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Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

For the

**Beaverhead-Deerlodge National
Forest Land and Resource
Management Plan to Comply with
District of Montana Court Order**

Beaverhead & Jefferson Counties, Montana

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**Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement
for the
Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan
To Comply with District of Montana Court Order**

Beaverhead and Jefferson Counties, Montana

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Abstract: In an April 2, 2012 Order, the U.S. District Court for the District of Montana directed the Forest Service to apply the minimization criteria mandated by Executive Order 11644 at the route-specific level where specific snowmobile routes are delineated in the 2009 Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest Plan. This Draft Supplemental EIS evaluates potential effects relevant to applying the minimization criteria to the three routes specifically designated in the Forest Plan as exceptions to winter, non-motorized areas.

Reviewers should provide the Forest Service with their comments during the review period of the draft supplemental environmental impact statement. This will enable the Forest Service to analyze and respond to the comments at one time and to use information acquired in the preparation of the final supplemental environmental impact statement, thus avoiding undue delay in the decision making process. Reviewers have an obligation to structure their participation in the National Environmental Policy Act process so that it is meaningful and alerts the agency to the reviewers' position and contentions. Comments on the draft supplemental environmental impact statement should be specific and should address the adequacy of the statement and the merits of the alternatives discussed (40 CFR 1503.3).

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This Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) evaluates potential effects relevant to applying the minimization criteria established in Executive Order (EO) 116441 at the route-specific level where snowmobile routes were delineated in the 2009 Land and Resource Management Plan² (Forest Plan) for the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (BDNF).

Background

2009 Forest Plan

In a Record of Decision (ROD) dated January 14, 2009, Regional Forester Thomas Tidwell approved the 2009 Forest Plan for the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest (often referred to as the Revised Forest Plan). The 2009 Forest Plan provides management direction for activities on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest for the next 10-15 years, including direction on eight revision topics (vegetation, wildlife, aquatic resources, recreation and travel management, fire management, livestock grazing, timber and recommended wilderness). This direction replaced previous management direction from the 1986 Beaverhead National Forest Plan and the 1987 Deerlodge National Forest Plan.

As part of addressing the recreation and travel management revision topic, the Forest Plan prescribed motorized and non-motorized allocations for large blocks of land. Pages 14 to 15 of the 2009 ROD disclose decision rationale to close 40% of the forest to winter public motorized recreation, as opposed to just 16% in the “no action” alternative. Alternative 6 Modified resulted in more acres allocated for quiet, non-motorized winter use and provided non-motorized allocations near conveniently located staging areas that provide quick and easy vehicle access to winter day use.

Forest Plan Related Motorized Closures

As explained in the 2009 ROD (page 23), the Forest Plan established desired conditions, standards and allowable uses but did not make site specific decisions such as closing individual motorized routes in areas recommended for wilderness. In the 2009 ROD, the Regional Forester directed the Forest Supervisor to issue a second ROD, based on the analysis in the FEIS, making site-specific decisions closing areas and routes to motorized use based on Forest Plan allocation and signing and enforcing those closures.

Forest Supervisor David Myers signed the 2010 ROD Enacting Forest Plan Travel Management Direction for Certain Areas of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest on February 12, 2010. Decisions documented in this ROD include closing areas to winter motorized travel allocated in the 2009 Forest Plan to winter non-motorized prescriptions from December 2 through May 15. Special Order 2010-BD-032, signed by Forest

¹ EO 11644 – “Use of Off-Road Vehicles on the Public Lands” - is included as Appendix A. Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR part 212 implement Executive Order 11644 as amended by Executive Order 11989.

² The 2009 Forest Plan, Forest Plan FEIS, Forest Plan ROD and the 2010 ROD Enacting Forest Plan Travel Management Direction for Certain Areas of the BDNF are electronically available at: <http://fs.usda.gov/goto/bdnf/forest-plan>.

Supervisor David Myers July 6, 2010, implemented the decisions in the 2010 ROD and initiated enforcement of these motorized closures.

Motor Vehicle Use Maps

The 2009 ROD (page 23) also described another stage of travel planning designating routes for motorized travel under 36 CFR 212 which would result in publication of Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUM) for the BDNF. This phase of travel analysis is being conducted area by area across the Forest.

On March 3, 2011, Forest Supervisor David Myers signed the Decision Notice for Designation of Summer Motorized Travel on the Madison Ranger District. This decision was implemented October 14, 2011 with publication of MVUMs for the Gravelly and Tobacco Root Mountains.

U.S. District Court

On September 7, 2010, Wildlands CPR, Inc., Friends of the Bitterroot, Inc., and Montanans for Quiet Recreation filed a complaint in U.S. District Court for the District of Montana (Case 98:10-cv-00104-DWM) alleging inadequate analysis of the impacts of winter motorized travel when developing the Forest Plan and failure to analyze criteria intended to minimize off-road vehicle impacts.

In an Order dated April 2, 2012, the U.S. District Court for the District of Montana found the Forest Service had adequately applied the minimization criteria of EO 11644 for areas generally open to snowmobile use. However, the court found “to the extent that specific routes have been designated for snowmobile use”, the Forest Service failed to show it adequately applied the minimization criteria at the route-specific level. The court ordered as follows: “that this case is remanded to the Forest Service for the limited purpose of applying the minimization criteria mandated by EO 11644 at the route specific level where specific snowmobile routes are designated. The Forest Service shall perform this analysis and update the Revised Forest Plan by September 30, 2012. A failure to do so will result in the suspension of the winter travel management portion of the Revised Forest Plan as of October 1, 2012.”

Purpose of this SEIS

This SEIS evaluates the potential effects relevant to applying the minimization criteria established by EO 11644 at the route-specific level where snowmobile routes were designated in the 2009 Forest Plan, as directed by the U.S. District Court for the District of Montana in an Order dated April 2, 2012.

This SEIS provides additional environmental analysis for three routes designated in the Forest Plan as exceptions to winter, non-motorized areas. Maps displaying the routes are attached as Appendix B. There is a Vicinity Map followed by three Management Area Maps from the Revised Forest Plan which show the designated routes. These routes are:

Snowmobile use through the Electric Peak area near Thunderbolt Creek and Cottonwood Lake (Jefferson County, Montana),

Snowmobile use through the non-motorized area on the Road #056 corridor in the vicinity of Antelope Basin (Beaverhead County, Montana), and

Snowmobile use on the route to Antone Cabin in the southwest portion of the Snowcrest Mountains (Beaverhead County, Montana).

No other snowmobile routes were specifically designated on maps in the Forest Plan.

Minimization Criteria

Section 3(a) of EO 11644 directs agencies to develop and issue regulations to provide for administrative designation of the specific areas and trails on public lands on which the use of off-road vehicles may be permitted. Regulations shall direct that the designation of such areas and trails will be based upon the protection of the resources of the public lands, promotion of the safety of all users of those lands, and minimization of conflicts among the various uses of those lands. Section 3(a) further specifies that regulations shall be in accordance with the following:

Areas and trails shall be located to minimize damage to soil, watershed, vegetation, or other resources of the public lands.

