

# **ROAD AND TRAIL WORK**

## **Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact**

**Gallatin National Forest  
Montana**

**April 15, 2009**

**Lead Agency:**

USDA Forest Service

**Responsible Official:**

Mary Erickson  
Forest Supervisor

**For Further Information, Contact:**

Steve Christiansen, Project Leader  
Gallatin National Forest  
P.O. Box 130  
Bozeman, MT 59771  
(406) 587-6701



# **ROAD AND TRAIL WORK**

## **Decision Notice**

### **Table of Contents**

|                                                                      | <b><u>PAGE</u></b> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>I. Introduction</b>                                               | <b>3</b>           |
| <b>II. Background</b>                                                | <b>3</b>           |
| <b>III. Purpose and Need for Action</b>                              | <b>4</b>           |
| <b>IV. Proposed Action</b>                                           | <b>5</b>           |
| <b>V. Decision and Reasons for the Decision</b>                      | <b>6</b>           |
| <b>A. Decision Criteria</b>                                          | <b>6</b>           |
| <b>B. Decision and Rationale</b>                                     | <b>6</b>           |
| <b>C. Consideration of the Issues</b>                                | <b>28</b>          |
| <b>D. Alternatives Studied in Detail</b>                             | <b>35</b>          |
| <b>VI. Public Involvement</b>                                        | <b>35</b>          |
| <b>A. Overview of the Public Involvement Process</b>                 | <b>35</b>          |
| <b>B. Consideration of Public and Other Agency Comments</b>          | <b>35</b>          |
| <b>VII. Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)</b>                 | <b>36</b>          |
| <b>VIII. Findings Required by Other Laws, Regulations and Policy</b> | <b>38</b>          |
| <b>IX. Implementation</b>                                            | <b>39</b>          |
| <b>X. Administrative Review and Appeal Opportunities</b>             | <b>39</b>          |
| <b>XI. Contact Person</b>                                            | <b>40</b>          |
| <b>XII. Appendix B – Response to Comments on the EA</b>              | <b>41</b>          |



## **I. Introduction**

This Decision Notice documents my decision and “finding of no significant impact” for the proposed improvement work on certain Gallatin National Forest roads and trails. After careful consideration of the impacts of the alternatives disclosed in the Gallatin National Forest Road and Trail Improvement Work Environmental Assessment (February 2009), I have selected Alternative 1 (the proposed action) for implementation with one minor modification (see page 6). In summary, this alternative will:

1. Construct the new trail connectors identified in the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan (Travel Plan) designed to create loop opportunities for ATVs, motorcycles and mountain bikes.
2. Construct other trail segments to accommodate the non-motorized and winter opportunities (both snowmobiling and skiing) targeted to be provided by the Travel Plan.
3. Reconstruct existing roads and trails to accommodate the uses designated by the Travel Plan (e.g. reconstructing a single track trail so that it can accommodate ATVs).
4. Construct and reconstruct trailheads and parking facilities needed to accommodate user demand.
5. Surface high priority roads and replace culverts to facilitate aquatic organism passage.
6. Restore and stabilize certain excess roads not designated for motorized use by the Travel Plan.

## **II. Background**

The work being performed is one phase of implementing the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan (Travel Plan) which established the opportunities to be provided for public recreation use and access on the Forest’s road and trail system (See Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan Record of Decision, October 2006). The Travel Plan specified the types of uses to be allowed and managed for on each road and trail including passenger car pleasure driving, high clearance vehicle use, ATV use, motorcycle use, biking, horseback riding, snowmobiling, hiking, skiing and snowshoeing. The improvement work I’ve chosen to implement is designed to provide adequate facilities to accommodate the designated uses and provide for other resource protection.

The Gallatin National Forest contains approximately 1.8 million acres of National Forest System land and is located along the northern and western boundaries of Yellowstone National Park in southwest Montana. The Forest spans portions of Madison, Gallatin, Park, Meagher, Sweet Grass and Carbon Counties. Offices are located in the cities of Bozeman, Livingston, Big Timber, Gardiner and West Yellowstone. The Gallatin National Forest includes lands in the Bridger, Bangtail, Crazy, Absaroka, Beartooth, Gallatin, Henry’s Lake and Madison Mountain Ranges. Major rivers include the Gallatin, Madison, Shields and Yellowstone Rivers.

### **III. Purpose and Need for Action**

#### **Need for Road and Trail Work**

The improvement work to be done on Gallatin National Forest roads and trails includes construction and reconstruction of trails; construction of trailheads and parking facilities; reconstruction of roads, marking of open/closed routes and areas, and restoration and stabilization of closed roads, all of which are designed to meet the desired conditions identified by the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan (Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan Record of Decision and Detailed Description of the Decision, 10/2006). The Travel Plan specified the types of uses to be allowed and managed for on each road and trail including passenger car pleasure driving, high clearance vehicle use, ATV use, motorcycle use, biking, horseback riding, snowmobiling, hiking, skiing and snowshoeing. There is now a need to provide adequate facilities to accommodate the designated uses while maintaining resource protection, and to restore and stabilize existing roads that are in excess to administrative, recreation and access needs. A more specific description of the need follows.

#### **New Trail Construction**

The Travel Plan identified some new trails but defined them on the decision maps as general corridors between two endpoints. In other words, the actual trails don't yet exist. There is now a need to provide the facilities to accommodate the designated uses.

#### **Trail Reconstruction**

Some existing trails were identified for ATV use by the Travel Plan but the trail facilities themselves are currently inadequate to safely accommodate this use. Therefore, reconstruction of these trails is needed. For example, where the existing tread is too narrow, additional width needs to be constructed. Where the clearing limits are too tight, additional vegetation needs to be removed. Where grades are steep and excessive tread erosion is occurring, relocation is needed to relax the grade. At stream crossings, trail bridges or hardened fords may be needed to protect stream courses.

#### **Road Reconstruction**

Most open roads on the Gallatin National Forest were constructed for logging traffic so their geometry is generally satisfactory. However, some entry roads to the Forest and roads to major destinations need to be hardened (e.g. graveled) to accommodate the use and minimize erosion. Some roads also need additional features such as turnouts, turnarounds at gates, and dispersed recreational roadside parking.

#### **Construction of Trailheads/Parking Areas**

Where a trail leaves the road system, a parking facility is necessary to keep users from parking along the roads, parking in private driveways, and from parking in front of gates. The amount of parking needed is determined by the anticipated volume and type of vehicle on a normal

recreational day, a summer Saturday for instance. Trailhead capacity will not be designed for peak demand periods such as opening day of hunting season or an event. Because the Travel Plan changed some use patterns, additional trailheads are needed, and for some existing facilities, the capacity needs to be increased. This is particularly true for trailheads where users typically bring vehicles with trailers, such as for stock, ATV's and snowmobiles.

### **Road Restoration, Stabilization and Decommissioning**

As a result of the Travel Plan decision, there are a number of existing roads that are not designated for public or routine administrative travel. These roads are to be effectively closed and therefore will not receive the level of periodic maintenance that occurs on open roads. Therefore these roads need to be restored and stabilized such that sediment production from road surfaces and cut and fill slopes is minimized, historic hydrologic function is returned, the risk of mass wasting is reduced or eliminated on road fills and vegetation is encouraged. For roads that are not needed for the long-term management of the Forest, decommissioning is needed to permanently remove the road from the system.

### **Purpose for Road and Trail Work**

Given the need for action described above the purpose for the road and trail work can be summarized as follows:

- 1) The purpose of constructing and reconstructing trails is to provide the trail facilities necessary to safely accommodate the uses designated by the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan (Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan Record of Decision and Detailed Description of the Decision, 10/2006).
- 2) The purpose of reconstructing roads is to; (a) harden the surface to accommodate anticipated vehicle use and minimize erosion, and (b) to provide the turnouts, turnarounds and roadside parking needed for safe, uncongested ingress and egress into the Forest.
- 3) The purpose of constructing trailheads/parking areas is to provide places for the public to load, unload and leave vehicles while using Gallatin National Forest trails and areas.
- 4) The purpose of restoring, stabilizing and decommissioning excess roads is to restore hydrologic function, reduce or eliminate the risk of mass wasting of road fills and minimize sedimentation from cut and fill slopes and road surfaces.

## **IV. Proposed Action**

As disclosed in Chapter 1 of the Environmental Assessment I had proposed the following work as part of implementation of the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan:

1. Construction of the new trail connectors identified in the Travel Plan designed to create loop opportunities for ATVs, motorcycles and mountain bikes.
2. Construction of other trail segments to accommodate the non-motorized and winter opportunities (both snowmobiling and skiing) targeted to be provided by the Travel Plan.

3. Reconstruction of existing roads and trails to accommodate the uses designated by the Travel Plan (e.g. reconstructing a single track trail so that it can accommodate ATVs, hardening dispersed camping site approach routes).
4. Construction and reconstruction of trailheads and parking facilities needed to accommodate user demand.
5. Surfacing of high priority roads and replacement of culverts to facilitate aquatic organism passage.
6. Restoration and stabilization of certain excess roads not designated for motorized use by the Travel Plan.

Generally, the work would be scheduled to be performed over a 5 year period beginning in 2009 and is located in various locations across the Forest.

## **V. Decision and Reasons for the Decision**

### **A. Decision Criteria**

In making my decision on the proposed road and trail projects I focused on the following criteria:

1. Whether the proposal provides the roads, trails, and trailhead/parking facilities that will safely accommodate the uses designated by the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan.
2. Whether the proposal provides for adequate resource protection and results in no significant adverse environmental effects.

### **B. Decision and Rationale**

After review of the description of Alternative 1 (the Proposed Action) and the predicted environmental consequences in Chapters 2 and 3 of the EA, it is my decision to implement the proposed road and trail projects with one minor modification. I am deferring the construction of the new ATV trail from the upper Buck Ridge Trailhead in Sec. 31, T7S, R4E to the Third Yellowmule Trail #157 until completion of the Upper Gallatin Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) plan by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). The Big Sky area is out of sediment standard compliance due to extensive roading, business, and residential construction on private land. Construction of this trail may only proceed after resolution of sediment issues in the South Fork of the West Fork of the Gallatin River and the West Fork of the Gallatin River.

My general rationale for deciding to proceed with the road and trail projects as described in detail below is that:

- (a) I believe that the projects are necessary and desirable to fulfill the objectives of the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan. These objectives included providing well-distributed opportunities for motorized and non-motorized uses of the Gallatin National Forest; and bringing existing and projected use to a point where it is consistent with achieving desired conditions for other resources.



- (b) I have concluded that implementation of the road and trail projects, with included mitigation, will not result in unacceptable environmental effects and, for many resources, will result in beneficial effects.

More specifically, work that will be done is as follows:

**Emigrant Gulch Area** (Absaroka Mountain Range, Map ABS-1)

In the Emigrant Gulch area the ATV/motorcycle/mountain bike trail from upper Arrastra down to Emigrant Gulch (about 2.5 miles) will be constructed and maintenance will be performed on about 2.0 miles of existing trail (see map ABS-1 at the Gallatin Forest website or on the accompanying CD). This project is designed to meet GNF Travel Plan Objective 1-2 for the Mill Creek Travel Planning Area which is to "Provide 1 or 2 ATV/motorcycle loop trails within the area." This connector route is also shown on the Final Travel Plan decision map for summer motorized uses. (See GNF Travel Plan, Detailed Description of the Decision, page II-136, and Final Travel Plan decision map for summer motorized uses).

**Gardiner Basin Area** (Absaroka Mountain Range, Map ABS-2)

In the Gardiner Basin area about 18 miles of cross-country ski trail will be cleared and marked in the Jardine area. Ski trails will begin near the Pine Creek Trailhead and generally run to the northeast using the Bear Creek Road #493, the Ash Mountain Road #6976, and the Darroch Creek Road #6962 (see map ABS-2 at the Gallatin Forest website or on the accompanying CD). The work includes about 3.0 miles of trail reconstruction and 3.0 miles of maintenance. This work is designed to facilitate cross-country skiing opportunities in this area consistent with the route-by-route management direction established in the GNF Travel Plan for the Gardiner Basin Travel Planning Area (See GNF Travel Plan, Detailed Description of the Decision, page II-96, and Final Travel Plan decision map for winter uses).

Application Rules from the Grizzly Bear Amendment ROD, p. A-2-5, apply to this project. More specifically, no other projects affecting secure habitat shall be allowed to occur within this bear subunit at the same time this project is being carried out.

**Suce Creek Area** (Absaroka Mountain Range, Map ABS-3)

In the Suce Creek area a winter parking facility will be constructed for cross-country skiers wishing to use winter routes along the Suce Creek Road #201 and the Baldy Basin Trail #44, outside of Wilderness (see map ABS-3 at the Gallatin Forest website or on the accompanying CD). The parking facility will be designed to accommodate up to 6 vehicles and be located along the Suce Creek Road outside the National Forest boundary. This work is designed to facilitate access to cross-country skiing opportunities in this area consistent with the route-by-route management direction established in the GNF Travel Plan for the Mission Creek Travel Planning Area (See GNF Travel Plan, Detailed Description of the Decision, page II-149, and Final Travel Plan decision map for winter uses).

