

United States
Department of
Agriculture



Lewis and Clark
National Forest
P.O. Box 871
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Lewis and Clark National Forest Plan

Record of Decision



Crystal Lake in the Big Snowy Mountains.

**RECORD OF DECISION
FOR
USDA, FOREST SERVICE**

**Final Environmental Impact Statement
Lewis and Clark National Forest
Land and Resource Management Plan
Cascade, Chouteau, Fergus, Glacier, Golden Valley, Judith Basin,
Lewis and Clark, Meagher, Park, Pondera, Sweetgrass, Teton,
and Wheatland Counties,
Montana**

INTRODUCTION

What is being decided?

The Record of Decision documents my decision and rationale for selecting Alternative G as the management strategy of the Lewis and Clark National Forest for the next 10 to 15 years. This strategy is contained in the document titled Forest Plan, Lewis and Clark National Forest, dated April 1986. The Forest Plan provides management area direction in the form of standards, guidelines, monitoring requirements, and a probable schedule of activities. The analysis of alternatives and public comments I considered in this decision can be found in the Environmental Impact Statement, dated April 1986.

What is the goal of the Forest Plan?

My goal in selecting Alternative G was to maximize net public benefit. In determining net public benefit, I considered public comments, social and economic stability, environmental quality, other agency and Indian Tribe goals, and resources you can place a dollar value on (priced) and those you cannot (nonpriced). In the rationale section of this Record of Decision, I discuss how these factors were considered in my decision.

What will happen to existing plans on the Lewis and Clark National Forest?

Once adopted, the Forest Plan will replace all previous resource management plans, subject to existing rights, contracts, leases, and specific authorities.

What is the duration of the Forest Plan, and can it be changed?

The Forest Plan can be changed in two ways, amendment or revision, to respond to changing needs and opportunities, congressional land designations, catastrophic events, monitoring results, or new technologies. The Forest Supervisor will follow amendment or revision procedures outlined in the National Forest Management Act and planning regulations (36 CFR Part 219.10(f)(g)), which include public notification and involvement. It will normally be revised every 10 years, but must be revised every 15 years.

What is not being decided?

Actions to be taken on specific sites are not included. Environmental analyses for specific projects are provided for in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act. Additional public involvement opportunity will be provided when projects are being considered. The Forest Plan does not address administrative activities to carry on day-to-day management. For example, personnel matters, internal organization, and equipment and property management are not included. In this Record of Decision I am not making recommendations for those portions of contiguous roadless areas located on adjacent Forests. Recommendations for the Middle Fork Judith and Big Snowies Montana Wilderness Study Act areas are not included in this Record of Decision. Recommendations to Congress on these areas are being made in a separate report.

ISSUES, CONCERNS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Public involvement played an important role in the development of issues and alternatives. Initially, letters inviting people to express their concerns were sent to 1,200 people who had previously expressed interest in management of the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Eleven public workshops were conducted and numerous organizations, elected officials, corporations, landowners and forest users were consulted. Comments received were analyzed and grouped into 32 issues and questions to be addressed. Forest Service employees added 7 management concerns. (Chapter I, pages 1-8 through 1-16, in the Environmental Impact Statement gives a complete listing of issues and concerns.) Subsequent public involvement was completed in 1983 during the review of roadless areas.

A Notice of Availability of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed Forest Plan was published in the Federal Register on July 26, 1982. The release of these documents was announced by the area news media. Over 1,000 copies of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and 1,200 copies of the Proposed Forest Plan were distributed to the public. Public meetings were held during the comment period, which lasted through November 30, 1982. Over 430 comments were received from interested individuals, corporations, and Federal, State, and local representatives.

A Notice of Availability of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement Supplement and Revised Proposed Forest Plan was published in the Federal Register on November 16, 1984. During the public comment period, over 530 responses were received from individuals, organizations, businesses, and agencies.

With the exception of the wilderness issue, the initial issues, concerns, and opportunities identified at the start of the planning process did not change as a result of the subsequent public involvement effort and public comment.

The key issues and management concerns used in selecting Alternative G from the various alternatives are:

- What recreation activities and use levels should be permitted?
- Which roadless areas on the Lewis and Clark National Forest should be recommended for wilderness designation?
- How should conflicts be resolved between wildlife and management activities of: livestock grazing, timber, oil and gas exploration and development, minerals, recreation, and wilderness?
- How much livestock grazing should be provided?
- How much timber should be harvested?

The remaining issues, management concerns and questions were incorporated into standards applicable to all alternatives or were part of the key issues.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternatives were developed to display the array of options for managing the land and to provide analytical data to help you and me make comparisons and determine the effects of addressing the issues in various ways. Public comments played an important role in the development of alternatives.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement incorporated the decisions made in RARE II (Roadless Area Review and Evaluation). Subsequently, a Ninth Circuit Court ruling (California vs. Block) found RARE II inadequate. This court ruling resulted in the Lewis and Clark National Forest having to issue a supplement to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement to address the wilderness issue further. This resulted in 5 additional alternatives that examined a wide range of wilderness options. This new information was released for public review and comment in a Draft Environmental Impact Statement Supplement in November 1984.

Analysis of public comments on both the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Draft Environmental Impact Statement Supplement produced additional information that caused me to adjust Alternative G. I considered these adjustments and the significance of the information added by public comments and I find no significant new information has been added or substantial changes made. I conclude that the magnitude of change in Alternative G was within the range of alternatives discussed and environmental effects disclosed in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Draft Environmental Impact Statement Supplement, and no further supplements to the Environmental Impact Statement are needed. A complete discussion of the changes in Alternative G is presented in the Environmental Impact Statement.

All alternatives that were addressed are briefly described below. More detailed information on alternatives can be found in Chapter II and Appendix B of the Environmental Impact Statement.

CURRENT DIRECTION (NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE)

This alternative maintains the present course of action. It uses goals and objectives from existing plans modified to respond to present and predicted program levels and demands. This is the "no action" alternative required by National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations 40 CFR 1502.14(c).

ALTERNATIVE A-2 (RPA)

Alternative A-2 is responsive to the direction in the "Revised President's Statement of Policy," which requires that one alternative meet the 1980 Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) goals and objectives. The RPA recommended program emphasizes high levels of timber harvest, livestock grazing, and road access. This alternative provides the highest level of timber harvest and low amounts of semi-primitive recreation settings. About 63,300 acres are recommended for wilderness classification. In response to the RPA program, the Montana Wilderness Study Act areas are recommended for development.

ALTERNATIVE A-1

This is the same as Alternative A-2 except the Big Snowies and Middle Fork Judith Montana Wilderness Study Act areas are recommended for wilderness classification. In total, 252,189 acres are recommended for wilderness classification.

ALTERNATIVE B-2

The purpose of this alternative is to increase the use of commodities produced by the Forest while maintaining a variety of recreation opportunities. Timber harvest and livestock grazing increase while elk and trout populations decrease. Semi-primitive recreation opportunity decreases significantly while developed recreation remains at current levels. About 63,300 acres are recommended for wilderness classification. The two Montana Wilderness Study Act areas are recommended for development.

ALTERNATIVE B-1

This alternative is similar to Alternative B-2 except the Big Snowies and Middle Fork Judith Montana Wilderness Study Act areas are recommended for wilderness classification.

ALTERNATIVE C

This alternative increases emphasis on the Forest's wildlife program. Wildlife and wildlife habitat benefit from lower timber and range levels and the increase in wildlife habitat improvement. Developed recreation opportunities increase and many semi-primitive recreation opportunities are maintained. About 63,300 acres are recommended for wilderness classification. The Montana Wilderness Study Act areas are managed for semi-primitive recreation and wildlife habitat.