Areas and trails shall be located to minimize harassment of wildlife or significant disruption of wildlife habitats.

Areas and trails shall be located to minimize conflicts between off-road vehicle use and other existing or proposed recreational uses of the same or neighboring public lands, and to ensure the compatibility of such uses with existing conditions in populated areas, taking into account noise and other factors.³

Areas and trails shall not be located in officially designated Wilderness Areas or Primitive Areas. Areas and trails shall be located in areas of the National Park system, Natural Areas, or National Wildlife Refuges and Game Ranges only if the respective agency head determines that off-road vehicle use in such locations will not adversely affect their natural, aesthetic, or scenic values.⁴

Route-Specific Analysis

Electric Peak

Page 94 of the Forest Plan is a map of the Electric Peak Management Area (MA) located in the Boulder River landscape north of Butte and south of Helena, Montana (also included in Appendix B of this DSEIS). The cross-hatched area on this map displays an area where summer and winter motorized travel is not allowed. The yellow line traveling north along Thunderbolt Creek to Cottonwood Lake then west towards Rock Creek is an exception to the winter motorized travel not allowed restriction. A Forest Plan Standard specific to the Electric Peak MA confines snowmobiling to designated routes (Forest Plan, page 95).

This route is 5.3 miles in length. It includes Trail #7065 along Thunderbolt Creek to Cottonwood Lake, a non-motorized trail during the summer. In winter, this route is part

³ These routes are not near populated areas. Therefore there are no further discussions related to this criteria in the DSEIS.

⁴ These routes are not within Wilderness or other areas described in this section. Therefore there are no further discussions related to this criteria in the DSEIS.

of the larger 12 mile long Cottonwood Lake Loop Snowmobile Trail. The Loop is popular with local area snowmobilers, and has been groomed by the Deer Lodge Snowmobile Club under an agreement with the Forest Service for more than 35 years. The 5.3 mile Thunderbolt Creek segment was retained as an exception to the winter motorized closure because it was key to providing this continued loop opportunity. The route provides a back country snowmobile experience that is not available for the remainder of the routes in the area, which are largely located on main roads.

The route has been an open winter motorized route and in use for more than 35 years prior to the 2009 Forest Plan (FEIS, pages 647 and 917).

The FEIS developed a range of alternatives which considered allocating or not allocating areas with important motorized routes and analyzing those effects by landscape. Alternative 6 was designed to retain motorized corridors in Electric Peak Management Area, while providing for non-motorized allocations (FEIS, pages 642, 739, 917 and 977). Alternative 6 Modified closed 55 percent of the Electric Peak management area to winter motorized travel. This area was open to winter motorized use in Alternative 1, No Action.

Effects of the alternatives analyzed in the FEIS (including an exception to a winter, non-motorized allocation for this route) to recreation and travel management in the Boulder River landscape are described in the FEIS on pages 374-376. Comments on the FEIS from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the Montana Wilderness Association specifically expressed support for the exception to the winter motorized travel not allowed restriction in the Electric Peak MA, retaining the snowmobile route.

Soil, Water, Vegetation & Other Resources

As disclosed in the FEIS (page 90), overall emissions from snowmobile use on the BDNF are unlikely to exceed National Ambient Air Quality or Montana Air Quality Standards since these standards have not been exceeded in the West Yellowstone area where snowmobile use is much heavier. Use of this single route by some winter, motorized recreationists is unlikely to exceed the same air quality standards. “Nuisance” emissions (emissions which alter desirable, clean-smelling air) are localized (along the route) and temporary (while snowmobiles are operating on the trail).

The FEIS finds impacts from snowmobile use on the BDNF to soil and vegetation are benign since these resources are buffered by snow during winter snowmobile use and the tracks vanish with snow melt (FEIS, pg 289). Snowmobile use of the Electric Peak route also occurs when soil and vegetation are buffered by snow.

Water quality has not been an issue with snowmobile use of this trail in the past. While Trail #7065 generally follows Thunderbolt Creek for much of its length, snow, terrain, and use patterns appear to be providing adequate protection. Risks for water contamination are highest near concentrated use areas such as snowmobile staging areas or parking lots if they occur close to water (FEIS, pg. 137). However, for this particular trail, there is no set parking/staging area and winter recreationists may arrive at the trail from a number of possible parking/unloading locations usually five or more miles from the trail. Parking generally occurs near the east end of the plowed County road and locations vary by season, snow, and plowing conditions. These sites serve as winter recreation access points for the broader Electric Peak/Boulder River area, and their use would be expected to continue essentially unchanged regardless of whether Trail #7065 is open to snowmobiles or not.

Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat

The Revised Forest Plan specifically addressed how the selected alternative reduced snowmobile impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat by closing areas to motorized winter recreation. Non-motorized winter allocations increased from the existing condition of 16% across the Forest to 39% (FEIS, pg. 508-509). Also, forest-wide the percent of big game winter range closed to motorized use increased from 26% to 43% and the percent

The Electric Peak area (the location of the 5.3 mile snowmobile trail) is in the Boulder River landscape where winter motorized acres were reduced from 189,122 acres to 131,451 acres (FEIS, pg. 376). Specifically, in the Boulder River landscape the percent of big game winter range closed went 15% to 44% and the percent of wolverine denning habitat closed to snowmobiles increased from 0% to 55% (FEIS, pg. 510, Table 176). In fact, the Electric Peak MA includes more than 5,900 acres allocated to winter non-motorized use with additional acres available on the adjacent Helena National Forest.

Concerning the wildlife and wildlife habitat specific to the 5.3 mile trail, big game are minimally impacted as the trail is not located in big game winter range. AR H17-02. As such, there is little likelihood of any impact as big game species would not be present during snowmobile use periods. The trail is also not located in wolverine denning habitat (AR H17-02). Furthermore, the trail is not covered by persistent spring snow pack and the trail elevation is below the elevation break for wolverine (Copeland, 2010). In terms of mountain goats, the location of the trail is not in an area identified by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks as an area of mountain goat distribution (AR H17-33).

Snowmobile use on the delineated route also would not alter vegetation characteristics of wildlife habitat in the area because the vegetation is buffered by the snow. In addition, the use of the trail does not impact riparian areas or species associated with riparian areas as use is restricted to the footprint of the existing trail and use is during the winter when it has negligible impact.

