



Proposal Name

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REVIEW

PROPOSAL INFORMATION

Proposal Name: Lake Como South Trails

Proposal Date: 12/12/2019

Proponent Name: Mark Smith

Line Officer: Eric Winthers

District: Darby/Sula Ranger District

County (ies): Ravalli

Anticipated Implementation: June 6, 2020

Signing Authority: District Ranger

PALS Tracking #: 57299

Project File: <https://usfs.app.box.com/folder/89173736600>

General Location: Lake Como Recreation Area

Applicable Management Areas: 2, 3a, 3c

Legal Description: T3N, R21W, Sec 5, 6, and 7

Elevation Range: 4,400' to 5,500'

Watersheds: Bunkhouse Creek

Is cost recovery anticipated? No

APPLICABLE CATEGORY/IES

This proposal is categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS because it fits the following FSH 1909.15 36 CFR 220.6(e) #(1), pending extraordinary circumstance determinations:

Applicable Category: 36 CFR 220.6(e) (1) (DM Required)

This category is applicable for this project because the project includes construction of trails.



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PROPOSAL

The Bitterroot National Forest is proposing to create a network of trails benefiting all non-motorized user groups and to help disperse use to the greater Lake Como Recreation Management Area. These trails are located between Lake Como and Tin Cup Creek, near Darby, MT. Construction would begin in June of 2020.

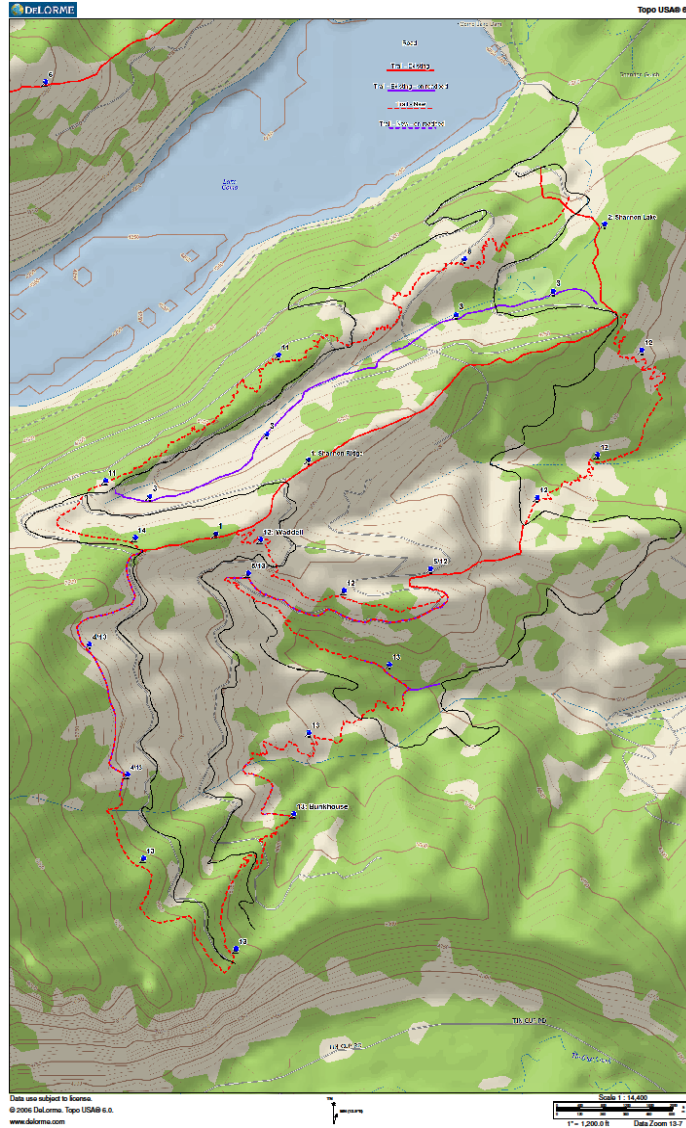
The proposed trail system will provide opportunities that are well-suited for beginning and intermediate recreationalists. The network will be built from a combination of existing single-track trails (2.8 miles), existing trails routes on road beds (4.5 miles), and proposed new single-track construction (approximately 8.0 miles).