ALTERNATIVE D

This alternative is responsive to increasing national and local demand for livestock grazing and outdoor recreation. This alternative provides the highest level of livestock grazing and a high level of developed recreation opportunities. Timber harvest levels, catchable trout, and elk populations decrease. About 63,300 acres are recommended for wilderness classification. Semi-primitive recreation opportunities are maintained by keeping large blocks of land roadless. The Big Snowies and Middle Fork Judith Montana Wilderness Study Act areas are managed for semi-primitive recreation, with some timber management in the latter.

ALTERNATIVE E-2

This alternative recognizes the historical use patterns on the Forest by emphasizing timber harvest and livestock grazing on the most productive lands. A high level of timber harvest and livestock grazing is programmed from the Jefferson Division. On the Rocky Mountain Division, wildlife habitat and semi-primitive recreation are emphasized. Overall, elk and trout populations and semi-primitive recreation opportunities decrease. About 63,300 acres are recommended for wilderness classification. The two Montana Wilderness Study Act areas are recommended for development.

ALTERNATIVE E-1

This alternative is similar to Alternative E-2 except that the Big Snowies and Middle Fork Judith Montana Wilderness Study Act areas are recommended for wilderness classification.

ALTERNATIVE F

This alternative was the Preferred Alternative in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. It increases the use of Forest resources while maintaining semi-primitive recreation and big-game hunting opportunities. Timber harvest and livestock grazing increase while elk and trout populations decrease. Developed recreation opportunities increase and most semi-primitive recreation settings are retained. About 63,300 acres are recommended for wilderness classification. The Big Snowies and Middle Fork Judith Montana Wilderness Study Act areas are managed for semi-primitive recreation, with parts of the latter also managed for timber products and recreation with roads in the area.

ALTERNATIVE F - DEPARTURE

This alternative is similar to Alternative F except there is a higher timber harvest level. It was developed to allow for departure from non-declining yield to reduce or prevent high mortality of lodgepole pine from epidemics of mountain pine beetle.

ALTERNATIVE G

This alternative resulted from the modification of Alternative F in response to public comments. It increases the long-term use of Forest resources while providing diverse wildlife habitat and maintaining dispersed recreation opportunities in a semi-primitive setting. Timber and livestock grazing increase while elk and trout populations remain at current levels. This alternative provides the greatest amount of semi-primitive recreation settings and the least amount of additional wilderness. Five areas totaling 51,834 acres are recommended for wilderness classification. The Big Snowies and Middle Fork Judith Montana Wilderness Study Act areas are managed for semi-primitive recreation and/or wildlife. The Harrison Creek/Weatherwax drainage in the Middle Fork Judith is designated for timber management.

ALTERNATIVE H

The goal of this alternative is to increase wilderness classification significantly while increasing production of commodities from currently developed lands. More than 664,000 acres are recommended for wilderness classification. The Big Snowies and Middle Fork Judith Montana Wilderness Study Act areas are managed for semi-primitive recreation and/or wildlife. The Harrison Creek/Weatherwax drainage in the Middle Fork Judith is designated for timber management.

ALTERNATIVE I

This alternative would increase the use of Forest resources while providing diverse wildlife habitat and maintaining dispersed recreation opportunity in a primitive or semi-primitive setting. This alternative provides opportunities to provide goods and services similar to Alternative G. About 235,700 acres of roadless areas that have received high public interest are recommended for wilderness classification.

ALTERNATIVE J

This alternative recommends wilderness classification for areas with outstanding wilderness quality and few conflicts. About 79,000 acres are recommended for wilderness. Emphasis and opportunities to provide goods and services for nonwilderness lands are similar to Alternative G.

ALTERNATIVE K

This alternative increases the Forest wildlife program while maintaining dispersed recreation opportunities in a primitive or semi-primitive setting. Areas of high public interest, totaling 387,106 acres, are recommended for wilderness classification. Opportunities to provide goods and services and the management emphases for this alternative are similar to Alternative C. Timber harvest and grazing levels are reduced from current levels.

DECISION

I have decided to approve implementation of Alternative G to guide the management of the Lewis and Clark National Forest for the next 10 to 15 years. Alternative G represents minor shifts in outputs in the short term while answering a number of long-term management questions.

The current level of camping, picnicking, and other "developed site" recreation opportunities will be maintained. Dispersed recreation (recreation that requires few if any improvements and occurs over a wide area) opportunities will change over the next decade. Additional roads associated with timber management and mineral development will increase recreation opportunities in a natural-appearing setting with roads. Conversely, recreation opportunities within a roadless setting will be reduced. Opportunities for winter recreation will increase with the development of snow trails for both motorized and non-motorized use. The Forest Service will continue to seek rights-of-way to provide public road and trail access to the National Forest.

Motorized use including off-road-vehicle use will be managed through the Forest's travel management process. The public will have an additional opportunity to discuss specific roads, trails, or areas during periodic updates of the Travel Plan. Additional Forest Plan direction concerning management of roads and trails is in Chapter II, pages 2-65 through 2-71.

Opportunities provided by the private sector, such as outfitter services and ski areas, will be maintained at present levels. Management plans for recreation residences are incorporated in the Forest Plan.

Of the 1,002,232 acres in the Forest's roadless inventory, more than 857,000 acres will be managed to emphasize roadless values, 51,834 acres are recommended for wilderness classification, and the remaining 93,398 acres have been assigned to various management areas that allow road access. Overall, 1,293,000 acres (70 percent of the Forest) will be managed for roadless or wilderness values. Lands managed for their roadless value but not formally classified as wilderness may require roads as a result of oil and gas and mineral development, with special provisions as necessary to maintain other resource values.

The current population potential for elk and trout will be maintained throughout the Forest. To maintain elk habitat, prescribed burning to increase forage, and road management to decrease human disturbance will be emphasized. Recommendations from the Montana Cooperative Elk-Logging Study will be incorporated into timber sales and transportation plans (Forest Plan, Appendix F).

In response to public concern about elk security areas (places they can go to escape humans) and hunting opportunity, Management Area F was added to Alternative G. Management Area F will maintain 350,000 acres of large, undeveloped blocks of land for elk and other wildlife. Management Area I, protects elk migration routes adjacent to the Sun River and Judith State Wildlife Management Areas. Management Area C was redefined to provide additional elk security habitat and has been expanded from 96,304 acres to 111,664 acres.

Practices to maintain or improve wildlife habitat are included with every management area. No additional grazing will be permitted on big-game winter ranges or riparian zones unless wildlife needs can be met.

On the Rocky Mountain Division, Alternative G maintains threatened and endangered species habitat and achieves recovery goals. Habitat capacity will be maintained or improved for a recovery goal level of 81 grizzly bears and 10 gray wolves. Interagency monitoring and evaluation will continue to be stressed on the Rocky Mountain Front (Forest Plan, Appendices H and I). Protection of unoccupied habitat for bald eagles and peregrine falcons throughout the Forest will be emphasized.

Sediments and water yields will be affected by other resource uses. Through the use of management standards, an increase less than 1 percent over current sediment levels on a forest-wide basis is projected. The increase will result from continued timber harvest, road construction, and grazing. The application of appropriate soil and water conservation practices will ensure that the quality of individual watersheds will remain within State water quality standards. (See Chapter II of the Forest Plan, pages 2-50 through 2-52.)