Regarding impacts on grizzly bear, the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest has recently re-initiated consultation with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the effects of implementing the 2009 Revised Forest Plan on the remainder of the Forest outside the Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Ecosystem. This re-initiation of consultation encompasses all aspects of the 2009 Revised Forest Plan including winter motorized use and allocations. On July 9, 2012 the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest submitted a Supplemental Biological Assessment to the USFWS. This Supplemental Biological Assessment determined that in terms of access management and secure habitat that the 2009 Revised Forest Plan, while improving these conditions over time, may affect and is likely to adversely affect the threatened grizzly bear. This determination was based on existing summer and fall open motorized road and trail densities above desired conditions as described in the 2009 Revised Forest Plan. Winter motorized recreation allocations was not a basis for this determination because use occurs when bears are in hibernation. In fact, the Supplemental Biological Assessment discussed the 23% reduction in acres available for winter motorized recreation. The Forest Service's prior Biological Assessment and the USFWS's Biological Opinion on the Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Ecosystem portion of the Forest found little effect of snowmobiles on grizzly bears except for possible impact to females with cubs immediately after den emergence (AR H17-37 pg. 31-33). The BO provides that the greatest probability of interactions at or near dens would be where potential denning habitat overlaps with open snowmobile areas and the influence zones around roads or routes.

In terms of the 5.3 mile snowmobile trail in the Electric Peak area, neither the trail nor the trail's influence zone overlaps with any potential denning habitat (which are usually on 30 to 60 degree slopes with a mean elevation of 8,845) (Supplemental BA pg. 45). The trail is below this elevation and does not have the steeper slopes for denning habitat. Furthermore, there has been no documented denning activity in the area. Therefore, there is not expected to be any impact from snowmobile use on the trail to any emerging females with cubs and there is not expected to be any impact from snowmobile use on the trail during denning or with grizzly bear use of spring habitat.

Off-Road Vehicle Use and Other Existing or Proposed Recreational Uses

Alternative 6 Modified allowed snowmobiling on designated routes (including the groomed trails), allowing riders to use popular trails while assuring there were no known user conflicts or resource impacts in the area. Many non-motorized, winter recreationists prefer opportunities to ski or snowshoe in the absence of motorized winter use (snowmobiles). In the Electric Peak MA, skiing and snowshoeing opportunities in the absence of snowmobile use is available on more than 5,900 acres (with additional areas available on the adjacent Helena National Forest). The 5.3 miles of snowmobile trail bisects this non-motorized area. Since snow packed down by snowmobiles on the trail makes travel on skis or snowshoes easier, some non-motorized users may choose to use the trail to access the area closed to snowmobile use. Conversely, some non-motorized users will avoid the trail to distance themselves from the sight and sound of motorized users. While a few skiers take multiple day trips and winter camp, most skiers are limited to about 10 miles per day so use generally occurs in relative close proximity to plowed roads and parking areas (FEIS, page 352). The closest plowed parking area is located about 5 miles from the southern end of the Electric Peak route.

There are no known public safety issues, reported conflicts, accidents or injuries associated with winter motorized use on Trail #7065.

Antelope Basin

Page 128 of the Forest Plan is a map of the Antelope Basin MA located in the Gravelly landscape south of Ennis and east of Dillon, Montana. The area on this map with \\\ hatching (see Antelope Basin MA map in Appendix B) displays an area where winter motorized travel is not allowed. The yellow line traveling north to south along the eastern edge of the map is an exception to the winter motorized travel not allowed restriction. A Forest Plan Standard specific to the Antelope Basin MA limits snowmobiles to the Road #056 corridor through this winter, non-motorized area (Forest Plan, page 129). The Forest Plan also specifies that this exception provides access to open areas beyond.

Further travel planning completed under 36 CFR 212 for the Madison Ranger District resulted in the October 14, 2011 publication of a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) for the Gravelly Mountain Range. The MVUM designates Road #056 as open to highway vehicles all year. Road #056 is not plowed. When snow makes the road impassable to highway vehicles, it is available for snowmobile use.

Divide Creek Road #056 is 4.6 miles in length and is located along the Continental Divide forming the border between Montana and Idaho near Island Park, Idaho. This route is the preferred connection between areas open to winter motorized use on the adjacent Caribou-Targhee National Forest. Road #056 provides the best way to connect

areas open to winter motorized uses. Use on the route is moderate as loop opportunities are provided only in good snow years.

The road has been as a connector route continually open to winter motorized use since snowmobiling began in the area.

Recreational users access the BDNF portion of the road from Highway 287 in Idaho, travel through an area open to snowmobiles on the Caribou-Targhee National Forest, through a winter, non-motorized area using the Road #056 corridor on the BDNF and back onto an open area in Idaho or other open areas in the Centennial Valley in Montana.

The FEIS developed a range of alternatives which considered allocating or not allocating areas with important motorized routes and analyzing those effects by landscape. Action alternatives allocated additional quiet, non-motorized opportunities, and a reduction to motorized settings in the winter. Alternative 6 was designed to retain this motorized corridor in the Antelope Basin MA. This area was well suited to non-motorized allocations but an important snowmobile route passed through the area (FEIS, pages 362 and 632). Winter motorized use in the entire Antelope Basin MA was allowed prior to the Forest Plan. Within the Gravelly Landscape winter motorized acres were reduced 38 percent, from 377, 935 acres in Alternative 1 to 234,607 acres in Alternative 6 (FEIS page 382).

Soil, Water, Vegetation & Other Resources

As disclosed in the FEIS (page 90), overall emissions from snowmobile use on the BDNF are unlikely to exceed National Ambient Air Quality or Montana Air Quality Standards since these standards have not been exceeded in the West Yellowstone area where snowmobile use is much heavier. Use of this single route by some winter motorized recreationists is unlikely to exceed the same air quality standards. “Nuisance” emissions (emissions which alter desirable, clean-smelling air) are localized (along the route) and temporary (while snowmobiles are operating in the road corridor).

The FEIS finds impacts from snowmobile use on the BDNF to soil and vegetation are benign since these resources are buffered by snow during snowmobile use and the tracks vanish with snow melt (FEIS, pg 289). Snowmobile use along the Road #056 corridor near Antelope Basin also occurs when soil and vegetation are buffered by snow. In addition, the route is a system road open to highway vehicles all year (although it becomes impassable due to snow during the winter).

Water quality has not been an issue with snowmobile use on this road in the past. Road #056 is located on the Continental Divide; there is no nearby water other than a few small springs. Snow, road design, and use patterns appear to be providing adequate protection. Risks for water contamination are highest near concentrated use areas such as snowmobile staging areas or parking lots if they occur close to water (FEIS, pg. 137). However, for this particular route, parking typically occurs off-forest along Highway 287.⁵ No water quality concerns resulting from winter recreation use at these parking areas along the highway have been identified. These sites serve as winter recreation access points for other areas on and off the BDNF, and their use would be expected to continue regardless of whether Road #056 is open to snowmobiles or not.

⁵ This highway crosses Reynolds Pass on the Idaho/Montana state line. It is numbered Highway 87 in Idaho and Highway 287 in Montana.

Wildlife

The Revised Forest Plan specifically addressed how the selected alternative reduced snowmobile impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat by closing areas to motorized winter recreation. Non-motorized winter allocations increased from the existing condition of 16% across the Forest to 39% (FEIS, pg. 508-509). Also, forest-wide the percent of big game winter range closed to motorized use increased from 26% to 43% .

