

Introduction

This booklet is an abridged version of the Bitterroot Forest Plan, which will guide all resource management activities on the Forest. The Forest Plan describes management practices, standards, guidelines, and levels of resource production. It supersedes previous land and resource management plans, including the Unit Plans developed in the 1970's and the Multiple Use Plan which have been guiding management until now.

The Bitterroot National Forest initiated Forest Planning in 1980 by asking you, the public, what interested you, what concerned you, and how you would like to see the Forest managed. From your comments and suggestions, we identified six major issues to be addressed by the Plan: visual quality, wildlife (especially elk), soil and watershed protection, timber harvest level, roadless areas, and recommendations for the management of Blue Joint and Sapphire Wilderness Study Areas.

Forest planners then analyzed the management situation and developed a wide range of alternatives. Additional public involvement initiated in September 1983 followed revision of regulations to require evaluation of roadless areas in the Forest Planning process.

The Proposed Forest Plan and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement were released for public review in March 1985. Over 35 meetings were held around the Forest to discuss the plan, and nearly 1,000 written comments were received. Public hearings were held on the Blue Joint and Sapphire Montana Wilderness Study Act areas in December 1985.

The comments were carefully considered, and the list of major issues was expanded to include timber sale economics, silviculture, the effects of sediment on fish, riparian area management, big game habitat effectiveness, and monitoring. Additional analysis of these issues resulted in the development of a new alternative, E2, which the Regional Forester selected as the Forest Plan. In addition, many minor changes in management direction were made in response to comments received on these and other issues.

The Record of Decision contains the rationale for selection of Alternative E2. The Plan provides for a historic level of local employment while maintaining or enhancing the wildlife, fish, scenic quality and diverse recreation values that are important to Forest users. While it is not possible to meet all requests and desires, the Plan balances commodity and amenity values in a way that considers the range and intensity of public concerns.

After a brief look at the Forest and its current situation, this Overview summarizes the management direction contained in the Final Plan.

The back page of this booklet has information about availability of other documents. The Planning team will make presentations for groups and organizations providing information and opportunity for questions. Contact Bob Bigler, 363-3131, if your group would like to know more about the Plan.

We thank you for your interest in your National Forest and we encourage your continued participation.

