision, altering the spatial pattern of motorized use over a relatively large area, the CEM provided some insight into which Subunits and areas would change most as a result of the travel management changes. Overall, however, the CEM results simply provided an additional, relatively general piece of evidence that the new travel plan would likely maintain or improve grizzly bear habitat throughout the area affected by the decision (USDA Forest Service 2007a).

The Proposed Plan for travel management in the BTM area is straightforward: eliminate all motorized travel except for an extremely limited mileage of access roads at the perimeter of the area. Because of the way the CEM is parameterized, with motorized routes decreasing the calculated effectiveness of grizzly bear habitat, it is clear without running the model that the Proposed Plan would result in an output of improved habitat effectiveness for all 3 affected subunits. Furthermore, based on the access management analysis described above, we know that the Two Medicine subunit is likely to demonstrate the smallest degree of improvement of the 3 subunits because it is where the majority of roads are that would remain open. Specific values of habitat effectiveness calculated by the CEM have no intrinsic meaning beyond providing a means to compare local areas or different activities within a single area. Therefore, outputs from running the CEM for the BTM would only provide a broad relative comparison of habitat effectiveness under the existing situation versus the Proposed Plan, confirming what we already know. The numeric output from a run of the model would provide no further value to inform management decision-making. Preparing the databases for analysis with the model is a very time-consuming, and therefore costly process. Therefore we chose not to run the CEM for this analysis, because it would not provide additional useful information with which to assess affects of the Proposed Plan that is not already provided by other analyses.

Compliance with the LCNF Forest Plan

The LCNF Forest Plan includes a variety of standards and guidelines that either directly or indirectly address management of grizzly bears and grizzly bear habitat management. Table 7 below summarizes Forest Plan standards that are relevant to the proposed project or that pertain directly or indirectly to grizzly bear habitat management. This table also displays how both the existing situation and the Proposed Plan comply with those standards, with differences highlighted in the Proposed Plan column.

**Table 7. Lewis and Clark National Forest Plan Standards for Grizzly Bear and Management of Roads and Motorized Trails**.

| Forest Plan Standards | Existing | Proposed Plan |
|---|---|---|
| Manage motorized use on NFS lands… to reduce effects on wildlife during periods of high stress (Wildlife & Fish C-1-6) | RMF Guidelines used to apply seasonal restrictions on motorized use primarily in grizzly bear spring and denning habitats | Continued use of restrictions in addition to **overall reduction in mileage/density of motorized routes** |
| Use the Interagency Wildlife (RMF) Guidelines to manage land-use activities occuring within the habitat of these species on the RMF (Wildlife & Fish, C-1-11) | RMF Guidelines used to apply seasonal restrictions on motorized use primarily in grizzly bear spring and denning habitats | Continued use of restrictions in addition to **overall reduction in mileage/density of motorized routes** |
| Maintain active communication with research and use current research for planning and implementation of projects in T&E species habitat (Wildlife & Fish, C-2-4) | Ongoing involvement with NCDE subcommittee and other groups at Forest and District level | No change |
| Use the Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines to coordinate multiple-use activities and manage T&E habitat (Wildlife & Fish, C-2-5; C-2-7, C-2-8) | BTM stratified into MS-1 (99+%) and MS-3 (<0.5%) habitat; appropriate management based on Interagency Guidelines applied to all activities accordingly | No change |
| Schedule direct habitat improvement projects (Wildlife & Fish, C-2-6) | Periodic habitat improvement projects usually designed to benefit multiple species, including grizzly bears | No change |
| Establish an active public information and education program addressing T&E species management; emphasize protective measures (Wildlife & Fish, C-2-11) | Various ongoing public information efforts; major emphasis on enforcement of the NCDE Food Storage Order | No change |
| Grazing will be made compatible with grizzly bears and/or habitat or discontinued (Range, D-4-6) | Most on-dates after July 1; ongoing monitoring of livestock forage consumption in riparian zones | No change |

| Forest Plan Standards | Existing | Proposed Plan |
|---|---|---|
| Coordinate timber harvest activities with seasonal grizzly bear habitat use (Timber E-4-14); maintain or improve bear food production on harvest sites (Timber E-4-15,16,17,18); maintain escape cover and isolation for grizzly bears (Timber E-4-19) | Standard applied to past sales and incorporated into new project development. No timber sales in BTM in recent past and none planned in foreseeable future. | No change |
| Limit firewood cutting on timber harvest roads, and permanently close after 2-3 years (Timber, E-2-4) | Minimal mileage of road, all at perimeter of BTM area. No new roads for past >10 years. | No change. |
| Protect T&E species through no surface occupancy and controlled surface use stipulations, timing limitations, and use of Interagency Guidelines for minerals operations and leases (Oil & Gas Leasing, Exploration Drilling Field Development, and Production, G-2-9, 10) | Stipulations and timing restrictions applied to all leases and to proposals for exploration and production. No active oil and gas operations for past >10 years. Congressional ban on new leases on NF lands of RMRD. | No change |
| Unacceptable damage to.. wildlife… will be mitigated by road restrictions or other road management actions…Coordinate wildlife restrictions with MFWP (Facilities/Travel Planning, L-2-4) | RMF Guidelines used to apply seasonal restrictions on motorized use primarily in grizzly bear spring and denning habitats | Continued use of restrictions in addition to **overall reduction in mileage/density of motorized routes** |
| Use the Interagency Wildlife Guidelines to avoid or mitigate conflicts between road construction and use and T&E species (Facilities/Travel Planning, L-2-33) | RMF Guidelines used to apply seasonal restrictions on motorized use primarily in grizzly bear spring and denning habitats | Continued use of restrictions in addition to **overall reduction in mileage/density of motorized routes** |

