

Chapter Three

Response to Issues, Concerns and Opportunities



Snowmobiler near Humpy Creek in the Uinta Mountains

CHAPTER 3

Response to Issues

Issue Identification and Forest Plan Response

The Revision Team identified the following set of issues after a review of the many letters that responded to the September 1999 Proposed Action for the forest plan revision as well as compilation of work completed at numerous public workshops in November and December of 1999. Over 800 comments from approximately 250 letters touched on every aspect of forest management. Narrowing the scope of the issues to those significant to this forest plan was a primary task of the team and forest leadership.

Following each significant issue is a statement that describes how the forest plan responds to the issue. During the forest planning process seven alternatives were developed which varied the response to the issues. The forest plan selected Alternative 7 as the most appropriate response to the each issue.

Significant Issues

Issue 1 – Recreation Use Conflicts/Access Management

How should increasing conflicts between and among users of motorized/mechanized vehicles (ATV's, snowmobiles, helicopters for skiing, and mountain bikes) and non-motorized recreation be addressed? How much and where is access appropriate for each of these groups? What user densities should we manage for in the future and where?

Note: TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLANS provide the most up-to-date direction for specific travel routes open to various types of travel. Forest plan revision did not address specific route changes. However, winter motorized use (generally for areas rather than routes) is addressed in the forest plan. Criteria to guide future travel management planning is also included in the revised forest plan.

Response to Issue 1

Alternative 7 addresses the issue of **recreation use conflicts and access management in winter** by providing for winter motorized use consistent with growing demand and the nature of the activity (i.e. large distances can be covered), while identifying selected areas for separation of non-motorized winter

opportunities. Portions of big game winter ranges, specific areas for cross-country skiing, some areas recommended for wilderness, and some areas where a boundary is impractical to manage are identified and mapped as non-motorized. Winter motorized use where it exists now (Lakes and portions of High Uintas roadless areas) *is allowed* within areas recommended for wilderness as interim management until such time that Congress acts on wilderness designation. Heli-skiing continues to be allowed in currently permitted terrain.

Opportunities for summer motorized recreation are provided on routes designated as open in current Travel Maps. Some areas with potential routes not currently open on travel maps for Ogden and Logan Ranger Districts are identified for potential future motorized trail development (See Revised Forest Plan, Chapter 4.B. Management Area Direction- Desired Future Conditions). Also the concept of the Shoshone Trail System is emphasized connecting existing motorized routes on National Forest, Bureau of Land Management, and State lands to provide extended riding opportunities between communities while providing an alternative to the unauthorized trails in sensitive watersheds along the Wasatch Front. Primitive and semiprimitive recreation opportunity classes (both motorized and nonmotorized) apply defined ranges of user densities to allow for monitoring of use patterns. Upon approaching thresholds, this Alternative proposes public notification and evaluation of whether to initiate management actions (potential permit system) to maintain user densities. Other opportunity classes are managed to allow for increases in demand by more intensive measures such as site hardening and management of concentrated use sites.

Special emphasis on education and enforcement is proposed through an objective in the Revised Forest Plan in response to public comments. Off Highway Vehicle use, watershed health, and user ethics are identified as key focus areas for education and enforcement.

Issue 2 – Roadless Areas Management

How much and where should additional acreage be recommended for wilderness designation? How much, where, and how should inventoried roadless areas be protected from development? How much and where should inventoried roadless areas be available for which types of development and uses?

Response to Issue 2

Alternative 7 addresses the issue of **roadless area management** by applying evaluation of individual roadless area values (FEIS Appendix C2) and resource capabilities/conditions to mapping of management prescriptions that either maintain or mostly maintain undeveloped character (75% of roadless acres) or allow varying types and degrees of development for specific purposes consistent with the prescription emphasis (25% of roadless acres). Road construction and reconstruction are not allowed in most roadless areas, nor is cutting, sale, and removal of timber. In most of these areas, prescribed and wildland fire use will

be the primary approach to returning vegetation to properly functioning conditions. Timber harvest and road construction are allowed in portions of some roadless areas for purposes of improving habitat for terrestrial wildlife (prescription 3.2D) and to maintain or restore ecosystem composition and structure and/or reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire effects (prescription 5.1), and for purposes of timber production (prescription 5.2). About 73,300 acres or 12% of inventoried roadless areas are recommended for Wilderness designation because of their high quality wilderness characteristics and minimal conflicts with other uses. In this Alternative, unlike the others, the recommended wilderness prescription (1.5) allows prescribed fire and continuation of existing snowmobiling.