Robert S. Morgan
ROBERT S. MORGAN, Forest Supervisor

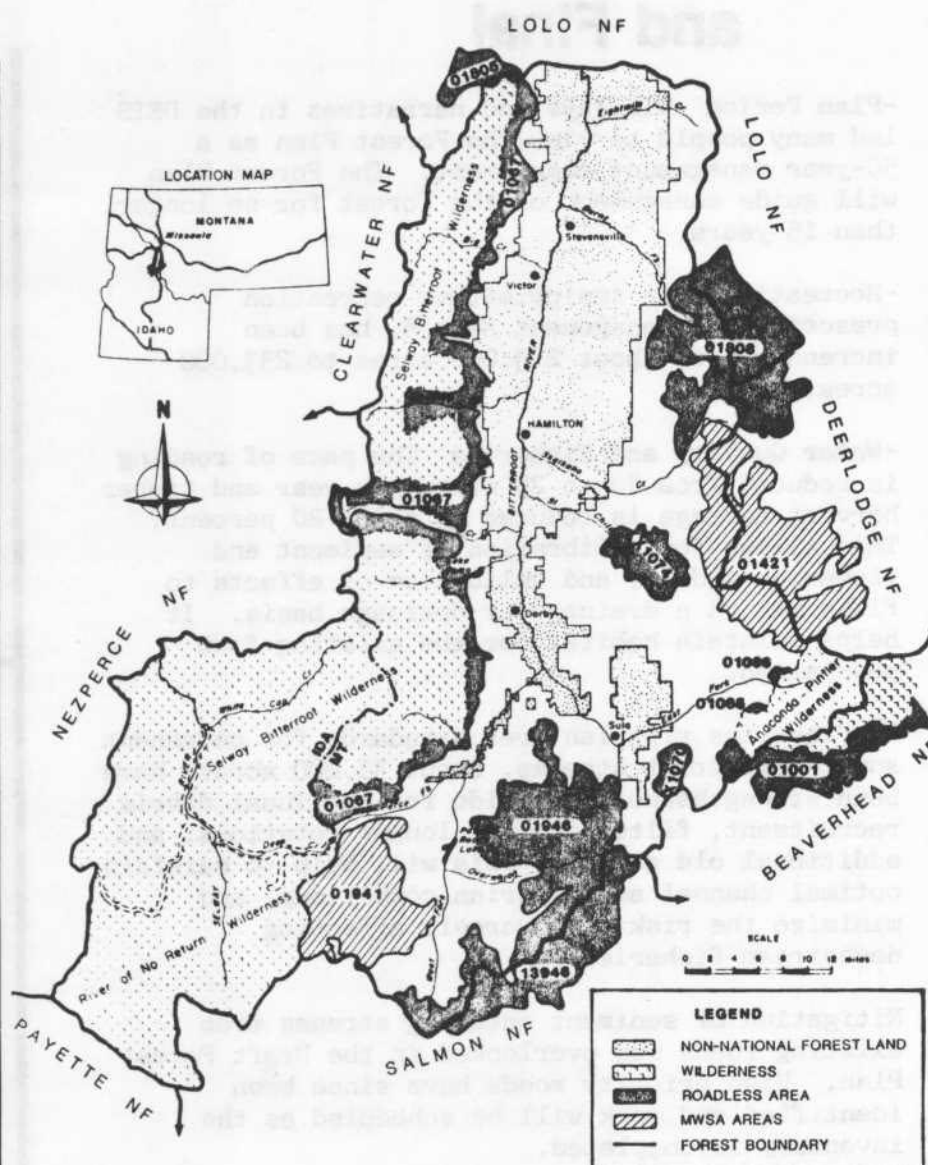
The Forest

The 1.6-million-acre Bitterroot National Forest straddles the Montana-Idaho border and includes the headwaters of the Selway and Bitterroot Rivers.

To the east of the Bitterroot Valley are the Sapphire Mountains, round-crested and mostly forested. In striking contrast, the Bitterroot Range on the west rises abruptly from the valley floor and is cut by steep rocky canyons, sawtoothed ridges, and impressive mountain peaks. Both ranges are visible from the valley, where 25,000 residents see this portion of the Forest daily. U.S. Highway 93 extends through the center of the valley and provides a view of the Forest to travelers. The beauty of these mountains gives credence to one of the major concerns, that of visual quality.

The Forest's appearance has been an issue for the past 20 years. Of the 586,000 acres outside wilderness and suitable for producing timber, 55 percent have moderately steep slopes, which, along with light-colored soils, make timber harvesting and road construction activities highly visible.

The valley population includes those engaged in farming, ranching, and timber production, recreation seekers, a retirement community, and those favoring a rural lifestyle within commuting distance of Missoula, the area's trade center. The population has increased 56 percent since 1970. About half of the Forest is now classified wilderness, one quarter is roadless including the Blue Joint and Sapphire Montana Wilderness Study Act areas, and about one quarter is roaded.



The Forest continued

Following are some additional facts and figures about the Bitterroot Forest current situation:

- 33 developed recreation sites
- 1,600 miles of trails
- Over 100 prehistoric cultural resource sites on the Montana portion of the Forest
- About 46 percent of the Forest outside of wilderness is visible from major roads or private land
- Winter elk population of about 5,700
- 2,000 miles of roads, of which 30 percent have travel restrictions, most to protect wildlife
- 99 lakes and 1,900 miles of streams with fish
- Less than 10,000 animal unit months of grazing
- Timber sold averaged 30.1 million board feet from 1976 to 1985
- Current approved harvest level of 32.5 million board feet
- 32 reservoirs store irrigation water
- Oil and gas applications pending on 5,700 acres; 6,946 acres have been leased; no exploration or drilling activity has occurred
- Trapper Creek Job Corps Center provides educational and vocational training for young adults
- Roads provide access to 20 percent of the Forest; about 33 miles have been built annually in the 1980's
- Major insects and diseases include mountain pine beetle, western spruce budworm, dwarf mistletoe and root diseases



Changes Between Draft and Final

-Plan Period Displays and narratives in the DEIS led many people to view the Forest Plan as a 50-year management commitment. The Forest Plan will guide management of the Forest for no longer than 15 years.