**Bangtails Area** (Bridger-Bangtails Mountain Ranges, Map BBG-1)

In the Bangtails area the following work will be performed:

1. Construction, reconstruction, and maintenance of the Jackson Creek, Grouse Creek, Willow Creek, and Bangtail Creek ATV loop trails. Work to be done includes about 5.8 miles of new trail construction, 3.1 miles of trail reconstruction, and 8.2 miles of trail maintenance. These actions, in combination with suitable existing routes, will facilitate approximately 49 miles of recreation opportunities for ATVs, motorcycles, and mountain bikes in the Bangtail Mountains. (Map BBG-1)
2. Resurfacing of the Jackson Creek Road #977 from the county road to the Jackson Creek Trailhead, about 3 miles. Resurfacing involves adding coarse aggregate to improve drivability and reduce sediment production. (Map BBG-1)
3. Construction of about 0.5 miles of motorcycle/mountain bike trail from the Bangtail Divide Trail #504 at the head of Stone Creek in Section 18, T1S, R8E down to the Bishop Park Road #1760. This action, in combination with #1 above and suitable existing routes, will facilitate approximately 49 miles of opportunities for motorcycles and mountain bikes. (Map BBG-1)
4. Construction of two 10 vehicle parking facilities in Sec. 28, T1S, R8E in upper Jackson Creek, and Sec. 25, T1N, R7E in upper Miles Creek for ATV riders, motorcyclists and mountain bikers wishing to access Bangtail area loop trails. (Map BBG-1)

The ATV and motorcycle trail construction, reconstruction and maintenance projects are designed to meet GNF Travel Plan Goal 1, and Objectives 1-1 and 1-2 for the Bangtails Travel Planning Area (Travel Plan Decision, page II-15). In summary, this goal and associated objectives are designed to primarily provide opportunities for pleasure driving, ATV, motorcycle and mountain bike use in this area. New trail construction is supported by Objective 1-2 which recognized a need to provide about 5 miles of additional ATV/motorcycle/mountain bike connector routes to create loops. The connector and loop routes are also identified in the route tables for the Bangtails Travel Planning Area (Travel Plan Decision, pages II-18 and II-19) and are shown on the Final Travel Plan decision map for summer motorized uses.

Resurfacing of the Jackson Creek Road is responsive to GNF Travel Plan Goal 4 for the Bangtails Travel Planning Area which is to: "Provide a road and trail system that accommodates traffic consistent with protecting soil and watershed condition." It also responds to forest-wide Travel Plan Goal D and Objective D-3 (Travel Plan Decision, page I-11) which direct maintenance of a road and trail system to be consistent with Forest Plan goals for water quality, wildlife habitat, fish habitat, threatened and endangered species recovery, and historical resources.

As stated above, the construction of 2 parking areas is designed to accommodate ATV riders, motorcyclists and mountain bikers wishing to access Bangtail area loop trails.

### **Bridger Ridge Area** (Bridger-Bangtails Mountain Ranges, Map BBG-2)

In the Bridger Ridge area the Bridger Ridge Hiking Trail #513 will be marked, on the ground, where needed. This trail runs along the ridge of the Bridger Mountains from the "M" at the southern end, to Sacagawea Peak in the north-central part of the Range. Marking activity is designed to help hikers locate and stay on the Bridger Ridge Trail. Hiking is emphasized on this route as identified on the route tables for the West Bridger North and West Bridger South Travel Planning Areas (Travel Plan Decision, pages II-191 and II-195).

**Fairy Lake Area** (Bridger-Bangtails Mountain Ranges, Maps BBG-3 and BBG-4)

In the Fairy Lake area the following work will be performed:

1. Construction of an ATV connector trail from the Fairy Lake Road #74 (about 1.4 miles) to the Fairy Lake Trail #500. Then maintenance work will be performed on about 2 miles of the Fairy Lake Trail from the end of the new construction to the North Fork Brackett Creek Road #662. This trail shall be routed to avoid wet and unstable areas. (Map BBG-3)
  2. Construction of a motorcycle connector trail from the North Fork Brackett Creek Road #662 to the Upper Brackett Creek Trail #525 (about 2.5 miles). (Map BBG-3)
  3. Construction of snowmobile connector trails from the Fairy Lake Road #74 at the Carrol Creek Road #75 and from the Cache Creek Road #1774 to the Fairy Lake Trail #500 (about 4.2 miles). (Map BBG-4)
  4. Construction of two trailhead facilities that will accommodate 10 vehicles each. The first, South Bridger Bowl Trailhead will be located in the northeast corner of Sec. 3, T1N, R7E, just south of the Bridger Bowl Ski Area parking lot. The second, Lower Fairy Creek Trailhead will be located in Section 30, T2N, R7E at the junction of the Cache Creek Road #1775. (Map BBG-3)
  5. Construction of a trailhead facility that will accommodate 6 vehicles at the junction of the Carrol Creek Road #75 with Fairy Lake Road #74 in Section 24, T2N, R6E. (Map BBG-3)
- Effectively close and restore 13 miles of excess project roads within the Fairy Lake area using Treatment Types #I-III (see page 24). (Map BBG-3)

The new ATV and motorcycle trail construction and maintenance projects are designed to meet GNF Travel Plan Objective 1-2 for the Fairy Lake Travel Planning Area which is to "Provide 1 to 3 designated ATV and/or motorcycle routes" (Travel Plan Decision, page II-67). The connector routes are also shown on the Final Travel Plan decision map for summer motorized uses.

The new snowmobile trail construction projects are designed to meet GNF Travel Plan Objective 2-2 for the Fairy lake Travel Planning Area which is to "Provide a system of 2 to 4 snowmobile loop trails and a connector route to the Flathead Pass area" (Travel Plan Decision, page II-67). The connector routes are also shown on the Final Travel Plan decision map for winter uses.

The road closure and restoration work is supported by forest-wide GNF Travel Plan Objective D-1 which states: "Close and rehabilitate existing roads that are in excess to administrative, recreation and access needs" (Travel Plan Decision, page I-11). The work to be done will be on portions of the road system shown as green on the Final Travel Plan decision map for summer motorized uses.

The proposed new trailhead facilities are designed to provide vehicle parking for the public who are using area trails in accordance with the designated uses established by the GNF Travel Plan.

### **Johnson Canyon Area** (Bridger-Bangtails Mountain Ranges, Maps BBG-5 and BBG-6)

In the Johnson Canyon area the following work will be performed:

1. Construction of the upper Johnson Canyon and Johnson to Felix ATV loop connector trails. Work to be done includes about 2.5 miles of new trail construction, and 2.6 miles of trail reconstruction. These trails shall be routed to avoid wet and unstable areas. This action, in combination with suitable existing routes, will facilitate approximately 11 miles of recreation opportunities for ATVs, motorcycles, and mountain bikes in the Johnson Canyon area of the north Bridger Mountain Range. (Map BBG-5)
2. Construction of a 10 vehicle parking facility in Sec. 36, T3N, R5E in Johnson Canyon (just inside the Forest boundary) for ATV riders, motorcyclists and mountain bikers wishing to access area loop trails. (Map BBG-5)
3. Resurfacing of the Johnson Canyon Road #6930 from the end of the county road to the Johnson Canyon Trailhead, about 2 miles. Resurfacing involves adding coarse aggregate to improve drivability and reduce sediment production. (Map BBG-5)
4. Construction of a new stock and hiking trail from the Johnson Canyon Trailhead south to the junction of the North Cottonwood Trail and the sportsmen's access trail across private land, about 3 miles. (Map BBG-6)

The new ATV trail construction projects are designed to provide the loop opportunities identified in the route tables for the West Bridger North Travel Planning Area (Travel Plan Decision, pages II-190 and II-191). These routes are also shown on the Final Travel Plan decision map for summer motorized uses.

The new parking facility is designed to provide vehicle parking for the public who are using Johnson Canyon and Felix Canyon area trails in accordance with the designated uses established by the GNF Travel Plan.

Resurfacing of the Johnson Canyon Road is responsive to forest-wide Travel Plan Goal D and Objective D-3 (Travel Plan Decision, page I-11) which direct maintenance of a road and trail system to be consistent with Forest Plan goals for water quality, wildlife habitat, fish habitat, threatened and endangered species recovery, and historical resources.

The construction of the Johnson Canyon/North Cottonwood stock and hiking trail is designed to provide a non-motorized connector route between Johnson Canyon and the North Cottonwood Creek area, consistent with GNF Travel Plan Objective 1-3 for the West Bridger North Travel Planning Area, (Travel Plan Decision, page II-187). Currently there is no National Forest System trail connecting the Johnson Canyon area with the trail system to the south in the Bridger Mountain Range.

### **Cooke City Area** (Beartooth Mountains, Maps BTH-1 and BTH-2)

In the Cooke City area the following work will be performed:

1. Construction, reconstruction, and maintenance of the Cooke City area ATV trails. Work to be done includes construction of the Henderson Mountain Connector Trail, about 0.2 miles; reconstruction of the Miller Creek loop trails; about 2.1 miles, and 6.0 miles of

trail maintenance/improvement work. This action, in combination with suitable existing routes, will facilitate approximately 23 miles of recreation opportunities for ATVs, motorcycles, and mountain bikes in the Cooke City area. (Map BTH-2) The construction and reconstruction of the Upper Miller Creek motorized trail loops leads to a permanent decrease in secure habitat. The Application rules for Permanent decreases below indicate that: A project may permanently change secure habitat if secure habitat of equivalent habitat quality (as measured by the Cumulative Effects Model or equivalent technology) is replaced in the same Bear Management Unit subunit. Therefore project roads (i.e. roads not designated for public or administrative use) in the area must be effectively closed to motorized traffic prior to, or simultaneously with building this new route.

2. Construction of a 10 vehicle parking facility just off the beginning of the Lake Abundance Road #3219 for multiple uses of areas to the north and west. (Map BTH-1)
3. Establishment, clearing and marking of Woody Creek area ski trails including about 2.1 miles of trail reconstruction and 1.2 miles of trail maintenance. Once completed, the Woody Creek area will provide about 6.7 miles of ski/snowshoe opportunity. (Map BTH-2)

Application Rules from the Grizzly Bear Amendment ROD, p. A-2-5, apply to this project. More specifically, no other projects affecting secure habitat shall be allowed to occur within this bear subunit at the same time this project is being carried out.

The new ATV trail construction, reconstruction and maintenance projects are designed to provide the connector and loop opportunities identified in the route tables for the Cooke City Travel Planning Area (Travel Plan Decision, pages II-49 and II-50). These routes are also shown on the Final Travel Plan decision map for summer motorized uses. The summer recreation use goal for this travel planning area is to emphasize regulated motorized/mountain bike use to the north of Highway 212 (id. page II-46).

The new parking facility is designed to provide vehicle parking for the public who are using the roads, trails and area to the north of Daisy Pass in accordance with the designated uses established by the GNF Travel Plan.

The establishment of Woody Creek area ski trails is consistent with Cooke City Travel Planning Area Goal 2 (Travel Plan Decision, page II-46) for winter recreation which emphasizes cross-country skiing opportunities south of Highway 212. It is also consistent with the route-by-route management direction established in the GNF Travel Plan for the Cooke City Travel Planning Area (See GNF Travel Plan, Detailed Description of the Decision, page II-51, and Final Travel Plan decision map for winter uses).

The projects in the Cooke City area shall be coordinated so that multiple projects are not occurring at the same time in the Lamar #1 grizzly bear subunit under the Gallatin Forest Plan Amendment for Grizzly Bear Conservation (Gallatin Forest Plan Amendment #27, April 2006).

#### **Deer Creeks Area** (Beartooth Mountains, Maps BTH-3 and BTH-4)

In the Deer Creeks area the following work will be performed:

1. Construction of the Wepler connector trail (about 0.8 miles) between the Wepler Road #2551 and the Lodgepole Trail #124 in Section 23, T3S, R14E to accommodate motorcycle, mountain bike, foot and stock use. (Map BTH-3)
2. Maintenance work on the entire motorcycle trail system within the Deer Creeks area to correct any safety issues (about 4.0 miles of work out of the 20 miles of opportunity provided). (Map BTH-3)
3. Construction of a 6 vehicle parking facility (trailhead) along the North Fork of Derby Gulch Road in Sec. 35, T2S, R15E for ATV riders, motorcyclists and mountain bikers wishing to use area loop trails. (Map BTH-4)
4. Construction of the following ATV connector trails (about 24 miles total): Tie Cutter Gulch (from the end of the West Bridger Road #448 over Tie Cutter Gulch and down into Deer Creek); North Fork to Tie Cutter (from the new trailhead on the North Fork of the Derby Gulch Road to the Derby Mountain Trail #126 in the center of Sec. 35, T2S, R15E), and upper Derby ATV connector trails (Sections 9, 10, 15 and 16, T3S, R15E). (Map BTH-4)
5. Reconstruction of the ATV portion of the Derby Mountain Trail #126 (from the center of Sec. 35, T2S, R15E to the north line of Sec. 9, T3S, R15E). (Map BTH-4)

The new ATV, motorcycle trail construction, reconstruction and maintenance projects are designed to provide the connector and loop opportunities identified in the route tables for the Deer Creeks Travel Planning Area (Travel Plan Decision, page II-58). These routes are also shown on the Final Travel Plan decision map for summer motorized uses.