Permitted livestock grazing will be maintained at 71,100 animal unit months. This level will be sustained as a result of vegetative manipulation through timber harvest, improved livestock distribution, and moderate investments in range improvements including noxious weed control and prescribed burning to increase range productivity. Sheep grazing in Management Situation I grizzly bear habitat will be phased out as opportunities arise, so as to comply with current Forest Service policy. Current policy recognizes the need to reduce human/bear conflicts and therefore places high priority on relocating sheep to alternative ranges outside Management Situation I areas. Implementation of this policy will be accomplished working closely with the existing permittee through range allotment administration. The existing permit will be reissued with the understanding that any future conflicts between sheep grazing and grizzly bears will be resolved in favor of the bear.

The first decade allowable sale quantity (the quantity of timber that may be sold from the area of suitable land) is 121 million board feet. The conversion factors used in forest planning convert 3.6 million cubic feet into 12.1 million board feet. If monitoring indicates the conversion ratios are not appropriate, that is, if more or fewer board feet are found to result from the harvest of 3.6 million cubic feet than estimated, board feet volumes will be adjusted. The annual timber sale program will average 14 million board feet with the inclusion of nonchargeable volume, such as posts and poles. Timber harvest will occur primarily in the Jefferson Division.

The timber harvest program on the Rocky Mountain Division has been reduced to 0.5 million board feet per year. This will provide continuing opportunity to meet local demand for posts, poles, firewood, houselogs, sawlogs, and other wood products. Management Area 0, which allows for low intensity timber management on the Rocky Mountain Division, was reduced by 27,055 acres between the draft and final Environmental Impact Statement.

Approximately 282,307 acres (15 percent of the Forest) will be managed for timber. Timber harvest will be scheduled on the flattest lands to avoid the need for more costly harvest methods. By concentrating timber operations in areas that already have roads, only 9 percent of the roadless areas will be developed. About 7,000 acres will be affected during the first decade.

More than 70 percent of the harvest is scheduled in lodgepole pine stands. These stands are typically over-mature, high-risk stands. The silvicultural practice of even-age management using clearcuts, shelterwood, or seed tree harvest methods will be used on most areas. The decision as to which harvest method to use is part of the project planning. Clearcutting will be used only where determined to be optimum through environmental analysis of the specific site. Some uneven-age management will be used in riparian and wildlife areas. Timber sales will be designed to break up large, continuous areas of lodgepole pine.

Oil and gas leases currently cover about 336,000 acres on the Rocky Mountain Division (86 percent of nonwilderness lands) and about 88,000 acres on the Jefferson Division. All of these leases are outside of classified wilderness areas. Exploration and some development is almost certain to occur within the next decade on the more promising portions of the leased areas. As a result of this, I expect roads will be built into some currently roadless areas. The exact location of exploration and individual oil and gas drilling cannot be pinpointed. However, Alternative G does specify general areas where activities will not be allowed. In addition, Alternative G contains standards and requirements designed to coordinate oil and gas activities with other resources and forest uses. Drilling and associated road construction will be handled on an individual basis with environmental analysis. Should discoveries be made, environmental analysis on field development will be conducted. Any new leases or reissuance of leases will undergo additional analysis as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and will meet the overall direction and stipulations outlined in the Forest Plan.

To support forest resource programs, 36 miles of arterial and collector roads and 130 miles of local roads may be constructed or reconstructed during the next 10 years. I expect the planned arterial and collector road program will follow experience, which has been about 70 percent reconstruction and 30 percent new construction. New arterial roads will generally be open for public use. Some new collector roads will be open while others will have restricted use. Roads built for oil and gas and most new local roads will be closed or have restricted use.

All of the Rocky Mountain Division has special restrictions governing off-road-vehicle and other motorized use. Lands within Wilderness are closed to all motorized use. Nonwilderness lands are either closed or restricted by type of vehicle or season of use. In addition, 34 miles of road and 176 miles of trail are either closed or have restricted use.

About 20 percent of the Jefferson Division has special restrictions governing off-road-vehicle and other motorized use. In addition, 176 miles of road and 469 miles of trail are also closed or restricted by type of vehicles or season of use.

In general, by 1995 the Lewis and Clark National Forest will look very much as it does today. Large contiguous roadless areas will still be present and the potential to supply timber products, forage for wildlife and livestock, and other commodities will be maintained.

This is not the end of the planning process. Change will be needed in the future. Improved information and continued public participation will provide a foundation on which to build systematic and reasoned changes. A monitoring program is a part of the Forest Plan. Evaluation of monitored activities is an important part of the management control system. This information will be made public and will provide an opportunity for interested groups and individuals to make their own assessments of our success or failure.

RATIONALE

The significant factors I used to determine which alternative maximizes net public benefit include: management of the Rocky Mountain Division, response of the public on issues, economic efficiency, social and economic stability, environmental quality, and compatibility with other public agency goals. No single factor determined this decision. The decision was arrived at through many compromises that recognize the technological, biological, social, economic, and legal demands and limitations placed on the Lewis and Clark National Forest.

In general, what I heard from people is that they basically like the way the Lewis and Clark National Forest is today. They are concerned, however, over what changes could take place in the future. The forest offers excellent recreation opportunities, big game hunting and scenic values. In addition, timber harvest and livestock grazing benefit local communities. Indications are that significant oil and gas potential exists on the Rocky Mountain Division. Quantities are unknown at this time. People are concerned about how the discovery and development of this resource could alter the existing situation.

From among the alternatives considered, several kept production (board feet of timber and animal unit months of livestock use) at relatively constant levels for the next decade. However, the patterns of use and the long term projections of these alternatives differ. Alternative G provides an overall plan for the forest that maintains a pattern of use and production that changes little from the present situation.

Management of the Rocky Mountain Division

Although management of the Rocky Mountain Division is not identified as a separate issue, people were concerned about the wildlife, wilderness, scenic, recreation, timber, and oil and gas resources on the Division. Because this is an area of significant public interest, I will highlight the rationale for my decision concerning the area.

The fact that high oil and gas potential exists on the Rocky Mountain Division affects my decision. I recognize people's apprehension over the effects of oil and gas development and their desire for the land to remain unchanged. I also

recognize the abundance and diversity of the wildlife, recreation and scenic values found there. Most of the area (98 percent) is classified as Management Situation 1 because of its importance to the survival of the grizzly bear. Because most of the nonwilderness lands are already leased, and because some exploration for oil and gas is likely, I do not want to initiate additional activities that will affect the area. Therefore, I have decided management of the Rocky Mountain Division should emphasize wildlife, recreation and scenic values.

I have decided to maintain a wide variety of recreation opportunities on the Rocky Mountain Front. This area provides the people of central Montana, especially those living in the hi-line counties, an opportunity to use public lands. If I were to recommend additional wilderness for the lands between the Bob Marshall Wilderness complex and the eastern boundary of the Forest, this would eliminate the opportunity for motorized recreation close to where people live. This use is already limited by Glacier National Park, where off-road-vehicle use is prohibited. In addition, the Blackfeet Reservation limits access to the northern portion of the Rocky Mountain Front.

Because the quantity of oil and gas is unknown, I believe exploration should continue for this important resource. Furthermore, I believe exploration must be conducted carefully with a high degree of concern for the wildlife, recreation and scenic values. Some people commented the area should be recommended largely for wilderness in order to protect it from the impacts of oil and gas exploration and development. I considered the potential effects of such activities and concluded, if done carefully, they could be carried out along with the emphasized values. I recognize this will require innovation and the utilization of the latest technology. Because of the oil and gas potential and my belief that exploration should take place to determine the extent of the reserve, I recommended only limited acreage of currently leased land for wilderness.