| Forest Plan Standards | Existing | Proposed Plan |
|---|---|---|
| Implement seasonal or year-round closures on existing or proposed roads if… they are necessary to allow grizzly use of important habitat, to reduce conflict, or to meet habitat objectives (Facilities/Travel Planning, L-2-34) | RMF Guidelines used to apply seasonal restrictions on motorized use primarily in grizzly bear spring and denning habitats | Continued use of restrictions in addition to **overall reduction in mileage/density of motorized routes** |
| **Management Area (MA) Direction** | | |
| **MA-E (34,000 acres or 25% of BTM area)**<br>Goal: Provide sustained high level of forage for livestock and big game.<br>Objectives: Maintain important identified wildlife habitat, including T&E habitat; achieve low (0.5-1.5 mi. open road/$mi^2$ area) public access through permitting motorized use on all arterial and most collector roads | Overall open road density 3.62mi/$mi^2$ for MA-E in BTM; motorized travel permitted on designated trails; no off-trail motorized travel allowed | **Overall open road density 0.12 mi/$mi^2$ for MA-E in BTM; reduced mileage of motorized trails**; no off-trail motorized travel allowed |
| **MA-F (54,000 acres or 40% of BTM area)**<br>Goal: Emphasize semi-primitive recreation opportunities, while maintaining and protecting other Forest resources.<br>Objectives: Minimize impact on identified wildlife habitat, including T&E habitat; do not construct roads for surface use activities; obliterate roads built for subsurface use when not needed; close all areas and trails to ORVs except designated routes | No new roads built; road provisions and other stipulations included in leases and applications for subsurface use; no off-trail motorized travel allowed | Continue as existing; **reduced mileage of motorized trails** |

| Forest Plan Standards | Existing | Proposed Plan |
|---|---|---|
| **MA-G (45,000 acres or 34% of BTM area)**<br>Goal: Maintain and protect Forest resources with minimal investment.<br>Objectives: Maintain important identified wildlife habitat, including T&E habitat; minimize public access by limiting motorized use to existing roads and travelways; obliterate roads built for subsurface use when not needed. | No new roads built; road provisions and other stipulations included in leases and applications for subsurface use; no off-trail motorized travel allowed | Continue as existing; **reduced mileage of motorized trails** |
| **MA-H (220 acres or <1% of BTM area)**<br>Goal: Provide recreation supported by public and private developments while maintaining other resource values<br>Objectives: Minimize impacts on important identified wildlife habitat, including T&E habitat; achieve high (+3.0 mi. open road/$mi^2$ area) public access through permitting motorized use on all arterial and most collector roads | MA-H is primarily areas around main access roads, recreation residences and other developed areas. Patrols by recreation guards for public information and enforcement of NCDE Food Storage Order; overall open road density 8.15 $mi/mi^2$ for MA-H in BTM area (Summit Campground area) | No change |

All MAs in the BTM meet Forest Plan objectives in the BTM area and would continue to do so under the Proposed Plan. Note that the relatively high open road density in MA-H reflects the very small amount of MA-H in the BTM, in the area that includes Summit Campground and the Pike Creek Road. It is unclear in the Forest Plan whether road densities are to be calculated for local segments of MA-H, as we have done here, or for the entire District or Forest. Nevertheless, presence of these facilities is consistent with Forest Plan direction for MA-H. Also, the Forest Plan direction for MAs provides density objectives only for roads, and does not specifically address motorized trails or overall motorized route density objectives. Evaluation of Forest Plan Management Area direction is one component of assessing how well current Forest Plan direction controls access and therefore protects wildlife habitat in general. Because the amount and location of a particular MA may vary greatly by Subunit, however, and because each Subunit may contain anywhere from one to several MA types, this analysis must occur only as a component of overall analysis of access. Evaluation of MA direction and compliance is most useful if accompanied by maps displaying the quantity and configuration of MAs within each Subunit. These maps are available in the project file.

In sum, the LCNF Forest Plan specifically calls for applying seasonal restrictions to all motorized activities in important seasonal wildlife habitats, based largely on the recommendations included in the RMF Guidelines. These recommendations have been applied rigorously to travel management on both roads and motorized trails beginning with the Existing (1988) Travel Plan, as well as to any projects proposed since the Forest Plan was signed in 1986.

The Forest Plan also calls for any proposed new roads to be single-purpose roads that would be closed to the public during the period of use, and either closed permanently or obliterated upon completion of the project activity. Construction and use of these roads is to be carried out according to the seasonal restrictions recommended in the RMF Guidelines. Although no new road construction has been carried out for at least a decade, all proposals that have included new road construction (primarily oil/gas proposals) have incorporated those provisions.

Approximately 76% of the BTM area is within the Bear-Marshall-Scapegoat-Swan Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA). Regulations regarding management of IRAs is currently under litigation but are likely to either heavily restrict or completely prohibit construction of new roads in IRAs.

*Cumulative Effects*

A number of factors could potentially result in impacts to grizzly bears cumulative to those of the Proposed Travel Plan for the BTM area. These factors are: developed and dispersed recreation, prescribed burning/wildfire, timber harvest, wildlife habitat on adjacent lands, livestock grazing, and implementation of the Travel Management Plan for the Birch-South portion of the RMRD.

Recreation is one of the primary uses by the public of the RMRD. In the BTM area there is one developed campground, as well as numerous dispersed campsites and several

trailhead facilities. Most visitors to the BTM travel in the backcountry where they hike, ride horseback, camp, fish, and hunt. The potential for displacement resulting from these activities and consequent reduction in the value of grizzly bear habitat exists under the Existing Condition as well as under the Proposed Plan. The other potential impact of these recreational activities is access by grizzly bears to human food sources. The RMRD initiated development of the NCDE Food Storage Special Order (current version: Food Storage Special Order LC00-18) in the late 1980's. Since that time, the RMRD has led efforts in the NCDE to revise the Food Storage Special Order (the Order) to make it both more effective and more enforceable. Several recreation guards are employed to patrol front-country recreation sites, posting signs and contacting the public as well as enforcing the Food Storage Order. Additionally, a backcountry ranger patrols the interior of the BTM area to carry out the same tasks. All employees are trained annually in the basics of the Order and enforcing it. The RMRD carries out a hunting camp patrol in the fall in which enforcement of the Food Storage Order is a primary purpose. All activities permitted on the RMRD (including grazing, recreation residences, outfitting and guiding, etc.) include consequences of failing to comply with the Order within their permits. Through these combined efforts, the potential for grizzly bears to gain access to human foods is minimized.