Snowmobile use along Road #506 corridor in Antelope Basin is in the Gravelly landscape where winter motorized acres were reduced from 377,935 acres to 234,607 acres (FEIS, pg. 382). Specifically, in the Gravelly landscape the percent of big game winter range closed went 19% to 49% and the percent of wolverine denning habitat closed to snowmobiles increased from 25% to 79% (FEIS, pg. 510) .

Concerning the wildlife and wildlife habitat specific to snowmobile use along Road #506 corridor in Antelope Basin, big game are minimally impacted as the trail is not located in big game winter range. AR H17-02. As such, there is little likelihood of any impact as big game species would not be present during snowmobile use periods. The trail is also not located in wolverine denning habitat (AR H17-02). Furthermore, the trail is not covered by persistent spring snow pack and the trail elevation is below the elevation break for wolverine (Copeland, 2010). In terms of mountain goats, the location of the trail is not in an area identified by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks as an area of mountain goat distribution (AR H17-33).

Snowmobile use on the delineated route also would not alter vegetation characteristics of wildlife habitat in the area because the vegetation is buffered by the snow. In addition, the use of the trail does not impact riparian areas or species associated with riparian areas as use is restricted to the footprint of the existing trail and use is during the winter when it has negligible impact.

On October 4, 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a Biological Opinion and Incidental Take Statement for Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Ecosystem grizzly bears (including those in the Gravelly landscape) for the 2009 Forest Plan. This Biological Opinion considered all winter motorized and non-motorized use and allocations included in the Forest Plan.

The USFWS's Biological Opinion on the Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Ecosystem portion of the Forest found little effect of snowmobiles on grizzly bears except for possible impact to females with cubs immediately after den emergence (AR H17-37 pg. 31-33). The BO provides that the greatest probability of interactions at or near dens would be where potential denning habitat overlaps with open snowmobile areas and the influence zones around roads or routes.

In terms of snowmobile use along Road #506 corridor in Antelope Basin, neither the trail nor does the trail's influence zone overlap any potential denning habitat (which are usually on 30 to 60 degree slopes with a mean elevation of 8,845) (FEIS, Revised BE pg. 45). The trail is below this elevation and does not have the steeper slopes for denning habitat. Therefore, there is not expected to be any impact from snowmobile use on the trail to any emerging females with cubs. Furthermore, there is not expected to be any impact from snowmobile use on the trail during denning or with grizzly bear use of spring habitat.

Off-Road Vehicle Use and Other Existing or Proposed Recreational Uses

There are no reported conflicts between winter uses on Road #056. There are no recorded public safety issues, accidents, or injuries associated with winter motorized use of Road #056. There is no cost to maintain or administer this winter motorized route.

Many non-motorized, winter recreationists prefer opportunities to ski or snowshoe in the absence of motorized winter use (snowmobiles). In the Antelope Basin MA, skiing and snowshoeing opportunities in the absence of snowmobile use is available on about 5,500 acres. The 4.6 miles of snowmobile trail occurs along the east edge of this non-motorized area adjacent to open areas in Idaho. Since snow packed down by snowmobiles on the trail makes travel on skis or snowshoes easier, some non-motorized users may choose to use the trail to access the area closed to snowmobile use. Conversely, some non-motorized users will avoid the trail to distance themselves from the sight and sound of motorized users. While a few skiers take multiple day trips and winter camp, most skiers are limited to about 10 miles per day so use generally occurs in relative close proximity to plowed roads and parking areas (FEIS, page 352). Highway 287 is about 1.5 miles from the BDNF boundary.

Antone Cabin

Page 152 of the Forest Plan is a map of the Snowcrest Mountain Recommended Wilderness MA located in the Gravelly landscape south of Ennis and east of Dillon, Montana. Motorized travel is not allowed in the MA (see Snowcrest Mountain Recommended Wilderness MA map in Appendix B). The yellow line traveling northeast in the southwest corner of the MA to Antone Cabin is an exception to the motorized travel not allowed restriction⁶. A Forest Plan Standard specific to the Snowcrest Mountain Recommended Wilderness MA opens the road to Antone Cabin (Road #325) to motorized vehicles (including highway vehicles) yearlong (Forest Plan, page 153). Road #325 is 4.5 miles in length and accesses the Antone Cabin, available for public rental July 1 through April 1.

Further travel planning completed under 36 CFR 212 for the Madison Ranger District resulted in the October 14, 2011 publication of a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) for the Gravelly Mountain Range. The MVUM designates Road #325 (Antone) as open to highway vehicles July 1 through March 31. Road #325 is not plowed. When snow makes the road impassable to highway vehicles, it is available for snowmobile use.

The Antone Road #325 is open to motorized uses in the winter to provide access to the Antone Recreation Rental Cabin. Winter motorized use of the area has always been low, because of limited access.

Soil, Water, Vegetation & Other Resources

As disclosed in the FEIS (page 90), overall emissions from snowmobile use on the BDNF are unlikely to exceed National Ambient Air Quality or Montana Air Quality Standards since these standards have not been exceeded in the West Yellowstone area where snowmobile use is much heavier. Use of this single route by some winter, motorized recreationists is unlikely to exceed the same air quality standards. "Nuisance" emissions

⁶ A yellow line travelling southeast in the center portion of the map to The Notch is an exception to the summer, motorized travel restriction. This route is not available for winter, motorized travel (Forest Plan, page 153) and will not be further analyzed in this Supplemental DEIS.

(emissions which alter desirable, clean-smelling air) are localized (along the route) and temporary (while snowmobiles are operating on the road).

The FEIS finds impacts from snowmobile use on the BDNF to soil and vegetation are benign since these resources are buffered by snow during snowmobile use and the tracks vanish with snow melt (FEIS, page 289). Snowmobile use on the road to Antone Cabin also occurs when soil and vegetation are buffered by snow. In addition, the route is a system road open to highway vehicles July 1 through March 31 (although it becomes impassable due to snow during the winter).

Water quality has not been an issue with snowmobile use on this road in the past. Road #325 crosses tributaries to the South Fork of Blacktail Deer Creek with a bridge and culverts; snow, road design, and use patterns appear to be providing adequate protection. Risks for water contamination are highest near concentrated use areas such as snowmobile staging areas or parking lots if they occur close to water (FEIS, pg 137). However, for this particular route, parking typically occurs about 15 miles away where Beaverhead County plows snow on the Blacktail Road to Prices Canyon and the South Centennial Valley Road to the Red Rock Wildlife Refuge at Lakeview, Montana. Both roads are county roads. No water quality concerns resulting from winter recreation parking at these areas have been identified. These sites serve as winter recreation access points for other areas on and off the BDNF, and their use would be expected to continue regardless of whether Road #325 is open for snowmobile access to Antone Cabin or not.