In order to maintain the existing situation, roads constructed for timber harvest or for other development activities initiated by the Forest Service will generally be less than one half mile in length, used until the timber objective is met (about 1 to 3 years), and reclaimed after use. These roads will generally be non-permanent, low-standard, truck trails used to provide access for firewood, post, pole, houselog, and sawlog cutting by local residents. I considered scheduling approximately 1 million board feet of timber for harvest. However, I decided against this in favor of a .5 million board feet program to supply local needs without the construction of permanent roads.

The rights and privileges reserved to the Indians of the Blackfeet Indian Nation by Article 1 of the Agreement set forth in, and accepted, ratified, and confirmed by the Act of Congress approved June 10, 1896, respecting that portion of their reservation now known as the North End Geographic Unit (RM-1) of the Lewis and Clark National Forest, shall be in no way infringed or modified by this Plan. The 130,000 acres of ceded land will be managed for wildlife, range, and semi-primitive recreation values. Under the Agreement, the Blackfeet Tribe retained the right to cut and remove timber, consequently, these lands are not included in the Forest's regulated timber base, and are not included in any wilderness recommendation.

The Forest Plan proposals and existing wilderness include 57 percent of the Rocky Mountain Division. An additional 5 percent will remain as a wilderness study

area. Of the balance of the area, 22 percent will be managed to maintain semi-primitive recreation opportunities, 12 percent for riparian, grazing and wildlife management, and 4 percent will be managed for timber and developed recreation. This will provide large areas for semi-primitive and primitive recreation experiences outside wilderness.

Response to Public Issues

Recreation

Issue: What recreation activities and use levels should be permitted?

Numerous and varied comments concerned recreation. Lack of public access, the economic importance of recreation, off-road-vehicle use, campgrounds, trails, dispersed recreation, and maintaining semi-primitive recreation opportunities were most frequently mentioned.

In response to people's comments, areas such as Oti Park, Hoover Creek, Deep Creek, Tenderfoot, Big Snowies, Badger-Two Medicine, and the majority of the Middle Fork Judith will be managed for semi-primitive recreation opportunities. These areas have established use patterns and are highly valued by the public. Alternative G has the greatest amount of this type of recreation opportunity when compared to the other alternatives.

In response to comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement Supplement for an improved trail system, the amount of trail proposed for construction and reconstruction has been increased from 50 to 100 miles per decade. The proposed level of trail construction and reconstruction is necessary to eliminate the backlog of trail maintenance and to retain the 1,677 existing miles in the trail system.

Wilderness

Issue: Which roadless areas on the Lewis and Clark National Forest should be recommended for wilderness designation?

This issue was addressed by evaluating the wilderness potential of all roadless areas on the Forest. After considering the analysis and people's comments I am recommending 51,834 acres for wilderness classification. These wilderness recommendations are preliminary administrative recommendations that will receive further review and possible modification by the Chief of the Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the President of the United States. Final decisions on wilderness designation have been reserved by the Congress to itself. Until Congress determines otherwise, recommended wildernesses will be managed to protect their wilderness values.

Wilderness opportunities range from the 51,834 acres in Alternative G to 664,326 acres under Alternative H. For a comparison of the various alternative wilderness recommendations, refer to Chapter II, pages 2-47 through 2-55, in the Environmental Impact Statement.

Some comments favored wilderness classification for the roadless lands on the Rocky Mountain Division. High wilderness qualities and a desire to protect the area from development, especially oil and gas development, were frequently

mentioned. Specific areas that received public support for wilderness include the Renshaw and Silver King-Falls Creek areas. Other people felt that careful nonwilderness management of the areas would protect them while providing the opportunity to explore for oil and gas resources. Some people opposed wilderness classification.

On the Jefferson Division, some people supported wilderness classification for the Middle Fork Judith, Big Snowies, Tenderfoot/Deep Creek, Crazy Mountains, and Pilgrim Creek. Other people felt that the Middle Fork Judith and Big Snowies should be developed for timber and other resources. Refer to Chapter VI, pages 6-12 through 6-15 and 6-111 through 6-115, in the Environmental Impact Statement, for a discussion of wilderness comments.

Three roadless areas extend into other Forests: Bear-Marshall-Scapegoat-Swan (Flathead, Helena, and Lolo), Crazy Mountains (Gallatin), and Box Canyon (Gallatin). Although these roadless areas are divided by administrative boundaries, they have been evaluated in their entirety. In reaching my decision I considered comments on the entire roadless area. Decisions concerning portions of the Bear-Marshall-Scapegoat-Swan, Crazy Mountains, and Box Canyon roadless areas on the Lewis and Clark Forest are included in this document. Decisions on other parts of these roadless areas will be documented in the Record of Decision for Forest Plans of the respective Forests.

On the Rocky Mountain Division, 352,098 roadless acres were evaluated for wilderness classification. The evaluation took into account the natural integrity and appearance, opportunities for solitude, primitive recreation opportunities, manageability and boundaries, potential resource trade-offs, and public interests and needs. The detailed evaluation of Forest roadless areas is in Appendix C of the Environmental Impact Statement. A summary of recommendations and rationale is discussed below:

Sawtooth - 15,500 acres - The area is not recommended for wilderness classification and is designated Management Areas I and O in the Forest Plan. Management Area I emphasizes maintenance and improvement of big-game habitat. Management Area O provides for a low intensity of timber management. The area's 16 miles of roads, the high oil and gas potential, and the opportunity to improve big-game habitat with prescribed fire are the primary reasons for the nonwilderness recommendation.

Silver King-Falls Creek - 35,568 acres - 18,190 acres are recommended for wilderness because of the high wilderness attributes and the high degree of public support. The remaining acres are not recommended for wilderness because of oil and gas potential, existing impacts to the natural integrity because of livestock grazing, and the need to maintain opportunities for different types of dispersed recreation. The nonwilderness portion is designated Management Area E, which emphasizes livestock and wildlife values.

Benchmark-Elk Creek - 32,314 acres - 3,630 acres are recommended for wilderness because of minimal resource trade-offs and improved administrative boundaries. The areas not recommended for wilderness classification are designated as Management Areas E, G, H, and O, which emphasize livestock and wildlife values, roadless values, recreation, and low intensity timber management. The predominant Management Area, G, emphasizes roadless values. The existing oil and

gas leases and opportunities to maintain nonwilderness recreation experiences along the Benchmark Road are the primary reasons for the recommendation.

Renshaw - 57,521 acres - 19,144 acres of the Renshaw area are recommended for wilderness classification because of high wilderness attributes and a high degree of public support. The Ford Creek Plateau portion of the area is not recommended for wilderness because of manageability problems with boundaries, loss of opportunities to improve big-game winter habitat and livestock forage, and forgone opportunities for dispersed recreation. The areas designated as Management Areas E, G, and I emphasize livestock and wildlife values, roadless values, and big game habitat.

Deep Creek-Reservoir North - 45,962 acres - Most of this area, 41,838 acres, is in a further planning status until the oil and gas potential of the area is determined. Once this is done, a recommendation regarding wilderness will be made through an amendment or revision to the Forest Plan. Restrictive stipulations protect the wilderness option while providing for oil and gas exploration.

Teton - 63,133 acres - In response to public comments, 10,870 acres in the West Fork and Upper South Fork of the Teton are recommended for wilderness classification. The remainder of the area is not recommended for wilderness because of the roads that bisect the area along the South Fork and Middle Fork of the Teton, oil and gas leases in the area, and forgone motorized recreation opportunities. This area is designated as Management Areas G and O.

Badger-Two Medicine - 102,100 acres - This area is not available for wilderness classification because of the rights retained by the Blackfeet Tribe in the Agreement of 1896. Under the Agreement, the Blackfeet Tribe retains the right to cut and remove timber. The area has been leased for oil and gas with extensive restrictions on surface use. The area is designated as Management Areas E, F, and G, which emphasize livestock and wildlife values, semi-primitive recreation, and roadless values.