One large wildfire burned in the BTM area in 2007. The Skyland Fire burned approximately 46,000 acres on the Flathead National Forest, LCNF, and Blackfeet Indian Reservation, with the majority of acres on the LCNF in the BTM area (roughly 31,000, or about 23% of the total BTM area). This fire burned with mixed severity although about 41% of the fire area in the BTM burned at relatively high intensity, with stand-replacement fire or other similar impacts to vegetation. About one-quarter of the fire area burned at moderate intensity, and one-quarter at low intensity, including areas that did not experience fire at all. The remaining area within the fire perimeter was grassland that burned (Green and Shovic 2007). Two other large fires (totaling an additional roughly 74,000 acres on the RMRD) burned in 2007 well south of the BTM area. Additional natural and prescribed fires may occur throughout the RMRD and adjoining lands in future years. Impacts on habitat will vary depending on the location and severity of the fires and on other factors. Bears may be displaced for varying time frames from some burned areas. Fires often result in improved forage for grizzly bears within 1-5 years of their occurrence.

Very little timber harvest has occurred on the RMRD since 1988, all of it more than 20 miles south of the BTM area. Some firewood cutting for individual and family use occurs in specific areas near the NF boundary in the BTM area. This activity generally occurs within a very short distance of existing roads, because motor vehicle travel has not been allowed off designated roads and trails since 2001. Personal-use firewood cutting would continue to occur in these areas. Because the areas are limited in number and extent, are associated with existing roads, and occur near the NF boundary, this activity will likely have only very limited impact on individual bears that may happen to be in the area when the activity occurs.

The area to the south and southwest of the project area includes the Great Bear and Bob Marshall Wildernesses, both part of the larger Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. Wildlife habitats there are subject almost exclusively to natural forces, such as climate and fire, and receive only minimal influence from human activity. About half of the western boundary of the BTM adjoins non-wilderness lands on the Flathead National Forest, where maintenance of wildlife habitat is a required management concern. Across U.S. Highway 2 on the northern boundary is Glacier National Park, where management generally favors bears and bear habitat. The entire eastern boundary of the BTM area abuts the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, where livestock husbandry is an important activity. Grizzly bears are known to move among these areas and to frequent lands east of the NF boundary, particularly in spring and late summer/fall. Nearly all grizzly bear-human conflicts and consequent grizzly mortalities occurring in the area known as the Rocky Mountain Front for the past 10+ years have been on private land. Although significant efforts have been made by agencies and private groups, non-NF lands east of the NF boundary are likely to continue to be a source of grizzly bear mortality.

Livestock grazing currently occurs within the project area on three permitted cattle grazing allotments. One additional cattle grazing allotment has been inactive for several years but may be used again in the future. The LCNF Forest Plan (see Table 7 above) requires, through incorporation of the RMF Guidelines and the Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines, that grizzly bear-livestock conflicts be resolved in favor of grizzly bears. The grazing allotments in the BTM area occur entirely within MS-1 habitat, where the Interagency Grizzly Bear Management Guidelines (1986) state that where grizzly-livestock conflicts occur and the bear is determined not to be a "nuisance bear" per the IGBC Guidelines, the problem will be resolved immediately by "removing the man-related cause." Known conflicts on NF allotments have been minimal and where they have occurred, livestock permittees have been advised to move cattle from the area to reduce likelihood of further conflict.

In October 2007 the LCNF released a new Travel Management Plan for the portion of the RMRD south of North Fork Birch Creek. Analysis and consultation for this plan was carried out in 2006. The Biological Assessment (BA) for the Birch-South plan concluded that the plan would likely maintain or improve habitat for grizzly bears by reducing the overall mileage of motorized routes on the RMRD (USDA Forest Service 2007a). The FWS concurred with the determination that the plan would not likely adversely affect grizzly bears (refer to the BA in USDA Forest Service 2007a). The Proposed Plan for the BTM would add to the overall grizzly bear habitat improvement created by the Birch-South plan.

**Determination of Effects**

I have determined implementation of the proposed Federal Action MAY AFFECT, BUT IS NOT LIKELY TO ADVERSELY AFFECT grizzly bears. My determination is based on the following rationale:

1. The Proposed Plan would reduce TOTMARD and OPMARD and increase Core in all Subunits to objectives recommended by the NCDE Subcommittee

of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee. The LCNF Forest Plan includes a number of prohibitions and limitations on future road-building (see Table 7), and requires use of the RMF Wildlife Guidelines to implement restriction dates on human activities in grizzly bear habitat. The 2001 FS/BLM OHV decision and the 2005 FS OHV regulations prohibit off-trail motorized travel, and over 75% of the BTM area is in an Inventoried Roadless Area. In sum, the Proposed Plan would eliminate motorized travel from the BTM except for a few key access roads near the perimeter, and would be reinforced by additional Forest Plan restrictions and recent FS regulations. Cumulative effects of other projects will not result in additional motorized access.

2. The NCDE Food Storage Order has been enforced effectively in both the front country and the back country in the BTM area since its inception. Extensive public education efforts are in place, and all permitted activities include provisions regarding the Order.
3. Timber harvest has not occurred for many years in the BTM area, and none is planned in the area in the foreseeable future. Fire may impact vegetation but generally in a manner that is positive for grizzly bears over the long term. These activities will not result in adverse cumulative impacts to grizzly bears or their habitat.
4. LCNF Forest Plan standards require adherence to the Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines for management of multiple use activities in grizzly bear habitat on the RMRD, over 99% of which in the BTM area is designated as MS-1 habitat by the LCNF Forest Plan.
5. The Proposed Plan would continue to allow limited motorized access in a few areas potentially used by grizzly bears, and would allow unlimited non-motorized access throughout the entire BTM area. The ongoing presence of recreating humans represents a potential for disturbance or displacement of grizzly bears, as well as potential for mortality through conflicts related to improper food storage, mistaken identity during hunting season, defensive encounters, or illegal killing.

**Recommendations For Removing, Avoiding, or Compensating Adverse Effects**

Adverse effects are not likely to occur under the Proposed Plan. Widespread public education efforts regarding new travel management regulations, coupled with enhanced enforcement of new regulations would help make the transition occur more quickly and smoothly. Effective signing, patrolling, and enforcement as ongoing activities would help avoid adverse effects. Ongoing activities by other agencies, and where appropriate by the U.S. Forest Service, to address and limit grizzly/human conflicts on non-NFS lands will continue to be an important component of maintaining a healthy grizzly bear population in the area.

## *CANADA LYNX (Lynx canadensis)*

### Legal Status

The Canada lynx is listed as Threatened throughout the contiguous Unites States. Management of lynx on lands managed by the LCNF is directed by the Northern Rockies Lynx Amendment (NRLA; USDA Forest Service 2007b), which adds specific management direction to Forest Plans, including the LCNF Forest, in the form of the Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction (NRLMD). Additional recommendations and guidelines for lynx management can be found in the Lynx Conservation and Assessment Strategy (LCAS; Reudiger et al. 2000).

