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RECORD OF DECISION

BITTERROOT NATIONAL FOREST TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLANNING PROJECT



Responsible Agency: USDA Forest Service

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Introduction

This Record of Decision (ROD) documents my decision and rationale on the Bitterroot National Forest Travel Management Planning Project. The project involves proposals to change motorized and non-motorized travel management on the Forest and a non-significant amendment of the Bitterroot National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan).

On November 9, 2005, the Forest Service published “Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use” in the Federal Register (36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295 Travel Management: Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use; Final Rule” (Federal Register 2005: 70FR68264)). The 2005 Travel Management Rule requires the Forest to designate those roads, trails, and areas where motorized travel will be permitted, while minimizing effects on resources and values identified in the Bitterroot Forest Plan. It also directs the Bitterroot National Forest to display those designated roads, trails, and areas on a motor vehicle use map (MVUM). Once the MVUM is published, public motor vehicle use on the Bitterroot National Forest will be allowed only on the designated routes (roads and trails) displayed on the map. The MVUM will show routes designated for public motorized travel, along with permitted vehicles and use seasons.

Litigation brought against the Forest Service regarding management of Montana’s Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) resulted in a settlement agreement in March 2007. According to the terms of the agreement, “The Forest Service agrees to use its good faith best effort to issue travel management decisions (including decisions covering both winter and summer use) for all WSAs by December 31, 2009...” (Montana Wilderness Association, Inc. et al. v. U.S. Forest Service, et al. Appeal No. 01-35690 and 01-35713) {PF PUBLIC-064}. To meet the intent of the settlement agreement, I have elected to include over-snow vehicle (OSV) use in my decision so that all suitable areas, routes, and seasons for their operation can be provided as envisioned in the Bitterroot Forest Plan.

While neither the settlement agreement nor the 2005 Travel Management Rule include direction to analyze winter use outside of WSAs or nonmotorized or mechanical transport uses, I expanded the analysis to include these uses as well, based on comments received in response to scoping and on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). I believe that to undertake a forest-wide travel planning process and to not look at all the various uses on the Forest would be incomplete.

Additionally, although the 2005 Travel Management Rule states, “At this time, the [Forest Service] does not see the need for regulations requiring establishment of a system of routes and areas designated for nonmotorized uses” {PF DIRECTION-003, p. 68272}, I concluded early in the analysis that motorized recreation opportunities on the Bitterroot National Forest could not be assessed without also considering opportunities for nonmotorized recreation. Motorized and nonmotorized recreation experiences are linked in the sense that one affects the other. This is particularly true for the effects of motorized use on nonmotorized user experiences. Providing quality recreation opportunities for both types of users requires the consideration of motorized use within the context of the full spectrum of uses. The 2005 Travel Management Rule states “Local Forest Service officials may choose to designate routes and areas for nonmotorized uses and enforce those designations with an order issued under 36 CFR part 261, subpart B {PF DIRECTION-003, p. 68272}.

Background

Executive Order (E.O.) 11644 (February 8, 1972), “Use of Off-Road Vehicles on the Public Lands,” as amended by E.O. 11989 (May 24, 1977), “Off-Road Vehicles on Public Lands,” directs Federal agencies to ensure that the use of off-road vehicles on public lands will be managed to protect resources, to promote the safety of Forest users, and to minimize conflicts among the various Forest uses.

In 1976, in response to E.O. 11644, the Bitterroot National Forest developed its first forest-wide travel plan. Since then, the Forest has adaptively managed its road and trail system in an effort to help mitigate the impacts of management activities on general watershed health and other affected resources. Common methods used by the Bitterroot National Forest to mitigate motorized travel impacts on affected resources include:

- Ø Seasonal road and trail restrictions
- Ø Yearlong road and trail restrictions to some or all motorized traffic
- Ø Long term storage of roads needed for future forest management
- Ø Decommissioning of unnecessary roads

The 1987 Bitterroot National Forest Plan was prepared when motorized use levels were considerably lower than they are today. Prior to the Forest Plan, other than Designated Wilderness, there were few distinct land area allocation differences between motorized and nonmotorized uses. This situation, coupled with an overall increase in motorized use, led to the establishment of unplanned motorized uses in many areas on the Forest. The Travel Management Planning Project is my response to these changes and direction.

