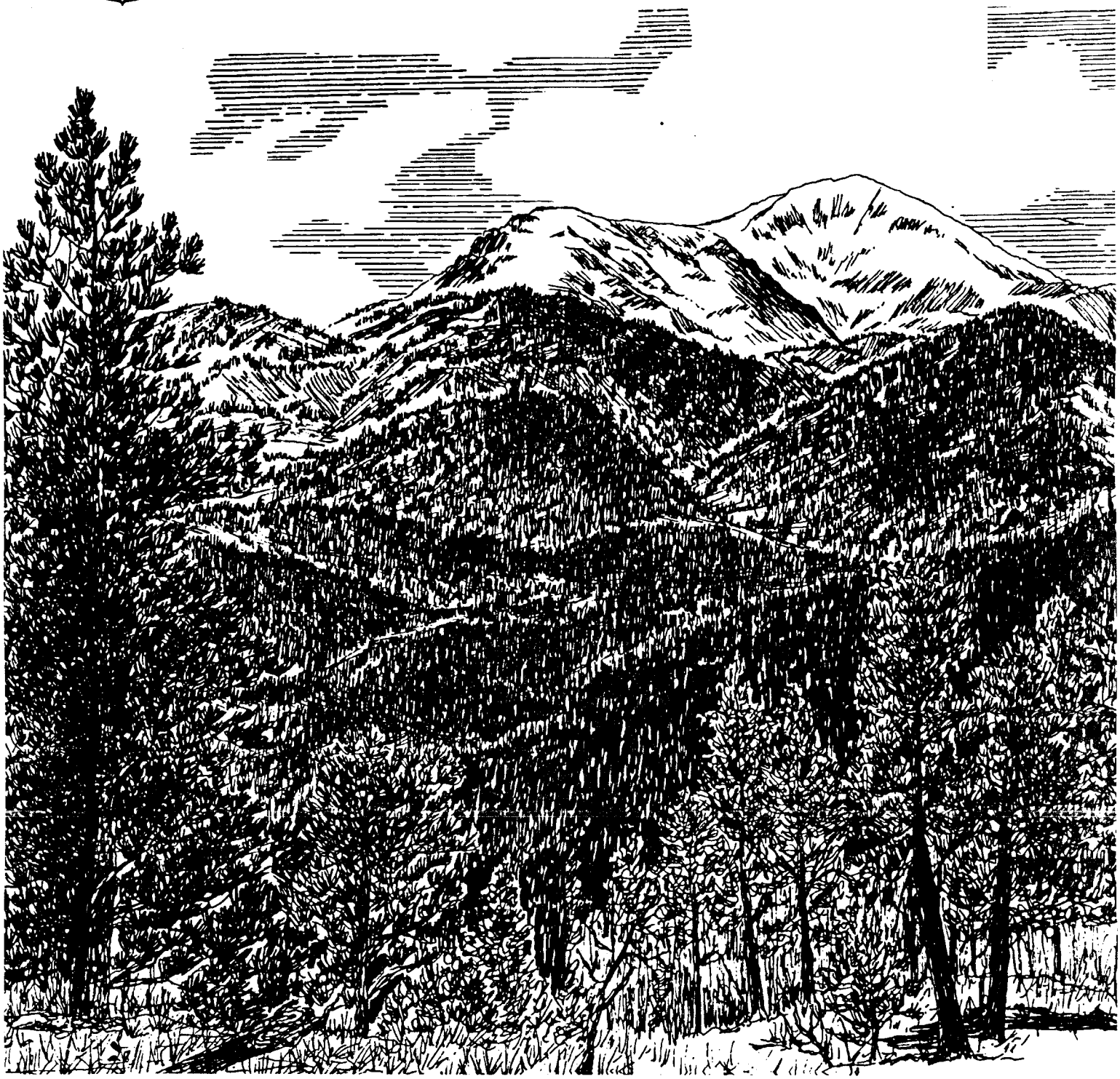
United States
Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

Lolo National Forest

The Lolo National Forest Plan
Record of Decision



COVER: Lolo Peak, a prominent landmark just south of Missoula, towers above Lolo Creek at an elevation of 9,096 feet. The Lolo National Forest, which includes the original Lolo Forest Reserve established in 1906, is named after this mountain.

RECORD OF DECISION

USDA Forest Service

LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

FOR THE

LOLO NATIONAL FOREST

Flathead, Granite, Lake, Lewis & Clark, Mineral, Missoula,
Powell, Ravalli, and Sanders Counties, Montana

April 1986

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INTRODUCTION

What is being decided?

This Record of Decision documents my decision and rationale for selecting Alternative d as the management strategy for the Lolo National Forest for the next 10 to 15 years. The Lolo National Forest is located in western Montana and the Plan addresses 2,083,192 acres of National Forest System lands. The Forest is approximately 120 miles long and between 40 and 80 miles wide, and makes up parts of Flathead, Granite, Lake, Lewis & Clark, Mineral, Missoula, Powell, Ravalli, and Sanders Counties. Total population for the 9-county area is approximately 235,000. Local people, as well as those from other parts of the country, display an active interest in the Forest's natural resource management, with its inherent environmental, social, and economic issues. The Lolo Forest Plan is a strategy for managing the Forest within that setting.

This strategy is contained in the document titled Lolo National Forest Plan, dated February 1986, and referred to as the Forest Plan in this document. It provides management direction in the form of standards, monitoring requirements, and a probable schedule of activities. Analysis of the alternatives I considered and public comments on these alternatives are found in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, February 1986.

What is the goal of the Forest Plan?

My goal in selecting Alternative d was to maximize net public benefit. I considered public input, other agency and Indian tribe goals, public issues and management concerns, environmental quality, economic efficiency, social and economic stability, and resources on which a dollar value can be placed and those that cannot be dollar valued. No single factor constituted the total rationale; the consideration of these factors and how they related to each other led to my decision. A discussion about how I considered these factors is found in the rationale section of this document.

What will happen to existing plans on the Forest?

Once adopted, the Forest Plan replaces all previous resource management plans prepared for the Forest, subject to existing rights, contracts, leases, and specific authorities for special area planning such as those related to Wilderness, the National Recreation Area, and National Recreation Trails.

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

The Forest Plan can be changed by an amendment or revision. This may be necessary to respond to changing needs and opportunities, legislated land designations, catastrophic events, monitoring results, or major new management or production technologies. In proposing change, the Forest Supervisor will follow the procedures outlined in the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Forest Management Act (16 USC 1604) planning regulations, 36 CFR Part

219.10(e), which include public notification and involvement. The Plan will normally be revised every 10 years but must be revised every 15 years.

What is not being decided?

The emphasis of the Forest Plan is not on project or site-specific decisions. Site-specific analysis is provided for at the project level. However, each individual project will conform to Forest Plan direction and comply with the National Environmental Policy Act.

The Forest Plan does not address administrative activities to carry on day-to-day management. For example, personnel matters, internal organizations, 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. In addition, I am not making recommendations on oil and gas leasing; however, the Forest Plan contains overall direction and stipulation for leasing.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, ISSUES, AND MANAGEMENT CONCERNS

Public involvement was essential in developing Forest Plan issues and alternatives. People's concerns about the way the Forest is managed provided the thrust for the majority of planning actions.