The new parking facility is designed to provide vehicle parking primarily for motorized users wanting to use the loop trail system that begins off of the North Fork of Derby Gulch Road.

#### **Porcupine Area** (Crazy Mountain Range, Map CRZ-1)

In the Porcupine area portions of the Porcupine-Lowline Trail #267 between the Ibex and Porcupine trailheads will be relocated to correspond with final rights-of-way. Some portions of the trail may be shifted onto National Forest land to the east. Currently, the trail passes through large portions of private lands with fences, gates, past harvest and road building and needs to be remarked and reconstructed. Under the decision for the Gallatin Travel Plan this trail is to provide opportunities for motorcycle, mountain bike, stock and foot use (Travel Plan Decision, page II-111). Work will involve about 5.2 miles of new trail construction, 2.6 miles of reconstruction and 3.0 miles of maintenance.

#### **Shields River Area** (Crazy Mountain Range, Maps CRZ-2 and CRZ-3)

Two projects will be implemented in the Shields River area. The first will be to construct a hiking and stock trail from the Upper Shields River Road #844 to the South Fork of the American Fork Trail #125. This trail will be designed to provide a non-motorized connector route between the Shields River area and the east side of the Crazy Mountains, consistent with GNF Travel Plan Objective 1-2 for the Shields Travel Planning Area, (Travel Plan Decision, page II-164). Work to be done includes about 3.3 miles of trail construction, 2.2 miles of reconstruction and 1.6 miles of maintenance. (Map CRZ-2)

The second project will be to surface sections of the Shields River Road #844 (from milepost 6 to milepost 20) and the Turkey Creek Road #6634 (entire length) to improve drivability and reduce sediment production, approximately 15.2 miles of work. The Shields River Road is designated by the Gallatin Travel Plan to primarily provide an opportunity for passenger car travel although other uses are also allowed (Travel Plan Decision, page II-167). The Turkey Creek Road is to be managed with an emphasis on providing opportunities for high clearance vehicles, ATVs, motorcycles and mountain bikes (id.). This proposal is responsive to GNF Travel Plan Objective 4-1 for the Shields Travel Planning Area which states: "Repair damage to road and trail system and schedule maintenance to attain conditions that are non-erosive" (Travel Plan Decision, page II-164). It is also responsive to Objective 3-1 for this Travel Planning Area (id., page II-164) which states "reduce contributed sediment from the road and trail system in the upper Shields and Smith Creek watersheds to achieve Yellowstone cutthroat trout habitat at 90% of its potential habitat capability". (Map CRZ-3)

#### **Smith Creek Area** (Crazy Mountain Range, Map CRZ-4)

In the Smith Creek area the following work will be performed:

1. Construction, reconstruction, and maintenance of the Bitter Creek, Honey Run, and East Fork ATV loop trails. Work to be done includes about 2.3 miles of new trail construction, 1.3 miles of trail reconstruction, and 10.0 miles of trail maintenance. The project, in combination with suitable existing routes, will facilitate approximately 34 miles of recreation opportunities for ATVs, motorcycles, and mountain bikes in the Smith Creek portion of the Crazy Mountains. (Map CRZ-4)
2. Effectively close and restore 20 miles of excess project roads within the Smith Creek area using Treatment Types #I-III (see page 24). (Map CRZ-4)
3. Construction of about 0.5 miles of motorcycle/mountain bike trail from near the end of the Sunlight Creek Road #6630 to the Shields Lowline Trail #258 in Section 1, T4N, R10E. The project, in combination with #1 above and suitable existing routes, will facilitate approximately 49 miles of opportunities for motorcycles and mountain bikes. (Map CRZ-1)
4. Construction of a 10 vehicle parking facility (trailhead) in Section 31, T6N, R10E, near the start point of the Bitter Creek trails for ATV riders, motorcyclists and mountain bikers. (Map CRZ-4)

The ATV, motorcycle and mountain bike trail construction, reconstruction and maintenance projects are designed to meet GNF Travel Plan Goal 1, and Objectives 1-1 and 1-3 for the Shields Travel Planning Area (Travel Plan Decision, page II-164). In summary, this goal and associated objectives are designed to primarily provide opportunities for pleasure driving, ATV, motorcycle and mountain bike use in the Smith Creek area. Objective 1-3 is to restore and designate old roads for motorized opportunities and mountain bike use. The loop routes are also identified in the route tables for the Shields Travel Planning Area (Travel Plan Decision, pages II-167 and II-169) and are shown on the Final Travel Plan decision map for summer motorized uses.

Road closure and restoration work is supported by forest-wide GNF Travel Plan Objective D-1 which states: "Close and rehabilitate existing roads that are in excess to administrative, recreation and access needs" (Travel Plan Decision, page I-11), and also Objective 3-1 for the

Shields Travel Planning Area (id., page II-164) which states “reduce contributed sediment from the road and trail system in the upper Shields and Smith Creek watersheds to achieve Yellowstone cutthroat trout habitat at 90% of its potential habitat capability”. The work to be done will be on portions of the road system shown as green on map CRZ-3.

As stated above, the construction of a parking area (trailhead) is designed to accommodate ATV riders, motorcyclists and mountain bikers wishing to access area loop trails.

**Bozeman Creek Area** (Gallatin Mountain Range, Map GAL-1)

In the Bozeman Creek area there will be a trail construction project to connect the mountain bike trails between Sections 5 and 7, T4S, R7E and then performance of general maintenance where needed on the remainder of this loop trail system. The work will include about 0.7 miles of new construction and about 3 miles of maintenance. This project is responsive to Objective 1-3 of the GNF Travel Plan for the Bozeman Creek area which states: “Provide a connector route for mountain bikes across City of Bozeman land in Sec. 5, T4S, R7E” (Travel Plan Decision, page II-29).

**Gallatin Roded Area** (Gallatin Mountain Range, Maps GAL-2, GAL-3, GAL-4, GAL-6, and GAL-12)

In the Gallatin Roded area the following work will be performed:

1. Clearing and marking of the Big Bear Snowmobile Trails. In addition to marking the trails, the work includes about 0.7 miles of new construction and about 1.0 mile of maintenance. The clearing width for a snowmobile trail is 8 feet. (Map GAL-6)
2. Construction, reconstruction, and maintenance of the Little Bear, Storm Castle, and Swan Creek ATV/motorcycle/mountain bike loop trails. Work to be done includes about 7.9 miles of new trail construction, 6.2 miles of trail reconstruction, and 15.0 miles of trail maintenance. The project, in combination with suitable existing routes, will facilitate approximately 77 miles of recreation opportunities for ATVs, motorcycles, and mountain bikes in the Gallatin Roded area. (Map GAL-2)
3. Surfacing (paving to reduce dusting around the Shenango Helibase) of the lower Storm Castle Road #132 from Highway 191 to the lower trailhead parking (about 0.6 miles). (Map GAL-3)
4. Construction of a 10 vehicle parking facility (trailhead) in Sec. 28, T4S, R4E at the Shenango administrative site (formerly Squaw Creek Ranger Station) for winter/spring users of the Storm Castle Creek drainage (Map GAL-3)
5. Construction of the snowmobile connector route from the Pine Tree Road #6970 to the Swan Creek Trail #186 along Trail #76 (about 1.5 miles of construction). Maintenance of about 1.0 miles of the remainder of the route. The project, in combination with suitable existing routes, will facilitate approximately 24 miles of snowmobile trail opportunity. (Map GAL-12)
6. Effectively close and restore about 3 miles of excess project roads (i.e. roads not designated for public or administrative use) within the Moose/Tamphery/Swan Creek areas using Treatment Types I-III (see page 24). (Map GAL-4)



7. Effectively close and restore about 25 miles of excess project roads within the Storm Castle, Wilson, and Bear Creek area using Treatment Types I-III (see page 24). (Map GAL-2)

The clearing and marking of the Big Bear Snowmobile Trail and construction of the snowmobile connector route from the Pine Tree Road to the Swan Creek Trail#186 is responsive to Goal 2 and Objective 2-1 of the GNF Travel Plan for the Gallatin Roaded Travel Planning Area (Travel Plan Decision, page II-85). The Travel Plan management emphasis for this area in the winter is to provide groomed and marked routes for snowmobiling. Included routes are also shown on the Final Travel Plan decision map for winter uses.

The ATV, motorcycle and mountain bike trail construction, reconstruction and maintenance projects are designed to meet GNF Travel Plan Goal 1, and Objectives 1-1 and 1-2 for the Gallatin Roaded Travel Planning Area (Travel Plan Decision, page II-85). In summary, this goal and associated objectives are designed to primarily provide opportunities for pleasure driving, ATV, motorcycle use in this area. Objective 1-2 is to provide an extensive system of ATV/motorcycle loop trails. The loop routes are also identified in the route tables for the Gallatin Roaded Travel Planning Area (Travel Plan Decision, pages II-90 to II-92) and are shown on the Final Travel Plan decision map for summer motorized uses.

The surfacing of the Storm Castle Road is responsive to GNF Travel Plan Goal 4 for the Gallatin Roaded Travel Planning Area which is to: "Provide a road and trail system that accommodates traffic consistent with protecting soil and watershed condition." It also responds to forest-wide Travel Plan Goal D and Objective D-3 (Travel Plan Decision, page I-11) which direct maintenance of a road and trail system to be consistent with Forest Plan goals for water quality, wildlife habitat, fish habitat, threatened and endangered species recovery, and historical resources.

As stated above, the construction of a parking area (trailhead) at the Shenango administrative site is designed to accommodate winter users of the Storm Castle Creek drainage. In other words, this will serve as a launch point for snowmobilers, skiers, and snowshoers wishing to travel further up the drainage.

Road closure and restoration work is supported by forest-wide GNF Travel Plan Objective D-1 which states: "Close and rehabilitate existing roads that are in excess to administrative, recreation and access needs" (Travel Plan Decision, page I-11), and also Goal 3 and Objectives 3-1, 3-2, and 3-3 for the Gallatin Roaded Travel Planning Area (id., page II-85) In summary this goal and objectives emphasize reducing contributed sediment from the road and trail system to provide habitat for westslope cutthroat trout in the West Fork of Wilson Creek and to provide for beneficial uses in all other streams. The work to be done will be on portions of the road system shown as green on the Final Travel Plan decision map for summer motorized uses.

#### **Hyalite Area** (Gallatin Mountain Range, Maps GAL-5, GAL-6, and GAL-13)

In the Hyalite area the following work will be performed:

1. Construction of 4x4 connector roads in the Moser Jumpoff and Langohr areas. Work involves 1.1 miles of new high clearance vehicle road construction to create loops within the existing open road system. (Map GAL-5)
2. Construction, reconstruction, and maintenance of the Buckskin and Lick Creek ATV/motorcycle/mountain bike loop trails. Work to be done includes about 1.4 miles of new trail construction, 1 mile of trail reconstruction, and 0.8 miles of trail maintenance. The project, in combination with suitable existing routes, will facilitate approximately 18 miles of recreation opportunity for ATVs, motorcycles, and mountain bikes on this route system. (Map GAL-5)
3. Construction, reconstruction, and maintenance of Hyalite area ski trails. Work involves about 2 miles of ski trail construction, 5 miles of reconstruction and 15 miles of maintenance. The project, in combination with suitable existing routes will provide 44 miles of cross-country ski trails within the Hyalite drainage. (Map GAL-13)
4. Construction of two six vehicle parking facilities (trailheads) at Wildhorse and Hood Creek Trailheads and expansion of the existing facilities at the Lick Creek and History Rock Trailheads to accommodate about 5 additional vehicles each. (Maps GAL-5 & GAL-13)
5. Effectively close and restore 20 miles of excess project roads within the within the Hyalite area using Treatment Types #I-III (see page 24). (Map GAL-5)
6. Construction of a 10 vehicle parking facility at the southern end of Hyalite Reservoir just south of Chisholm campground in Section 23, T4S, R6E, to accommodate fishers, mountain bikers and other dispersed users away from the campgrounds and Hyalite Road turnouts. (Map GAL-5)

The construction of 4x4 connector roads in the Moser Jumpoff and Langohr areas are designed to create loop opportunities for high-clearance vehicle travel in the Hyalite area, consistent with the route tables for the Hyalite Travel Planning Area (Travel Plan Decision, pages II-105) and the Final Travel Plan decision map for summer motorized uses.