The new trails will have a Designed Use for: Bicycle as a Trail Class 3; Design Tread Width: 24", Design Grade: 10% with short pitches of 15%, and a Design Clearing: Height of 8' and width of 6'.



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MAP(S)





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PROPOSAL SCREENING

REGULATORY CONSIDERATIONS

Given the nature of the proposal, the Responsible Official is requesting documentation to demonstrate compliance with the following regulatory considerations in addition to NEPA:

NFMA/Land Management Plan

Special Management Areas:

ESA

Wilderness

NHPA

Roadless

Tribal Consultation

Wild & Scenic River Corridor

CAA

Recommended Wilderness

CWA

Research Natural Areas

Pertinent Executive Orders

National Scenic & Historic Trails

National Recreation Areas

AGENCIES, ORGANIZATIONS & PERSONS TO BE CONTACTED

In 2017, the Bitterroot National Forest hosted three open houses for the public to provide input on the current and future opportunities within the Lake Como Recreation Area. Public comments were supportive of the non-motorized trails proposals. The Lake Como Master Plan was then updated to reflect the public input and to help guide the management of the area to provide for a safe, enjoyable recreation experience while protecting the resources. This Lake Como South trails project was included in the Master Plan as a project to implement.

On December 12, 2019, the project was added to the Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA).

A press release was sent out on December 19, 2019 describing the project and asking for public comment. Twelve comments were received from the public; ten comments were in support and two comments had some concerns regarding the project.

The concerns included:

1. Increased disturbance to wildlife - The commenters recognize that the project area is already heavily roaded and contains existing bike trails. Current motorized and non-motorized use on these existing roads and trails creates some level of disturbance to wildlife species in the area. Additional trails and additional use will likely increase disturbance to local wildlife populations to some extent, which the Forest acknowledged in the Wildlife BE/BA and the Terrestrial BA. Despite the current level of disturbance, the project area still provides habitat for many wildlife species that continue to use the area.



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There is increased demand for non-motorized recreational opportunities, and responding to that demand in an area that is already impacted by existing recreational use will likely have fewer overall disturbance impacts to wildlife populations than constructing trails in areas that currently lack trail access and are relatively undisturbed. The proposed location of many of the new trails in close proximity to roads or trails already open to year-round or seasonal motorized or non-motorized use limits the expansion of the disturbance footprint into areas that currently experience little disturbance.

2. Seasonal road closures – The closure signs at some gates may list elk calving as one reason for the closure. However, elk calving is no longer listed as a rationale for seasonal closures on BNF maps. The current management purposes listed for seasonal closures on Forest maps include “Protect wildlife” and/or “Provide wildlife security during hunting season”, among several other non-wildlife related reasons.

3. New trail construction crossing streams - Impacts to water quality from trail construction and use can be minimized through trail location and design features such as bridges, culverts or puncheons. Locate trails outside of riparian areas where possible. Harden trail features that cross streams, wet areas or wetlands to reduce erosion and sediment contribution and maintain trail function, limiting maintenance needs. Waterbar longer grades to reduce erosion, seed and fertilize larger areas of soil disturbance to reduce erosion, weed establishment. Apply appropriate trail best management practices as part of project design.

This project was also presented to the Ravalli County Collaborative on January 13, 2020 and February 10, 2020 who offered their support.



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RESOURCE PARTICIPATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS REVIEW

The Line Officer/Responsible Official has requested the following resource areas to review the proposal to determine compliance with the regulatory considerations.