Issues addressed in the Forest Plan analysis were identified through reviewing public comments on completed Forest Unit Plan Environmental Impact Statements and the Forest Travel Plan; Forest resource plans; completed Unit Plans and Travel Plans for adjacent National Forests; recent environmental impact statements prepared by other Federal agencies; recent appeals on management decisions in the Forest Service's Northern Region; a survey of the Forest's newspaper clipping file for recent years; and a public involvement effort as described in the Lolo National Forest Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), 1986, Appendix A and Chapter IV. Supervisor's Office and District resource personnel participated in a parallel effort to identify management concerns in their fields or areas of specialty. The original package addressed 31 public issues and 19 management concerns. The 1985 package addressed 35 issues, including 4 that had emerged during the planning period from public comments on earlier drafts. Specific issues are listed in the FEIS, Chapter I.

The following questions summarize the public issues and management concerns that influenced my decision to select the Forest Plan from the various alternatives:

Which roadless areas or parts of roadless areas should be recommended for wilderness and how should the remaining areas be managed?

What volume represents an economically sound, stable timber supply from the Lolo Forest for the next 10 years, recognizing the capability of the land and other Forest values?

What are the impacts of Lolo Forest land management activities on local communities and how will their needs will be considered in the process?

What amount of open/closed roading is needed on the Forest to accomplish resource objectives, taking into account areas of the Lolo with erosive soils, marginal timber, steep slopes and big game management needs?

How can the Forest Plan provide for diverse wildlife and fish populations, contribute to recovery of threatened and endangered species, such as the Grizzly Bear, and take advantage of management activities to enhance wildlife habitat?

How can the Rock Creek Blue Ribbon trout stream and the unique values of its drainage be protected?

How can water quality and basic soil productivity be maintained or improved, considering the intermingled ownership pattern on the Forest, the presence of granitic soils, glacial lake sediments, and steep slopes in areas where timber harvest may take place?

What parts of the Forest should be managed to meet specific types of recreation needs?

Where on the Forest should activities be constrained to protect the visual quality?

How can fire management and suppression be used on the Forest to achieve resource management objectives in a cost effective manner?

Other areas of interest were considered in developing the Forest Plan and were dealt with through Forest-wide standards applicable to all alternatives. These Forest-wide standards apply generally to issues and management concerns dealing with how things are done on the Forest. These areas of interest include:

- recreation management
- range management
- timber harvesting techniques
- timber utilization standards
- hard rock and oil and gas leasing and development
- protection of soil and water
- acquiring or disposing of lands
- special use permits
- road standards
- monitoring and budget

ALTERNATIVES

Alternatives were developed to display an array of land management options and provide analytical data to help make comparisons and determine the relative effects of various ways of resolving the issues.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) describes seven alternatives including the proposed action displayed as the Forest Plan. This Impact Statement meets the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508).

The seven alternatives described here, including a "Current Direction" alternative, were developed and analyzed through the National Forest Management Act planning process. A detailed discussion and comparison of alternatives is found in the FEIS, Chapter II.

Alternative a

The National Forest Management Act and National Environmental Policy Act regulations require inclusion of a "no action" alternative. It is defined as that condition most likely to exist in the future if current management direction would continue unchanged (36 CFR 219.12(f)(7)). Alternative a was designed to continue the current program. It projects the effects of this direction on goods and services, on the costs and benefits of management, and on the Forest environment and people. The bases for the current program are the Forest Multiple Use and Unit Plans, which were developed prior to the National Forest Management Act, and were not issue-driven. In formulating this "No Action" alternative, only those social variables evident from past planning decisions received attention; no emphasis was put on resolving emerging issues which played a major role in development of other alternatives.

Alternative b

This alternative was designed to emphasize nonmarket values, especially roadless management, visual quality, wildlife, fish habitat, and water quality. Timber, livestock grazing, and minerals opportunities are provided to the extent they are consistent with the emphasis on nonmarket uses.

Alternative b responds to public values that define the Forest as a variety of plant and animal communities in balance with their physical environment. The principal goal of management in this alternative is to maintain the Forest's balance in as natural an environment as possible, both in the way the Forest looks and in the way it functions. Management effectiveness is measured in terms of total resource costs and benefits rather than just dollar costs and benefits.

Alternative c

Alternative c emphasizes timber and mineral opportunities and provides significant amounts of the wilderness and wildlife habitat that can be achieved at little cost to market outputs.

This alternative responds to public values that define the Forest as a composite of resources that represent actual and potential products that contribute to income and employment of area residents. Managing the Forest approximates running a business or producing a crop. Practices and principles that guide management stem from considering economic efficiency as well as direct and indirect environmental effects. The flow of services from the Forest should meet demand levels. Public lands should provide a return on taxpayers' investment dollars with management efficiency measured in terms of economic efficiency.

Alternative d

This alternative was designed to resolve issues and management concerns, with a mix of both market and nonmarket uses and outputs. Emphasis is on roadless recreation, wilderness, wildlife habitat, fisheries, visual quality, and timber issues.

In Alternative d, Forest management recognizes the importance of natural ecosystems and the products that influence the economic health of western Montana. Management is made complex by attempting to meet the diverse, and sometimes conflicting, needs and desires of local and national publics. Costs and benefits are measured by changes in the natural environment in addition to dollars, with public service a measured objective. The timber resource will be managed cost effectively, measuring environmental as well as dollar costs and benefits.

Alternative e

Alternative e emphasizes timber and other commodity outputs to be achieved in the most cost effective manner. It does not respond to the wilderness issue. This alternative results in an extensive road system, encouraging opportunities for development, minerals exploration, and roaded recreation.

This alternative reflects a public view of the Forest as a large area of public land, with the principal goal to provide for the use of the land and its products. Forest lands need to be accessible. The needs and demands of people directly influenced by the Forest should have priority over desires imposed by outside influences. Management efficency is measured in terms of resource production and utilization.

Alternative f

This alternative was designed to emphasize nonmarket uses, especially wilderness, roadless recreation, wildlife diversity, and aquatic habitat. Timber management is confined to sites that do not have soils, wildlife, or in most cases, visual constraints.

This alternative recommends those roadless areas with particular public interest for wilderness; to provide for geographical distribution of wilderness areas across the Forest; and provide for representation of major ecosystems found on the Lolo. Management effectiveness is measured in terms of total resource costs and benefits rather than just dollars and benefits.

Alternative g

Alternative g was designed to maintain or increase market outputs from currently roaded lands and respond to nonmarket issues on roadless areas. All inventoried roadless acreage is recommended for wilderness. Developed areas represent actual and potential products, and the goal of management should be to maintain productivity by emphasizing a particular resource for which a given part of the Forest is best suited.

This alternative is based on the public comments suggesting that the natural environment be preserved to the maximum extent possible. The principal goal of the Forest Service should be to manage presently developed areas for the appropriate resource, and preserve the remaining undeveloped areas in a roadless condition. Management effectiveness would be measured in terms of total resource costs and benefits rather than just dollar costs and benefits.