Recommendations to Congress for the Middle Fork Judith and Big Snowies Montana Wilderness Study Act areas are being made in a separate report. Alternative G recommends nonwilderness for both areas. Until Congress determines otherwise, Montana Wilderness Study Act areas will be managed, subject to existing rights and uses, to maintain their existing wilderness character and potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. After congressional action on the Montana Wilderness Study Act areas on the Lewis and Clark National Forest, the Plan will be amended or revised as necessary to reflect the decision.

The Tenderfoot-Deep Creek area in the Little Belt Mountains generated some comment. It is not recommended for wilderness because of the private land within the area, motorized access to portions of the area, and diminished opportunities to improve big-game winter range and forage for livestock with prescribed fire. About 88 percent of the area will be managed for range, wildlife, and semi-primitive recreation with emphasis on roadless values. The remaining roadless areas on the Jefferson Division generated very few or no specific comments. These areas will be managed for various uses.

Wildlife

Issue: How should conflicts be resolved between wildlife and management activities of: livestock grazing, timber, oil and gas exploration and development, minerals, recreation, and wilderness?

A high degree of concern was expressed about fish and wildlife. People discussed the impact of timber harvest, increased road access, livestock grazing, and oil and gas activities on elk and their habitat. Impacts on elk security habitat and elk hunting opportunity were also major concerns. Refer to Chapter VI, pages 6-16 through 6-28 and 6-116 through 6-128, for detailed comments concerning wildlife.

Alternative G places a high emphasis on elk and trout and the maintenance and improvement of their habitat. The mix of resource activities and outputs is designed to maintain the current population for elk and trout. By the third decade, three alternatives have higher levels of elk and trout, seven alternatives have lower levels, and five alternatives have levels similar to Alternative G. The increased levels under Alternatives C, H, and K are achieved by reducing livestock grazing, timber harvesting, or road construction, and by high investments in wildlife habitat improvement. Conversely, the alternatives with lower elk and trout populations have higher levels of livestock grazing, timber harvesting, and road construction. For a comparison of the various alternative fish and wildlife outputs, refer to Chapter II, pages 2-56 through 2-62 in the Environmental Impact Statement.

Many people discussed the importance of fish and fish habitat. Concerns centered around possible sedimentation and consequences to the fisheries. In response to these concerns, Management Standard C-3, Fish Habitat, Management Area R, Riparian Zones, and Forest-Wide riparian standards have been strengthened.

People voiced a concern for threatened and endangered species, especially the threatened grizzly bear and the endangered gray wolf. The concerns centered around the impact of Forest activities on their habitat and the recovery of these species on the Rocky Mountain Division. I believe Alternative G will fully meet Forest Service responsibility under the Endangered Species Act. Planned Forest management actions under all alternatives provide for meeting or exceeding recovery levels of listed threatened and endangered species. Alternatives A-1, A-2, B-1, B-2, D, F, and F-Departure have a higher potential for human/wildlife conflicts because of their increased emphasis on production of commodities. Alternatives with high levels of wilderness and Alternatives C, E, and K, which restrict access into semi-primitive settings on the Rocky Mountain Division, would disturb threatened and endangered species the least.

The biological opinion of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service was that the Revised Proposed Forest Plan (Alternative G) with modifications will not jeopardize threatened and endangered species. Additional changes in Alternative G, as presented in the final Environmental Impact Statement, were coordinated with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, who confirmed the nonjeopardy opinion still applied. New data is analyzed continually. If any planned activity is found to create a situation of jeopardy, it would be modified so that the situation is eliminated or the activity will not be permitted.

People felt that roads were detrimental to water quality and wildlife, particularly elk and threatened and endangered species. Comments were also received about specific road locations, the number of roads, and road closures (travel planning).

The primary effects of road construction are the displacement of soil, increased vehicle and public access, reduced big-game security, decreased scenery, and the reduction in settings suitable for semi-primitive recreation. A discussion of the environmental consequences of road construction by alternative is in Chapter IV, pages 4-108 through 4-115, in the Environmental Impact Statement.

Compared to the other alternatives, Alternative G provides the second lowest level of arterial and collector road reconstruction or construction. The estimated 3.6 miles per year is a small reduction from the expected current need. Approximately 11 miles of local roads will be built yearly under Alternative G.

The miles of road as well as the acres of timber harvested take into account people's desire for semi-primitive recreation, elk hunting, and the maintenance of elk and trout populations. I believe Alternative G provides a balance between providing necessary access for resource development and recreation use, and protecting and maintaining other values. Alternatives with higher levels of roads would reduce opportunities for semi-primitive recreation, elk security areas, and the quality of elk hunting.

Livestock Grazing

Issue: How much livestock grazing should be provided?

Livestock grazing on the Lewis and Clark National Forest is important to the local farm and ranch economy. National Forest allotments provide summer forage for livestock to complement the typical ranch operation. The demand for livestock grazing on the Forest is evidenced by the high interest in grazing permits and the applications by existing permittees to increase livestock numbers on National Forest System land.

Comments received concerning livestock grazing were mixed. Some people desired less grazing to minimize conflicts with riparian areas, soil and water quality, and wildlife habitat, especially elk winter range and threatened and endangered species habitat. Some recommended an increase in livestock grazing, while others wanted a continuation of current grazing levels.

Alternative G maintains the current level of livestock grazing. This level of grazing allows for other public uses of the Forest while maintaining the permittees' ranch operations. Nine alternatives provide for higher levels of livestock grazing, two alternatives provide similar levels, and four alternatives provide for lower levels than Alternative G. For a comparison of the level of grazing for the various alternatives, refer to Chapter II, pages 2-63 through 2-66, in the Environmental Impact Statement. Alternatives that significantly increase livestock grazing generally did so at the expense of the fish and wildlife resource. Increased use could adversely affect riparian areas, increase sedimentation, and decrease the catchable trout population. Forage competition with big-game, particularly on winter ranges, can lead to declines in elk, bighorn sheep, and deer populations. A discussion of range activities and their

effects on other resources is in Chapter IV, pages 4-37 through 4-42, in the Environmental Impact Statement.

I believe the slight projected long-term increase in grazing under Alternative G is compatible with other resources. Future increases are based on utilizing increased forage production following timber harvest, moderate investments in range improvements, and implementing intensive grazing management systems. No additional grazing on big-game winter habitat or riparian areas will be authorized unless wildlife forage needs are being met. In response to public concern, Forest-wide management standards have been developed to protect riparian areas and threatened and endangered species habitat. It is not anticipated that the slight increase in cattle grazing on the Rocky Mountain Division will adversely affect threatened and endangered species because of improved management systems, and the application of management standards designed to protect these species. The proposed long-range increase in grazing was reduced by more than 5,000 animal unit months between the draft and final Environmental Impact Statement.

Timber Management

Issue: How much timber should be harvested?

Many of the people commenting on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement addressed the timber sale program or timber management. Some favored increased harvest levels and cited jobs, community stability, and potential losses from insects and disease as the primary reasons. On the other hand, people desiring a decrease in harvest levels, or no harvesting at all, identified three primary reasons: wildlife, especially elk; soil erosion and water quality; and fish habitat protection. Numerous people questioned the economics of timber management on the Forest. Some people were against timber harvesting in particular areas while others favored timber harvesting in specific areas. Refer to Chapter VI, pages 6-35 through 6-39 and 6-132 through 6-142, for a summary of public comments.