-Recreation The semiprimitive recreation prescription, Management Area 5, has been increased from about 213,000 acres to 233,000 acres.

-Water Quality and Fisheries The pace of roading is reduced from 40 to 25 miles per year and timber harvest acreage is reduced by about 20 percent. This allows for calibration of sediment and fisheries models, and validation of effects to fisheries on a drainage-by-drainage basis. It helps maintain habitat for the existing fish population.

Nonfisheries riparian area standards for permanent and intermittent streams, about 31,000 acres, have been strengthened to provide for continual debris recruitment, filter strips, longer rotations, and additional old growth. This will help to maintain optimal channel and riparian conditions, and minimize the risk of adversely affecting downstream fisheries.

Mitigation of sediment entering streams from existing roads was overlooked in the Draft Forest Plan. High priority roads have since been identified and work will be scheduled as the inventory is completed.

-Elk Habitat Management Area 2 has been expanded by about 24,000 acres to include nearly all winter range that was assigned to Management Area 1 in the Proposed Action. Road closures have been increased to provide 50 to 60 percent elk habitat effectiveness.

-Visual Management Area 4 (unroaded retention) no longer exists in the Final Plan. Most of the area on the west side that had been assigned to Management Area 4 (about 7,000 acres) was reassigned to Management Area 5. The visual quality objective along the Sapphire face and other highly visible areas was increased to partial retention, Management Area 3a.

Management Area 1 has been changed to provide a better balance of multiple uses. Approximately 6,000 acres of high use recreation area adjacent to secondary travel and stream corridors will be managed to meet the partial retention visual quality objective. The remainder will be managed to meet modification and maximum modification visual quality objectives.

-Timber Testing of the allowable sale quantity (ASQ) has been conducted in response to economics, community stability, projected timber demand, and capital investment concerns. The ASQ was reduced from the Proposed Action by 3.1 MMBF to 33.4 MMBF and the suitable base by 59,400 acres to 389,800 acres to respond to economic, water, fisheries, and wildlife issues. The change reduces the amount of logging in roadless areas, steep terrain, and low value species.

The 1987 Montana Timber Supply and Demand Study and a local supply and demand analysis were used to compare demand with alternative supply levels. The ASQ selected would maintain the 1976-85 volume sold level of 30.1 MMBF but would not meet the 40 MMBF Bitterroot Forest share of the volume requested by mill owners. The Montana study also indicates that predicted demand for timber in the Bitterroot market area could begin to exceed local timber supply about the year 2005.

The Final EIS clarifies that tables displaying area and volume by harvest method are estimates since final determination will be made following site-specific analysis.

-Roading The amount of road construction in the first decade is reduced by 15 miles per year which reduces the need for capital investment funds and helps increase timber sale values.

-Wild and Scenic Rivers Two streams have been identified as eligible for study under the Wild and Scenic Rivers process: Blodgett Creek and Lost Horse Creek.

-Monitoring Fish and sediment monitoring has been improved to assure that adequate information is available to determine the effects of management activities. Monitoring will keep pace with management activities; outputs and activities will be reduced if necessary, to assure that monitoring will properly evaluate the effects of activities.

Goals and Objectives

The Forest Plan is based on Alternative E2, a modification of the "Proposed Action" (Alternative E) in the Draft EIS.

The issues defined by the public, and the goals and objectives of the Forest Plan that address them, are listed below. Additional goals and objectives can be found in Chapter II of the Forest Plan.

Visual quality

- Maintain a high level of visual quality on landscapes seen from population centers and major travel corridors, and adjacent to fishing streams.

Goals and Objectives continued

Wildlife

- Maintain habitat for the possible recovery of threatened and endangered species.
- Provide optimal habitat on elk winter range.
- Maintain habitat to support viable populations of wildlife species.
- Cooperate with the States of Idaho and Montana to maintain the current level of big-game hunting and trout fishing opportunities.
- Maintain vegetative diversity on land where timber production is a goal of management.
- Participate and cooperate in threatened and endangered species identification, recovery, and protection.
- Maintain sufficient old-growth habitat on suitable timberland to support viable populations of old-growth dependent species.