The RMRD is also within an area (Unit 3 – Northern Rockies) proposed as critical habitat for Canada lynx. Areas proposed as critical habitat will "require some level of management to address the current and future threats to the lynx and to maintain the physical and biological features essential to the conservation of the species" (Federal Register V.73, No.30). Critical habitat is defined as habitat that contains the primary constituent elements (PCEs), and is defined at a regional scale for lynx as boreal forest types that support deep snow throughout the winter.

### Local Population and Habitat Status

As part of the requirements of the LCAS (Reudiger et al. 2000), which guided lynx habitat management on National Forests prior to the NRLMD, Lynx Analysis Units (LAUs) were mapped for the RMRD. LAUs are a conceptual framework meant to approximate the home range of a female lynx. They contain blocks of denning and foraging habitat in sufficient quantity to maintain a female lynx throughout the year. The LAU is generally the unit at which project analysis of impacts to lynx habitat is conducted. The RMRD contains 27 LAUs, with 5 (RM1, RM2, RM3, RM4, and RM5) in the BTM area (Map 4). The RM5 LAU, however, extends south to the Middle Fork of Birch Creek, and therefore encompasses some are not included in the decision. Nevertheless, the analysis with respect to Canada lynx occurs at the level of the LAU and will therefore incorporate that portion of the RM5 LAU unaffected by the decision.

Lynx generally occur in cool, moist coniferous forest types that support populations of their primary prey, snowshoe hare (Reudiger et al. 2000). Sufficient presence of large, woody debris appears to be important for natal den sites (Reudiger et al. 2000). Lynx have been documented throughout the RMRD, with concentrations of observations in the Two-Medicine, Teton, and Sun River drainages. The accumulation of observations in these areas may result in part from the fact that these areas receive more use by forest visitors and employees than other, more inaccessible portions of the RMRD.

Potential lynx habitat has been mapped for the RMRD, using vegetation type and using models developed by the Kootenai National Forest, that were modified to fit conditions on the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Mapped potential lynx habitat is entirely within the NF boundary, and is classified as foraging or denning habitat. Coniferous forest that does not appear to meet the requirements for foraging or denning has been mapped as travel habitat, because it may provide connectivity among patches of foraging and/or

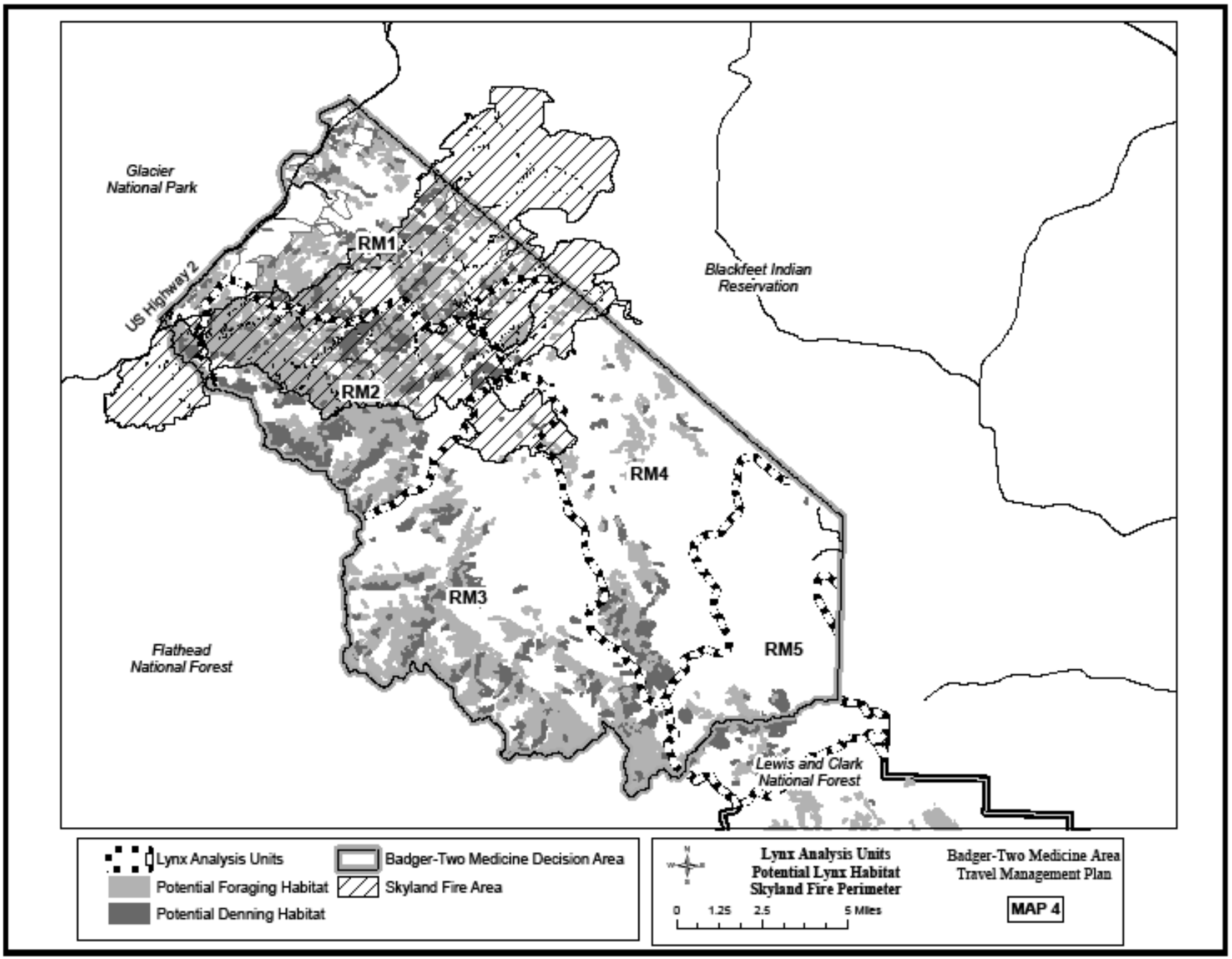
denning habitat (Federal Register V.73 No.30). About 268,000 total acres of lynx habitat (foraging +denning) has been mapped on the RMRD, with roughly 38,000 acres of foraging and denning habitat estimated in the 5 LAUs that comprise the BTM area (Map 4).