Table 1: Documentation of Review Completion

Resource	Review Complete	Specialist's Initial Input on Proposal
Botany	1/13/2020 Robin Taylor Davenport	Field Visit: Field visit needed post-decision but pre-implementation and environmental review can be completed. Estimated Total # of Days to Complete Work: <2 Is consultation with a regulatory agency anticipated? YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unsure <input type="checkbox"/>
Cultural/Heritage	12/20/2019 Matt Werle	Field Visit: Field visit needed post-decision but pre-implementation and environmental review can be completed. Estimated Total # of Days to Complete Work: 2-5 Consultation anticipated for: SHPO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tribal <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/>
Engineering	10/16/2019 Jake Pintok	Field Visit: No field visit needed. Estimated Total # of Days to Complete Work: 0
Fisheries	1/10/2020 Mary Jo Christianson	Field Visit: No field visit needed. Estimated Total # of Days to Complete Work: <2 Is consultation with a regulatory agency anticipated? YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unsure <input type="checkbox"/>
Fuels	10/16/2019 David Fox	Field Visit: No field visit needed. Estimated Total # of Days to Complete Work: 0
Hydro	1/10/2020 Marilyn Wilde	Field Visit: No field visit needed. Estimated Total # of Days to Complete Work: <2
Lands/Special Uses	10/16/2019 KristinTroop	Field Visit: No field visit needed. Estimated Total # of Days to Complete Work: 0
Minerals	Click here to enter a date. Specialist's Name	Field Visit: Choose an item. Estimated Total # of Days to Complete Work: Choose an item.
Range	10/16/2019 Diane Bessler Hackett	Field Visit: No field visit needed. Estimated Total # of Days to Complete Work: <2
Recreation	10/16/2019 Erica Strayer	Field Visit: No field visit needed. Estimated Total # of Days to Complete Work: <2 Are the following needed: MRDG <input type="checkbox"/> Roadless Briefing <input type="checkbox"/> None <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Scenic Resources	1/13/2020 Autumn Ela	Field Visit: No field visit needed. Estimated Total # of Days to Complete Work: <2
Soils	1/10/2020 Cole Mayn	Field Visit: No field visit needed. Estimated Total # of Days to Complete Work: <2
Special Management Areas	Click here to enter a date. Specialist's Name	Field Visit: Choose an item. Estimated Total # of Days to Complete Work: Choose an item.
Silviculture	10/16/2019 Amy Campbell	Field Visit: No field visit needed. Estimated Total # of Days to Complete Work: 0
Wildlife	1/6/2020 David Lockman	Field Visit: No field visit needed. Estimated Total # of Days to Complete Work: <2 Is consultation with a regulatory agency anticipated? YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> Unsure <input type="checkbox"/>



ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS REVIEW

NATIONAL FOREST MANAGEMENT ACT (NFMA) – LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN CONSISTENCY

The pertinent specialist has reviewed the proposal and made the following determinations regarding proposal consistency with applicable Land Management Plan direction, standards and guidelines.

Botany: Consistent

Range: N/A

Cultural/Heritage: Proposal Modification Needed

Recreation: Consistent

Engineering: N/A

Scenic Resources: N/A

Fisheries: Consistent

Soils: Consistent

Fuels: N/A

Silviculture: Consistent

Hydro: Consistent

Special Management Areas: N/A

Lands/Special Uses: N/A

Wildlife: Consistent

Minerals: N/A

Other:

SUPPORTING PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

Table 2: Applicable Project File Documentation to Support NFMA Compliance

Documentation Type	File Name (if applicable/needed)
Specialists Reviews	https://usfs.app.box.com/folder/103412839890



ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

THREATENED, ENDANGERED, PROPOSED AND CANDIDATE SPECIES &/OR CRITICAL HABITAT

The pertinent specialists reviewed the proposal and made the following determinations for threatened, endangered and/or proposed species:

Table 3: TEPC Effect Determinations for ESA

Species/Habitat	Status	Proposed or Designated Critical Habitat Present?	Determination*	Brief Rationale (or refer to other project documentation)
Grizzly Bear	Threatened	Yes	NLAA	None have been designated on the BNF
Canada Lynx	Threatened	Yes	NE	None have been designated on the BNF
Yellow-Billed Cuckoo	Threatened	No	NE	No suitable habitat
Bull Trout			NE	Not Present
Western Pearlshell Mussel			NE	Absent from project area

*NE – No Effect; NLAA – May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect; LAA – May Affect, Likely to Adversely Affect; No Jeopardy - Not Likely to Jeopardize the Continued Existence or Adversely Modify Critical Habitat

SUPPORTING PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

Documentation Type	Location
Fisheries BA	https://usfs.app.box.com/file/616201816301
Wildlife BA	https://usfs.app.box.com/file/616192240083
Heritage	https://usfs.app.box.com/file/616174770598
Wildlife FWS consultation	https://usfs.app.box.com/file/616202156776



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SENSITIVE SPECIES (FSM 2670)

The pertinent specialists reviewed the proposal and made the following determinations for sensitive species:

Table 4: Sensitive Species Impact Determinations

Species	Determination*	Rationale (or refer to other project documentation)
Whitebark Pine	MIIH	Does occur in the project area
Rocky Mountain Paintbrush	MIIH	
Westslope Cuthroat Trout	MIIH	Present in Bunkhouse Creek
	Choose an item.	

NI – No Impact; **MIIH**- May Impact Individuals or Habitat, but Will Not Likely Contribute To A Trend Towards Federal Listing Or Loss Of Viability To The Population Or Species; **WIFV** - Will Impact Individuals or Habitat with A Consequence That the Action May Contribute To A Trend Towards Federal Listing Or Cause A Loss Of Viability To The Population Or Species

SUPPORTING PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

Table 5: Applicable Project File Documentation to Support Agency Sensitive Species Compliance

Documentation Type	File Name (if applicable/needed)
Wildlife BA	https://usfs.app.box.com/file/616192240083
Botany BA	https://usfs.app.box.com/file/616195109025



NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT (NHPA) – SECTION 106 REVIEW

The pertinent specialist has reviewed the proposal and made the following determination regarding Section 106 compliance:

Other - See explanation of other determination in comments section.

COMMENTS

Section 106 consultation is required prior to project implementation but may be completed after the NEPA decision document is completed. The project will be inventoried and all resources located within the APE will be identified, evaluated and a concurrence request will be sent to SHPO and affected Tribes prior to implementation. The project will seek to avoid adverse effects to historic properties.

SUPPORTING PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

Table 6: Applicable Project File Documentation to Support NHPA Compliance

Documentation Type	File Name (if applicable/needed)
Heritage site	https://usfs.app.box.com/file/616210203223
Heritage CE review	https://usfs.app.box.com/file/616192130351

TRIBAL CONSULTATION

Based on the nature of the proposal, the line officer/responsible official made the following determination regarding Tribal Consultation:

Tribal consultation will be completed during the Section 106 consultation process.

COMMENTS

Confederated Salish Kootenai Tribe will be consulted post decision but prior to implementation and trails will avoid impacts to historic properties.

SUPPORTING PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

Table 7: Applicable Project File Documentation to Support Tribal Consultation Compliance

Documentation Type	File Name(s)

CLEAN WATER ACT (CWA)

The pertinent specialist has reviewed the proposal and made the following determination: Mitigation and project design would protect water quality, protect near trail floodplains and wetland and comply with the Clean Water Act.