Water quality and fish

- Maintain sufficient instream flows to support quality fish habitat.
- Manage municipal watersheds to assure sustained yields of high quality water.
- Manage riparian areas to prevent adverse effects on channel stability and fish habitat.
- Maintain habitat to support current populations of catchable trout.
- Maintain or enhance fish habitat by: maintaining riparian habitat and its potential to replace woody debris, minimizing the miles of road needed for management, requiring high standards for road construction and maintenance, reducing sediment from existing roads, dispersing timber harvest and assuring vegetative recovery prior to re-entry.
- Cooperate with State agencies and local organizations to determine the cumulative effects of public and private land management on the Bitterroot River.

Wilderness and roadless areas

- Recommend areas with high wilderness attributes and longstanding support for wilderness for addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System.
- Provide for the natural evolution of ecosystems within designated wilderness.
- Complete the Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) analysis.
- Provide for the current mix of dispersed recreation by maintaining about 50 percent of the Forest in wilderness, about 20 percent in semiprimitive motorized recreation and about 30 percent in roaded areas.

Timber harvest level

- Provide sawtimber and other wood products to help sustain a viable local economy.
- Achieve a species mix of offered volume that is nearly proportional to standing inventory.

Timber sale economics

- Maintain advance sale preparation at a level to provide flexibility in offering sales that are responsive to market conditions and economic efficiency.
- Offer affordable sales.
- Implement Regional Guide utilization standards by the middle of the Plan period.

Silviculture

- Seek out opportunities for biologically appropriate and cost-efficient uneven-aged management.
- Convert high-risk or insect and disease infested stands to young, healthy stands.

Future Condition

Descriptions of what the Forest would be like at the end of the first decade under Forest Plan management direction are shown below:

Visual Quality

- 28,700 acres or 7 percent of the suitable timberland will be harvested by shelterwood or clearcut systems; however, timber harvest and roads will not be readily visible from the valley or major road and trail corridors.

Wildlife and Fish

- Only minor changes will occur to current wildlife populations and distribution.
- Winter forage supplies for big game will increase as timber is harvested.
- Thermal and hiding cover will comprise at least 40 percent of the winter range.
- Area along streams which support fish populations will be managed to protect that habitat.
- The effects of sediment caused by roads and timber harvest will be limited by mitigation measures, to provide habitat for the existing trout population.

Water and Air

- Water quantity and existing air quality will be maintained.

Timber Harvest

- Up to 334 million board feet of green timber and salvage material will be harvested.

Roadless Area

- The 405,000 roadless acres were assigned to: semiprimitive recreation (214,000 acres), wilderness (77,000 acres) and roaded (99,000 acres) management. The remaining 15,000 acres are unsuitable for timber management.
- Only 18,000 acres are scheduled for development in the first 10 years.

Wilderness

- Wilderness will increase from 47 percent of the Forest (743,000 acres) to 52 percent (820,000 acres) if Congress follows this recommendation.

Road System

- New road construction will have been limited to 250 miles, the minimum necessary to meet Forest objectives.
- The road system will have increased by 12 percent, to 2300 miles.

Implementation

Implementation of the Forest Plan will begin 30 days after the Notice is published in the Federal Register. Implementation requires moving from the Unit Plan direction, budget and targets to Forest Plan direction, budget and targets. In some situations past management activities may influence the scheduling of future activities.

Forest Plan management direction comprises the sideboards for project planning and activities. Projects are developed to accomplish the direction efficiently and effectively. Project analysis will provide information for environmental analysis reports and monitoring.

Region 1 of the Forest Service, which includes the Bitterroot Forest, is developing direction for Forest Plan implementation after extensive employee input. The resulting direction will be summarized in a booklet to be distributed to employees in late October, 1987. Copies of the booklet will also be available to the public.

The Forest Plan may be amended or revised as conditions change and shall be revised at least every 15 years. Amendments and revisions will include public involvement.

Standards

The Forest Plan describes management standards which apply Forest-wide or to specific management areas.