In 2007 the Skyland Fire burned approximately 46,000 acres on the FNF, LCNF, and BIR, with the majority of acres on the LCNF in the BTM area (over 31,000, or about 23% of the total BTM area). Based on fire intensity mapping carried out by the Lewis and Clark Complex BAER team (unpublished map data), roughly 34% of the mapped foraging and denning habitat in the BTM area LAUs is within the fire perimeter, although not all of it burned, and fire intensity varied in areas that did burn. About 9% of the mapped lynx habitat in the BTM LAUs experienced low intensity fire, about 6% moderate intensity fire, and about 18% experienced high intensity fire. New habitat mapping has not yet been carried out, but estimates of fire intensity indicate that approximately 10-15% of the area classified as having burned at low intensity remains unburned (Green and Shovic 2007). Although field estimates of lynx habitat have not been carried out in the BTM, based on information from the BAER Summary Report (Green and Shovic 2007) we assume that most of the areas affected by fire experienced burning of understory vegetation and debris, and therefore are no longer suitable snowshoe hare habitat or as lynx denning habitat. Therefore we adjusted map estimates of available habitat described above to remove burned areas (see Table 8 below). This likely provides a very conservative estimate of remaining lynx habitat. Further discussion of the impacts of the Skyland fire on lynx can be found below in the Cumulative Effects section.

**Table 8. Total Acreage of Lynx Habitat, and Acreage and Percent of each habitat category within the 5 Lynx Analysis Units (LAUs) of the Badger-Two Medicine area**

| | Total Acreage – entire RMRD[1] | Acreage of Post-fire Habitat in Badger-Two Medicine | % of Total Habitat in Badger-Two Medicine | *Acres of Habitat by LAU* | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | LAU RM1 | LAU RM2 | LAU RM3 | LAU RM4 | LAU RM5 |
| **Total Lynx Habitat (Foraging + Denning)** | 268,000 | 25,300 | 9.4% | 3,270 | 5,180 | 11,350 | 3,520 | 1,980 |
| **Lynx Foraging Habitat** | 171,300 | 17,500 | 10.2% | 2,480 | 3,210 | 8,500 | 2,320 | 1,020 |
| **Lynx Denning Habitat** | 96,700 | 7,800 | 8.1% | 780 | 1,970 | 2,850 | 1,200 | 960 |
| **Travel Habitat** | 110,500 | 17,800 | 16.1% | 4,190 | 2,690 | 5,670 | 4,170 | 1,120 |

[1]Figures for total habitat on the RMRD have not been adjusted for fire, because 2 other large fires also burned on the RMRD in 2007 and impacts to lynx habitat in those areas have yet to be estimated. Therefore total lynx habitat estimates are likely high, and estimates of the percentage of all habitat found in the BTM are likely low, providing a conservative estimate of the portion of overall habitat present in the BTM area.


Glacier
National Park
US Highway 2
RM1
RM2
RM3
RM4
RM5
Blackfeet Indian
Reservation
Flathead
National Forest
Lewis and Clark
National Forest
Lynx Analysis Units
Potential Foraging Habitat
Potential Denning Habitat
Badger-Two Medicine Decision Area
Skyland Fire Area
N
W
E
S
Lynx Analysis Units
Potential Lynx Habitat
Skyland Fire Perimeter
0 1.25 2.5 5 Miles
Badger-Two Medicine Area
Travel Management Plan
MAP 4

**Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Effects Analysis**

***Direct and Indirect Effects***

Objective HU 01 in the NRLMD is to reduce the potential for competition with generalist predators in winter "by discouraging the expansion of snow-compacting activities in lynx habitat" (USDA Forest Service 2007b). The acreage of area open to snowmobiling, as well as the mileage of over-snow trail under the existing situation is displayed in Table 9 below to illustrate the potential impact that snowmobiling might currently have on lynx habitat, and to provide an idea of the extent to which potential impact would be reduced under the Proposed Plan. Lynx habitat includes foraging and denning habitat combined, but not habitat potentially used only for travel by lynx. Figures are adjusted for fire as described above.

**Table 9. Acres Open to Snowmobiling, Percent of Habitat in LAU Open to Snowmobiling, and Mileage of Over-Snow Route in Lynx Habitat by LAU for the Existing Condition (Habitat Adjusted for Fire)**

| | RM1 | RM2 | RM3 | RM4 | RM5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Open Acres in Lynx Habitat** | 2,700 | 5,180 | 2,560 | 1,090 | 7 |
| **Open Acres as Percent of Lynx Habitat in LAU** | 82.8% | 100% | 22.5% | 30.9% | 0.4% |
| **Existing Mileage of Over-Snow Route in Lynx Habitat** | <1 | <1 | 3.4 | 0 | 0 |

A substantial portion of the acreage listed as open to snowmobiling under the existing situation may not actually be available to snowmobiles. Areas indicated as open were designated by drawing general boundaries on a two-dimensional map. Open areas thus include heavily vegetated areas, cliffs, rocks, steep terrain and other features that are actually unavailable to snowmobiles. Therefore the acreage currently open to snowmobiles in lynx habitat is likely to be substantially less than that displayed above. Nevertheless, a large portion of the mapped lynx habitat in the RM1 and RM2 LAUs are currently open to snowmobiling, with somewhat less in RM3 and RM4. Under the Proposed Plan, no snowmobiling would occur in any of the 5 LAUs, eliminating those impacts.

The NRLMD refers to "areas of consistent snow compaction", which are areas or routes that get "enough human use that individual tracks are indistinguishable. In such places, compacted snow is evident most of the time" (USDA Forest Service 2007b). The Pike Creek Road and the main South Fork Two Medicine to Pool Creek trail are the only areas in the BTM that likely currently meet or come close to meeting that definition. The mileage of those routes that falls within mapped lynx habitat is displayed in Table 9 above by LAU. Very little mileage exists within mapped lynx habitat, particularly since the majority of the area those routes travel through was affected by the Skyland Fire in 2007. Nevertheless, under the Proposed Plan that limited mileage of over-snow route would be eliminated. Non-motorized travel would continue to be allowed throughout the

BTM area under the Proposed Plan. Based on current estimates of winter non-motorized activity, it is unlikely that 'areas of consistent snow compaction' would occur, with the possible exception of the northern 5 miles or so of the South Fork Two Medicine trail, in the RM1 LAU. Much of this travel would occur in areas not mapped as lynx habitat or in areas affected by the Skyland Fire.