The construction, reconstruction, and maintenance of the Buckskin and Lick Creek ATV/motorcycle/mountain bike trails are designed to create loop opportunities for these users in the Hyalite area, consistent with the route tables for the Hyalite Travel Planning Area (Travel Plan Decision, pages II-105 and II-106) and the Final Travel Plan decision maps for summer motorized and non-motorized uses.

Construction, reconstruction, and maintenance of Hyalite area ski trails is responsive to Hyalite Travel Planning Area Goal 2 and Objective 2-3 (Travel Plan Decision, page II-102) for winter recreation which emphasizes cross-country skiing opportunities. It is also consistent with the route-by-route management direction established in the GNF Travel Plan for the Hyalite Travel Planning Area (See GNF Travel Plan Decision, pages II-105 to II-107, and the final Travel Plan decision map for winter uses).

The construction of parking facilities at the Wildhorse and Hood Creek Trailheads are designed to accommodate users of these trails. Currently there are no adequate parking areas at these trailheads. The expansion of the parking facilities at the Lick Creek and History Rock Trailheads will accommodate anticipated increasing use of these trails. The construction of a parking facility at the southern end of the Hyalite Reservoir is designed to accommodate fishers, mountain bikers and other dispersed users away from the campgrounds and Hyalite Road turnouts.

Road closure and restoration work is supported by forest-wide GNF Travel Plan Objective D-1 which states: "Close and rehabilitate existing roads that are in excess to administrative, recreation and access needs" (Travel Plan Decision, page I-11). The work to be done will be on portions of the road system shown as green on the Final Travel Plan decision map for summer motorized uses.

#### **North Dry Area** (Gallatin Mountain Range, Map GAL-7)

In the North Dry area portions of the Eightmile Trail #132 from the lower trailhead to the upper trailhead will be reconstructed. Under the decision for the Gallatin Travel Plan this trail is to provide opportunities for mountain bike, stock and foot use (Travel Plan Decision, page II-204). Work will involve about 2.7 miles of trail reconstruction.

#### **Cutler Lake Area** (Gallatin Mountain Range, Map SAW-1)

In the Cutler Lake area a parking facility alongside the County Road near Cutler Lake will be constructed and a trail system will be established (maintained) for mountain bike, stock and foot use. Work to be done includes about 1.5 miles of new trail construction, 1.8 miles of trail reconstruction, and 1.8 miles of trail maintenance. This project is consistent with the route-by-route management direction established in the GNF Travel Plan for the Yankee Jim Travel Planning Area (See GNF Travel Plan Decision, page II-199, and the final Travel Plan decision map for non-motorized uses).

This project along with any other projects in the Gallatin #3 bear subunit shall be coordinated so that multiple projects are not occurring at the same time in this same subunit under the Gallatin Forest Plan Amendment for Grizzly Bear Conservation (Gallatin Forest Plan Amendment #27, April 2006).

#### **Rock/Tom Miner Area** (Gallatin Mountain Range, Maps GAL-8, GAL-9, and SAW-2)

In the Rock/Tom Miner area the following work will be performed:

1. Construction of the mountain bike connector trail from the South Rock Creek road to the existing Fisher Wagon Route Trail #276. Work involves 1.3 miles of new construction to create a mountain bike loop opportunity. (Map GAL-8)
2. Construction of a 10 vehicle parking facility on the State land Section 16, T8S, R6E along the Tom Miner Road for access to the Sawtooth Trail #297. (Map SAW-2)
3. Construction of the Lower Sawtooth Stock Trail from the new parking facility to the existing Sawtooth Trail #297. Work involves 3.4 miles of new construction. (Map SAW-2)
4. Effective closure and restoration of 8 miles of excess project roads within the within the Soldier Creek/Twin Peaks road system using Treatment Types II and III (see page 24). (Map GAL-9)

Application Rules from the Grizzly Bear Amendment ROD, p. A-2-5, apply to this project. More specifically, no other projects affecting secure habitat shall be allowed to occur within this bear subunit at the same time this project is being carried out.

Construction of the mountain bike connector trail is consistent with the route-by-route management direction established in the GNF Travel Plan for the Tom Miner/Rock Travel Planning Area (See GNF Travel Plan Decision, page II-185, and the final Travel Plan decision map for non-motorized uses).

The 10 vehicle parking facility along the Tom Miner Road and construction of a new lower Sawtooth Stock Trail is designed to provide a trailhead and designated route of travel to National Forest land at Trail #297.

Closure and restoration of 8 miles of road is responsive to GNF Travel Plan Goal 3 and Objective 3-1 for the Tom Miner/Rock Travel Planning Area (See GNF Travel Plan Decision, page II-182). The goal is to maintain a network of open roads and trails that will provide for grizzly bear and other wildlife habitat security.

This project along with any other projects in the Gallatin #3 bear subunit shall be coordinated so that multiple projects are not occurring at the same time in this same subunit and that acres affected does not exceed the allowable acreage for the subunit under the Gallatin Forest Plan Amendment for Grizzly Bear Conservation (Gallatin Forest Plan Amendment #27, April 2006).

#### **Trail Creek/Bear Canyon Area** (Gallatin Mountain Range, Maps GAL-10 and GAL-11)

Two projects will be implemented in the Trail Creek/Bear Canyon area. The first will be to construct a hiking and stock trail from the ridge above Bear Lakes to the existing North Trail Creek Trail. This trail will be designed to provide a foot and horse trail connecting the Bear Canyon area to the North Fork of Trail Creek, consistent with GNF Travel Plan Objective 1-2 for the Bear Canyon Travel Planning Area, (Travel Plan Decision, page II-20). The route eliminates the need for roaded access through the North Trail Creek private road system. Work to be done includes about 5 miles of trail construction. This trail shall be routed to avoid wet and unstable areas. (Map GAL-11)

The second project will be to construct a non-motorized trail from the Trail Creek County Road to the end of the existing trail at Chestnut Mountain. This trail will be designed to provide a mountain bike, foot and horse trail connecting Chestnut Mountain to Trail Creek, consistent with GNF Travel Plan Objective 1-3 for the Bear Canyon Travel Planning Area, (Travel Plan Decision, page II-20). Work to be done includes about 4.1 miles of trail construction and 1 mile of trail reconstruction. (Map GAL-10)

Work in this area will be confined to an operating period that runs from July 1st to the end of September thus avoiding working in this identified wildlife corridor during the time of year it is most important for movement (avoiding spring or fall).

#### **Hebgen Basin Area** (Henry's Lake Mountain Range, Maps HEN-1 and HEN-2)

Three projects will be implemented in the Hebgen Basin area. The first will be to clear and mark the Bakers Hole Ski Trail which will run along the Yellowstone Park boundary from West Yellowstone to Bakers Hole Campground. This trail is consistent with and displayed on the final

Travel Plan decision map for winter uses. Work to be done includes about 3 miles of trail clearing. (Map HEN-1)

The second project will be to effectively close and restore about 25 miles of excess project roads within the Hebgen Basin area using Treatment Types #I-III (see page 24). Road closure and restoration work is supported by forest-wide GNF Travel Plan Objective D-1 which states: "Close and rehabilitate existing roads that are in excess to administrative, recreation and access needs" (Travel Plan Decision, page I-11). (Map HEN-2)

The third project will be to construct about a 0.25 mile ATV route connector segment running parallel to the Madison Arm Road in Sec. 1, T13S, R4E. This project completes an ATV loop opportunity without the safety hazard of mixing ATVs and larger vehicles on the Madison Arm Road. The trail connector is consistent with and displayed on the final Travel Plan decision map for summer uses. (Map HEN-2)

Any work to be conducted in the Hebgen Basin area that is within 1.0 mile nesting bald eagles or within 0.5 mi of known foraging habitat shall not commence until August 15<sup>th</sup> annually. (Montana Bald Eagle Management Plan 1994).

#### **Lionhead Area** (Henry's Lake Mountain Range, Maps HEN-3 and HEN-4)

Two projects will be implemented in the Lionhead area. The first will be to construct an ATV/motorcycle/mountain bike connector trail from the Contour Road #1718 to the Denny Creek Road #1735 in Sec. 25, T12S. This trail will be designed to create a loop opportunity for ATVs, motorcycles and mountain bikes, consistent with route-by-route management direction established in the GNF Travel Plan for the Lionhead Travel Planning Area (See GNF Travel Plan Decision, pages II-128 to II-129, and the final Travel Plan decision map for motorized uses). Work to be done includes about 0.3 miles of trail construction. (Map HEN-3)

The second project will be to construct a non-motorized trail parallel to the Ski Hill Trail #114. This project is responsive GNF Travel Plan Objective 1-2 for the Lionhead Travel Planning Area (Travel Plan Decision, page II-125) which is to establish a non-motorized trail route to serve as the Continental Divide Scenic Trail (CDNST) off existing motorized Trail #114. (Map HEN-4)

Work in this area will be confined to an operating period that runs from July 1st to the end of September thus avoiding working in this identified wildlife corridor during the time of year it is most important for movement (avoiding spring or fall).

#### **Mile Creek Area** (Henry's Lake Mountain Range, HEN-5)

In the Mile Creek area the proposal is to relocate a route on the National Forest from the Mile Creek Trail #214 to Reynolds Pass and the Reynolds Pass Trailhead on the Targhee National Forest. The purpose of this project is to remove the Continental Divide Trail from off of the Mile Creek Road and Highway 87. This project is responsive to GNF Travel Plan Objective 1-2 for the Lionhead Travel Planning Area, (Travel Plan Decision, page II-125), which is to establish a non-motorized trail route to serve as the Continental Divide Scenic Trail (CDST). (Map HEN-5)

**Buck Ridge Area** (Madison Mountain Range, Maps MAD-1 and MAD-2)

Two projects will be implemented in the Buck Ridge area however I'm deferring the second one at this time. The first project will be to relocate the lower Buck Ridge Snowmobile and ATV Trail to the west generally following Trail #906 road reservation location. As part of the Big Sky land exchange the Forest Service acquired and reserved a road location easement between the Buck Creek Ridge Parking Lot on Hwy 191 to the Buck Creek Ridge Road on national forest land in Sec. 32, T7S, R4E. The proposal here is to relocate the trail to this easement. This project involves about 2.2 miles of trail reconstruction and 0.7 miles of maintenance. (Map MAD-2)

The second project will be to construct new ATV trails from the upper Buck Ridge Trailhead in Sec. 31, T7S, R4E to the Third Yellowmule Trail #157. This trail is designed to provide a series of ATV, motorcycle and mountain bike loops by providing an alternative connector route between the Yellowmule Trails #157 and #162 to the north of the Buck Ridge Trail #10 and the Inspiration Divide Trail #8. This project is responsive to GNF Travel Plan Objective 1-2 for the Big Sky Travel Planning Area, (Travel Plan Decision, page II-24), which is to provide an ATV/motorcycle connector trail from the Buck Ridge Trail into the First, Second and Third Yellowmule Creek drainages. It is also consistent with the route-by-route management direction established in the GNF Travel Plan for the Big Sky Travel Planning Area (See GNF Travel Plan Decision, page II-27, and the final Travel Plan decision map for motorized uses). Work to be done includes about 9 miles of trail construction, 3.9 miles of reconstruction and 0.3 miles of maintenance. (Map MAD-1) However, I am deferring the construction of this new ATV trail until completion of the Upper Gallatin Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) plan by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). The Big Sky area is out of sediment standard compliance due to extensive roading, business, and residential construction on private land. Construction of this trail may only proceed after resolution of sediment issues in the South Fork of the West Fork of the Gallatin River and the West Fork of the Gallatin River.

In addition, these projects along with any other projects in the Hilgard #1 and #2 bear subunits shall be coordinated so that multiple projects are not occurring at the same time in the same subunit and that acres affected does not exceed the allowable acreage for the subunit under the Gallatin Forest Plan Amendment for Grizzly Bear Conservation (Gallatin Forest Plan Amendment #27, April 2006).

**Pika Point Area** (Madison Mountain Range, Map MAD-3)

In the Pika Point area the portion of the Minnie Wapiti Trail #203 from the Oil Well Road Trail #68 to Pika Point will be relocated to accommodate ATVs. Work to be done includes about 1 mile of trail reconstruction and 0.5 miles of maintenance. (Map MAD-3) This project is consistent with the route-by-route management direction established in the GNF Travel Plan for the Taylor Fork Travel Planning Area (See GNF Travel Plan Decision, page II-180, and the final Travel Plan decision map for motorized uses)

These projects along with any other projects in the Hilgard #1 and #2 bear subunits shall be coordinated so that multiple projects are not occurring at the same time in the same subunit and that acres affected does not exceed the allowable acreage for the subunit under the Gallatin

Forest Plan Amendment for Grizzly Bear Conservation (Gallatin Forest Plan Amendment #27, April 2006).