Wildlife

The Revised Forest Plan specifically addressed how the selected alternative reduced snowmobile impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat by closing areas to motorized winter recreation. Non-motorized winter allocations increased from the existing condition of 16% across the Forest to 39% (FEIS, pg. 508-509). Also, forest-wide the percent of big game winter range closed to motorized use increased from 26% to 43% .

Snowmobile use along Road #506 corridor in Antelope Basin is in the Gravelly landscape where winter motorized acres were reduced from 377,935 acres to 234,607 acres (FEIS, pg. 382). Specifically, in the Gravelly landscape the percent of big game winter range closed went 19% to 49% and the percent of wolverine denning habitat closed to snowmobiles increased from 25% to 79% (FEIS, pg. 510) .

Concerning the wildlife and wildlife habitat specific to snowmobile use along Road #506 corridor in Antelope Basin, big game are minimally impacted as the trail is not located in big game winter range. AR H17-02. As such, there is little likelihood of any impact as big game species would not be present during snowmobile use periods. The trail is also not located in wolverine denning habitat (AR H17-02). Furthermore, the trail is not covered by persistent spring snow pack and the trail elevation is below the elevation break for wolverine (Copeland, 2010). In terms of mountain goats, the location of the trail is not in an area identified by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks as an area of mountain goat distribution (AR H17-33).

Snowmobile use on the delineated route also would not alter vegetation characteristics of wildlife habitat in the area because the vegetation is buffered by the snow. In addition, the use of the trail does not impact riparian areas or species associated with riparian areas as use is restricted to the footprint of the existing trail and use is during the winter when it has negligible impact.

On October 4, 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a Biological Opinion and Incidental Take Statement for Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Ecosystem grizzly bears (including those in the Gravelly landscape) for the 2009 Forest Plan. This Biological Opinion considered all winter motorized and non-motorized use and allocations included in the Forest Plan.

The USFWS's Biological Opinion on the Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Ecosystem portion of the Forest found little effect of snowmobiles on grizzly bears except for possible impact to females with cubs immediately after den emergence (AR H17-37 pg. 31-33). The BO provides that the greatest probability of interactions at or near dens would be where potential denning habitat overlaps with open snowmobile areas and the influence zones around roads or routes.

In terms of snowmobile use of 4.5 miles of Road #325 to access Antone Cabin, neither the trail nor does the trail's influence zone overlap any potential denning habitat (which are usually on 30 to 60 degree slopes with a mean elevation of 8,845) (FEIS, Revised BE pg. 45). The trail is below this elevation and does not have the steeper slopes for denning habitat. Therefore, there is not expected to be any impact from snowmobile use on the trail to any emerging females with cubs. Furthermore, there is not expected to be any impact from snowmobile use on the trail during denning or with grizzly bear use of spring habitat.

Off-Road Vehicle Use and Other Existing or Proposed Recreational Uses

Many non-motorized, winter recreationists prefer opportunities to ski or snowshoe in the absence of motorized winter use (snowmobiles). In the Snowcrest Mountain Recommended Wilderness MA, skiing and snowshoeing opportunities in the absence of snowmobile use is available on nearly 92,000 acres. The 4.5 miles of snowmobile trail occurs only in the southwest corner of this non-motorized area. Since snow packed down by snowmobiles on the trail makes travel on skis or snowshoes easier, some non-motorized users may choose to use the trail to access the area closed to snowmobile use. Conversely, some non-motorized users will avoid the trail to distance themselves from the sight and sound of motorized users. While a few skiers take multiple day trips and winter camp, most skiers are limited to about 10 miles per day so use generally occurs in relative close proximity to plowed roads and parking areas (FEIS, page 352). Plowed roads are located more than 15 miles from the Antone Cabin road. Some skiers may choose to travel to Antone Cabin (available for public rental) using a snowmobile and ski the surrounding large area in the absence of winter motorized use.

Snowmobiling in the area has occurred for many years. Within the Gravelly Landscape, winter motorized acres were reduced by 38 percent with Alternative 6 Modified, from 377,935 acres open to motorized winter use to 234,607 acres (FEIS page 382). Within the Snowcrest, Alternative 1 allows winter motorized use on 59 percent of the Snowcrests, while Alternative 6 allocated 1 percent to winter motorized use (FEIS, page C-145).

There are no known documented or known user conflicts during the winter season on Road #325. There are no recorded safety issues associated with winter motorized access on this road, nor have there been any accidents or injuries. There is no cost to administer or maintain this route in the winter for motorized use.

Summary

This section only summarizes EO 11644 minimization criteria applied to the specified snowmobile routes. Readers are referred to more detailed descriptions of the individual routes on previous pages.

Snowmobile use in the Electric Peak area near Thunderbolt Creek and Cottonwood Lake, along the Road #056 corridor in Antelope Basin and on the road to Antone Cabin will not exceed air quality standards. Nuisance emissions are localized and temporary. Impacts to soil and vegetation are buffered by snow. In addition, Road #056 and the road to Antone Cabin are open to highway vehicles. Degraded water quality from human waste and petroleum products will not occur since areas of concentrated use are not located along the specified routes. Use of the routes by snowmobiles does not alter wildlife habitat and potential wildlife disturbance is limited. Since snowmobile use is restricted to the specified routes, conflicts with recreationists using the adjacent winter, non-motorized areas are limited. In addition, use of these routes by most cross country skiers and snowshoers is limited by distance from plowed parking areas.

APPENDIX A

Draft SEIS For the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan to Comply with District of Montana Court Order

EXECUTIVE ORDER 11644 - USE OF OFF-ROAD VEHICLES ON THE PUBLIC LANDS

Source: The provisions of Executive Order 11644 of Feb. 8, 1972, appear at 37 FR 2877, 3 CFR, 1971-1975 Comp., p. 666, unless otherwise noted.

An estimated 5 million off-road recreational vehicles--motorcycles, minibikes, trial bikes, snowmobiles, dune-buggies, all-terrain vehicles, and others--are in use in the United States today, and their popularity continues to increase rapidly. The widespread use of such vehicles on the public lands-- often for legitimate purposes but also in frequent conflict with wise land and resource management practices, environmental values, and other types of recreational activity-- has demonstrated the need for a unified Federal policy toward the use of such vehicles on the public lands.

NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States by the Constitution of the United States and in furtherance of the purpose and policy of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321), it is hereby ordered as follows:

Sec. 1. Purpose. It is the purpose of this order to establish policies and provide for procedures that will ensure that the use of off-road vehicles on public lands will be controlled and directed so as to protect the resources of those lands, to promote the safety of all users of those lands, and to minimize conflicts among the various uses of those lands.