Compliance With Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction

Table 10 (below) provides a summary of compliance with appropriate NRMD objectives, guidelines, and standards for both the existing situation and the Proposed Plan.

**Table 10. Current and Proposed Compliance and Consistency with Applicable Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction Objectives, Guidelines and Standards**

| All Management Practices and Activities | Existing Situation | Proposed Plan |
|---|---|---|
| Objective ALL 01 – Maintain or restore lynx habitat connectivity | Large patches of lynx habitat remain undisturbed by motorized travel; habitat well distributed among LAUs | Eliminates potential for motorized travel to fragment habitat within BTM area and between BTM and other adjoining areas |
| **Human Use Projects** | | |
| Objective HU 01 – Maintain the lynx's competitive advantage in deep snow by discouraging the expansion of snow-compacting activities | Large areas open to snowmobile travel although acreage used likely limited; limited mileage of trail open to snowmobiles | Eliminates snowmobile travel throughout BTM area |
| Objective HU 02 – Manage recreational activities to maintain lynx habitat and connectivity | Large patches of lynx habitat remain undisturbed by motorized travel; habitat well distributed among LAUs | Eliminates potential for motorized travel to fragment habitat within BTM area and between BTM and other adjoining areas |
| Objective HU 03 – Concentrate activities in existing developed areas | Majority of over-snow travel concentrated on S. Fork Two-Medicine to Pool Creek trail | Eliminates snowmobile travel throughout BTM area; majority of anticipated non-motorized winter travel in limited area within 5 miles of Summit Campground and US Highway 2 |

| | Existing Situation | Proposed Plan |
|---|---|---|
| Guideline HU G7 – Avoid locating new permanent roads on ridge-tops, saddles, or other areas important for lynx habitat connectivity | No new roads planned | No motorized use in BTM area except on limited mileage of existing routes near area perimeter |
| Guideline HU G9 – Restrict public use on roads built for projects, and reclaim or decommission when finished | No roads planned for project work; Forest Plan Standards E-2-4, G-2-9, G-2-10, and L-4-34 restrict road construction and use of new roads in Threatened and Endangered species habitats. Over 75% of BTM area in Inventoried Roadless Area. | As described in Existing; proposed non-motorized emphasis in BTM area greatly limits possibilities for new road construction. |
| Guideline HU G11 – Avoid expanding over-snow routes or areas beyond baseline areas of consistent snow compaction unless to consolidate use and improve lynx habitat | Extremely limited existing areas of designated over-snow routes, and no existing designated play areas | Eliminates snowmobile travel throughout BTM area; non-motorized over-snow travel likely to occur on trails currently used for snowmobiles and non-motorized winter travel |
| Guideline HU G12 – Winter access for non-recreational special uses should be limited to designated routes or designated over-snow routes | Extremely limited winter access for special uses (access to one communication site and 1-2 private inholdings near BTM area perimeter) | Winter access to communication site would be on case-by-case basis, along existing road. Infrequent use would not result in area of snow compaction. |

Compliance with Proposed Critical Habitat Designation

The BTM area is along the eastern boundary of Unit 3 (Northern Rockies Unit) of the Proposed critical habitat for Canada lynx (Federal Register V.73 No.30). As such, the BTM and surrounding lands to the north, west, and south have been identified as containing adequate amounts of boreal forest, with adequate annual snowfall to support viable populations of lynx. Although the Skyland Fire reduced snowshoe hare, and therefore lynx foraging habitat in the BTM area, it is recognized that forested landscapes are dynamic and that lynx home ranges will necessarily incorporate forest stands in differing stages of succession (Fed. Register V. 73 No.30). The key to maintenance of the principal constituent elements (PCEs) for lynx habitat is connectivity between patches of suitable foraging habitat, maintained at a spatial scale that allows for large disturbances such as the Skyland Fire. The BTM area encompasses over 25,000 acres of potential lynx habitat, and is adjoined to the west and south by National Forest lands that also support large acreages of lynx habitat. Glacier National Park to the north, although separated from the BTM area by a two-lane highway (US Highway 2), also contains large tracts of lynx habitat.

The Proposed Plan would not alter the amount or characteristics of boreal forest habitat in the BTM area. It would remove nearly all motorized travel from the BTM area, particularly from the interior and south portions that adjoin additional lynx habitat to the west and south. Therefore, the Proposed Plan would not affect proposed critical habitat in the BTM area.

Compliance with the LCNF Forest Plan

The Lewis and Clark National Forest Plan was completed in 1986, many years before Canada lynx were listed as a Threatened species. Therefore no specific measures for protection of Canada lynx or their habitat were included in the Plan. General measures for protection of Threatened and Endangered species and their habitats in the Forest Plan are included in Table 7, above, in the grizzly bear analysis section.

***Cumulative Effects***

A number of factors could potentially result in impacts to Canada lynx cumulative to those of the Proposed Travel Plan. These factors are: prescribed burning/wildfire, timber harvest, livestock grazing, and implementation of the Birch-South Travel Management Plan.

In 2007 the Skyland Fire burned approximately 46,000 acres on the Flathead National Forest, LCNF, and Blackfeet Indian Reservation, with the majority of acres on the LCNF in the BTM area (over 31,000, or about 23% of the total BTM area). Roughly 34% of the mapped foraging and denning habitat in the BTM area LAUs is within the fire perimeter, although not all of it burned, and fire intensity varied in areas that did burn. The result, however, is likely a reduction in available lynx foraging habitat in the BTM area for at least 3-5 years. In addition to the Skyland Fire, the Fool Creek and Ahorn Fires burned large areas further south on the RMRD in 2007. The combined total of all 3 fires was about 105,000 acres on the RMRD that were within the fire perimeters. Specific impacts

to lynx habitat of the Fool Creek and Ahorn Fires have not yet been estimated, although it is assumed that those fires also decreased the quantity of lynx habitat currently available on the RMRD. Several wildfires of varying size as well as several smaller prescribed fires have occurred on the RMRD since 1988. Within the perimeters of all of these fires, a mosaic of fire effects was achieved. Additional natural and prescribed fires may occur throughout the RMRD and adjoining lands in future years. Impacts on habitat will vary depending on the location and severity of the fires and on other factors. Fires may alter or remove habitat for lynx prey species within portions of their perimeter, but in some areas regeneration may result in improved snowshoe hare habitat within several years of burning.