#### **Sage Creek Area** (Madison Mountain Range, Map MAD-4)

In the Sage Creek area a snowmobile connector trail from the Sage Creek parking lot at Highway 191 to the Oil Well Road Trail #68 will be constructed. This project will route snowmobiles above moose winter range in the lower Taylor Fork drainage and eliminate the need for snowmobiles to travel along the plowed Taylor Fork Road to the Wapiti Road #2522. The reroute is consistent with and shown on the final Travel Plan decision map for winter uses. Work to be done includes 2.8 miles of snowmobile trail construction and 2.4 miles of reconstruction. (Map MAD-4)

These projects along with any other projects in the Hilgard #1 and #2 bear subunits shall be coordinated so that multiple projects are not occurring at the same time in the same subunit and that acres affected does not exceed the allowable acreage for the subunit under the Gallatin Forest Plan Amendment for Grizzly Bear Conservation (Gallatin Forest Plan Amendment #27, April 2006).

For the Sage Creek snowmobile trail limit the amount of benched construction to that which is needed to provide a safe facility for users and grooming equipment.

#### **Pole Gulch Area**

In the Pole Gulch area about 8 miles of excess project roads in the Miller Creek and Pole Gulch areas will be closed using treatment type III (see page 24). Actions include rip/drain/seed/slash and pulling culverts.

Road closure and restoration work is supported by forest-wide GNF Travel Plan Objective D-1 which states: "Close and rehabilitate existing roads that are in excess to administrative, recreation and access needs" (Travel Plan Decision, page I-11), and also Objective 5-1 for the Yellowstone Travel Planning Area (id., page II-200) which states "repair damage to road and trail system and schedule maintenance to maintain conditions that are non-erosive."

#### **West Pine Area**

In the West Pine area about 2 miles total of excess project roads in West Pine Creek will be closed using treatment type III (see page 24). The work will include re-contouring junctions with Road #978, rip/drain/seed/slash remaining roads (ATV encroachment on existing closed project roads).

Road closure and restoration work is supported by forest-wide GNF Travel Plan Objective D-1 which states: "Close and rehabilitate existing roads that are in excess to administrative, recreation and access needs" (Travel Plan Decision, page I-11), and also Objective 5-1 for the Yellowstone Planning Area (id., page II-200) which states "repair damage to road and trail system and schedule maintenance to maintain conditions that are non-erosive."

## **Authorized Work Description**

This section describes the types of work that is authorized by my decision for the site-specific actions discussed above.

### **New Trail Construction**

New trail construction work may be accomplished by a trail contractor, by Forest trail crews, volunteer labor and/or other partnerships.

Outside of Wilderness, excavation could be accomplished by a mix of hand labor with hand tools, small trail-sized excavators, skid-steer loaders, ATV's and/or other trail sized machinery. Inside of Wilderness work will be accomplished with hand labor and hand tools or other authorized methods. Construction of the motorized routes will be accomplished using the most cost effective method, typically with some small mechanized equipment.

Transportation of materials such as bridges could be done with skid steer loaders, ATV's or helicopters. Inside of Wilderness any transport of materials by helicopter shall be specifically authorized by me, or my successor, after being informed by a minimum tool analysis.

Work may include jack hammering, drilling, and blasting rock from the trail tread by licensed Forest or contract crews. Inside of Wilderness jack hammering, motorized drilling or wheel barrows will need to be specifically authorized by me, or my successor, after being informed by a minimum tool analysis.

All machinery, tools, or gear are required to be weed/seed free and shall be inspected for compliance.

### **Trail Reconstruction**

Reconstruction work on trails identified for ATV use is designed to bring the trail to a standard that can safely accommodate their use. For example, where the existing tread is too narrow, additional width will be constructed. Where the clearing limits are too tight, additional vegetation will be removed. Bridges, culverts or armored fords may be installed to protect stream courses. Where grades are steep and excessive tread erosion is occurring, trails may be relocated and constructed to relax the grade.

### **Typical Trail Standards**

The following standards are typical of the trails planned to be constructed or reconstructed and represent the range of nationally accepted standards.

1. ATV Trails: (also accommodates most other trail vehicles and uses)
  - **Single lane:** with strategic passing areas on steep sideslopes
  - **Tread Width:** 4' – 6' depending on challenge level and terrain
  - **Clearing limits:** 6' - 8' horizontal, 8' – 10' vertical, depending on vegetation, challenge level and terrain
  - **Grades:** sustained grades less than 12%, pitches up to 20% on good soils



- **Crossings:** Bridges across live streams unless stream substrate is rocky and stable with no aquatic issues, bridges 6' clear between curbs
2. Pack & Saddle Trails: (also accommodates motorcycles and mountain bikes)
    - **Single lane:** with strategic passing areas on steep sideslopes
    - **Tread Width:** 2' – 3' depending on challenge level and terrain
    - **Clearing limits:** 6' - 8' horizontal, 8' – 10' vertical, depending on vegetation, challenge level and terrain
    - **Grades:** sustained grades less than 10%, pitches up to 15% on good soils
    - **Crossings:** Bridges across live streams unless stream substrate is rocky and stable with no aquatic issues, bridges 7' clear between handrails, 5' clear between curbs
  3. Motorcycle Trails:
    - **Single lane:** with strategic passing areas on steep sideslopes
    - **Tread Width:** 1' – 4' depending on challenge level and terrain
    - **Clearing limits:** 6' - 8' horizontal, 8' – 10' vertical, depending on vegetation, challenge level and terrain
    - **Grades:** sustained grades less than 10%, pitches up to 15% on good soils
    - **Crossings:** Bridges across live streams unless stream substrate is rocky and stable with no aquatic issues, bridges 7' clear between handrails, 5' clear between curbs
  4. Mountain Bikes:
    - Geometrically similar to Motorcycle Trails
  5. Snowmobile Trails: (also accommodates skiing and snowshoeing)
    - **Single or Double lanes:** depending on width of grooming, volume of use, and configuration of loops
    - **Tread Width:** 8' – 20' depending on single or double lanes and grooming needs
    - **Clearing limits:** Tread width plus 4' horizontal, 12' vertical, depending on snow depth, challenge level, vegetation, and terrain
    - **Grades:** sustained grades less than 12%
    - **Crossings:** Bridges across streams that melt out during operating season. Bridge widths equal tread width plus 2 feet and fits groomer
  6. Ski/Snowshoe Trails:
    - **Single or Double lanes:** depending on width of grooming, volume of use, and configuration of loops
    - **Tread Width:** 4' – 16' depending on single or double lanes and grooming needs
    - **Clearing limits:** Tread width plus 4' horizontal, 12' vertical, depending on snow depth, challenge level, vegetation, and terrain
    - **Grades:** sustained grades less than 8%, pitches up to 12%. Flatter for easier courses.
    - **Crossings:** Bridges across streams that melt out during operating season. Bridge widths equal tread width plus 2 feet, and fits groomer if used.

### **Road Reconstruction**

Entry roads to the Forest and to major destinations will be hardened to accommodate the use and minimize erosion. Several key roads have been identified to be hardened. Roads will be surfaced for the entire designed width, including turnouts, driveway approaches, parking areas, dispersed camping spots, etc. Depth of aggregate is based on the anticipated use, operating season, and capability of the subgrade soils. Aggregates are available locally, either through

commercial pits or existing National Forest pits. Additional features along the road may be constructed as needed, such as turnouts, turnarounds at gates, dispersed recreational roadside parking, trailheads for access to trail opportunities, etc.

### **Construction of Trailheads/Parking Areas**

Because the Travel Plan changed some use patterns, additional new trailheads will be constructed and the capacity will be increased for others (see the description of activities by area above).

### **Road and Trail Maintenance**

Road and trail maintenance work is continually being accomplished by the Forest, along with contractors, volunteers, partners, commercial users, and private landowners. This work is necessary to accommodate and protect recreational users, minimize effects to adjacent resources, protect the investment in the facility, and to provide administrative access for services and emergencies. Maintenance includes work such as removing blow-down, brushing, surface grading, keeping drainage improvements functioning properly, keeping structures like bridges, cattleguards, gates, etc. functioning properly, hardening soft sections of subgrade, and maintaining signing.

### **Road Restoration & Stabilization, and Decommissioning**

This alternative includes road restoration & stabilization to minimize sediment production from open or closed road surfaces, including cut and fill slopes, and to restore or maintain historic hydrologic function. The types of treatment to be used are as follows:

**Treatment Type I:** This treatment is applied to roads that will remain open to administrative traffic but closed to public highway vehicles. Roads may be designated for motorized trail uses.

- Install driveable cross drains on the road grades. Armor drainage dips as needed to improve functionality.
- Lightly scarify road surface for seeding
- Seed scarified surfaces
- Block entrance road entrance with gate

**Treatment Type II:** This treatment is for closing roads that may be reused in the future or for roads that will be decommissioned and of low risk for sediment production into stream courses.

- Remove road surface compaction by ripping road to 12" depth.
- Remove at risk culverts from drainages and remove road fills within drainage.
- Plug and store ditch relief culverts for future use.
- Install frequent cross drains.
- Slash road surfaces.
- Seed any exposed soils.
- Block road entrances with an earthen berm, ripping and slashing, recountouring & slashing, or a mix.

**Treatment Type III:** This treatment is used for closing roads and decommissioning them from the system. It may also be used on road segments that are at high risk for mass wasting into stream courses, even though the entire road may remain on the road system.

- Recontour the prism to original ground profile as close as practical. This is usually considered to be around  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the original on this Forest.
- Remove all drainage structures and dispose of them.
- Remove all fills from drainages to as close to the original geometry as practical.
- Armor stream bottom if needed to prevent excessive erosion
- Slash open soils
- Seed open soils

### **Standard Operating Procedures**

This section describes some of the expectations of how the above actions will be carried out. It highlights conduct that is to be observed in making choices during implementation.

1. **Species of Special Management Direction.** Motorized routes shall be located to avoid or mitigate for known occupied habitat such as nesting, denning, roosting or key foraging areas for species of special management designation. (See Travel Plan Guideline G-2).
2. **Rare Habitats.** To help in maintaining biodiversity, impacts to rare habitats such as old growth, riparian, aspen, etc. with route construction, modification, or parking lot siting will be avoided to the extent possible (see EA, Table 2, Chapter 3, Biodiversity Section). The district biologist will be consulted for each project to determine survey needs prior to construction. Rare habitats will be avoided and buffered from the construction work if at all possible. (See Travel Plan Guideline H-2)
3. **In order to mitigate effects to wildlife during important times of year such as calving and fawning, wintering, road/trail work will be conducted from 7/15 to 10/15.** Outside of important big game winter ranges, work in the late fall or winter may occur. Complete road/trail work in high elevation whitebark pine habitat by 9/1 to avoid conflicts with grizzly bear. (See Travel Plan Guideline I-1)
4. **Water, Fisheries and Aquatic Life.** Road and trail construction, reconstruction, and maintenance will be designed to not exceed annual sediment delivery levels in excess of those in Table I-4 of the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan (Travel Plan Standard E-4, Detailed Description of the Decision, page I-12).
5. **Water, Fisheries and Aquatic Life.** Roads and trails shall not be located in the floodplains of rivers and streams or in wetlands except where necessary to cross a stream or wetland with appropriate permits. (See Travel Plan Standard E-5).
6. **Water, Fisheries and Aquatic Life.** Stream crossing facilities for roads and trails shall allow for passage of aquatic organisms, except where passage restriction is desired to isolate genetically pure cutthroat trout populations from exposure to hybridization or competition by non-native salmonids. (See Travel Plan Standard E-6).

7. **Water, Fisheries and Aquatic Life.** Road materials shall not be side-cast into streams or wetlands. (See Travel Plan Guideline E-7).

8. **Wildlife.** Work will be carried out to minimize disturbance to wildlife. This means completing work within an area expeditiously and avoiding unnecessary noise. Repeated (i.e. multi-day) low altitude helicopter use within specific project areas will be avoided.

9. **Invasive Weeds.** To prevent weed seeds and root fragments from being moved along the treatment area, ripping roads in weed patches will be avoided.

10. **Invasive Weeds.** To limit the spread of weed seeds and root fragments through soil dispersal any re-contouring of roads will be done to keep any weed contaminated soil in a localized area.

11. **Invasive Weeds.** For road stabilization and decommissioning, survey for existing weeds and then treat weeds at least one or two seasons prior to disturbing the site. This will reduce the existing weed density and encourage the successful establishment of new grass seedlings and other vegetation.

If weeds are present, and more than 500 feet from motorized access route, use Treatment Type 1 (install small cross drains, lightly scarify road surface and seed with native grasses, sign the route closed to motorized vehicles, and block the road entrance with boulders, fence or gate). The road needs to remain accessible to the furthest weed patch by either ATVs or UTVs. The route is for weed treatments, and will not be for motorized public use.

If weeds are present, and less than 500 feet from motorized access route (if it is reasonably accessible for backpack sprayer treatments), then use Treatment Types II or III (rip or re-contour road, and make impassible to all ATVs). Avoid spreading contaminated soil to new areas. Clean equipment prior to moving to new site, if needed.

12. **Lynx.** Recreation developments and operations should be planned in ways that both provide for lynx movement and maintain the effectiveness of lynx habitat. For example, minimize spatial extent of site and retain maximum cover.