Sec. 2. Definitions. As used in this order, the term:

- (1) "public lands" means (A) all lands under the custody and control of the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture, except Indian lands, (B) lands under the custody and control of the Tennessee Valley Authority that are situated in western Kentucky and Tennessee and are designated as "Land Between the Lakes," and (C) lands under the custody and control of the Secretary of Defense;
- (2) "respective agency head" means the Secretary of the Interior, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the Board of Directors of the Tennessee Valley Authority, with respect to public lands under the custody and control of each;
- (3) "off-road vehicle" means any motorized vehicle designed for or capable of cross-country travel on or immediately over land, water, sand, snow, ice, marsh, swampland, or other natural terrain; except that such term excludes (A) any registered motorboat, (B) any fire, military, emergency or law enforcement vehicle when used for emergency purposes, and any combat or combat support vehicle when used for national defense purposes, and (C) any vehicle whose use is expressly authorized by the respective agency head under a permit, lease, license, or contract; and
- (4) "official use" means use by an employee, agent, or designated representative of the Federal Government or one of its contractors in the course of his employment, agency, or representation. [Sec. 2 amended by Executive Order 11989 of May 24, 1977, 42 FR 26959, 3 CFR, 1977 Comp., p. 120]

Sec. 3. *Zones of Use.* (a) Each respective agency head shall develop and issue regulations and administrative instructions, within six months of the date of this order, to provide for administrative designation of the specific areas and trails on public lands on which the use of off-road vehicles may be permitted, and areas in which the use of off-road vehicles may not be permitted, and set a date by which such designation of all public lands shall be completed. Those regulations shall direct that the designation of such areas and trails will be based upon the protection of the resources of the public lands, promotion of the safety of all users of those lands, and minimization of conflicts among the various uses of those lands. The regulations shall further require that the designation of such areas and trails shall be in accordance with the following—

- (1) Areas and trails shall be located to minimize damage to soil, watershed, vegetation, or other resources of the public lands.
 - (2) Areas and trails shall be located to minimize harassment of wildlife or significant disruption of wildlife habitats.
 - (3) Areas and trails shall be located to minimize conflicts between off-road vehicle use and other existing or proposed recreational uses of the same or neighboring public lands, and to ensure the compatibility of such uses with existing conditions in populated areas, taking into account noise and other factors.
 - (4) Areas and trails shall not be located in officially designated Wilderness Areas or Primitive Areas. Areas and trails shall be located in areas of the National Park system, Natural Areas, or National Wildlife Refuges and Game Ranges only if the respective agency head determines that off-road vehicle use in such locations will not adversely affect their natural, aesthetic, or scenic values.
- (b) The respective agency head shall ensure adequate opportunity for public participation in the promulgation of such regulations and in the designation of areas and trails under this section.
- (c) The limitations on off-road vehicle use imposed under this section shall not apply to official use.

Sec. 4. *Operating Conditions.* Each respective agency head shall develop and publish, within one year of the date of this order, regulations prescribing operating conditions for off-road vehicles on the public lands. These regulations shall be directed at protecting resource values, preserving public health, safety, and welfare, and minimizing use conflicts.

Sec. 5. *Public Information.* The respective agency head shall ensure that areas and trails where off-road vehicle use is permitted are well marked and shall provide for the publication and distribution of information, including maps, describing such areas and trails and explaining the conditions on vehicle use. He shall seek cooperation of relevant State agencies in the dissemination of this information.

Sec. 6. *Enforcement.* The respective agency head shall, where authorized by law, prescribe appropriate penalties for violation of regulations adopted pursuant to this order, and shall establish procedures for the enforcement of those regulations. To the extent permitted by law, he may enter into agreements with State or local governmental agencies for cooperative enforcement of laws and regulations relating to off-road vehicle use.

Sec. 7. *Consultation.* Before issuing the regulations or administrative instructions required by this order or designating areas or trails as required by this order and those regulations and administrative instructions, the Secretary of the Interior shall, as appropriate, consult with the Secretary of Energy and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

[Sec. 7 amended by Executive Order 12608 of Sept. 9, 1987, 52 FR 34617, 3 CFR, 1987 Comp., p. 245]

Sec. 8. *Monitoring of Effects and Review.* (a) The respective agency head shall monitor the effects of the use of off-road vehicles on lands under their jurisdictions. On the basis of the information gathered, they shall from time to time amend or rescind designations of areas or other actions taken pursuant to this order as necessary to further the policy of this order. (b) The Council on Environmental Quality shall maintain a continuing review of the implementation of this order.

Sec. 9. *Special Protection of the Public Lands.* (a) Notwithstanding the provisions of Section 3 of this Order, the respective agency head shall, whenever he determines that the use of off-road vehicles will cause or is causing considerable adverse effects on the soil, vegetation, wildlife, wildlife habitat or cultural or historic resources of particular areas or trails of the public lands, immediately close such areas or trails to the type of off-road vehicle causing such effects, until such time as he determines that such adverse effects have been eliminated and that measures have been implemented to prevent future recurrence.

(b) Each respective agency head is authorized to adopt the policy that portions of the public lands within his jurisdiction shall be closed to use by off-road vehicles except those areas or trails which are suitable and specifically designated as open to such use pursuant to Section 3 of this Order.

[Sec. 9 added by Executive Order 11989 of May 24, 1977, 42 FR 26959, 3 CFR, 1977 Comp., p. 120]