THE DECISION

I have decided to approve implementation of Alternative d to guide the management of the Lolo National Forest for the next 10 to 15 years. Alternative d is a modification of the Proposed Action identified in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement; it was modified to be responsive to concerns raised by people during the public review of the DEIS. Alternative d establishes a basis to resolve major public issues on the Lolo Forest, as well as take advantage of important opportunities.

Wilderness designation is recommended for 223,600 acres with high wilderness values, including the Great Burn, the Bob Marshall Addition, the Selway-Bitterroot Addition, and Sliderock. These values will be maintained pending legislative action. The existing and recommended wilderness, along with the managed roadless acreage, amounts to approximately 26 percent of the Forest.

The first decade allowable sale quantity of 1.07 billion board feet approximates harvest levels of the past 10 years. This is only slightly less than the 1.11 billion board feet that could be offered for sale during the next 10 years under the current direction alternative. I believe that the annual program can accommodate fluctuations in the market and needs of local mills, and remain within the decade's allowable sale quantity. Even-aged management will predominate, which includes shelterwood, seed tree and clearcut silvicultural systems.

I have selected six areas totalling about 3300 acres to be managed as Research Natural Areas (RNA); these sites represent major forest ecosystems in western Montana that will be maintained for future observation and study.

Approximately 140 additional miles of road will be needed annually during the next 10 to 15 years to achieve the multiple-use objectives specified in Alternative d. The majority will be low standard local roads. The total miles of road left open at any one time for traffic will not be greater than the amount of miles currently open. A strong road management program in the Plan will minimize sediment to streams, maintain the high quality of water, benefit wildlife, and maintain hunter recreation opportunities.

Alternative d facilitates recovery of the grizzly bear: it identifies essential habitat for the bear's recovery, adopts the Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines, and provides protection and habitat enhancement through Forest-wide and management area standards that constrain access and timing of human activities in areas important to the bear.

I am particularly pleased to be able to take advantage of an opportunity of national and local significance by increasing elk habitat productivity and potential elk numbers by approximately 25 percent over current levels. Recommendations from the Montana Cooperative Elk Logging Study will be incorporated into timber sale and transportation planning.

Management is designed to provide habitat for viable populations of the diverse wildlife and fish species on the Forest. Special care is taken to provide and maintain habitat for those wildlife species dependent on snags, old growth, and riparian zones. Fish habitat will be available to support a 7 percent increase in fish population.

Water on the Lolo Forest will retain its generally excellent quality through strong Forest-wide standards, management area direction, specific direction protecting riparian areas and fisheries, application of Best Management Practices, and a monitoring plan that will positively influence the treatment of water, soils, and fisheries on the Forest.

My decision provides for continuing and coordinated management and protection of the values present in the Rock Creek drainage and its Blue Ribbon trout stream through a special management chapter in the Forest Plan. This chapter will also be an important part of the Deerlodge National Forest Plan when it is completed.

A variety of recreation attractions are protected and the rich variety of recreation experiences available on the Lolo will continue. I consider this a major resource on the Lolo to be managed for the more than 1.3 million local and national recreation visitors the Forest receives each year. This diversity of recreation opportunities provide for growth in the tourist industry and contribute to the unique and high quality of lifestyle recognized in Montana.

In order to protect the natural appearing landscapes important to people, resource management activities are significantly constrained by visual quality objectives in areas adjacent to or readily visible from major highways, roads, trails, campgrounds, and other recreational developments.

RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

The factors I used to determine which alternative maximizes net public benefit include response to issues, concerns, and opportunities; environmental quality; economic efficiency; and compatibility with other agency and Indian tribe goals. The social and economic stability concerns are included in these discussions. In making this decision, I recognize the limitations of the physical and biological systems, and that the Lolo National Forest cannot provide everything each individual or group would like.

Response to Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities

We received mixed comments about Wilderness recommendations on the Lolo. Some people opposed any additional wilderness acres because of the loss of opportunities to produce commodities; others suggested that various areas be preserved through wilderness classification. Some people told us that those areas listed in Governor Schwinden's May 10, 1984, recommendation to the Montana Congressional Delegation should be added. The challenge was to propose those areas with high wilderness values, while maintaining opportunities for commodity and certain recreation uses on other lands.

I considered priced and nonpriced benefits from both a National and local perspective, along with public comments, previous legislative proposals, and the analysis contained in the Environmental Impact Statement. My recommendations pertain only to those roadless areas on the Lolo National Forest. Decisions on roadless areas shared by adjacent National Forests will be contained in their Records of Decision. My recommendations for the principal roadless areas receiving public support for wilderness follow:

The Great Burn (Hoodoo Roadless Area, 01301) - The Hoodoo, or more popularly known as the Great Burn in Montana, has very high wilderness value, and I sense, is one of the Lolo National Forest's roadless areas with the most public support for wilderness designation. I am recommending a total of 89,530 acres of the Hoodoo, including the Cache Creek/Irish Basin portion of the area, be designated as an addition to the Wilderness system. This is also in accordance with Governor Schwinden's recommendation and approximates the wilderness legislation proposed by the Montana Congressional Delegation in 1984.

The vastness and diversity of the area, along with its rectangular shape extending approximately 30 miles north-south is excellent wilderness. Designation provides undisturbed habitat for many wildlife species, and the existing primitive/semiprimitive recreation setting would be retained. The effects of wilderness classification on big-game winter range will be insignificant because of its small acreage and location at lower elevations. I am willing to accept the loss of opportunities to harvest timber in the Great Burn and recognize the impacts on those who feel that the mineral potential in Cache Creek/Irish Basin is high. However, I feel the designation of this area is needed to resolve the wilderness issue.

Bob Marshall Addition (Bear-Marshall-Scapegoat-Swan Roadless Area, 01485) - The Lolo National Forest's portion of the Bear-Marshall-Scapegoat-Swan roadless area has very high wilderness value, and is strongly supported by the public for wilderness designation. The area lies immediately adjacent to an existing wilderness complex that is considered by many to be the crown jewel in the National Wilderness system. I am recommending a total of 69,250 acres of the area be designated as Wilderness. This part of my decision is also in accordance with Governor Schwinden's recommendation and wilderness legislation proposed by the Montana Congressional Delegation in 1984. A group of citizens representing various interests worked hard to agree on acceptable boundaries and my decision reflects their recommendations.

The area adds to the value of the existing Wilderness complex, expanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. Designation provides undisturbed habitat for many wildlife species, including essential habitat for grizzly bear and gray wolf. While there is some evidence of human activity, it has not impacted the natural appearance or wild character of the area. I am aware of the loss of opportunities to harvest timber, particularly in the Monture area. However, I feel that my decision recognizes an area of extremely high wilderness value and that designation of the area is needed to resolve the wilderness issue.

Cube Iron - Silcox (01784) - I am not recommending wilderness designation for the Lolo National Forest's 37,700 acres of the Cube Iron-Silcox roadless area. Of the many important resources in the area, I consider the grizzly bear the most important. The area includes approximately 21,000 acres of essential grizzly bear habitat; many of the existing components of that habitat are the result of fire. Plant succession will reduce the effectiveness of this habitat in the future. Vegetation management will be needed to retain the current condition. While we did receive considerable public support for wilderness designation for the area, it currently receives heavy recreation use by local citizens who prefer it be managed as nonwilderness. I believe management emphasis on grizzly bear habitat, other wildlife needs, visual quality, and roadless recreation in a nonwilderness setting, will provide the best opportunities to manage the vegetation and continue to provide for the grizzly bear and other values.