Nine alternatives provide for higher levels of timber harvest, four alternatives provide lower harvest levels, and two alternatives provide levels similar to Alternative G. For a comparison of the alternative timber harvest levels, refer to Chapter II, pages 2-67 through 2-75, in the Environmental Impact Statement. Alternatives with higher levels of timber harvest typically result in decreases in elk and trout population potentials and in semi-primitive recreation areas. Alternative G maintains adequate habitat to support existing elk populations, catchable trout populations, and a high amount of opportunity for semi-primitive recreation while providing a level of timber harvesting upon which local job markets can depend. A discussion of the environmental consequences of the various timber harvesting levels is in Chapter IV, pages 4-43 through 4-75, in the Environmental Impact Statement.

My decision for a timber sale program of 14 million board feet annually meets the average annual levels of timber sales over the past 25 years. I believe annual volume can be harvested without lowering the biological potential of the Forest while providing for a mix of multiple uses. This will be accomplished by practicing timber management on 282,307 acres of suitable lands.

I have reviewed the level of timber harvest in relationship to the supply potential, demand, effects on other resources, net public benefit and public comments. The result is a program that will help benefit community stability at Judith Gap and maintain the jobs associated with the sawmills at Townsend, Lewistown, and Livingston. This has been done by increasing the proposed timber sale program of 13 million board feet to 14 million board feet yearly. This extra million board feet, along with one half million feet moved from the Rocky Mountain Division to Jefferson Division, will be available for industry. The timber program on the Rocky Mountain Division will be reduced to one-half million board feet yearly for local incidental use.

Since 1980, almost all timber available for purchase has been sold by the Lewis and Clark National Forest. Bid competition has increased the value of many of these sales. The Forest does not have a large volume of uncut timber under contract.

Alternative G will not provide the 20 million board feet yearly sought by the local timber industry. Projections are that in three decades the Forest can provide this level while still maintaining wildlife habitat and productivity, and protecting soil and water quality. Forest-Wide standards and management area direction contained in the Forest Plan are designed to minimize the effects of timber harvest on these resources.

Economic criteria as well as constraints designed to achieve multiple-use goals and objectives were important considerations in determining the location and amount of timber harvest. About 60 percent of the lands capable of producing timber were not considered suitable at the present time because of marginal economics and other resource values.

Considerable public concern exists about "below cost" timber sales in which receipts returned to the Treasury from the sale of timber are less than the costs of preparing and administering the sale. Alternative G does not include economic analysis of individual timber sales. A detailed economic analysis will be completed for sales of more than 1 million board feet.

Economics is an important consideration and one of many factors considered in reaching my decision. Timber sale economics is complicated because of the mix of priced and non-priced benefits and costs, changing market conditions, and the long time frames involved. Decisions concerning individual sales will be based on net public benefit, considering both priced and non-priced costs and benefits. I expect some sales to be "below cost" in order to achieve long-term resource management objectives.

Even-aged silviculture was found to be appropriate for the majority of the vegetative types found on the Forest. Clearcutting helps avoid the serious problem of transmitting mistletoe from infected trees to newly established trees. By removing all standing trees, the establishment of soil borne root rots can also be avoided.

Forest data shows excellent natural regeneration of lodgepole pine about 90 percent of the time following regeneration harvest. Proper sale layout will improve the age class distributions of future lodgepole pine stands, improve forest diversity, and help protect areas against future outbreaks of insects and

disease. The mosaic pattern of vegetation resulting from timber harvesting can also be a deterrent to large wildfires.

Economic Efficiency

In determining the most economically efficient alternative, the Forest Service uses an estimate of present net value. In calculating present net value, a dollar value is assigned to various outputs. Some of these, such as timber, are determined by the market and produce a revenue. Others use assigned values derived from research and generally do not produce a revenue. However, some resources, such as roadless areas, do not produce revenue and have no basis from which to estimate a value. Therefore, present net value cannot be the only criterion used in selecting an alternative. The criterion used was maximizing net public benefit, which includes both the net value of resources that produce revenue and consideration of those that do not produce revenue.

Since it is impossible to meet all desires totally and simultaneously, I felt it was necessary to evaluate the tradeoffs between resources that produce revenue and those that do not within each alternative, and decide which alternative best maximizes net public benefit. Table 1 displays the alternatives arranged in order of decreasing present net value and the long-term sustained yield and total acres of wilderness, recommended wilderness and roadless lands. The discussion that follows briefly describes the reasons for the changes in present net value and allows the reader to compare the Selected Alternative to those alternatives with higher present net values. Much more detailed discussion is found in the Environmental Impact Statement, Appendix B.

TABLE 1

Alternative/ Benchmark	Present Net Value (MM/\$)	Timber Long-term Sustained Yield (MMBF)	Total Acres of Wilderness, Recommended Wilderness and Roadless (Acres)
MAX PNV	308	43.8	384,000
A-1	281	41.1	696,000
E-1	262	34.6	919,000
A-2	257	43.5	506,000
B-1	243	32.6	757,000
E-2	242	38.8	733,000
B-2	235	33.6	703,000
F-Departure	230	26.2	1,162,000
H	224	23.7	1,367,000
F	223	25.4	1,164,000
I	219	20.3	1,268,000
J	219	20.3	1,240,000
G-Selected	215	23.8	1,293,000
K	200	14.4	1,282,000
D	186	16.0	1,124,000
Current Plan	183	14.3	979,000
C	180	18.3	1,178,000

The following discussion presents the present net value tradeoffs among alternatives:

PNV - Tradeoffs, Alternative A-1

Alternative A-1 has the highest present net value of all alternatives, with a corresponding high level of timber. In order to produce these levels of revenue-producing benefits, elk habitat, elk hunter recreation, wilderness, semi-primitive recreation opportunity and fisheries were judged to be at such a level as to make Alternative A-1 inadequate in responding to public issues. Alternative A-1 is inadequate in maximizing net public benefits even though \$27 million in present net value is traded off compared to the Present Net Value Benchmark. This tradeoff is primarily because of the high timber sale program over the next 50 years. Alternative G has a lower present net value than Alternative A-1 because it produces more elk, elk hunter recreation, fish, and semi-primitive recreation opportunity.

PNV - Tradeoffs, Alternative E-1

Alternative E-1 has the second highest present net value among alternatives for reasons similar to Alternative A-1. The reduction of \$18 million in present net value compared to Alternative A-1 is because of a reduced level of timber offered for sale. Net public benefits are not maximized by Alternative E-1 because of significant reductions in elk, elk hunter recreation, fish habitat and semi-primitive recreation opportunity on the Jefferson Division. These are public issues that I believe Alternative G successfully resolves.

PNV - Tradeoffs, Alternative A-2

The tradeoffs of Alternative A-2 are similar to Alternative A-1 except that Alternative A-2 recommends less wilderness. The present net value is reduced \$24 million from Alternative A-1 due primarily to higher recreation values attributed to wilderness recreation.

PNV - Tradeoffs, Alternative B-1

Alternative B-1 has the fourth highest present net value. The alternative provides midpoint increases in timber and livestock grazing that fell between current management and the Resource Planning Act recommended program. Present net value is reduced by \$38 million from Alternative A-1. This reduction is primarily because of a decrease in the timber offered for sale. Like Alternative A-1, I feel that this alternative is inadequate in maximizing net public benefits because of the reductions in elk, elk hunter recreation, fish habitat, and semi-primitive recreation opportunities.

PNV - Tradeoffs, Alternative E-2 and B-2

The tradeoffs of Alternative E-2 and B-2 are similar to E-1 and B-1 except that these alternatives recommend less wilderness. The present net value is reduced by \$20 million and \$7 million respectively. Again, this change is primarily because of higher recreation values attributed to wilderness recreation.