APPENDIX B

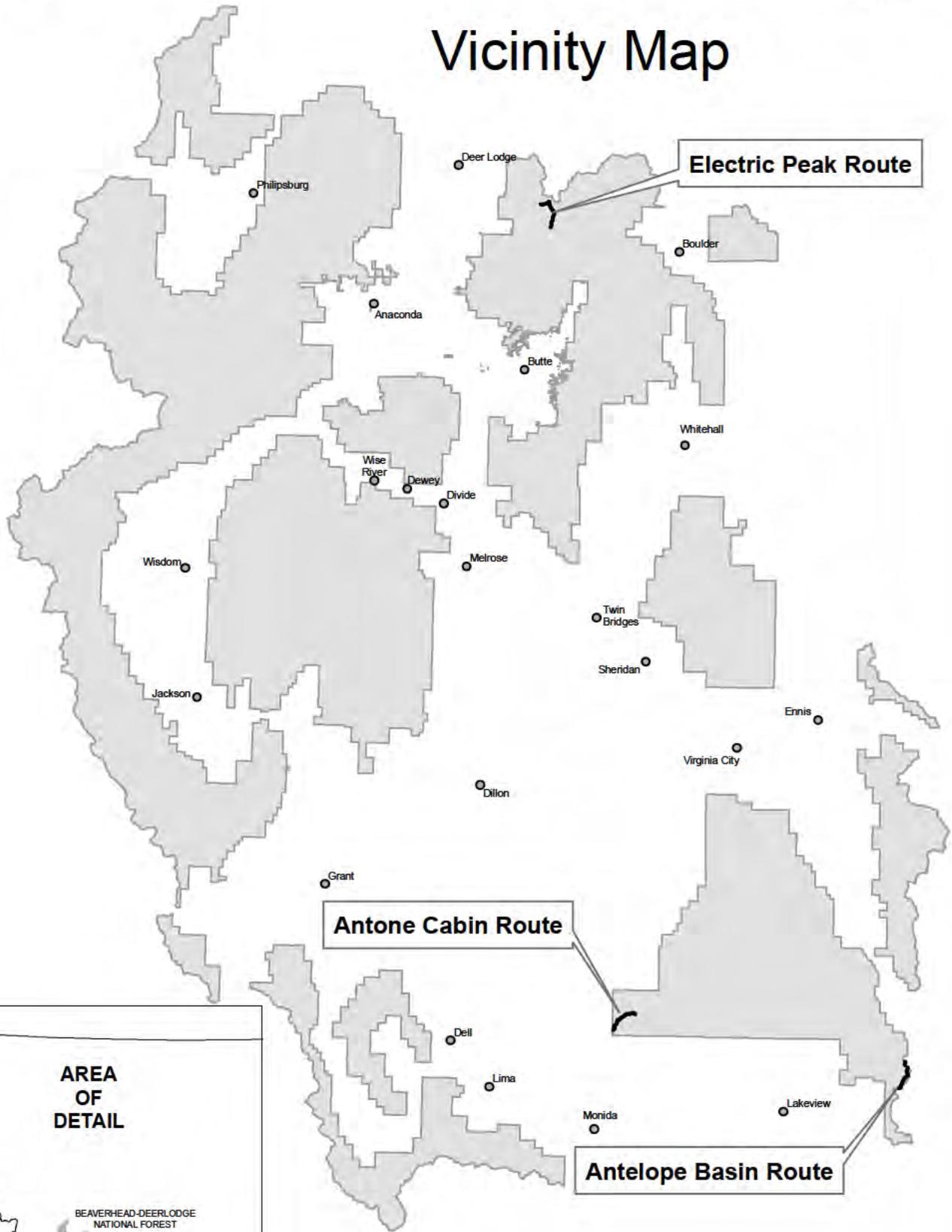
Draft SEIS

For the

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan to
Comply with District of Montana Court Order

MAPS

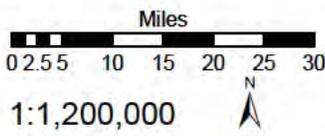
Vicinity Map



Electric Peak Route

Antone Cabin Route

Antelope Basin Route



Legend

Beaverhead-Deerlodge NF Boundary

Date: 6/26/2012

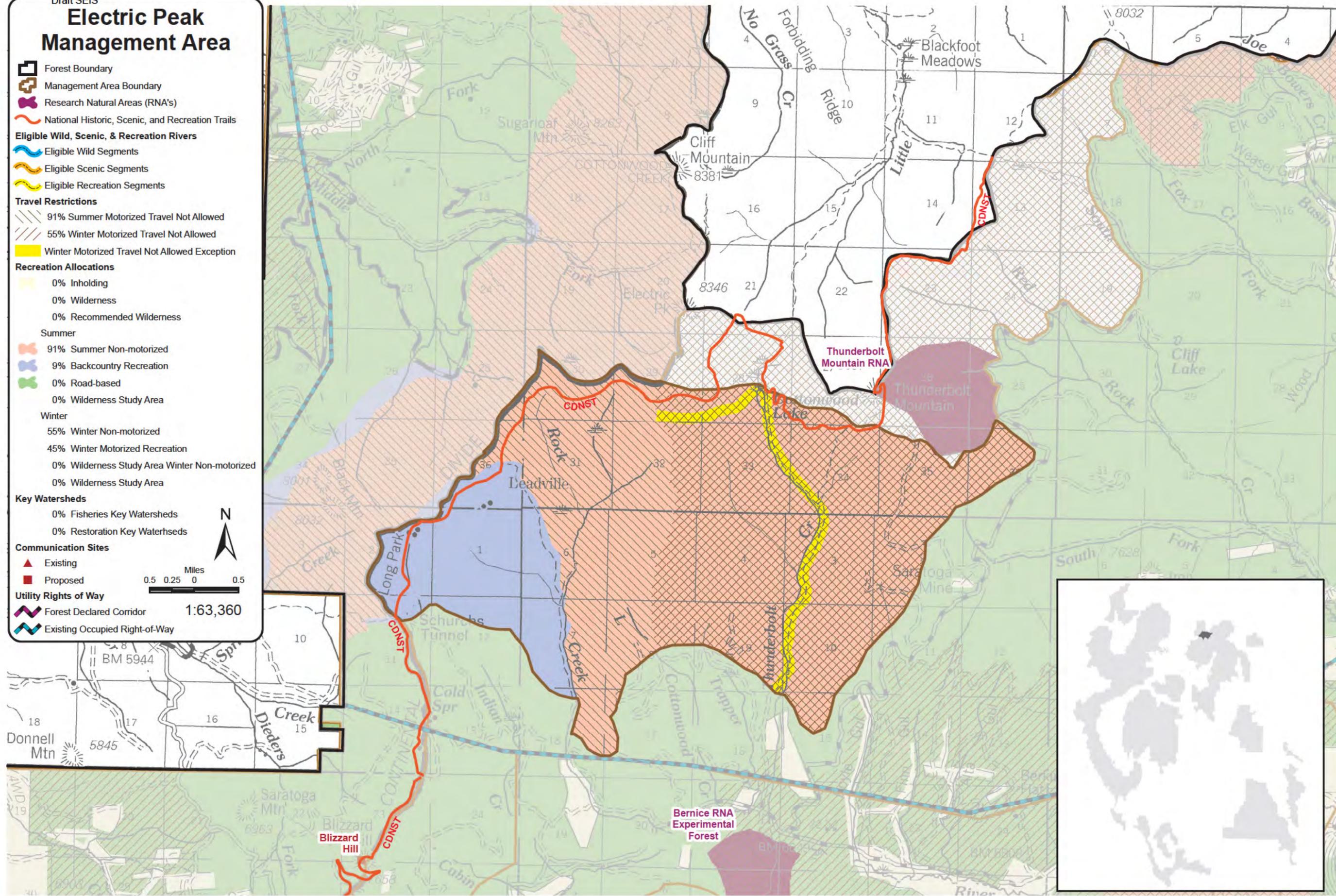
Draft SEIS

Electric Peak Management Area

- Forest Boundary
- Management Area Boundary
- Research Natural Areas (RNA's)
- National Historic, Scenic, and Recreation Trails
- Eligible Wild, Scenic, & Recreation Rivers**
 - Eligible Wild Segments
 - Eligible Scenic Segments
 - Eligible Recreation Segments
- Travel Restrictions**
 - 91% Summer Motorized Travel Not Allowed
 - 55% Winter Motorized Travel Not Allowed
 - Winter Motorized Travel Not Allowed Exception
- Recreation Allocations**
 - 0% Inholding
 - 0% Wilderness
 - 0% Recommended Wilderness
 - Summer**
 - 91% Summer Non-motorized
 - 9% Backcountry Recreation
 - 0% Road-based
 - 0% Wilderness Study Area
 - Winter**
 - 55% Winter Non-motorized
 - 45% Winter Motorized Recreation
 - 0% Wilderness Study Area Winter Non-motorized
 - 0% Wilderness Study Area
- Key Watersheds**
 - 0% Fisheries Key Watersheds
 - 0% Restoration Key Watersheds
- Communication Sites**
 - Existing
 - Proposed
- Utility Rights of Way**
 - Forest Declared Corridor
 - Existing Occupied Right-of-Way