Selway-Bitterroot Addition (Lolo Creek, 01805) - The Lolo Creek roadless area is significant because of its location adjacent to the existing Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness and its proximity to population centers. We received considerable public support for recommending a portion of the Lolo Creek roadless area for wilderness, with many people requesting that we propose acreage similar to Governor Schwinden's recommendation. In addition, a group of citizens representing different interests and the Governor's office, worked on boundary recommendations for the area. In response to those requests, I am recommending 3,990 acres of the Lolo Creek roadless area be designated as an addition to the Wilderness system and that acreage approximates the Governor's recommendation. I believe the remaining 10,670 acres are better suited for roadless recreation and management of wildlife habitat in a nonwilderness setting. Designation will add to the completeness of the existing Wilderness.

Sliderock (Quigg, 01807) - I am recommending 60,830 acres of the Quigg roadless Area for wilderness. We received considerable public support for wilderness designation, and the area has some interesting wilderness values. The area is relatively large and compact and easy to manage as a wilderness unit. A portion of the northwest boundary of the Quigg area is within one-half mile of the existing Welcome Creek Wilderness. Designation provides for undisturbed habitat for many wildlife species, and the existing primitive/semiprimitive recreation setting would be retained. The approximately 9,000 remaining acres are better suited for wildlife habitat management and timber.

Stony Mountain (01808) - I am not recommending wilderness designation for the Stony Mountain area. The area was included in Governor Schwinden's recommendation; however, we received conflicting public comments about the area's value for wilderness. Management of the area is shared by the Lolo, Deerlodge, and Bitterroot National Forests. Current use is predominantly nonmotorized recreation on the Lolo and Bitterroot portions, and motorized recreation and timber management on the Deerlodge unit. I believe the area is best suited for nonmotorized recreation in a nonwilderness setting on the Lolo National Forest portion.

Other roadless areas were evaluated in the Environmental Impact Statement. They were recommended for nonwilderness uses to meet objectives for timber, recreation, and wildlife (Environmental Impact Statement, pages II-46 through II-55). Overall, the roadless areas will be managed to emphasize the following:

	Percent
Wilderness	29
Dispersed Recreation/Amenity	28
Wildlife	15
Timber	20
Other	8

I believe the recommendations for wilderness in Alternative d represent areas where people are willing to accept the tradeoffs in other resources because of the special quality of the area or its contribution to the completeness of an already existing Wilderness.

Issues related to the timber resource were controversial because of timber's relationship to all other forest resources and uses. People have highly opposing views on timber harvest. Some people view use of the timber resource as being compatible with other forest resources and that harvesting timber is in the public interest. Others believe timber harvest is generally detrimental and harvest should not occur at the expense of other forest values. Some people suggested that it may not be economically reasonable to harvest timber in remote areas, or sound resource management to harvest in erodible soils.

In addition, I recognize that the timber industry is requesting a return to what they term as a "historic" cut level of 160 million board feet per year to approximate the supply of timber necessary to meet local mill capacity. I understand that their request is based on the acknowledgment that private lands will be depleted within 10 years and they would like the Forest to have the flexibility to make up the difference. I recognize our responsibility to assist local industry and dependent communities in western Montana.

The Governor's comments suggested that the Forest Plan should initially provide for an amount of timber that closely matches the level of harvest on the Forest during the last few years; however, he also requested that the Plan retain the flexibility to expand timber volumes to meet potential increases in the next decade.

Alternatives with allowable sale quantities higher than the Selected Plan appear at this time to lead to resource use conflicts in future decades that might preclude achieving the balance of outputs and effects desired. Resource outputs will be monitored and increases (or decreases) will be reconsidered as we implement the plan. On the other hand, I evaluated alternatives that offered less timber in favor of other forest values. I feel these alternatives did not provide an adequate amount of timber for sale to support our local economy.

Given the available timber supply and environmental considerations in Alternative d, I feel confident that adverse economic or environmental consequences will not result. Alternative d approximates the volume of timber offered on an average annual basis for the past 10 years. During that time, I feel we maintained and strengthened environmental quality on the Lolo Forest. I am not willing to accept the potential effects on water, fisheries, and wildlife, or major changes in the appearance of the Forest if timber volumes are increased beyond Alternative d. The amount of timber actually offered for sale each year may vary depending on demand and our ability to prepare sales, as long as the control, which is the total decade volume, is not exceeded. I am convinced that within Alternative d flexibility exists and is necessary to accommodate fluctuations in market conditions during the next 10 years. Alternative d provides for levels of commodity and nondollar priced outputs that minimize unwanted change in the existing social and economic structure and in land use patterns. I believe my decision maximizes Net Public Benefits.

While some sales may be below cost, I am willing to set the programmed sales level at a volume higher than that which is apparently most economically efficient in today's market. It may be necessary at certain times and in specific locations to incur below-cost timber sales to achieve long-term resource management objectives and protect other resource values.

Most individuals and interest groups supported an aggressive road management program. Some comments indicate that people perceive road building as an independent objective of Forest planning. This is a misunderstanding. The road mileage displayed in the Environmental Impact Statement is a function of the miles of roads needed to manage timber and provide access for recreation and administration.

People are concerned about the adverse effects of roads on wildlife security, fisheries and water quality, and hunter recreation opportunities. In response to these concerns, the total miles of roads open for unrestricted travel will not increase beyond the number of miles presently open for public use. This will require closing most new, and possibly some existing roads to public use during a part or all of the year to maintain the present level of open access. Alternative d establishes explicit objectives for road management and standards for road planning, construction, and maintenance that I believe will result in the resource protection people want, while achieving multiple-use benefits.

Most people supported the protection of wildlife resources through the Forest Plan. However, some commented that we did not go far enough. People told us that they were worried about threatened and endangered species, particularly the grizzly bear and the importance of providing for recovery of the animal. Others were worried about the potential impacts of timber harvest and road construction on big-game populations. Some individuals and interest groups were concerned that protection of wildlife resources would unreasonably limit timber harvest.

I believe that the wildlife values of the Lolo National Forest are viewed as important parts of the lifestyle of western Montana and that people expect that to continue.

The recovery of species listed as threatened or endangered is important, and people have strong emotions about these animals. The grizzly bear is a species of National significance and I am committed to its recovery. I want to do our part toward recovery of the bear and our efforts will be directed towards: identification of habitat essential to grizzly bear recovery based on ecosystems found on the National Forest System as well as adjacent lands; strict application of the direction for activities occurring within the essential habitat; Forest-wide standards to protect the bear; and adoption of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines. A biological evaluation was done and the Proposed Forest Plan (Alternative d) received a nonjeopardy opinion from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

There seems to be more agreement among various individuals and interest groups on the importance of big-game, particularly elk, on the Forest than any other issue. I recognize big-game as an important commodity as well as noncommodity resource in western Montana - important to the state's economy, people's recreation, and the quality of life in the area. It is clear from public responses that the big-game resource is highly valued at the national as well as the local level.