PNV - Tradeoffs, Alternative H

Alternative H is based on maximizing timber harvest on developed lands and recommending 664,326 acres of roadless land for wilderness classification. Alternative H has the eighth highest present net value. The difference of \$84 million compared to the Present Net Value Benchmark is a result of reduced revenue-producing benefits, primarily timber as a result of a reduced suitable timber base. I think Alternative H places extreme emphasis on wilderness that results in inadequate response to public issues. I think the lower present net value of Alternative G is a necessary tradeoff for achieving recreational and wildlife habitat diversity and maintaining the livestock grazing program.

PNV - Tradeoffs, Alternative F and F-Departure

Alternative F has a present net value of \$85 million less than the Maximum Present Net Value Benchmark. The lower present net value is again largely the result of maintaining areas in a semi-primitive condition in response to public issues. There is less than \$1 million decrease in present net value from Alternative H primarily because of lower levels of wilderness and higher levels of grazing.

I feel that Alternative F does not maximize net public benefits because of reduced wildlife populations, fewer semi-primitive recreation areas and greater conflicts between livestock and wildlife. Alternative F-Departure has a present net value of \$78 million less than the Maximum Present Net Value Benchmark. The \$7 million net value over Alternative F is because of increased timber harvest levels in earlier decades.

PNV - Tradeoffs, Alternative I, J and K

These alternatives were designed to evaluate the tradeoffs for a range of wilderness recommendation. Alternatives I and J have higher present net value than Alternative G. The change in present net value of these two alternatives is relatively small (\$1 million) because the major differences are in resources that do not produce a revenue and are not measured by present net value. Alternative K has a lower present net value (\$15 million) because of the lower timber harvest program. While these alternatives recommend more wilderness, I believe Alternative G achieves needed recreation and wildlife habitat diversity.

I believe that Alternative G provides the mix of resources and services that most closely responds to issues, concerns, and opportunities. Alternative G maintains habitat for existing elk populations, catchable trout populations, and a diversity of recreation opportunities including large amounts of semi-primitive recreation settings, while providing for the recent levels of timber harvest and livestock grazing upon which local communities and ranchers are dependent. Threatened and endangered species habitat will be maintained. Plant diversity and post, pole, and firewood opportunities will increase.

Social and Economic Stability

The economic structure of the local area is dependent upon activities related to natural resources, such as grazing, logging, processing lumber, oil and gas exploration and development, and some mining. Alternative G promotes the continuation of existing lifestyles that are dependent upon the use of these natural

resources. Alternative G could result in slight increases in population, employment, and income. Twelve alternatives provide for greater increases in population, employment, and income, primarily through increased levels of timber harvest. These increases, however, are achieved at the expense of amenities such as scenic quality, wildlife, and recreation opportunities. The timber and livestock grazing levels proposed in Alternative G will maintain the resource base upon which many local communities and ranch families are dependent while maintaining other important values. I believe Alternative G provides the best mixture of market resources and other values and consequently, benefits a larger number of individuals and groups than the other alternatives.

I recognize there could be significant social and economic effects from oil and gas development. The greatest potential is within the Rocky Mountain Division, specifically in the Badger-Two Medicine, Blackleaf-Teton, and Falls Creek areas. Oil and gas activity is highly speculative and with the current amount of information, an accurate analysis of the social and economic impacts of future energy development is difficult. Social and economic effects of exploration and development activities will be addressed in subsequent environmental analyses on specific sites.

The Environmental Impact Statement considered the social and economic consequences of the various alternatives. (Environmental Impact Statement, pages 4-123 through 4-128.) From a social and economic perspective, I feel Alternative G contributes to local community stability while maintaining other values important to people.

Environmental Quality

Environmental quality is an important consideration in selecting an alternative. The environmental effects of the various alternatives and the proposed action are discussed in Chapter IV of the Environmental Impact Statement. These effects will be monitored to ensure compliance with the Forest Plan and applicable laws and regulations. Air quality will be maintained within legal limits and water quality will meet or exceed State water quality standards. Soil erosion will be minimized and long-term soil productivity will be maintained. Fish and wildlife populations will be maintained and timber harvesting, road construction, and oil and gas activities will be designed to minimize adverse effects on wildlife, especially threatened and endangered species. Forest management will improve the health, vigor, and diversity of vegetation and will reduce the risk of insect and disease epidemics and catastrophic wildfire.

The management standards developed to protect environmental quality are displayed in Chapter II of the Forest Plan. These standards do not vary by alternative. They provide the specific direction and mitigation measures necessary to assure long-term productivity. Additional standards for mitigating the environmental impacts of activities on various resources can be found in Appendices F, G, H, I, J, and K of the Forest Plan. Adherence to the management standards will allow for resource development while protecting the environmental quality on the Forest.

The adverse effects that cannot be avoided are identified by resource activity in Chapter IV of the Environmental Impact Statement. Although the application of Forest-wide standards is intended to limit the number and duration of these adverse effects, I recognize there will be some short-term increases in sedimentation resulting from soil disturbance, and increased water yield associated with timber harvesting activities.

Also, I expect some short-term reduction in air quality from dust, smoke, and automobile emissions resulting from increased recreational use; timber, range, and wildlife habitat management activities, and the increased use of prescribed fire.

I considered these environmental factors along with alternative outputs in reaching my decision. I feel Alternative G maintains the environmental quality of the Lewis and Clark National Forest.

Compatibility With Other Public Agency and Indian Tribe Goals

From the outset of the planning process, Federal, State, and local agencies have been informed of the Forest Plan's development. Refer to Appendix A in the Environmental Impact Statement for a description of the planning coordination that was completed. Letters from Federal, State, and local agencies are located in Appendices E and F of the Environmental Impact Statement.

The Lewis and Clark National Forest worked closely with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. For example, the Department's field biologist helped develop the Forest wildlife standards. The Department's guidelines for managing roads and recommendations from the Montana Cooperative Elk-Logging Study have been incorporated in the Forest Plan. The Department expressed concern regarding the possible reduction of opportunities for elk hunting. This would be in conflict with the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, which calls for increased hunter opportunity on the Lewis and Clark National Forest. In response to the Department's concerns, additional management areas were established to retain large roadless blocks for elk security and to protect important habitat and migration routes adjacent to State wildlife management areas.

The Forest Service coordinated with the Montana Department of State Lands concerning land use and fire management. The Forest also coordinated with the State Department of Health and Environmental Sciences concerning water quality and "Best Management Practices." Management standards have been revised to reflect concerns about water quality.

All alternatives provide habitat for recovery of the threatened grizzly bear and the endangered gray wolf. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Grizzly Bear and Northern Rocky Mountain Wolf Recovery Plans were used to develop management standards to protect habitat for threatened and endangered species and aid in their recovery. The Forest Service is closely involved with the Interagency Rocky Mountain Front Wildlife Monitoring and Evaluation Program, which includes representatives from the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. Wildlife management guidelines developed through this program have been incorporated into the Forest Plan.

The National Park Service has expressed concern about management activities on the Lewis and Clark National Forest adjacent to Glacier National Park. These concerns include: potential effects on wildlife that migrate between the areas, air and water quality, and visual quality. The management emphasis in the adjacent Badger-Two Medicine area has been changed to reflect these values. The two agencies meet regularly to exchange information and coordinate the management of adjacent lands.