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State determination and describe any proposal modifications and/or coordination that needs to occur to ensure compliance with CWA

SUPPORTING PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

Table 8: Applicable Project File Documentation to Support CWA Compliance

Documentation Type	File Name(s)



NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (NEPA) – EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCE CONSIDERATIONS

Pertinent specialists have reviewed the proposal and made the following determinations with regards to presence of extraordinary circumstances:

Table 9: Extraordinary Circumstance Determinations

Resources Conditions Considered for Extraordinary Circumstances	Is there a degree of potential effect that raises uncertainty over its significance? Briefly explain. ¹
WILDLIFE Federally listed threatened or endangered species, Designated critical habitat, Forest Service sensitive species	NO, there is no uncertainty Rationale for Yes/No: No Affects to Canada Lynx and their critical habitat because no Canada Lynx has been designated on the BNF. The habitat type for Lynx is secondary. The action would have No Affect to the Yellow-Bellied Cuckoo because there is no suitable habitat for this species in or near the project area. The project would not change the linear open motorized route density. Potential effects of disturbance and displacement of individual transient bears would be unlikely. Design features to reduce the risk of possible human/bear interactions and bear mortalities. Would have negligible effects to typical grizzly bear food sources.
FISHERIES Federally listed threatened or endangered species, Designated critical habitat, Forest Service sensitive species	NO, there is no uncertainty Rationale for Yes/No: Trail -crossings would be required on Waddell and Bunkhouse Creeks. The crossing will consist of hand-built, armored trail fords. Work on Bunkhouse Creek (fishbearing) would not begin until after July 15 to protect spawning/incubating westslope cutthroat trout. Waddell Creek is non-fishbearing.
BOTANY Federally listed threatened or endangered species, Designated critical habitat, Forest Service sensitive species	NO, there is no uncertainty Rationale for Yes/No: In regards to the project area, increased competition is the most concerning impact since it is already a dense mixed conifer forest. Considering all the threats to whitebark pine and its current decline, it is important to note that trail construction and even timber harvest are not activities associated with the decline of the species (USDI Fish and Wildlife Service 2011).
	N/A, not present

¹Be sure to provide resource context for rationale discussions. Is there something unique to this proposal or existing resource conditions that would lead to greater intensity of effects than would typically be anticipated for similar actions?



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Resources Conditions Considered for Extraordinary Circumstances	Is there a degree of potential effect that raises uncertainty over its significance? Briefly explain. ¹
Floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds	Rationale for Yes/No:
Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas	N/A, not present Rationale for Yes/No:
Inventoried roadless areas	N/A, not present Rationale for Yes/No:
Research natural areas	N/A, not present Rationale for Yes/No:
American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites	N/A, not present Rationale for Yes/No:
Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas	YES, there is uncertainty Rationale for Yes/No: A site visit prior to implementation would need to be done to avoid one area of interest.



Proposal Name

DECISION MEMO

Lake Como South Trails
U.S. Forest Service
Darby/Sula Ranger District, Bitterroot National Forest
Ravalli, MT

This decision incorporates all previous information in this document and included in the project file.

DECISION & RATIONALE

I have decided to authorize the activities described above in the [Proposal](#) section, to include any modifications identified during environmental analysis and review of regulatory compliance.

APPLICABLE CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION & FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

The [Proposal Information](#) section above provides rationale for categorically excluding this action from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and for using the identified *category/categories*. The [Environmental Analysis Review](#) section documents the finding that no extraordinary circumstances exist, along with findings required by other applicable laws and regulations, demonstrating compliance with the regulatory framework for the activities authorized by this decision.

AGENCIES, ORGANIZATIONS & PERSONS CONTACTED

A [list of agencies, organizations and/or persons contacted](#) regarding this proposal is provided above, along with a brief overview of comments/feedback received and how they were considered.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

I intend to implement this decision on June 6, 2020.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

Decisions that are categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) are not subject to an administrative review process (Agriculture Act of 2014 [Pub. L. No. 113-79], Subtitle A, Sec. 8006).

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact:

Eric Winthers, Darby/Sula District Ranger, Po Box 388, Darby, MT, 59829, 406-821-3913

/S/ Eric Winthers

2/27/2020

Eric Winthers

Darby/Sula District Ranger



Proposal Name

DECISION MEMO

Lake Como South Trails
U.S. Forest Service
Darby/Sula Ranger District, Bitterroot National Forest
Ravalli, MT

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