I looked at ways to achieve greater increases in big-game numbers than those in Alternative d. I cannot accept the excessive costs to maintain an artificial level of habitat necessary to sustain those increases. The natural biological level of habitat would need high investments, resulting in significant constraints on other resources, to be capable of supporting the increased animal numbers. However, I accept the increased road management costs to achieve the projected 25 percent increase in Alternative d based on the following factors: the national significance of big-game populations on the Forest; the capability of the land to support that increase; and the opportunity to maintain and enhance the quality and quantity of hunter recreation opportunities on the Forest.

Habitat is provided for viable populations of the diverse indigenous small-animal species in most major drainages of the Forest in Alternative d. I evaluated alternatives that provided more and less acreage for wildlife diversity and different spacial arrangements on the Forest. I believe that it is important to maintain the integrity and distribution of the rich and varied ecosystems that exist on the Lolo Forest, and encourage present gene pools. I also recognize that people enjoy and value the opportunity to view different

species of wildlife as a major part of their recreation experience. I believe that Alternative d provides for both, without adversely limiting production of commodity goods.

Based on the analysis and public comments, I believe that Alternative d provides a strong wildlife program.

People made it clear that protection of water quality and the aquatic environment were among the most important issues on the Lolo Forest. They were fearful that management activities would impact the high quality of water and fisheries on the Forest and some people doubted that we would fulfil our intentions to refine our water data and carry out our monitoring program because of budget priorities.

I chose not to select an alternative with more commodity outputs because of the potential to reduce water quality on and beyond Forest boundaries, and the impact on fisheries beyond current levels. Our analysis indicates that we can meet water quality standards in all the alternatives examined; however, the data used in the analysis is imprecise. I felt uneasy when evaluating alternatives with greater amounts of timber harvest and road construction because alternatives with increased timber activities have a higher risk to water quality. Furthermore, I don't believe it is economically sound to increase timber harvest to levels resulting in unaffordable costs necessary to protect water quality and fisheries.

I believe that Alternative d allows us to harvest timber and meet water quality standards, and that it responds to the overall water quality concern. As the Forest Plan, it includes explicit standards called "Best Management Practices", to protect water quality. It sets clear direction that State water quality laws and standards will be met. Alternative d formalizes past management direction, including riparian protection, sediment mitigation measures, and monitoring emphasis. New road construction will be primarily of low standard, with the amount of new roads constructed kept to the minimum necessary to achieve resource objectives; most new roads will be closed when projects are completed. In addition, I expect the Forest Supervisor to continue to coordinate actions with other landowners in order to minimize adverse effects on water quality. Should coordination fail, the Forest Plan standards provide for additional measures to protect water quality in areas of intermingled ownership.

The health and condition of the aquatic environment is one of our most significant environmental quality indicators. I do not intend to adversely affect the aquatic environment. The Forest Plan is designed to maintain riparian quality through specific management area direction and Forest-wide standards that protect the high water quality, fisheries, wildlife, and recreation values on the Lolo Forest; and fisheries habitat improvement projects. I accept some impacts on timber harvest, grazing, and a decrease in easy, inexpensive access in order to locate and manage roads and grazing allotments to accommodate and protect the aquatic environment. While I view fisheries habitat improvement as desirable to correct some past practices, mitigation for future adverse effects resulting from timber management and road building activities will not be necessary under this plan.

Sediment and stream flow data have been collected on the Forest for the past 6 years. I expect the Forest Supervisor to continue this data collection in order to calibrate the sediment yield and fish response models and to assess the effects of land management activities. In order to strengthen the Forest monitoring plan, a paragraph has been included in the introduction that reads as follows: "If monitoring cannot be accomplished in accordance with this plan, management activities will be redesigned, rescheduled, or dropped and an amendment will be issued." If I find through our monitoring program that water quality and the aquatic environment cannot be protected, it will be necessary to adjust the Forest Plan.

Individuals and interest groups made it clear that the values in the Rock Creek drainage are as important now as in the past. I recognize Rock Creek, with its Blue Ribbon trout stream and surrounding unique environment, as a national treasure to be managed as such. I believe it is in the public interest to limit timber harvest in Rock Creek and eliminate the Rock Creek Road, No. 102, as a major timber haul route in order to protect the important recreation, wildlife, and aquatic values in the area. I believe that certain commodity management activities are not consistent with the other values present in Rock Creek.

I expect the Forest Supervisors from the Lolo and Deerlodge National Forests to coordinate their management according to the chapter found in both Forest Plans. I respect the agreements reached between the Forest Service and the former Rock Creek Advisory Committee during the 1970's, which provided a basis for the Rock Creek Chapter in the Forest Plan.

People told us that they needed a variety of quality recreation experiences, and that they were concerned that future road building and accelerated timber harvest in some areas would impact these opportunities. Some people felt that we did not take into account the importance of recreation occurring on National Forest lands to the tourism industry in Montana.

It is part of the Forest Service's multiple-use management philosophy to provide a wide range of recreation opportunities, emphasizing the type of recreation most suited to a particular Forest. Recreation opportunities provided in Alternative d range from a primitive wilderness experience to developed campgrounds with road access. Opportunities in semiprimitive settings, for both motorized and nonmotorized recreation, are also important and provided, as are particular opportunities for the handicapped visitor. Timber harvest projected in Alternative d should not cause major changes in the present recreation situation on the Forest. Timber and tourism are both important to the economy of the State and the quality of lifestyle for people living here. I believe that Alternative d provides both.

Few people commented on visual management objectives for the Forest. However, I recognize that scenic values are important to both local residents and to visitors that contribute to the local economy. The Forest Plan provides for maintaining a high level of scenic beauty along major travel and recreation corridors without limiting timber harvest activities more than I desire.

People felt that the mineral resource did not receive adequate treatment in the analysis or the Forest Plan, and that minerals should affect management area designations in areas of mineral potential. My decision in selecting

Alternative d provides for the development of important energy and mineral resources while providing stipulations and mitigating measures to be utilized where surface resource values warrant special protection.

As part of my decision, I recognize fire as an economic and ecologically sound tool for wildland management to achieve the following objectives: fuel reduction, fire hazard reduction, production of wildlife forage, maintenance of natural ecosystems, and natural ecosystem management in wilderness. I understand the particular problems with air pollution in our western Montana valleys and the pollution threat to local communities. Weighed against Forest value losses if fire is not used, I have opted to use fire only within certain specific prescriptions to accomplish management objectives rather than rely on wildfire. I expect the Forest Supervisor to closely monitor the situation on a case by case basis.

Although transitory range is being created, I have decided to limit grazing increases on the Lolo National Forest in order to protect riparian areas, provide for wildlife, and limit the damage to tree seedlings. I do not believe that grazing without stock controls is the best use of most of these areas, and I do not want to encourage use of allotments that are economically unsound. I recognize the importance of some allotments to people's livelihood in order to round out seasonal operations, and as part of their basic lifestyle. After looking at our analysis, I have decided to maintain those grazing allotments where I can afford the range improvements to protect environmental quality. Where I cannot, allotments will be phased out.