13. **Lynx.** Methods to avoid or reduce effects (direct mortality) on lynx should be used in lynx habitat when upgrading unpaved roads to maintenance levels 4 or 5, if the result will be increased traffic speeds and volumes, or a foreseeable contribution to increases in human activity or development. For example, implement methods to control speed such as speed limits or other traffic controls in final designs of new and upgraded roads and trails.

14. **Lynx.** Wherever possible new permanent trails should be situated away from forested stringers. For example, locate trails to maintain at least a 300 ft wide corridor along major ridges and saddles.

15. **Lynx.** Cutting brush along low-speed, low-traffic-volume roads should be done to the minimum level necessary to provide for public safety.

16. **Lynx.** Follow Travel Plan programmatic direction for Bear Canyon, Lionhead, North Bridgers, and Shields Travel Planning Areas. This applies to identified lynx linkage areas

influenced by proposed road and trail work and should be considered in other identified linkage areas not specifically mentioned by TPA.

17. **Bald Eagle.** Per the USFWS BO (2006), reduce the potential for human-caused mortality and disturbance of bald eagles attempting to nest and/or forage within the action area.

18. **Bald Eagle.** Avoid working within 1.0 mile of nesting bald eagles or within 0.5 miles of known foraging habitat until August 15 (Montana Bald Eagle Management Plan 1994).

19. **Bald Eagle.** Follow Travel Plan programmatic direction for Hebgen Basin Travel Planning Area (Goal 3). This applies to known or future bald eagle nesting sites within the Hebgen Basin Area influenced by proposed road and trail work.

20. **Peregrine Falcon.** Follow Travel Plan programmatic direction for Gallatin River Canyon Travel Planning Area (Guideline 1-2). This applies to any portion of the Gallatin Canyon influenced by proposed road and trail work.

### **ADDITIONAL APPLICABLE MITIGATION**

The following additional mitigation measures are included in my decision.

1. **Cultural Resources.** Projects identified in the Allen Report (7/14/08) will be surveyed prior to construction for cultural resources and any discovered sites avoided in ground-disturbing activities.

2. **Rare Plants.** All projects will be surveyed prior to construction for rare plants/habitats and appropriate mitigation (e.g. avoidance) will be applied if sensitive plants are found.

3. **Invasive Weeds.** For projects scheduled to be implemented in 2010 and beyond, weed surveys of project areas shall be conducted at least 1 year prior to soil disturbance. If weeds are found, work with the district weed specialist to adjust project design or execution as needed to minimize the risk of spreading weeds. Any weed treatment shall be done at least one year in advance of soil disturbance work. For projects to be implemented in 2009, work shall be scheduled in late summer and fall such that weed surveys and any needed treatment can be done earlier in the summer.

5. **Invasive Weeds.** Certified noxious weed free seed will be used for projects that include seeding [FSM 2081.2,1.a.(3)(a)]. A weeds specialist shall review the list of seeds present in the seed mixture prior to approving the use of seeds. Seed mixtures shall also be comprised of native species. [FSM 2081.2,1.a.(3)(b,c)]. This mitigation will prevent introducing seed mixtures contaminated with noxious weeds or invasive plants that are not legally listed as noxious weeds but are invasive in the ecosystem. Slash, woody debris or mulch shall be scattered on disturbed soil to improve the water holding capacity and thus assist the establishment of grass seedlings.

6. **Invasive Weeds.** To avoid spreading weeds between work sites, off-road equipment will be washed and inspected to ensure that it is free of soil and plant material between project areas.

The district weed specialist should be consulted to determine when equipment should be washed between projects. [FSM 2081.2,1.a.(2)(a)(b), (6)(d,e) and 2081.2,1.b.(3)].

7. **Invasive Weeds.** To prevent the spread of weeds through use of contaminated material all fill, pit-run or gravel must be weed-free. A weed survey of the rock source shall be done prior to using the material. The borrow pit will not be used if new invaders, defined by the weed specialist, are found on site. [2081.2,1.a.(4); 2081.2,1.b.(3)].

8. **Peregrine Falcon.** Provide a temporal buffer during nest chronology (initiation, incubation, nestling, and fledging) by precluding heavy equipment operation and blasting until after August 15. This applies to proposed road and trail work in the Gallatin Roaded Area near the Gallatin River corridor.

9. **Goshawk.** If an affected area is within potential goshawk habitat, surveys will be completed during the year that project work is planned. If goshawks are found in the vicinity or an active nest is located, a post-fledging area (PFA) will be defined. Allow no ground disturbing activities inside known occupied PFAs from April 15 through August 15 (about 30 days post-fledging) to protect the goshawk pair and young from disturbance during the breeding season until fledglings are capable of sustained flight. After August 15, treatment-related activities may commence within the PFA but still outside the nest area.

10. **Sensitive Wildlife.** In the event that species of special management designation are found in any affected area, measures will be taken to protect them and may result in project restrictions or modifications.

## **Monitoring**

1. **Invasive Weeds.** To ensure that sites are re-vegetated within a few years, thus reducing the risk of invasive weed establishment, monitor vegetation seedling establishment. If seeds are not established on site within one year then re-seed and use weed-free mulch to help seedling establishment. Use certified weed free straw if used as mulch. Repeat until seeds do become established. [FSM 2081.2,1.a.(3),(5)].

2. **Lynx.** Monitoring for lynx was identified in the Travel Plan EIS. Monitoring for this proposed road and trail project work will include an annual review of planned and completed work items to ensure compliance with mitigation.

3. **Bald Eagle.** Per the USFWS BO (2006), monitor bald eagle nest productivity annually.

4. **Sensitive Species.** Continue annual surveys of sensitive species with consideration of necessary special closure needs based on current year activity.

5. **Cultural Resources.** As part of ongoing monitoring of cultural resource sites, monitor those sites identified in the Allen Report (7/14/08) for unanticipated indirect effects from recreation users.

### C. Consideration of the Issues

Scoping is an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues related to a proposed action [40 CFR 1501.7]. Based on comments received during scoping for this proposal and the environmental analysis disclosed in the EA, I found 13 issues in need of consideration in my decision. My conclusions about each of these issues are discussed below.

**1. Biological Diversity.** The facets of the biodiversity issue include vegetative diversity, species viability and the intertwined issue of connectivity/corridors/ linkage, which, for simplicity, is referred to as corridors. The concerns with the road and trail projects were the potential impacts on known or highly suspected wildlife corridors and on loss of rare habitats. My decision includes a number of mitigation measures and operating procedures designed to minimize impacts. For example, any proposed construction through new areas (new routes or reroutes, etc.), shall be field reviewed so that rare habitats can be avoided. Specific projects proposed in wildlife corridor areas will be timed such that work does not occur at the more important times of year for them to be used for travel to other areas (spring and fall).

Based on the analysis disclosed on pages 3-2 through 3-19 of the EA I've concluded that the overall implementation of my decision is beneficial to biodiversity and species viability. This is because the Travel Plan proposes an overall reduction of motorized routes on the Forest, and especially in some important areas for wildlife, it enhances biodiversity. The actual on-the-ground construction work may have some temporary displacement effects on wildlife but these potential impacts are adequately mitigated. New routes will be surveyed and routed in such a manner as to avoid important wildlife habitats such as old growth, riparian, willow, aspen, and whitebark pine, therefore, there will be minor to no effect to rare habitats.

**2. Fisheries.** Concerns with the road and trail projects and their potential effects on fisheries are those that could result from impacts to stream channel form and function, particularly in the form of changes in fine sediment delivery (EA, page 3-21). In addition, construction activities potentially could have direct effects to individual aquatic biota. The project area encompasses portions of the Madison, Gallatin, Yellowstone, Boulder and Shields River drainages, which, on the GNF, contain over 1,700 miles of fishable streams and over 700 high mountain lakes and reservoirs. These rivers, lakes and their tributaries support several internationally known "blue ribbon" trout fisheries, as well as populations of important endemic fish and amphibians.

Based on the analysis disclosed on pages 3-20 through 3-26 of the EA, I have concluded that on the whole, the proposed action will not have negative effects to aquatic biota and their habitat. In fact, implementation of this action would be beneficial over no action because modifications will be made to stream crossings to improve stream channel form and function, and to allow for aquatic organism passage. Road restoration (decommissioning) work and other mitigation will also reduce overall sediment delivery to pre-treatment levels. While there could be some direct mortality to aquatic organisms during construction or remediation of stream crossings, it is unlikely, and would not have population level effects.

One work area, Buck Ridge, is part of a travel planning area (TPA) which exceeds Travel Plan aquatic standards/guidelines for sediment delivery (Travel Plan Standard E-4; Story 2008). This work area contains a conservation population of westslope cutthroat trout. In the Buck Ridge TPA, the majority of sediment delivery is the result of anthropogenic activities outside of GNF

lands (Story 2008). Therefore trail improvements as proposed for this work area would not comply with Travel Plan aquatic standards/guidelines for sediment delivery. The completion of the Upper Gallatin River Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) analysis by Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), which will determine sediment guidelines and controls in this watershed (Story 2008), may result in the ability to proceed with these trail projects. My decision is to defer the construction of the new ATV trail until completion of the Upper Gallatin Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) plan by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

**3. General Wildlife.** In terms of travel management, wildlife can be affected primarily through displacement due to uses of the road and trail system. This issue was addressed and considered in the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan FEIS (2006). Therefore, concerns over the work to be done now on facilities are focused on displacement that may occur during the construction activity.

Based on the analysis disclosed on pages 3-27 through 3-44 of the EA, I have concluded the potential negative consequences to wildlife from construction activity is not significant and that following through with implementation of the Travel Plan (10/2006) is superior to the alternative of doing nothing (no action). The increased noise that is associated with the construction activity will cause a temporary and minor displacement of some species away from the area where work is occurring, but when the construction work is completed, wildlife will return to the area used prior to construction. Because the work is spread over 5 years, and there are few routes located in close proximity to one another, the implementation of the road and trail projects will tend to have fairly minor and temporary displacement effects on general wildlife species, and there will be habitat to which they can be temporarily displaced. The mitigation measures in place in my decision (pages 24 through 28) will also reduce or avoid impacts to wildlife.

**4. Grizzly Bear.** The grizzly bear is currently listed by the Regional Forester as a sensitive species in the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA). It was removed from listing as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 2007. The Gallatin Forest Travel Management Plan FEIS (2006) contains a thorough description of the effects of various types of human access and travel (motorized and non-motorized) on the grizzly bear. Similar to the “general wildlife” issue above, the impacts that are of concern with the road and trail projects are those that create more noise and displacement than the current use of the routes.

There is considerable higher level direction that provides standards and guidance for management activities that are designed to minimize any effects to the grizzly bear. The grizzly bear in the Greater Yellowstone Area, after delisting, is now managed under the Grizzly Bear Amendment 27 (2007) and State Management Plans. The Gallatin Forest Travel Management Plan (2006) also contains direction to conserve the bear. There is still some management direction in the Gallatin Forest Plan, however, Appendices G and H and of the Forest Plan and Amendment 19 to the Forest Plan were replaced by the 2007 Amendment. As a sensitive species, there is direction from the Regional Forester (FSM 2670) regarding preparation of a Biological Evaluation and determinations for actions impacting sensitive species. For more information see pages 3-48 through 3-52 of the EA. The road and trail projects associated with my decision comply with all applicable direction (EA, page 3-75).



Overall, based on the discussion on pages 3-45 through 3-75 of the EA, I've concluded that implementation of my decision is highly beneficial to wildlife, including grizzly bears, when compared to what would exist without Travel Plan implementation. For the grizzly bear, full Travel Plan implementation increases overall security habitat and reduces Open Motorized Access Route Density (OMARD) and Total Motorized Access Route Density (TMARD), and will have a major beneficial effect in a number of bear subunits. Also, following the Application rules presented in the Amendment 27, and included in my decision, will assure that construction activity will have only minor and temporary impacts to grizzly bears

**5. Invasive Weeds.** The ground disturbance associated with the road and trail projects, as with most Forest Service activities, has the potential to increase the spread of invasive weeds on the Forest. Control of noxious weeds is required by the *State of Montana County Noxious Weed Management Act*, by *The Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974*, and by *Executive Order 13112, Invasive Species, February 3, 1999*. In addition, the Gallatin Forest Plan (page II-28) directs the Forest to "(i)mplement an integrated weed control program ---- to confine present infestations and prevent establishing new areas of noxious weeds. The 2008 GNF invasive weed inventory has mapped 19,237 acres of established weeds, and these are mostly found along roads and trails.

My decision includes mitigation measures that are designed to identify existing weed patches and then incorporates activities that will minimize the spread of the weeds (avoidances, treat existing weeds, plant disturbed sites with grass seed, clean equipment, etc.) (see pages 24 through 28). My selected alternative will increase weed control effort on project roads by implementing a weed survey, by increasing weed treatment efforts prior to treatment of road surface, and by increasing native grass cover on project roads. Post-activity monitoring is also prescribed. The battle against invasive weeds will continue well into the future on the Gallatin National Forest, but based on the discussion on pages 3-77 through 3-80 of the EA, I have concluded that, with my included mitigation, the risk of weed spread from these road and trail projects will be minimal.