The Forest-wide standards cover the following:

- travel planning and trail location
- cultural resources protection
- minimum standards for visual quality and old growth
- designation of wildlife indicator species
- minimum standards for elk habitat effectiveness
- protection of threatened and endangered species
- timber sale and reforestation
- protection of soil and water resources
- minerals development
- road design
- fire management, insects and diseases, and noxious weeds
- special uses and range allotments
- protection of eligible Wild and Scenic study rivers

The Management Area standards cover the following:

- the recreation opportunity spectrum setting
- visual quality objectives
- specific old growth standards
- wildlife habitat improvements
- elk habitat effectiveness
- livestock use and range improvements
- timber practices
- watershed protection
- restrictions on minerals access
- land exchanges
- road density
- fuel treatments
- utility corridors

Management Areas

The land within the Bitterroot National Forest has been assigned to 17 management areas in Alternative E2, the selected alternative.

This section briefly describes the management areas and lists the goals for managing each. The Forest Plan map shows the location of each management area.

Management Area 1

Description

- 194,089 acres east of the Bitterroot Valley and in the upper portions of the West and East Forks
- 84 percent suitable for timber management
- Parts of 26 range allotments
- Recreation use includes wildlife viewing, berry picking, hunting, firewood gathering
- Usually viewed from secondary roads and trails

Goals

- Emphasize timber management, and forage production for livestock and big game
- Provide access for recreation and mineral exploration
- Assure minimum visual quality, old growth, and habitat for wildlife

Management Area 2

Description

- 128,785 acres below 6,200 feet in elevation on both sides of the Bitterroot Valley
- Big-game winter range
- 85 percent suitable for timber management
- Parts of 31 range allotments
- Recreation use includes big-game hunting
- Usually viewed from far away or from travel routes not widely used

Goals

- Optimize winter range for elk using timber harvest
- Provide access for recreation and mineral exploration
- Provide moderate levels of visual quality, old growth, habitat for other wildlife species, and livestock forage

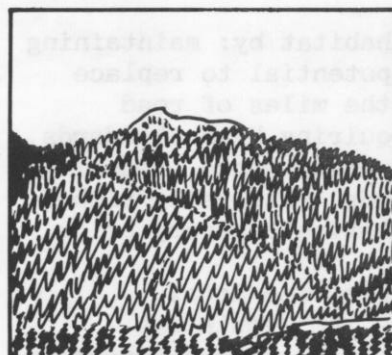
Management Area 3a

Description

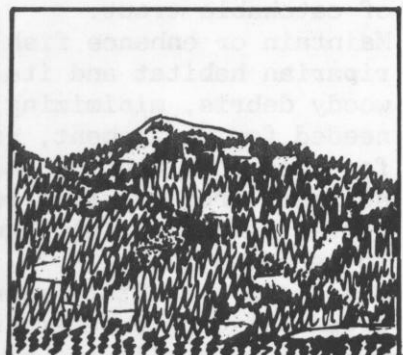
- 103,869 acres in visually sensitive areas along U.S. Highway 93, Skalkaho Highway, and Sleeping Child, East Fork and West Fork roads
- 68 percent suitable for timber management
- Mostly elk winter range
- Parts of 24 range allotments
- Includes the major recreation access routes

Goals

- Maintain visual quality
- Emphasize roaded recreation, old growth, and big-game cover
- Provide moderate levels of timber, and livestock and big-game forage
- Provide access for mineral exploration