Environmental Quality

Environmental quality was a consideration in my selecting Alternative d. I considered environmental consequences of the various alternatives. Air quality will be maintained within legal limits and water quality will meet State water quality standards. Soil erosion will be minimized and long-term soil productivity will be maintained. Fish and wildlife populations will be maintained or increased; and timber harvest, 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 the forest 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. The standards provide the specific direction and mitigation measures to assure long-term productivity is not impaired by the application of short-term management practices. Management activities will be monitored. The adverse effects that cannot be avoided are identified by resource in Chapter IV of the Environmental Impact Statement. Although the application of Forest-wide Standards are intended to limit the number and duration of these adverse effects, sedimentation and short-term reductions in air quality are associated to some extent with all alternatives.

I feel that Alternative d improves the environmental quality of the Lolo National Forest over current direction for the following reasons:

Alternative d provides for environmental quality through strong Forest Goals, Forest-wide Standards, Management Area standards and direction, and an extensive, affordable Monitoring Plan that emphasize protection of water quality and soils, visual quality objectives, fisheries, and wildlife habitat.

The Selected Alternative provides for the recovery of threatened and endangered species on the Forest. It regulates human access and use in and through occupied grizzly bear habitat. In addition, tools such as prescribed burning to enhance food-producing areas are used to enhance habitat. Alternative d supports expansions in populations of peregrine falcons and bald eagles through Forest Goals and Forest Standards.

Resource management activities in Alternative d are significantly constrained by visual quality objectives in areas adjacent to or readily visible from major highways, roads, trails, campgrounds, and other recreational developments. The Selected Alternative identifies the parts of the Forest where visual management objectives should constrain resource management activities. At the present time, approximately 80 percent of the Forest has a relatively natural appearance. The Selected Alternative provides the public with natural-appearing landscapes, but minimizes the extent to which visual objectives constrain resource management activities.

The transportation system in the Selected Alternative is integrated to serve resource needs, with roads kept to the minimum number and size needed to support resource management and closed when appropriate to protect values. Forest Standards provide for the minimum number of miles of road needed for resource management activities without jeopardizing other resources. Cost share agreements with other landowners provide for sharing road costs and reducing total road miles needed in an area of intermingled ownership.

A diverse mosaic of vegetational species, age class, and development is maintained and well distributed across the Forest to maintain ecological integrity.

Economic Efficiency

In determining the most economically efficient alternative, the Forest Service uses an estimate of present net value (PNV), which is the difference between discounted benefits and discounted costs. In calculating present net value, a dollar value is assigned to various outputs. Some of these are determined by the market such as timber, and produce a revenue. Others such as recreation, use assigned values derived from research and generally do not produce a revenue. However, some resources that do not produce revenue have no basis from which to estimate a value, as in the case of grizzly bear; therefore, present net value cannot be the only criterion used in selecting the Forest Plan. The criterion used was the maximization of net public benefit, which includes both the net value of resources that produce revenue and consideration of those that do not.

In making my decision, I felt it necessary to evaluate how opportunities change by alternatives with varying combinations of these two types of resources. This helped me understand the interactions occurring between resources in determining net public benefit. Table 1 displays each alternative arranged in order of decreasing present net value. It also shows estimated outputs for a select group of priced and nonpriced resources which relate to the key issues used in selecting the Forest Plan. Details of how present net value and other outputs are calculated for alternatives are described in Appendix B of the Environmental Impact Statement.

The following discussion presents the present net value and tradeoffs among alternatives, and my assessment of public net benefits.

PNV - Tradeoffs, Alternative e

Alternative e, a modification of Alternative d, is designed to respond to the issue of roadless management. Legislated wilderness areas are maintained as wilderness, while inventoried roadless areas, including the proposed wilderness under Alternative d, are made available for timber harvest. The output differences between these two alternatives can be primarily attributed to this difference in wilderness assignment. Land available for old-growth dependent species is the lowest of any alternative. The potential for dispersed recreation is only slightly higher than Alternative f, which is the lowest of all alternatives, and the proportion of visually sensitive areas maintained is the lowest of any alternative. Both the allowable sale quantity and long-term sustained yield are the third highest of the alternatives. Fish habitat potential is at a relatively high level, very close to the highest level achieved in Alternative g. The change in area income (+$5.7 million per year) and employment (+358 jobs per year) are both the second highest of any alternative, lower only than Alternative c, which also emphasizes high commodity outputs. The reduction of PNV from the Max PNV Benchmark is $158 million. Much of this reduction is a result of reduced flexibility in scheduling timber harvests to maintain high timber volume.

High revenue production in Alternative e results in wilderness and roadless management, visual quality protection and elk winter forage production to be at such levels as to make Alternative e inadequate in responding to public issues and thus does not maximize net public benefits.

PNV - Tradeoffs, Alternative c

The emphasis of this alternative is high commodity production. Higher timber outputs come at the expense of a lowered level of protection for inventoried visually sensitive areas, which is at the lowest level of all alternatives; elk winter range productivity potential is at 85 percent as a result of the impacts on cover/forage ratios; and the amount of land available for old-growth dependent species is reduced with 27 percent of the drainages not having an adequate level of old growth. The higher timber outputs also require the highest level of road construction costs of all alternatives during the first decade, at $5.2 million per year. The development activities have an impact on expected fish populations as reflected by this alternative having the lowest

Table 1: Alternatives Ranked by PNV, Selected Priced and Nonpriced Outputs.

	Benchmark MAX PNV	Alternatives e	c	g	a	b	d *	f
Present Net Value (MM$)	379	221 (1)	206 (2)	203 (3)	176 (4)	174 (5)	174 (6)	135 (7)
Reduction in PNV from Max PNV Benchmark (MM$)	0	158 (7)	173 (6)	176 (5)	203 (4)	205 (3)	205 (3)	244 (1)
Wilderness Management (M Acre)	130	140 (7)	352 (4)	916 (1)	352 (4)	352 (4)	363 (3)	539 (2)
Roadless Management (M Acre)	95	300 (2)	145 (5)	21 (7)	165 (4)	379 (1)	181 (3)	77 (6)
Dispersed Recreation Potential (MRVD's/Yr.)	1634	2028 (6)	3522 (3)	2238 (5)	3627 (2)	3693 (1)	3311 (4)	1987 (7)
Total Rds. Needed for Management (Miles)	10468	11588 (3)	12592 (2)	11108 (5)	13175 (1)	10569 (7)	11109 (4)	10863 (6)
Change in Area Income Associated with Forest Activities (MM$/Yr.)	+6.2	+5.7 (2)	+7.9 (1)	+0.9 (7)	+4.7 (5)	+3.7 (6)	+5.6 (3)	+5.4 (4)
Changes in Person-Year Area Employment (Jobs/Yr.)	+414	+358 (2)	+527 (1)	+35 (7)	+316 (5)	+246 (6)	+344 (3)	+330 (4)
Elk Winter Range Productivity (% of Existing)	83	73 (5)	85 (3)	64 (7)	100 (2)	75 (4)	129 (1)	67 (6)
Diversity--Land for Old Growth Dependent Species (M Acre)	440	464 (7)	595 (4)	923 (1)	521 (6)	853 (2)	595 (4)	661 (3)
Aquatic Habitat--Fish Population Potential (M Nos. > 6")	665	966 (3)	823 (7)	970 (1)	905 (5)	868 (6)	964 (4)	968 (2)
Visual Quality (% of Inventoried Visually Sensitive Areas Maintained)	28	52 (7)	57 (5)	56 (6)	90 (1)	89 (2)	71 (4)	73 (3)
Land Suitable for Timber (M Acre)	1320	1326 (3)	1420 (1)	956 (7)	1402 (2)	1099 (6)	1239 (4)	1204 (5)
Allowable Sale Quantity (MMBF/Yr.)	123	107 (3)	130 (1)	92 (7)	111 (2)	104 (6)	107 (3)	107 (3)
Long-Term Sustained Yield (MMBF/Yr.)	240	191 (3)	211 (1)	174 (5)	201 (2)	173 (6)	178 (4)	171 (7)
Annual Budget to Implement (MM$)	19.3	16.2 (6)	21.6 (1)	14.0 (7)	18.7 (4)	19.4 (3)	19.7 (2)	18.1 (5)
Annual Returns to Treasury (MM$)	10.4	9.6 (4)	11.2 (1)	8.4 (7)	10.0 (2)	10.0 (2)	9.6 (4)	9.6 (4)