The Forest has met numerous times with the Blackfeet Tribal Council, Blackfeet Lewis and Clark Project, and their legal counsel to discuss the Forest Plan. The lands referred to as the "ceded strip" (North End Geographic Unit) on the Rocky Mountain

Division will be managed to protect the rights of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation as stated in the Agreement of 1896. These rights include:

- the right to cut and remove wood and timber,
- the right to go upon any portions of the lands hereby conveyed,
- the right to hunt and fish in accordance with State Fish and Game laws.

Alternative G is compatible with land management plans completed by the Bureau of Land Management for lands adjacent to the National Forest in the Rocky Mountain Division and the Jefferson Division. Along the Rocky Mountain Front, the Bureau of Land Management has identified several adjacent areas (12,500 acres) as Outstanding Natural Areas. Like the adjacent National Forest System lands, they are under lease for oil and gas exploration. Surface use of the lands is similar.

Overall, I feel Alternative G meets the combined concerns of the agencies as well as, or better than, any other alternative. A dialogue with public agencies and interested individuals will continue. The involvement of these interested parties is critical to the successful implementation, monitoring, and updating of the Forest Plan.

Summary of Reasons for Selecting Alternative G

I believe Alternative G is responsive to public issues, in particular the issue of keeping the Forest as it is today while establishing long-term direction. This objective is achieved through the large blocks of land to remain roadless for recreation and wildlife. Alternative G also establishes direction for timber harvesting and livestock grazing that will continue social and economic stability in the local area. I believe Alternative G will maintain the environmental quality of the Lewis and Clark National Forest, and the Forest Plan is compatible with other agency and Indian Tribe goals. In selecting Alternative G, I made a decision to trade off some economic efficiency to respond to public issues and maintain quality hunting and scenery. For these reasons I believe Alternative G maximizes net public benefit.

Many divergent opinions were considered in the development and selection of the Forest Plan. All viewpoints could not be positively addressed. I believe, however, that Alternative G achieves a desirable mix considering the range and intensity of the comments received on the various issues.

Comparison of the Environmentally Preferred Alternative and the Selected Alternative

The identification of the environmentally preferable alternative is required by National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) 40 CFR 1505.2(b) and is the alternative that has the least impact on the physical and biological environment. Livestock grazing, timber harvesting, road construction, oil and gas development, and recreation use are the primary activities that affect the environment. Impacts can include increased soil disturbance and sedimentation, reductions in wildlife security and populations, and degradation of riparian habitats. The alternative in which activities that disturb the ground are minimized is considered the environmentally preferred alternative.

The environmentally preferred alternatives are Alternatives C and K. Alternative K emphasizes wildlife values and dispersed recreation in a primitive and semi-primitive

setting. Alternative C places a high emphasis on wildlife values and received broad public support as the environmentally preferred alternative. These alternatives recommend low levels of timber harvesting, livestock grazing, and road construction, and have the least amount of land suitable for timber harvest. For both alternatives, additional oil and gas leasing with surface occupancy would be recommended only on areas that are currently accessible and are not extremely sensitive to development. These alternatives provide for the greatest elk population levels, catchable trout populations, and elk hunter days. The alternatives also provide high levels of opportunity for primitive and semi-primitive recreation. Overall, these alternatives require the least amount of surface disturbance and create the least environmental impact.

If the environmentally preferred alternatives were implemented, the supply of timber from the National Forest would not be adequate to meet the needs of the local mills. This could result in adverse impacts on local employment and income. The wilderness classification of 387,106 acres recommended in Alternative K, which includes much of the Rocky Mountain Division roadless area, reduces the exploration and development potential of oil and gas reserves. The oil and gas opportunities are further reduced because of no-surface occupancy stipulations for semi-primitive recreation areas. The Rocky Mountain Division has a high hydrocarbon potential, primarily natural gas. The present net value of Alternatives C and K is 35 and 16 million dollars, respectively, less than Alternative G.

Alternative G provides for long-term increased levels of timber harvest and grazing. The environmental impacts that result from the increase in the production of commodities will be minimized by the management standards identified in the Forest Plan. I believe Alternative G provides for the best mix between providing goods and services while protecting environmental quality on the Forest.

IMPLEMENTATION, MITIGATION, AND MONITORING

Implementation

Implementation of the Forest Plan will begin 30 days after the Notice of Availability of the Environmental Impact Statement, and Record of Decision appears in the Federal Register. (36 CFR 219.10(c)(1)).

Implementation is likely to result in some individual timber sales having expenses that exceed revenues. These sales are referred to as "below-cost" timber sales. Analysis indicates some of these sales will be necessary to achieve both short-term and long-term objectives to maximize net public benefits. Construction of roads is the primary reason for expenses to exceed revenues in the first decade.

Minimizing below-cost timber sales will receive high priority in the implementation and budgeting process and in the designing and scheduling of timber sales. Cost-efficient management requires that cash flow analyses be used to minimize these negative cash flow projects.

The Forest Supervisor has authority to change implementation schedules to reflect differences between proposed annual budgets and actual appropriated funds. Such schedule changes are considered an amendment to the Forest Plan, but are not considered a significant amendment, or require the preparation of an environmental impact statement, unless the changes significantly alter the long-term relationships between levels of multiple-use goods and services projected under planned budget

proposals as compared to those projected under actual appropriations (36 CFR 219.10 (e)).

The time needed to bring all activities into compliance with the Forest Plan will vary depending on the type of project. Management direction contained in the Forest Plan will be used to analyze any proposal involving the use of the National Forest. All permits, contracts, leases, and other instruments for occupancy and use of the National Forest System lands will be consistent with the Forest Plan.

As a long range strategy for the Forest, the Forest Plan is programmatic in nature. During the planning of specific projects environmental analyses will be conducted.

Mitigation

Implementation is guided by the Forest-Wide Management Standards located in Chapter II of the Forest Plan, and by the specific Management Area prescriptions and requirements addressed in Chapter III of the Plan. The management standards were developed through an interdisciplinary effort and contain measures necessary to mitigate or eliminate any long-term adverse environmental effects. Additional mitigation measures and management standards are discussed in the various appendices to the Plan. To the best of my knowledge, all practical mitigation measures have been adopted and are included in the Forest Plan.

Monitoring

Implementation will be evaluated to determine how well objectives have been met and how closely management standards have been applied. Refer to Forest Plan Chapter V, pages 5-6 through 5-17, for a description of the monitoring and evaluation requirements. Appendix H of the Forest Plan discusses the Interagency Wildlife Monitor/Evaluation Program for important wildlife species on the Rocky Mountain Division. Monitoring data will be used to update inventories, to improve future mitigation measures, and to assess the need for amending or revising the Forest Plan. An evaluation report will be made available for public review.

PLANNING RECORDS

Planning records contain the detailed information and decisions used in developing the Forest Plan and Environmental Impact Statement as required in 36 CFR 219.12.

All of the documentation chronicling the Forest planning process are available for inspection during regular business hours at:

Forest Supervisor's Office
Lewis and Clark National Forest
1601 Second Avenue North
Great Falls, MT 59401
406-727-0901

These records are incorporated by reference into the Environmental Impact Statement and Forest Plan.

RIGHT TO ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

This decision is subject to administrative review pursuant to 36 CFR 211.18. Notice of appeal must be in writing and submitted to:

James C. Overbay, Regional Forester
Northern Region
USDA, Forest Service
P.O. Box 7669
Missoula, MT 59807

Notice of appeal must be submitted within 45 days from the date of this decision or within 30 days after publication by the Environmental Protection Agency of the Notice of Availability of the Environmental Impact Statement and Forest Plan, whichever date is later. A statement of reasons to support the appeal and any request for oral presentation must be filed within the 45-day period for filing a notice of appeal.



JAMES C. OVERBAY
Regional Forester

June 4, 1986
Date