Very little timber harvest has occurred on the RMRD since 1988, all of it more than 20 miles south of the BTM area. Some firewood cutting for individual and family use occurs in specific areas near the NF boundary in the BTM area. This activity generally occurs within a very short distance of existing roads, because motor vehicle travel has not been allowed off designated roads and trails since 2001. Personal-use firewood cutting would continue to occur in these areas. Nearly all of the wood-cutting that occurs is in areas not mapped as lynx habitat. Therefore this activity is likely to have little to no effect on lynx or their prey.

Livestock grazing currently occurs within the project area on three permitted cattle grazing allotments. One additional cattle grazing allotment has been inactive for several years but may be used again in the future. Three of these allotments contain only limited acreage of lynx habitat, as does one pasture of the fourth. Grazing is managed in the project area on a deferred rest-rotation basis. Allotments are monitored and grazing plans adjusted annually to maintain established standards for forage utilization and impacts to vegetation and landscape features. Nevertheless, grazing has the potential to alter habitat for lynx prey species.

In October 2007 the LCNF released a new Travel Management Plan for the portion of the RMRD south of North Fork Birch Creek. Analysis and consultation for this plan was carried out in 2006. The Biological Assessment (BA) for the Birch-South plan concluded that the plan would reduce the overall acreage of lynx habitat available to snowmobiles, but would maintain the existing limited mileage of routes designated for use by snowmobiles (USDA Forest Service 2007a). The Birch-South plan would add to the overall reduction in snowmobile activity that would occur under the Proposed Plan for the BTM.

**Determination of Effects**

I have determined implementation of the proposed Federal Action MAY AFFECT, BUT IS NOT LIKELY TO ADVERSELY AFFECT Canada lynx. My determination is based on the following rationale:

1. The project would eliminate snowmobiling from the entire BTM area.
2. Over-snow activity, such as cross-country skiing, would continue and have the potential to create limited areas of compacted snow.

3. The project would eliminate wheeled motorized travel in the BTM area except on a few access roads near the area perimeter, thus reducing potential for impacts to lynx.
4. Cumulative impacts of other projects on lynx, their habitat, and prey species would be negligible.

I have determined implementation of the proposed Federal Action WILL NOT RESULT IN DESTRUCTION OR ADVERSE MODIFICATION OF PROPOSED CRITICAL HABITAT for Canada lynx. My determination is based on the following rationale:

1. The project would not result in any vegetation changes in the area; therefore the project would not
    a. reduce or remove understory vegetation within boreal forest stands, or
    b. cause permanent loss or conversion of boreal forest.
2. The project would not increase traffic volume and speed on roads dividing critical lynx habitat; the project would in fact eliminate motorized travel from all but a very limited number of roads at the perimeter of the project area.

**Recommendations For Removing, Avoiding, or Compensating Adverse Effects**

No adverse effects are anticipated.

## CONSULTATION

Consultation for this project was initiated by a meeting between the following FS personnel: A. Rowley (LCNF Deputy Forest Supervisor), L. Conway (LCNF Forest Biologist), W. Maples (RMRD District Biologist), and the following FWS personnel: A. Vandehey (Consultation Biologist). The meeting was held on 15 November 2005 in Wolf Creek, MT, and occurred at a time when the LCNF proposed to make a single decision for travel management on the entire RMRD. Discussion focused primarily around information needs for consultation on grizzly bears pertaining specifically to access management; a summary is provided in the 'Consultation' section of the Biological Assessment for the Birch-South decision (USDA Forest Service 2007a).

Concurrence was requested and received in September 2006 on the Biological Assessment for the Birch-South Travel Management Plan, after the decision had been made to separate the decision for that portion of the RMRD from the decision for the BTM area.

In July 2008, W. Maples (USDA Forest Service) initiated a telephone conversation with A. Vandehey (USDI Fish and Wildlife Service) regarding consultation on the BTM Travel Management Plan. The discussion focused on the question of whether it was necessary to complete a detailed access management analysis and CEM analysis for this decision, given its simplicity in removing all motorized travel from the BTM area. A. Vandehey felt that some type of access management or motorized route density analysis would be necessary, but that the CEM analysis was not required.

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# Appendix D

US Fish and Wildlife Service Concurrence

USFWS Letter of Concurrence: December 15, 2008:

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ECOLOGICAL SERVICES MONTANA FIELD
OFFICE 585 SHEPARD WAY HELENA, MONTANA
59601 PHONE (406) 449-5225, FAX (406) 449-5339

# United States Department of the Interior

File: M19 Lewis and Clark National Forest (I) December 15, 2008

Lesley W. Thompson, Forest Supervisor
Lewis and Clark National Forest
1101 15th Street North
P.O. Box 869
Great Falls, Montana 59403-0869

Dear Mr. Thompson:

This is in response to your November 10, 2008 request for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) review of the biological assessment for federally listed threatened and endangered species regarding the effects of the proposed Rocky Mountain Ranger District Travel Management Plan, Badger-Two Medicine Area (Travel Plan). Your request was received November 14, 2008.

Travel management would be revised on the non-wilderness portion of the Rocky Mountain Ranger District north of Birch Creek in the area commonly known as the Badger-Two Medicine Area. A total of approximately 9 miles of road would be open yearlong or seasonally to motorized travel. The majority of these roads would be restricted to existing roads along the periphery of the Travel Plan area. These roads access campgrounds, trailheads, and firewood cutting areas. Approximately 3.7 miles of the Whiterock Pass Road near the eastern boundary of the area would be open only for very occasional travel by permittees to access communication sites for maintenance or emergency repairs, but would not be open at any time to the public or for routine administrative travel. No trails would be open to motorized travel of any kind. Snowmobile travel would not be allowed anywhere in the Travel Plan area.

The Service has reviewed the biological assessment and concurs with the determination that the proposed action is not likely to adversely affect the threatened grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*), the threatened Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) and the endangered gray wolf (*Canis lupus*). Therefore, pursuant to 50 CFR 402.13 (a), formal consultation on the species referenced above is not required.