**6. Lynx.** The Canada lynx was listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act in March 2000. Lynx have been documented, historically and currently, throughout the Rocky Mountains of Montana from the Canadian border through the Yellowstone area. Direction for evaluating federal actions relative to lynx habitat is provided in the Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction Record of Decision and subsequent Forest Plan Amendments (NRLA) (USDA 2007). Lynx was analyzed as a significant issue in the Gallatin Travel Management Plan FEIS (2006). A determination of "may affect, not likely to adversely affect" was given for lynx because the intent of the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy (LCAS), the management direction prior to the NRLA (USDA 2007), had been met with that decision. The concerns now with the road and trail projects would be modification of habitat through the creation of transportation corridors and additional disturbance (displacement) impacts that could occur when forest roads or trails are constructed or reconstructed.

After reviewing pages 3-81 through 3-92 of the EA and the Biological Assessment (Feigley, 3/2009) I have concluded that my decision would not adversely affect the threatened Canada lynx. Denning habitat is a not limiting factor for lynx. Direct loss of habitat due to the presence of road and trail corridors, and trailhead parking areas is minimal (0.6% loss). The potential threat to lynx populations from high traffic volume on roads that bisect suitable lynx habitat and associated suburban developments is low, and indirect disturbance effects would be short-term

and temporary. In the Biological Assessment, Forest Service biologist Rachel Feigley determined that my selected alternative is “not likely to adversely affect” the Canada Lynx. In their letter of March 26, 2009, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with this determination.

**7. Migratory Birds.** Migratory bird species are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (16 USC 703-711). A January 2001 Executive Order requires agencies to ensure that environmental analyses evaluate the effects of federal actions and agency plans on migratory birds, with emphasis on species of concern. The effects of changes in human use levels and distribution associated with the Travel were addressed in the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan FEIS (2006: Chapter 3, pp. 396-419). The potential effects of concern with the road and trail projects are habitat alteration resulting from facility construction, maintenance, and/or restoration, plus disturbance due to noise, equipment and human presence associated with implementation projects.

Based on the discussion on pages 3-92 through 3-98 of the EA, I have concluded that there would be some impacts to migratory birds associated with habitat modification and disturbance from my decision. However, many of the proposed new routes provide loop connectors for existing routes, and some have been established as “user-built” routes for a while now, so disturbance from recreational use may already be having effects in some areas. I also believe that the long term ecological benefits to be gained from water quality and vegetative cover improvements associated with road restoration and stabilization projects would outweigh short term disturbance effects caused by construction and reconstruction of new and existing routes and trailhead parking facilities.

**8. Roadless.** My decision includes several small projects that will construct ATV or snowmobile trails within inventoried roadless areas. The effects of motorized use of these routes (primarily effects on opportunities for solitude) were addressed in the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan FEIS (2006) and were considered in making the Travel Plan decision. The effects of concern with my decision here would be the perception of a loss of apparent naturalness where cut or fill slopes of specific trails become more evident and the temporary effects to opportunities for solitude during construction activities.

It must be remembered that nothing in current policy or regulation prohibits motorized use or construction of motorized trails within inventoried roadless areas. There are essentially no additional effects from these projects to roadless which were not disclosed and considered in making the Travel Plan decision. The effects to apparent naturalness from cut and fill slopes are typically short term effects which lessen within 5-10 years of construction as vegetation is re-established and cut or fill slopes soften. Construction activities will be of short-duration, typically less than one year, and therefore loss of opportunities for solitude would only be temporary. Based on the discussion on pages 3-99 through 3-104 of the EA, I have concluded that the impacts to roadless character would be minor and insignificant. None of the trail construction or reconstruction work included in my decision would preclude future designation of any of these areas as wilderness, nor are they in conflict with the Roadless Final Rule of 2001.

**9. Water Quality.** Watershed condition, stream habitat characteristics, stream channel and form, and effects on watershed conditions were addressed in the Gallatin National Forest Travel Plan FEIS (2006) and were considered in the Travel Plan decision. The concerns with road and

trail projects would be the potential sediment changes occurring with the ground disturbing work to the facilities.

Trail construction can result in short term sediment increases but with much narrower surface prisms and less sediment per mile of trail than for road construction as described in the Travel Plan FEIS 3-538 and 3-539. Cross country trail clearing and marking, and trail reconstruction have very little sediment effects. Trail maintenance, road resurfacing, and trail reconstruction generally reduce sediment yields. The parking facility construction associated with the roads and trail improvements are generally located in areas which are not directly connected as sediment source areas to streams.

During initial road restoration treatments, such as ripping, culvert removal, and especially recontouring, a small and localized sediment increase could occur. However, my adopted mitigation includes the construction of erosion ditches (water bars), slashing, and ripping of roads surfaces as needed to improve water infiltration. These measures are expected to quickly reduce sediment to below pre-treatment levels. In addition, as vegetation reestablishes itself (from reseeding of native grasses and the natural reestablishment of grass, forbs, and shrubs) sediment levels would be reduced to 0-5 percent of untreated and native surfaced roads.

Therefore, based on the discussion contained on pages 3-105 through 3-114, I have concluded that implementation of my decision will reduce sediment levels, primarily due to road restoration and decommissioning, and thus result in overall benefits to water quality.

**10. Wolverine.** The wolverine is classified as a Forest Service sensitive species. Sensitive species are those identified by the Regional Forester for which population viability is of concern. Concerns over the road and trail projects would be altering habitat conditions, which can alter wolverine use patterns over the short and long term, and displacement from suitable habitat due to noise and disturbance associated with human presence and the use of equipment during construction activities. The effects of changes in human use levels and distribution associated with the Travel Plan were addressed in the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan FEIS (2006: Chapter 3, pp. 598-635) and were considered in that decision.

Based on the discussion on pages 3-115 through 3-120 of the EA, I have determined that since the majority of Travel Plan implementation activities would occur at lower elevations than wolverines are expected to occur during summer/fall months, would not overlap with the winter wolverine reproductive season, and would be of relatively short duration in any one location, my decision would have very minimal disturbance impacts on wolverines across the Gallatin Forest landscape. While there would be some minor habitat alterations, primarily at lower elevations, involving removal of security cover, resulting from work required to create new routes or improve existing facilities, road closures and subsequent vegetation recovery would have some potential benefits for wolverines, by providing more security cover in areas that might be used as travel routes during dispersal or other movement patterns. I believe that long term ecological benefits to be gained from water quality and security cover improvements associated with road restoration and stabilization projects would outweigh short term effects to wolverines caused by construction and reconstruction of new and existing routes.

**11. Rare Plants.** Rare plants include threatened, endangered, or sensitive plants. "Sensitive plants" are those plant species identified by a regional forester for which population viability is a

concern, as evidenced by: a.) significant current or predicted downward trends in population numbers or density, or b.) significant current or predicted downward trends in habitat capability that would reduce a species' existing distribution (FSM 2670). The main concern is with direct loss of rare plant habitat from road and trail construction and reconstruction activities (i.e. new ground disturbance). There is also the potential indirect effect of facilitating invasion of an area where there is a rare plant species with a weed species that could then dominate the site. I addressed the weeds issue earlier in this Decision Notice.

I have included mitigation in my decision that specifies that all projects will be surveyed prior to construction for rare plants/habitats and appropriate mitigation (e.g. avoidance) will be applied if sensitive plants are found. This allows impact to sensitive plants to be avoided such that there will be no direct or indirect impact to sensitive plant populations. Some individual plants could be impacted if they are not discovered on the survey or if avoidance is not possible but I've concluded that such occurrence would be uncommon and therefore would not jeopardize rare plant populations. Based on the discussion on pages 3-121 through 3-125 of the EA, I have determined that there would be no significant impacts on rare plant species with implementation of my decision.

**12. Sensitive Wildlife.** The Forest Service Northern Region has identified Sensitive Species of vertebrates and plants for which population viability may be a concern, as evidenced by: 1) Significant current or predicted downward trends in population numbers or density, 2) Significant current or predicted downward trends in habitat capability, which may reduce a species' existing distribution (FSM 2670.5.19). All Forest Service planned, funded, executed or permitted programs and activities are to be reviewed for possible effects on sensitive species (FSM 2672.4). The concern is over disturbance during construction activities and also direct loss of habitat due to removal of vegetation where needed to create a transportation corridor to specified clearing widths.

Determinations have been made for all sensitive species for the potential effects caused by road and trail projects as described in the EA (pages 3-126 through 3-13). A determination of "may impact individuals or habitat, but will not likely contribute to a trend towards federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species" was made for all species except the flammulated owl, trumpeter swan, harlequin duck, and Townsend's big-eared bat which all had a determination of "no impact". In addition, my decision includes a number of standard operating procedures and mitigation measures that will serve to minimize disturbance related impacts (see pages 24 through 28).

**13. Soils.** The potential effects of my decision on soils was addressed in the report "Travel Plan Implementation 2009 Soils Initial Impact Review" (Shovic, 8/12/08). The analysis also incorporates by reference the soils analysis disclosed in the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan FEIS (Travel Plan FEIS, pages 3-519 to 3-534). I've concluded from these analyses that there would be minor effects to soils from the road and trail projects. Proposals for reconstruction, maintenance and stabilization of roads and trails will occur on existing routes and are designed in part to protect the soil resource. New trail construction will result in new ground disturbance but the majority of this work will occur in areas with low soil sensitivity (Shovic Report, page 6). There are three trails in locations where there are sensitive soils in the vicinity. These are as follows:

**ATV connector trail in Fairy Lake Area**

One mile of construction in a map unit containing wet areas and unstable, erosive soils (71-1A). Mitigation has been included in my decision (page 9) to route this trail to avoid wet and unstable areas within this map unit.

**Upper Johnson Canyon ATV loop in Johnson Canyon Area**

One-half mile of construction in a map unit containing wet areas (64-2C). Mitigation has been included in my decision (page 10) to route this trail to avoid wet areas within this map unit.

**Bear Lakes ATV trail in Trail Creek Bear Canyon Area**

One-half mile of construction in a map unit containing wet areas and unstable, erosive soils (71-1A). Mitigation has been included in my decision (page 18) to route this trail to avoid wet and unstable areas within this map unit.

Avoidance of sensitive soils in trail location, as prescribed in my decision, eliminates concerns over unacceptable adverse soils impacts on these new trails.

**D. Alternatives Studied In Detail**

Two alternatives were analyzed in the EA and considered in making my decision; Alternative 1 (the proposed action) and Alternative 2 (no action). These two alternatives were determined to be adequate because; (a) the significance of environmental issues could be minimized through application of mitigation and design features to the proposed action, and (b) the effects of other alternatives (i.e. combinations of the proposed action and no action alternatives) could be adequately understood through comparison of the Proposed Action and No Action Alternatives.

I did not select the “no action” alternative because it would not provide the roads, trails, and trailhead/parking facilities that would safely accommodate the uses designated by the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan. And, I’ve concluded that the proposed action provides for adequate resource protection and results in no significant adverse environmental effects. In fact, the no action alternative would likely result in greater adverse environmental effects due to the lack of adequate facilities to accommodate public access and travel.

**VI. Public Involvement****A. Overview of the Public Involvement Process**

Proposed road and trail improvement projects have appeared on the Gallatin National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions since January of 2008. A public opportunity was provided on the road and trail proposals from June 11<sup>th</sup> through July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008. An extension was granted to those requesting it through August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008. Seventeen comment letters and emails were received. Forest Service responses to comments received are included in Appendix A of the EA.

The Environmental Assessment (EA) was made available for public comment beginning with the publication of legal notice in the Bozeman Daily Chronicle on February 20, 2009. Copies of the EA were sent to those who commented during the earlier (scoping) comment period. Comments were due on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009. One letter was received. Forest Service responses to this comment letter are attached to this Decision Notice (Appendix B).

## **B. Consideration of Public and Other Agency Comments**

In terms of environmental issues to be considered in the analysis and decision public comments indicated concerns over sedimentation (water quality), fish habitat (primarily stream crossings), rare plants, and general wildlife. All of these issues were studied in detail within the EA and the potential effects were considered by me in making this decision.

There were also comments with specific suggestions about work to be done on specific routes. Many of these suggestions will be incorporated during implementation. See Appendix A of the EA for our responses to these comments and our responses to comments made on the EA which is attached to this Decision Notice.

There were a number of other comments about process, and about earlier decisions made through the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan (2006). See Appendix A of the EA for our responses to these comments.

## **VII. Finding of No Significant Impact**

I have reviewed the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the proposed activities documented in the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Gallatin National Forest Road and Trail Improvement Projects and determined that these actions will not have significant impacts on the quality of the human environment. Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. The implementing regulations for NEPA at 40 CFR 1508.27 provide criteria for determining the significance of effects. This provision requires consideration of both the context and intensity of predicted effects in determining significance. I based my finding on the following:

(a) **Context.** I have determined that the appropriate context for weighing the significance of impacts was within the general vicinity of the project area which is the Gallatin National Forest as a whole. I came to this conclusion because: (1) My decision includes activities that will occur in locations throughout the Forest. And (2) Impacts from work to roads, trails and trailhead facilities do not extend beyond the local level. Expanding the scope to set context at the regional or national level would only tend to water down potential impacts.