No timber harvest



Partial retention

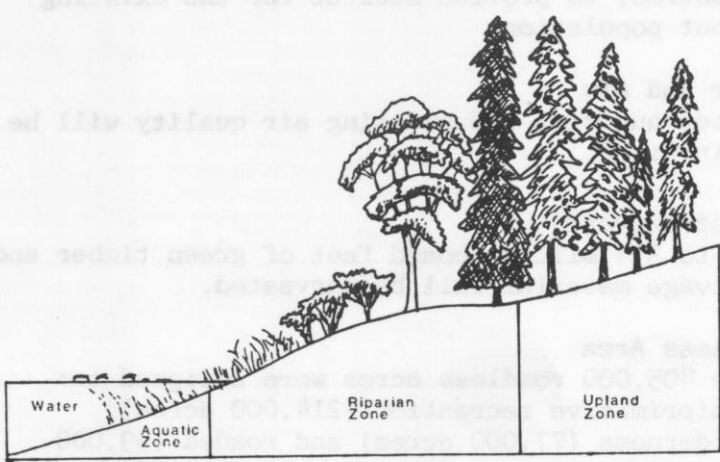
Management Area 3b

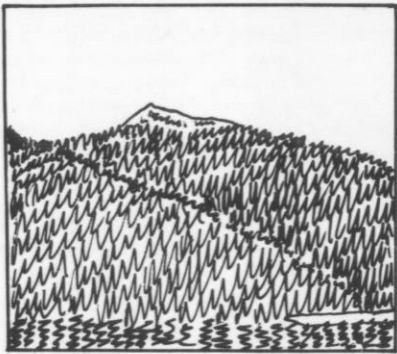
Description

- 50,431 acres of riparian habitat along fisheries and nonfisheries streams
- 82 percent suitable for timber management
- Mostly big-game winter range
- Highest concentration of resource values on the Forest
- Most diverse plant and animal ecosystems
- Highest concentration of recreation use
- Has the most productive timber sites
- Parts of 34 range allotments

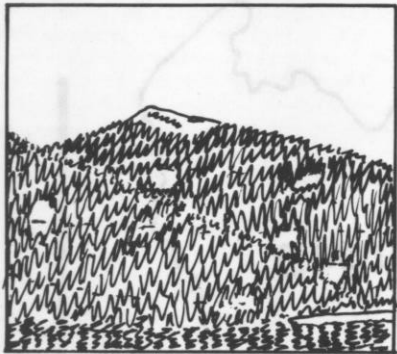
Goals

- Manage streamside habitat to maintain flora, fauna, water quality, recreation activities
- Emphasize fish habitat, soil and water protection, dispersed recreation, visual quality, and old growth
- Provide low levels of timber harvest and livestock forage
- Provide moderate level of big-game forage
- Provide access for mineral exploration





No timber harvest



Retention

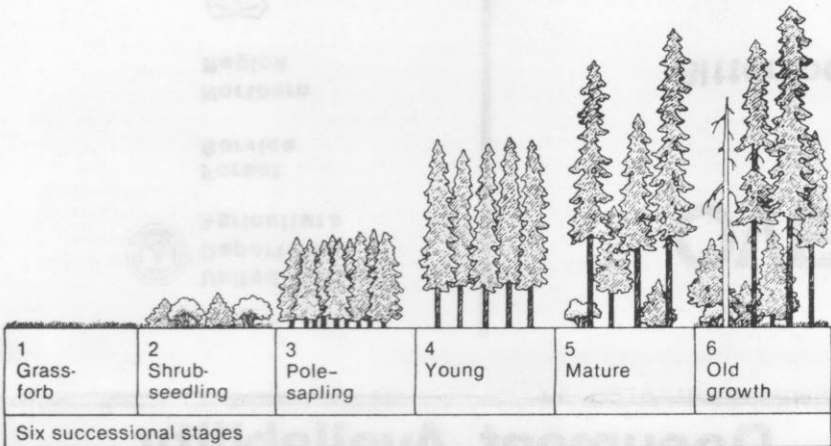
Management Area 3c

Description

- 7,027 acres in visually sensitive areas along access routes to the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness and adjacent to Lake Como
- 73 percent suitable for timber management
- Mostly big-game winter range
- Concentrated recreation use, including fishing

Goals

- Maintain visual quality
- Emphasize dispersed recreation, old growth, big-game cover, and fisheries
- Provide low levels of timber harvest, and livestock and big-game forage
- Provide access for mineral exploration



Management Area 5

Description

- 233,148 acres of recreation and elk security areas identified as Dome-Shaped Mountain, Kent Peak, Overwhich Falls, Upper West Fork, Chicken-Deer, Nez Perce Fork, Lost Horse, Camas Creek, and Fred Burr Creek, and other small areas along the Bitterroot Mountains facing the valley
- 160 miles of fishing streams
- Parts of seven grazing allotments
- Recreation use
- Range for Rocky Mountain goat and bighorn sheep

Goals

- Emphasize motorized and nonmotorized semiprimitive recreation, and elk security
- Maintain or enhance big-game habitat
- Provide recreation access via existing roads in or to Saddle Mountain, Nez Perce Fork, Lost Horse, Deer Creek, Beaver Creek, Bare Cone, Burnt Fork, Roaring Lion, and Canyon Creek areas
- Not managed for timber production