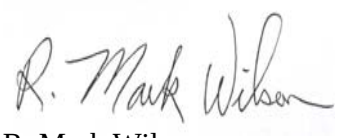
The Service bases its concurrence on the information and analysis in the biological assessment prepared by Wendy Maples, District Biologist on the Rocky Mountain Ranger District. Three grizzly bear subunits occur within the analysis area. Open and total motorized access route densities would be reduced and core area would be increased on Forest lands in all three grizzly bear subunits in the action area. No trails would be open to motorized travel of any kind and snowmobile travel would not be allowed anywhere in the action area. Five lynx analysis units occur within the analysis area. Snowmobile travel would no longer be allowed anywhere in the

action area. Over-the-snow activity, such as cross-country skiing, would continue to be allowed. Vegetation changes would not occur as a result of the proposed action. Proposed lynx critical habitat would not be affected. All aspects of the proposed Travel Plan are compatible with applicable standards and guidelines in the Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction. No known wolf pack occurs within the action area. However, it is likely that wolves from nearby packs use portions of the area. No known den or rendezvous sites occur in the action area and the Travel Plan would no affect the wolf prey base. A reduction in roads would occur; therefore an increase in mortality risk to wolves is not likely. The Travel Plan is a long-term plan, expected to be in place for a minimum of 10 to 15 years. During this timeframe, the potential for disturbance to grizzly bears, Canada lynx and gray wolves does exist, however we agree with the conclusions in the biological assessment that impacts related to the Travel Plan would be insignificant to grizzly bears, Canada lynx and gray wolves.

If the final project design is changed so as to have effects on threatened or endangered species other than those described in the biological assessment, a revised biological assessment will be necessary. The Service will then issue a letter of concurrence/non-concurrence on the revised biological assessment.

We appreciate your efforts to ensure the conservation of threatened and endangered species as part of your responsibilities under the Endangered Species Act, as amended. If you have questions or comments related to this issue, please contact Katrina Dixon or me at 406-449-5225.

Sincerely,



R. Mark Wilson
Field Supervisor

# Appendix E

Blackfeet Tribal Historic Preservation Office Concurrence

BTHPO Letter of Concurrence: March 6, 2009

RECEIVED
MAR 6 2009
Lewis & Clark NF

Appendix E

BLACKFEET
TRIBAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
BLACKFEET TRIBE
P. O. BOX 2809
BROWNING, MT. 59417
**Telephone (406) 338-7181** **john.murray@blackfeetplanning.org** **FAX (406) 338-7206**

March 5, 2009

Lesley W. Thompson, Forest Manager
Lewis & Clark National Forest
1101 15th Street North
P.O. Box 869
Great Falls, MT 59417

Letter of Concurrence: Badger Two Medicine Unit - Travel Management Decision

Dear Mr. Thompson:

The Blackfeet Tribal Historic Preservation Office has received your letter of March 2, 2009 regarding the travel management decision to close to motorized use, both in summer and winter, all trails in the Badger-Two Medicine Unit. The Blackfeet THPO is in "concurrence" with your findings.

As per Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), 16 USC 470 et seq., when properly done, compliance always results in good management of cultural resources by federal agencies, and good management always results in compliance with federal mandates.

Again, be it known to all, the Blackfeet THPO is in "concurrence" with your findings.

Sincerely yours,

John R. Murray, Jr., THPO

cc: Blackfeet Tribal Business Council
Montana SHPO
Michael Munoz

# Badger Two Medicine - Travel Management Plan Record of Decision

Rocky Mountain Ranger District  Lewis and Clark National Forest

| BTM-Travel Management Code | *Restricted to:* Road Vehicles *(licensed)* | *Restricted to:* All-Terrain Vehicles *(unlicensed)* | *Restricted to:* Trail Bikes *(unlicensed)* | *Restricted to:* Pack and Stock | *Restricted to:* Bicycles | *Approximate* Miles of Roads & Trails | Comments *Note: entire Badger Two Medicine Area is closed to snowmobiling* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | *Yearlong* | *Yearlong* | *Yearlong* | *No restrictions* | *No restrictions* | *182* | Closed yearlong to all types of wheeled motorized vehicles |
| B2 | *No restrictions* | *Yearlong* | *Yearlong* | *No restrictions* | *No restrictions* | *6* | Open |
| I | *12/1-6/30* | *12/1-6/30* | *12/1-6/30* | *No restrictions* | *No restrictions* | *2* | Seasonal restrictions to all types of wheeled motorized vehicles. Open 7/1 – 11/30 |
| Z | *Seasonal* | *Yearlong* | *Yearlong* | *No restrictions* | *No restrictions* | *Summit CG 0.6* | Closure dates by administrative option, related to weather or potential for resource damage |

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK

BLACKFEET INDIAN RESERVATION

FLATHEAD NATIONAL FOREST

East Glacier

Summit

Badger

8960 9223 8958 9218 9204 8987

Winter Area Restrictions in the Badger Two Medicine

**Snowmobile Area Restrictions**

Restricted Yearlong

Restricted Yearlong - Wilderness

Private Land

0 2 4 8 Miles

**All roads & trails in the Badger Two Medicine Area are closed yearlong to snowmobiling.**

**Note: Montana State Law prohibits the operation of snowmobiles on plowed roads open to wheeled vehicle traffic.**

**Legend**

**Route Categories**

- Road - No Restrictions
- Road - Seasonal Restrictions
- Road - Yearlong Restrictions
- Trail - Nonmotorized
- Trail - No perfected easement
- Decommission Route

**Travel Codes**

- A Trails
- B2 Roads

*Please refer to travel management code table above for specifics.*

**Lands Adjacent to Badger Two**

- BLM
- Bureau of Reclamation
- National Park Service
- Other Federal
- Private Land
- Private Land Trust
- Reservation Land
- State Land
- Water
- Adjacent National Forests
- Wilderness

0 1.25 2.5 5 Miles

Vicinity Map


Disclaimer:
The Forest Service uses the most current and complete data available. GIS data and product accuracy may vary. They may be: developed from sources of differing accuracy, accurate only at certain scales, based on modeling or interpretation, incomplete while being created or revised, etc. Using GIS products for purposes other than those for which they were created may yield inaccurate or misleading results. The Forest Service reserves the right to correct, update, modify or replace GIS products without notification. For more information contact:

Lewis & Clark National Forest
1101 15 Street N, Box 869
Great Falls, Montana 59403
406-791-7700

N W E S

Travel Management for other Jurisdictions is not displayed on this map. Please refer to regulations for the appropriate Agency, Forest or other Jurisdiction for more information.

*Data Compiled: July 2008*