Miles
0.5 0.25 0 0.5

1:63,360



Draft SEIS

Antelope Basin Management Area

- Forest Boundary
- Management Area Boundary
- Research Natural Areas (RNA's)
- National Historic, Scenic, and Recreation Trails

Travel Restrictions

- 39% Summer Motorized Travel Not Allowed
- 25% Winter Motorized Travel Not Allowed
- 'Winter Motorized Travel Not Allowed' Exception

Recreation Allocations

- 2% Non-FS Inholding
- 0% Wilderness
- 0% Recommended Wilderness

Summer

- 39% Summer Non-motorized
- 41% Backcountry Recreation
- 18% Road-based
- 0% Wilderness Study Area

Winter

- 25% Winter Non-motorized
- 73% Winter Motorized Recreation
- 0% Wilderness Study Area Winter Non-motorized
- 0% Wilderness Study Area

Key Watersheds

- 0% Fisheries Key Watersheds
- 31% Restoration Key Watersheds

Eligible Wild, Scenic, & Recreation Rivers

- Eligible Wild Segments
- Eligible Scenic Segments
- Eligible Recreation Segments

Communication Sites

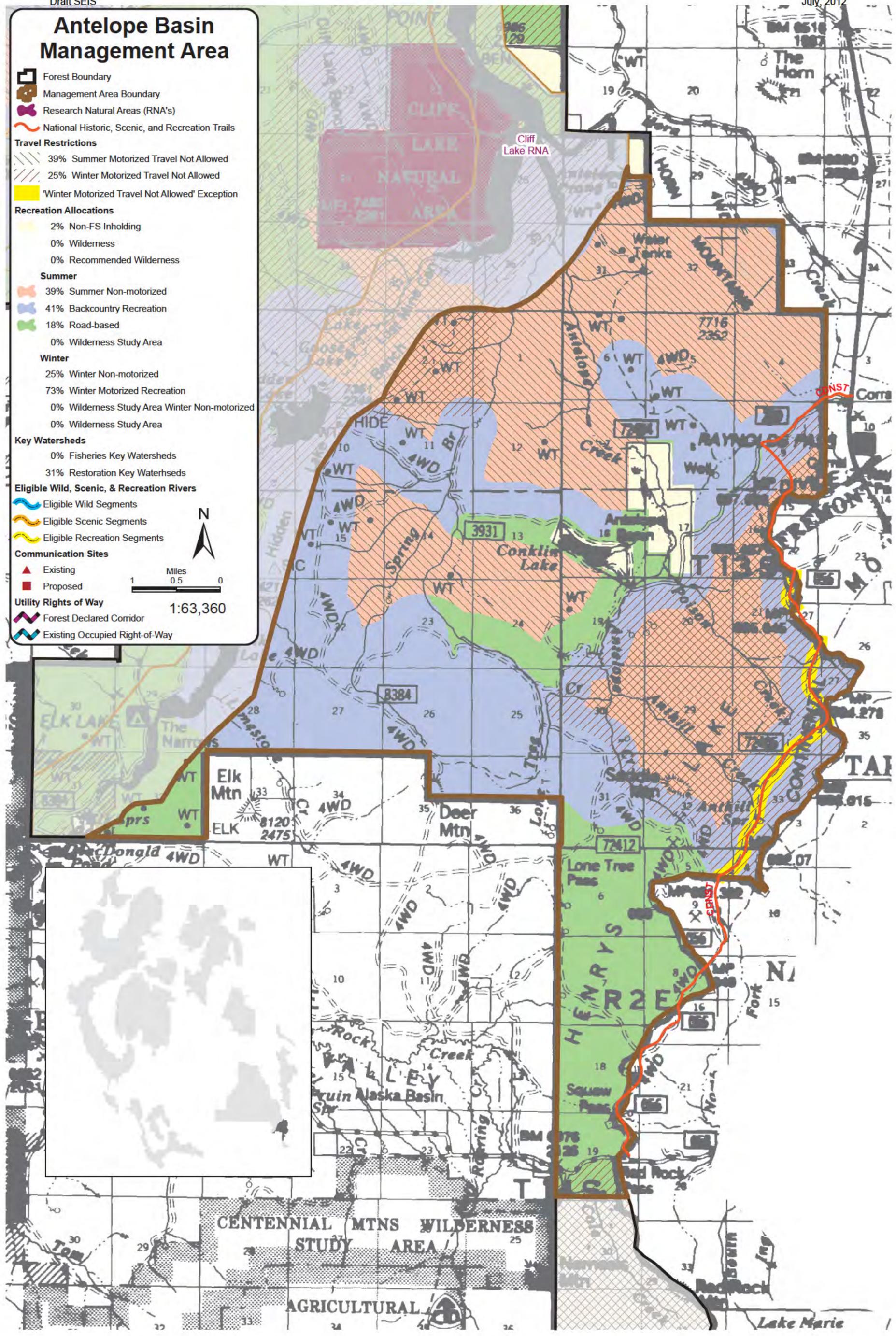
- Existing
- Proposed

Utility Rights of Way

- Forest Declared Corridor
- Existing Occupied Right-of-Way



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Draft SEIS

Snowcrest Recommended Wilderness Management Area

-  Forest Boundary
-  Management Area Boundary
-  Research Natural Areas (RNA's)
-  National Historic, Scenic, and Recreation Trails
- Travel Restrictions**
-  100% Summer Motorized Travel Not Allowed
-  100% Winter Motorized Travel Not Allowed
-  'Motorized Travel Not Allowed' Exceptions
- Recreation Allocations**
-  0% Non-FS Inholding
-  0% Wilderness
-  100% Recommended Wilderness
- Summer**
-  0% Summer Non-motorized
-  0% Backcountry Recreation
-  0% Road-based
-  0% Wilderness Study Area
- Winter**
-  0% Winter Non-motorized
-  0% Winter Motorized Recreation
-  0% Wilderness Study Area Winter Non-motorized
-  0% Wilderness Study Area
- Key Watersheds**
-  0% Fisheries Key Watersheds
-  0% Restoration Key Watersheds
- Eligible Wild, Scenic, & Recreation Rivers**
-  Eligible Wild Segments
-  Eligible Scenic Segments
-  Eligible Recreation Segments
- Communication Sites**
-  Existing
-  Proposed
- Utility Rights of Way**
-  Forest Declared Corridor
-  Existing Occupied Right-of-Way