(b) **Intensity.** In accordance with 40 CFR 1508.27(b) my determination that the severity of impacts were not significant was based on consideration of the following 10 factors:

### *1. Beneficial and Adverse Impacts.*

Based on the predicted impacts of the alternatives discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 of the EA, I have determined that both the beneficial and adverse impacts of the action will not be significant. As discussed earlier in this Decision Notice, I considered 12 issues in making my decision and concluded that the scope and magnitude of effects associated with these issues were limited and acceptable.

2. *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.*

There will be no significant effects on public health and safety. I base this conclusion on the analysis disclosed in the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan FEIS (Travel Plan FEIS, pages 4-20 to 4-23). The general conclusion of the Travel Plan FEIS was that there are three factors that influence safety of the road and trail system: the condition of the facilities, the mixture of use on a particular facility, and user behavior. The decision for the Travel Plan considered and addressed the latter two factors. Providing facilities (e.g. roads and trails) that will safely accommodate uses designated by the Travel Plan is part of the purpose of this action (Alternative 1). In other words, any safety issues with included routes will be corrected through implementation of my decision. Also, see the EA page 3-139.

3. *Unique characteristics of the geographic area.*

There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area. There are no prime farmlands, prime rangelands, or prime forest lands within the project area. While Gallatin National Forest lands are a valued asset there would be no one-of-a-kind (unique) characteristics affected by my decision. Chapter 3 of the EA addresses the potential environmental consequences of the work to be done to the Forest transportation network. In general, it can be concluded that any potential adverse effects can be avoided through the standard operating procedures and mitigation I've included in my decision.

4. *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

The effects on the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial. There is no scientific controversy over the impacts of the project (see Appendix A of the EA – Response to Comments Received During Scoping). No comments were received on the EA that indicated that the impacts disclosed were a subject of disagreement.

5. *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

We have considerable experience with the types of actions to be implemented with my decision. Construction, reconstruction, maintenance and restoration of roads, trails, and trailhead facilities have been done on the Gallatin National Forest for decades. Under the Forest Service Handbook at FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30, most of the projects fit into categories of actions that have routinely been found not to have significant effects on the human environment and therefore do not require preparation of an EA or an EIS. In addition, the analysis shows that the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (see EA, Chapter 3).

6. *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

The action does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects. Construction, reconstruction, maintenance and restoration of roads, trails, and trailhead

facilities are independent of other management activities that may occur on the Gallatin National Forest. The objectives are achieved upon completion of each of the included projects and they do not trigger a need for future action.

7. *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

The scope of analysis addressed in the EA includes a discussion of all connected and other actions that may have additive effects with the direct and indirect effects of the proposed action and alternatives. Cumulative effects of all past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions are discussed as a separate section for each of the issues discussed in Chapter 3 of the EA. Based on these discussions I have concluded that there would be no significant cumulative impacts.

8. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The potential effects of the proposed action (now my decision) on cultural resources was addressed in the report "Cultural Resources – Initial Specialist Report – Travel Plan Implementation" (Allen, 7/14/08). The analysis also incorporates by reference the cultural resource analysis disclosed in the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan FEIS (Travel Plan FEIS, pages 3-93 to 3-101). The general conclusions of these analyses are that there would be no effect, no effect given project design mitigation (EA, page 2-22) or no effect but monitoring will be conducted to assess potential unanticipated indirect effects from the proposed action (EA, page 2-24). Unanticipated indirect effects would include collection, or other damage to sites from users of routes within close proximity to those sites.

9. *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.*

The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973. The only listed species currently that may occupy the Gallatin National Forest is the Canada lynx. After reviewing pages 3-81 through 3-92 of the EA and the Biological Assessment (Feigley, 3/2009) I have concluded that my decision would not adversely affect the threatened Canada lynx. Denning habitat is a not limiting factor for lynx. Direct loss of habitat due to the presence of road and trail corridors, and trailhead parking areas is minimal (0.6% loss). The potential threat to lynx populations from high traffic volume on roads that bisect suitable lynx habitat and associated suburban developments is low, and indirect disturbance effects would be short-term and temporary. In the Biological Assessment, Forest Service biologist Rachel Feigley determined that my selected alternative is "not likely to adversely affect" the Canada Lynx. In their letter of March 26, 2009, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with this determination.



10. *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered and addressed as a separate section for each of the issues discussed in Chapter 3 of the EA and, with the mitigation included in my decision, the road and trail projects were determined to be compliant with all of these requirements. The action is also consistent with the Gallatin National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1987) as amended, and the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan (2006) (See EA, Chapter 3).

### **VIII. Findings Required by Other Laws, Regulations, and Policies**

As stated in the previous paragraph, applicable laws and regulations were considered and addressed as a separate section for each of the issues discussed in Chapter 3 of the EA and, with the mitigation included in my decision, the road and trail projects were determined to be compliant with all of these requirements. The action is also consistent with the Gallatin National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1987) as amended, and the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan (2006) (See EA, Chapter 3).

### **IX. Implementation**

The projects included in my decision are scheduled to be implemented over a 5-year period beginning in the summer of 2009. If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

### **X. Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities**

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. Only individuals or organizations that submitted substantive comments during the comment period may appeal. A written appeal must be submitted within 45 days following the publication date of the legal notice of this decision in the Bozeman Chronicle, Bozeman, Montana. It is the responsibility of the appellant to ensure their appeal is received in a timely manner. The publication date of the legal notice of the decision in the newspaper of record is the *exclusive* means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Appellants should not rely on date or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Paper appeals must be submitted to: USDA Forest Service, Northern Region, ATTN: Appeal Deciding Officer, P.O. Box 7669, Missoula, MT 59807; or USDA Forest Service, Northern Region, ATTN: Appeal Deciding Officer, 200 East Broadway, Missoula, MT 59802. Office hours: 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Fax (406) 329- 3411.

Electronic appeals must be submitted to: <appeals-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us>. In electronic appeals, the subject line should contain the name of the project being appealed. An automated response will confirm your electronic appeal has been received. Electronic appeals must be submitted in MS Word, Word Perfect, or Rich Text Format (RTF).

It is the appellant's responsibility to provide sufficient project- or activity-specific evidence and rationale, focusing on the decision, to show why the decision should be reversed. The appeal must be filed with the Appeal Deciding Officer in writing. At a minimum, the appeal must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14, and include the following information: The appellant's name and address, with a telephone number, if available; A signature, or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for electronic mail may be filed with the appeal); When multiple names are listed on an appeal, identification of the lead appellant and verification of the identity of the lead appellant upon request; The name of the project or activity for which the decision was made, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the date of the decision; The regulation under which the appeal is being filed, when there is an option to appeal under either 36 CFR 215 or 36 CFR 251, subpart C; Any specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks and rationale for those changes; Any portion(s) of the decision with which the appellant disagrees, and explanation for the disagreement; Why the appellant believes the Responsible Official's decision failed to consider the substantive comments; and, How the appellant believes the decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy.

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 days following the date of appeal disposition.

## **XII. Contact Person**

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Steve Christiansen at the Gallatin National Forest Supervisors Office, P.O. Box 130, Bozeman, MT 59771, (406) 587-6701.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
MARY C. ERICKSON  
Forest Supervisor  
Gallatin National Forest

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

# **Appendix B**

## **Gallatin National Forest**

### **Road/Trail Improvement Projects**

### **Forest Service Responses to Comments Received**

### **On the**

### **Environmental Assessment**

The Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Gallatin National Forest Road/Trail Improvement Projects was made available for public comment beginning with the publication of legal notice in the Bozeman Daily Chronicle on February 20, 2009. Copies of the EA were sent to those who commented during the earlier (scoping) comment period. Comments were due on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009. One letter was received. Forest Service responses to this comment letter are provided below.

1. **Suce Creek Area.** “The only potential concern with this action is that the stream crossing be designed to keep the stream banks from being impacted and to keep sediment from being washed into the stream in the spring.”

#### **Forest Service Response**

In general, trail bridges on the Gallatin National Forest (GNF) are designed to span a stream's banks plus three feet, which sets the bridge footings back from streambanks and eliminates impacts to them. Also, construction is generally timed to occur in summer after stream-flows recede. The GNF will be securing a Streambed Protection Act (SPA 124) permit from the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) biologist responsible for the area in which this action will occur, and therefore will work with that biologist to be sure these concerns are addressed in project design and implementation.

2. **Fairy Lake Area.** “For this action the ATV bridge should span Fairy Creek and be designed so that it does not become a sediment source. The same is true of the motorcycle bridge that will cross Middle Fork Brackett Creek.”

#### **Forest Service Response**

In general, trail bridges on the Gallatin National Forest (GNF) are designed to span a stream's banks plus three feet, which sets the bridge footings back from streambanks and eliminates impacts to them. Also, construction is generally timed to occur in summer after stream-flows recede and is designed to drain road and trail surfaces so that sediment transport is limited to the degree possible and so that it is filtered by vegetation to reduce sediment delivery to streams. The GNF will be securing a Streambed Protection Act (SPA 124) permit from the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) biologist responsible for the area in which this action will occur, and therefore will work with that biologist to be sure these concerns are addressed in project design and implementation.

**3. Porcupine Area.** “Any new crossings related to the relocation of the trail should not negatively impact the streambed and/or banks and should not be a sediment source. The preferred alternative is a bridge that spans the stream and its immediate banks. Porcupine and North Fork Elk Creek have known populations of pure Yellowstone Cutthroat trout.”

#### **Forest Service Response**

The stream crossing in this case is expected to be a bridge; in general, trail bridges on the Gallatin National Forest (GNF) are designed to span a stream's banks plus three feet, which sets the bridge footings back from streambanks and eliminates impacts to them. Also, construction is generally timed to occur in summer after stream-flows recede and is designed to drain road and trail surfaces so that sediment transport is limited to the degree possible and so that it is filtered by vegetation to reduce sediment delivery to streams. The GNF will be securing a Streambed Protection Act (SPA 124) permit from the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) biologist responsible for the area in which this action will occur, and therefore will work with that biologist to be sure these concerns are addressed in project design and implementation.

**4. Shields River Area.** “The crossing on American Fork Creek should not negatively impact the streambed and/or banks and should not be a sediment source. The preferred alternative is a bridge that spans the stream and its immediate banks.

Road surface work should not deposit fill directly into or create a sediment source for any flowing water.”

#### **Forest Service Response**

In general, trail bridges on the Gallatin National Forest (GNF) are designed to span a stream's banks plus three feet, which sets the bridge footings back from streambanks and eliminates impacts to them. Also, construction is generally timed to occur in summer after stream-flows recede and is designed to drain road and trail surfaces so that sediment transport is limited to the degree possible and so that it is filtered by vegetation to reduce sediment delivery to streams. The GNF will be securing a Streambed Protection Act (SPA 124) permit from the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) biologist responsible for the area in which this action will occur, and therefore will work with that biologist to be sure these concerns are addressed in project design and implementation. Finally, Standard E-7 of the GNF Travel Management Plan Decision precludes sidecasting of fill material into streams, and thus project work will take this into consideration during project design and implementation.

**5. Smith Creek Area.** “With the removal of the road crossing, the streambed and stream banks should be restored to a natural state. This would include proper stream type, width, depth, and slope.”

#### **Forest Service Response**

When stream crossing are removed, the project is designed to ensure proper stream channel dimensions are restored. The GNF will be securing a Streambed Protection Act (SPA 124) permit from the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) biologist responsible for the area in

which this action will occur, and therefore will work with that biologist to be sure these concerns are addressed in project design and implementation.

**6. Rock/Tom Miner Area.** "The trail crossing on Rock Creek should not negatively impact the streambed and/or banks and should not be a sediment source. The preferred alternative is a bridge that spans the stream and its immediate banks.

With the removal of the road crossing on Soldier Creek, the streambed and stream banks should be restored to a natural state. This would include proper stream type, width, depth, and slope."

### **Forest Service Response**

The stream crossing in this case is expected to be a bridge; in general, trail bridges on the Gallatin National Forest (GNF) are designed to span a stream's banks plus three feet, which sets the bridge footings back from streambanks and eliminates impacts to them. Also, construction is generally timed to occur in summer after stream-flows recede and is designed to drain road and trail surfaces so that sediment transport is limited to the degree possible and so that it is filtered by vegetation to reduce sediment delivery to streams. When stream crossing are removed, the project is designed to ensure stream channel dimensions are restored. The GNF will be securing a Streambed Protection Act (SPA 124) permit from the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) biologist responsible for the area in which this action will occur, and therefore will work with that biologist to be sure these concerns are addressed in project design and implementation.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotope, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 14th and Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). The USDA Forest Service is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