Issue 3 – Biodiversity and Species Viability

What are the key factors to emphasize and what is the proper balance of management and land use activities that can maintain biodiversity on the forest? Which areas need what kind of management direction to ensure overall biodiversity as well as viability of species?

Response to Issue 3

Alternative 7 addresses the issue of **biodiversity and species viability (including watershed functions)** by emphasizing factors known to contribute to conservation biology with a combined approach of active human intervention in some areas and minimal intervention in others by taking actions as follows:

- Identifying current, or managing to create, a system of areas representing all native ecological units and seral stages across their historic range of variation.
- All known wildlife corridors managed to maintain function of corridor (regionally significant Bear River and currently designated western portion of East Fork Smiths Fork Uinta Mountains).
- Manage and/or restore rangelands and manage livestock grazing (through the new Guideline for lower allowed forage utilization (30-40% rather than 50%) on lands in unsatisfactory condition, improved emphasis on permit administration, refined annual operating instructions, and Allotment Management Plan revisions) to restore proper functioning of watersheds, riparian areas, and lands in unsatisfactory condition. Closes vacant allotments (Clegg, Hardscrabble, Mill Canyon, Shingle Mill, and Wright) in the Salt Lake County and Davis County watersheds. Other vacant allotments are left open pending future site-specific analysis. However, given recent funding levels, stocking of vacant allotments is unlikely.
- Active vegetation management practices such as suppression of fire for protection of life and property, timber harvest, thinning, mechanical treatment of fuels, and/or seeding with native species are applied to already developed areas and about 25 percent of inventoried roadless area acres, mimicking natural disturbance processes including insects and disease where possible; while practices including prescribed fire, and wildland fire use are emphasized in most

- (75%) undeveloped lands to move landscapes within the historic range of variability to the degree that this is compatible with other objectives.
- e. Maintain most (71%) high value inventoried roadless areas as undeveloped.
 - f. Road decommissioning is pursued consistent with Travel Maps and priority based on roads analysis is placed on improving water quality, fish habitat, and watershed functions and reduction of habitat fragmentation.
 - g. Take aggressive actions to greatly reduce noxious weeds.
 - h. Maintain or restore connectivity of forested lands.
 - i. Discourage introductions of non-native species, especially in wilderness.
 - j. Monitor management indicator species and their habitats to validate assumptions about habitat relationships.
 - k. Protect and/or restore special habitats (7 grazing allotments in the Uinta Mountains would be closed if permits are voluntarily waived without preference, to provide for bighorn sheep habitat; establish baselines of groomed or designated open over the snow routes or play areas within lynx analysis units in the Uinta Mountains).
 - l. Add portions of the Burro Peaks, Thompson Peak and West Beaver Allotments to the adjacent, lower allotments, but maintains existing AUMs on those allotments.
 - m. Encourage restoration of native cutthroat trout to key drainages (Hayden Fork, Whitney, Temple Fork, Beaver Creek, Causey, South Fork Weber).
 - n. Maintenance of existing Research Natural Areas (Mollens Hollow, Morris Creek, and Red Butte) except for realignment of the lower portion of Red Butte to create a Special Interest Area allowing restoration research; include additional acreage with current Morris Creek RNA.
 - o. Designate special interest areas in Willard Basin, and lower Logan Canyon for botanical values, and the T.W. Daniels Experimental Forest for scientific and educational purposes.

Issue 4 – Concerns About Continued Economic Contributions and Personal/Social Benefits of the Forest

What will be the effects on traditional and current economic outputs and social benefits of the forest? These include forage for livestock, timber for harvest, production of oil and gas, recreation related services and all of the accompanying “quality of life/lifestyle” benefits obtained from the forest? Where and how much of these outputs and benefits can be expected in the future?

Response to Issue 4

Alternative 7 addresses the issue of concerns about **economic contributions and social benefits of the Forest** through using opportunities for economic benefit from active vegetation management on lands capable and tentatively suitable (primarily areas mapped as 5.2 and 5.1), while mitigating for maintenance of biodiversity, species viability, and watershed health. Recreation opportunities are emphasized for their value both to local economies and to quality of life for both urban and rural communities. Values for water quality, air quality, natural

ecological functions, and perpetuation of species, as well as administrative and environmental costs of commodity outputs are recognized and included for maximizing net public benefit.