* Selected Alternative

() Denotes ranking among alternatives for this output.

fish population potential. The reduction in PNV from the Max PNV ($173 million) is less than all but Alternative e, principally because the large land base suitable for timber management allows more flexibility in scheduling harvests. The emphasis on commodity outputs, primarily timber, requires a high budget, the highest of all alternatives at $21.6 million, but the change in area income and employment is also the highest of all alternatives at +$7.9 million per year and +527 jobs per year. This alternative shows the effects of extremes, with timber harvest levels, returns to the Treasury, community jobs and income, and PNV on the positive side; budget to implement, required road construction, visual quality, fish population potential, old growth habitat and elk forage on the negative side.

These negative impacts result in an alternative that does not maximize net public benefits. Alternative c does not adequately address public issues.

PNV - Tradeoffs, Alternative g

Alternative g is designed to respond to the issue of roadless management. All inventoried roadless areas are assigned to wilderness, accruing to 916,000 acres, the highest of all alternatives. It also has the lowest acreage of roadless management, since almost all roadless areas are assigned to wilderness. The amount of land available for old growth habitat is the highest of all alternatives. Fish habitat is well protected as a result of the large area removed from commodity production. The impact of wilderness on elk winter range is evidenced by productivity being at 64 percent of the current level, the lowest of alternatives. The proportion of visually sensitive areas maintained outside of wilderness is relatively low at 56 percent. The low road mileage limits the amount of road-oriented recreation that is available. With so much area removed from timber harvest, it was necesary to constrain a floor on harvest to maintain a first decade harvest level of 90 MMBF per year, which is approximately equal to current levels. Without this constraint, the alternative would have an adverse impact on community stability. Alternative g has the smallest increase of any alternative in area income (+$0.9 million per year) and jobs (+35 per year). As with Alternative c, this alternative is an example of the effects of extreme positions on both commodity outputs and nonmarket resource outputs. While this alternative has the highest levels of wilderness acreage, fish population potential, and old growth habitat of any alternative, it also has the lowest level of elk forage productivity, allowable sale quantity, income and jobs for local communities, and annual budget requirements of $14 million per year.

The unbalanced nature of this alternative does not maximize public net benefits and does not adequately address important public issues.

PNV - Tradeoffs, Alternative a

Alternative a continues direction from the existing Forest Multiple Use Plan (1972) and Planning Unit plans. It provides a relatively high level of market resources with high visual management and elk winter range productivity. Total wilderness will be at 352,000 acres which is the total of both existing and proposed wilderness, and is next to the lowest of alternatives. One objective of this alternative is to protect the visually sensitive areas, and 90 percent of such areas are protected. The potential for dispersed recreation is the second highest of all alternatives. With the exception of Alternative c, this

alternative has the largest land area assigned to timber management with 1402 M acres. This alternative also has the second highest level of allowable sale quantity and long-term sustained yield of any alternative, meeting the objective of relatively high commodity outputs. The reduction in PNV relative to the Maximum PNV Benchmark, is $203 million. Road construction under this alternative is expected to be the third highest of all alternatives in the first decade, $4.6 million per year, and the total mileage needed for management is higher than any other alternative with 13,175 miles. In terms of economic impacts on local communities, this alternative is roughly midway between Alternatives b and d.

Continuation of the current direction in Alternative a, while addressing timber, elk, and visual quality objectives relatively well, does not adequately address the more recent public issues of wilderness, roadless, and environmental diversity.

PNV - Tradeoffs, Alternative b

Alternative b has a strong environmental emphasis with a high increase in roadless compared to Alternative a, and with wilderness remaining the same as the current direction. It has the highest acreage assigned to roadless use and the total of roadless and wilderness management is at the second highest level of all alternatives. This helps lead to the highest potential for dispersed recreation. The amount of land available for old-growth dependent species is higher than all alternatives except for Alternative g. The productivity of elk winter range is relatively low (at 75 percent) because of the reduced level of habitat manipulation through timber harvest and habitat burning. Eighty-nine percent of the visually sensitive areas are maintained, which is the second highest of the alternatives. Although the low level of road building in the riparian zone is beneficial to the aquatic habitat, the potential fish population is relatively low because this alternative does not emphasize fish habitat improvement which other alternatives do, such as Alternative d. The amount of land suitable for timber harvest is lower than all alternatives with the exception of Alternative g. In addition, both the allowable sale quantity and the long-term sustained yield are at the next to lowest level of all alternatives. The reduction in PNV, at $205 million, is similar to Alternatives a and d.

While this alternative does a good job of addressing environmental issues it does not adequately treat timber, economic, and community stability issues which depend on timber harvest. It does not adequately address the range of public issues and thus does not maximize public net benefits.

PNV - Tradeoffs, Alternative d

This alternative is the selected action for the Forest. The objective of this alternative is to balance commodity production and environmental protection. It provides for output levels of resources such as timber, range, recreation, wildlife, and wilderness that support rather than impact base employment, income, and job distribution in local communities. Increasing big game winter forage is also a significant objective. Elk winter forage, at 129 percent of existing production, would have the potential to allow increased elk numbers over the current situation. A total of 363,000 acres is assigned to wilderness management, which is the third highest of all alternatives. Areas assigned to

roadless management are selected to provide roadless recreation throughout the Forest. Adequate levels of old-growth habitat are maintained in 79 percent of the drainages through the addition of 44,000 acres of old-growth management areas. The combination of a moderate level of road construction and riparian habitat improvement projects results in a potential fish population of 964,000, which is only 0.6 percent lower than the highest population potential of Alternative g. The reduction in PNV of this alternative relative to Max PNV is $205 million. The change in area income associated with Forest activities is an increase of $5.6 million, the third highest of all alternatives. The change in area employment is also the third highest of all alternatives as is the level of allowable sale quantity.

A number of tradeoffs were necessary in the formulation of this alternative, primarily in terms of PNV, but all public issues are addressed in, what I believe, an adequate manner. I believe this alternative maximizes net public benefits.