Management Areas 6, 7a, 7b, and 7c

Description

- 743,082 acres of designated wilderness
- 76,805 acres of recommended wilderness

Goals

- Manage existing wilderness according to the Wilderness Act
- Manage recommended wilderness to maintain wilderness characteristics; chain saws, trail bikes and snowmobiles permitted until Congress acts

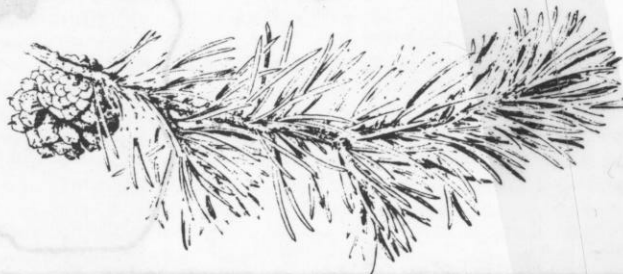
Management Areas 8a and 8b

Description

- 35,448 acres of scattered parcels of grassland, rockland, meadows, and subalpine forest
- About half in grazing allotments
- Recreation use
- Old growth in subalpine forests
- Grassland at lower elevations

Goals

- Maintain existing uses
- Manage at custodial level but protect resources on adjacent management areas (Management Area 8a)
- Optimize big-game forage on grassland winter range (Management Area 8b)
- Permit cattle use which complies with winter range goals



Management Area 9

Description

- Research Natural Areas including 488 acres in Boulder and Sawmill Creeks recommended for classification as Research Natural Areas, and another 11,666 acres recommended for Research Natural Area classification in Management Areas 5, 6, and 7

Goal

- Manage as natural benchmarks for future research

Management Area 10

Description

- 461 acres in 33 developed recreation sites, including campgrounds, boat launching facilities, picnic areas, and Lost Trail Ski Area

Goal

- Provide developed recreation by maintaining existing sites
- Protect riparian zones from human impacts



Management Areas 11a, 11b, and 11c

Description

- 4250 acres in road corridors between the Selway-Bitterroot and Frank Church-River of No Return wildernesses (Management Area 11a)
- 4 National Recreation Trails (Management Area 11b)
- 2 National Historic Trails and 1 National Scenic Trail (Management Area 11c)

Goal

- Manage in accordance with the laws that established the road corridors and designated the trails

"Caring for the Land and Serving People"



September 1987

Bitterroot National Forest Plan

OVERVIEW



Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation will provide the public and managers information on the progress and results of implementation. Monitoring will be done on a sample basis and will be balanced with output levels.

The monitoring and evaluation action plan is found in Chapter IV of the Forest Plan. A partial list of monitoring items follows: size of the roadless base, achievement of visual quality objectives, elk habitat effectiveness, acres of old growth, populations of indicator species (elk, pine marten, pileated woodpecker and cutthroat trout), timber volumes sold and harvested, restocking of harvested areas, suitability of timberlands, water and sediment yields, hydrologic recovery, cumulative off-site watershed effects, riparian area condition, road construction mitigation, and public issues.

An annual report that evaluates monitoring results will be made available to the public.



Document Availability

Documents Available

1. Forest Plan
2. Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Forest Plan
3. Record of Decision for the FEIS
4. Summary of the FEIS
5. Appendix D of the FEIS: Public Comments and Forest Service Responses (loan copies)

Documents Available at Libraries in Hamilton, Stevensville, Darby, Missoula (County and University of Montana), Helena (State), Billings (Eastern Montana College), Anaconda, Butte, and Philipsburg, Montana; and Grangeville and Salmon, Idaho

Planning Records available for review at Forest Supervisor's Office, 316 North Third, Hamilton, Montana, Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Request copies of documents from Forest Supervisor's Office, 316 North Third, Hamilton, Montana 59840, (406) 363-3131

District Offices:

Stevensville Ranger District, 88 Main, Stevensville, MT (777-5461)

Darby Ranger District, U.S. Highway 93, Darby, MT (821-3913)

Sula Ranger District, U.S. Highway 93, Sula, MT (821-3201)

West Fork Ranger District, West Fork Road, West Fork, MT (821-3269)