Some forested lands are identified as suitable and mapped with prescription 5.2 for emphasis on timber production. Other tentatively suited lands are available for timber harvest including salvage where that activity can be mitigated to meet habitat objectives and/or to mimic natural disturbance processes. Timber harvest is also allowed where it can be used to reduce hazardous fuels, improve aquatic or terrestrial habitat, long-term scenic or recreation site values, and/or for watershed improvement. Livestock grazing is managed on suitable rangelands to meet standards and guidelines associated with habitat and watershed needs. A lower forage utilization allowance (30-40% instead of 50%) is applied to lands in unsatisfactory condition. Allotments with substantial areas in unsatisfactory condition are highest priority for improved grazing administration. Where movement of livestock or other structural means does not accomplish satisfactory conditions (based on monitoring of key areas), or are not economically feasible, livestock grazing will be removed through grazing permit action until satisfactory conditions are achieved. Some vacant allotments are left vacant pending site-specific analysis. However, given experienced budget levels and priority of other, active allotments it is expected that most vacant allotments will remain vacant during the planning period. Within the Appeal Settlement Zone of the Uinta Mountains 47,900 acres are available for oil and gas leasing. Of those, 27,000 acres allow surface occupancy while 20,900 do not allow surface occupancy. About 20,400 acres in this Zone are unavailable. Recreation related opportunities for economic benefits are tied to the ROS classes. Although ski area boundary expansions are not allowed nor are new ski areas, world class skiing will continue. In general, outputs are expected to be slightly less than recent years and are dependent on the degree to which projects for improvement of terrestrial or aquatic habitat yield commercially viable opportunities.

Issue 5 – Environmental, Social, and Economic Impacts of Uses

How will we ensure that impacts of uses to watershed conditions, terrestrial, riparian and aquatic wildlife and fish habitats, recreation settings and scenery, and local quality of life are kept within acceptable limits? Uses include livestock grazing, timber harvest, recreation, oil & gas development, and road and trail management.

Response to Issue 5

The Forest Plan addresses the potential impacts from uses by closing vacant grazing allotments within Davis and Salt Lake County watersheds and lowering the forage utilization allowance in areas of unsatisfactory condition. It reduces potential timber harvest to sustainable levels. Relatively few acres have prescriptions emphasizing timber production (MPC5.2). Timber harvest on lands with other prescriptions must be designed to meet the intent of those

prescriptions. Lands available for oil and gas leasing are leased with timing restrictions or surface constraint stipulations to protect other resources. It provides direction for future recreation use in heavily used riparian areas.

Socially, any change to the make-up of communities or social patterns as a result of implementing Alternative 7 would be very minor. In some cases, jobs and incomes related to one type of resource development may be forgone in order to emphasize or manage an area for another resource output; other types of jobs will be associated with this other management. The larger regional economy will not be significantly impacted.

Issue 6 – Appropriate Types and Amounts of Facility Development for Wildland Settings in the Forest

How much more recreation related facility development, where and of what types, should be allowed in the future?

Response to Issue 6

Alternative 7 addresses the issue of **appropriate types and amounts of facility development** by allowing some additional facility development primarily in roaded natural, and rural ROS classes. Replacement of current facilities that have unacceptable impacts to resources is emphasized along with site designation and access hardening in concentrated recreation use areas to prevent and/or mitigate impacts. Facility design and construction must include mitigation for maintenance of biodiversity, species viability and watershed health. Trail construction is allowed consistent with management prescriptions to provide a variety of opportunities, particularly in already developed areas. Emphasis is identified for completion of the Bonneville Shoreline and Great Western Trails and to connect the existing trail opportunities on National Forest (Ogden and Logan Ranger Districts) with trails on Bureau of Land Management, State and private lands using the concept of the Shoshone Trail System. Facilities at ski areas are consistent with Resort Natural Setting landscape character theme. The only change from existing conditions for recreation opportunity classes is within ski area permit boundaries where the designation changes from roaded natural to rural to focus growing recreation use where facilities are available.