PNV - Tradeoffs, Alternative f

Alternative f is a modification of Alternative d and is designed to respond to the issue of roadless management for inventoried roadless areas. This alternative assigns to wilderness those inventoried roadless areas recommended by public interest groups advocating wilderness during the public review process. The total area assigned to wilderness in this alternative is the second highest, at 539,000 acres. Alternative f, with a high level of wilderness and many environmental outputs, maintains a timber output level that is exceeded by only two alternatives. However, there is a cost associated with this alternative in that the PNV of $135 million is the lowest of all alternatives.

The relatively high cost of providing outputs is not consistent with public concern about efficient management of resources. Other tradeoffs include the low level of elk forage production and low dispersed recreation potential which are also important public issues. For these reasons I find this alternative to be inadequate.

Compatibility with Other Public Agency and Indian Tribe Goals

Extensive efforts were made to ensure that the Selected Alternative considered the goals of other public agencies and of Indian Tribes. Seven plans of other agencies were reviewed; 76 agencies and Indian tribal offices were contacted in person or by mail. They were maintained on the Forest Plan mailing list throughout the process, and received information including the status of the Plan, public meeting dates, explanatory information, and official documents. In addition, several meetings were conducted with representatives of the Confederated Salish-Kootenai Tribes' Cultural Committees.

I believe Alternative d is compatible and complimentary to the goals of other agencies and Indian Tribes. The Bureau of Land Management and the Confederated Salish-Kootenai Tribe are major land management entities sharing boundaries with the Lolo National Forest. The Rattlesnake National Recreation Area and Wilderness is compatible with a Confederated Salish-Kootenai Tribal wilderness designation on a boundary shared with the Forest. Management of timber and recreation lands on the National Forest is compatible with Bureau of Land

Management resource plans. Coordination with these agencies will continue as projects are implemented.

I feel that the Selected Alternative will permit the Lolo National Forest to contribute to the achievement of the various goals of the State of Montana. The Forest Plan has been developed in close cooperation with the State of Montana. Concerns expressed by Governor Schwinden on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement have been responded to in the Selected Alternative. Diverse opportunities are provided to contribute to the recreation and tourism industry in Montana as well as those tied to commodities.

High levels of wildlife habitat are provided and protected along with increased emphasis on water quality and fisheries enhancement that will contribute to achieving State fish and wildlife goals. I believe the Selected Alternative provides timber sales that will be adequate to meet the demand in the decade ahead.

COMPARISON OF THE ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE AND THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

Alternatives b and g are considered to be environmentally preferable as they provide for the least amount of human-induced physical and biological change among the alternatives.

The Alternative b assignments for wilderness and roadless amount to 731 thousand acres, and for Alternative g, this total is 937 thousand acres. Alternative d provides for 544 thousand acres of wilderness and roadless management. As a percent of the Forest Plan total acreage, this amounts to 35 percent, 45 percent, and 26 percent respectively.

Elk population potentials for Alternative b and g (7400 and 6400) are both lower than that predicted for Alternative d (11,600) as a result of reduced habitat management opportunities.

Fish population increase potential is the greatest under Alternative g, which reflects the relatively low roading of riparian areas, the installation of direct fish habitat improvements, and a reduction in grazing. Alternative b predicts a decrease in the fish population potential as a result of increased grazing and a reduced effort at direct fish habitat improvement. Alternative d lies between these two alternatives, and predicts an increase in fish numbers over the existing population, close to populations predicted for Alternative g.

Alternatives b and d are similar in their effects on water, both having no significant effect on quality or use. Alternative g would have the least effect on water quality and uses on a Forest-wide basis, but quality would suffer in those drainages intensively managed for timber.

Alternative b maintains 97 percent of the inventoried visually sensitive areas in a natural-appearing condition, compared to 75 percent under Alternative g and 74 percent under Alternative d.

Alternatives b and g project lower timber harvest volumes than Alternative d. Alternative g displays the fewest acres available for timber management, followed by Alternative d. Alternative b projects a higher dispersed recreation potential than Alternatives g or d, but all three alternatives have more potential than anticipated use.

My decision is founded in maximizing net public benefits available under Alternative d, that provides considerations for community stability, acceptable land use patterns, environmental acceptability, economic prudence, and legality. I believe that Alternative d provides a commodity output level that supports rather than impacts the local social and economic structure. The level of commodity production also allows for meeting other important social and resource needs, maximizing net public benefits with tradeoffs that people can accept.

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 appear in the Federal Register (36 CFR 219.10(c)(1)).

Implementation requires a shift from an existing land-use management program with a budget and schedule of activites, to the management outlined in the Forest Plan. In areas where management activities have already been imposed, some period of adjustment may be required to attain Forest Plan goals and objectives. However, as soon as practicable, the Forest Supervisor will ensure that, subject to valid existing rights, all projects and contractual obligations are consistent with the Forest Plan. The Forest Supervisor has authority to change the implementation schedule to reflect differences between proposed annual budgets and actual appropriated funds. Such scheduled 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)).

Implementation activities related to the key issues are:

Approximately 223,600 acres of roadless area have been recommended for wilderness. The recommendation for wilderness designation is a preliminary administrative one which will receive further review and possible modification by the Chief of the Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the President, prior to a final recommendation to Congress. Decisions on wilderness designation reside with the Congress.

Implementation will likely result in some individual timber sales having a negative cash flow when all costs are considered in relation to revenues received from the first entry timber harvest. These sales are referred to as "below-cost" sales. Analysis indicates that some below-cost sales may be necessary to achieve short-term and long-term objectives to maximize net public benefits.

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 evaluated to minimize negative cash flow projects (Forest Plan, Chapter II, and Forest Service Manual 2430). Northern Region policy states (2430 letter dated April 19, 1985):

2. (a.) An area timber harvesting economic assessment will be made when sales are planned for an undeveloped area.

(b.) An area assessment should be made for other developed or partially developed areas when previous sales have shown substantial economic problems.

(c.) A feasibility analysis of each sale over 1 million board feet will be made to assure it has been designed with the most cost-effective measures possible in keeping with environmental concerns.

Improved road management has already been initiated as an extension of Current Direction through the Forest Travel Plan.

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 Forest 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 Forest Plan. To the best of my knowledge, all practical mitigation measures have been adopted and are included in the Forest Plan.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation comprise the management control system for the Forest Plan. It will provide you and me with information on the progress and results of implementation. This information and evaluation will provide feedback into the Forest planning process for potential future change.

Table V-1 in the Forest Plan displays the basic outline of the monitoring process. An annual monitoring program, developed in accordance with this outline, will be prepared as part of the Lolo National Forest's annual work program. These monitoring programs will be based on funds available. If funds are inadequate to properly monitor the Forest Plan goals and objectives, an analysis will be made to develop a further course of action. This may include a Forest Plan amendment, revision, or dropping projects.

The results and trends of monitoring described in the annual monitoring report will be evaluated and summarized annually. An evaluation report will be prepared at least every 5 years.

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
Lolo National Forest
Fort Missoula, Building 24
Missoula, Montana 59801
(406) 329-3750

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

APPEAL RIGHTS

My decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 211.18. Notice of appeal must be in writing and submitted to me:

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

Appeal notice must be submitted within 45 days from the date of this decision or 30 days after publication by the Environmental Protection Agency of the Notice of Availability of the Environmental Impact Statement and Forest Plan, whichever 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
JAMES C. OVERBAY
Regional Forester

April 9, 1986
Date