For this travel planning effort, the Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) utilized a screening process (PF IDT-008), for both summer and over-snow use, which was developed to be consistent with the criteria for designation of roads, trails and areas, contained in Section §212.55 of the 2005 Travel Management Rule, as described below.

Purpose and Need for Action

The overall objective of this project is to provide a manageable and sustainable system of designated public motorized routes and areas within the Bitterroot National Forest, consistent with and to achieve the purposes of the Forest Plan and the travel management regulations at 36 CFR 212 subpart B.

To meet the overall objectives, there is a need to:

- 1) Address conflicts between motorized and nonmotorized uses
- 2) Improve quality of the recreational experience
- 3) Integrate resource considerations into the route system
- 4) Address confusion regarding where and when motorized use can occur and what types of vehicles are allowed
- 5) Ensure consistency with the 2005 Travel Management Rule

The current Bitterroot National Forest travel plan (2005) represents many years of management decisions based on monitoring, public comments, and the need to minimize effects on resources. Public motor vehicle use of the majority of this system continues to be manageable and is consistent with the current travel management regulation for the Forest, the 2005 Forest Visitor Map. However, there are administrative and resource issues with some parts of the transportation system. Motorized recreationists currently use some roads and trails that are accessible to motorized travel, but are not part of the official Bitterroot National Forest transportation system. There is a need to identify and evaluate those routes, and consider them for possible inclusion into the designated motorized system. There is also a need to consider other routes currently part of the official transportation system, but not usable by motor vehicles due to vegetation growth or loss of the road or trail surface.

The Bitterroot National Forest's transportation system has been continuously monitored since the Forest Plan was published in 1987, and over time, site-specific adjustments have been made. The Forest's Monitoring and Evaluation Report contains a number of monitoring items which are applicable to

motorized/mechanical transport on the Forest. These include Invasive Weeds-Item 10; Water and Sediment Yield-Item 17; Cumulative Watershed Effects-Item 19; Riparian Area Condition-Item 22; Road Construction, Mitigation, and Maintenance-Item 24; Off-Highway Vehicle Effects on Lands-Item 28; Item Recreation Site and Trail Use Effects on Land-Item 29; and Law Enforcement Efforts on the Bitterroot National Forest. Please refer to the Project File documents FPMON (Forest Plan and Monitoring Documents) for a listing of past monitoring reports.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) documents the analysis of four travel plan alternatives for summer and over-snow (winter) to meet these management objectives and needs. In addition, a number of other alternatives suggested in response to scoping and comments on the DEIS were considered but eliminated from detailed study in the FEIS. The alternatives and the rationale for not carrying them forward for full analysis are discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.5 of the FEIS.

In this document, “summer” also includes the seasons of spring and fall. Throughout this document, the term “winter” is used interchangeably with “over-snow.” However, over-snow is technically more correct, as the season of winter begins around December 20-21 and ends around March 19-21, while there could be snow covering the ground on the Forest from November until March, depending upon the location.

Public Involvement

Forest Plan Revision - 2004-2005

The Forest held numerous public meetings throughout the Bitterroot Valley to revise the 1987 Forest Plan. Community groups comprised of people with diverse viewpoints gathered in 2004 and 2005 to see if they could reach consensus on issues related to revision of the Forest Plan. The groups involved in this process spent considerable time discussing travel management issues {PF PUBLIC-031.pdf}, and some groups agreed on ideas primarily related to management of roadless areas. Although a new Forest Plan was not finalized many ideas that received support from diverse interests involved in the forest planning discussions were incorporated into **Alternative 1**.

Fall 2006

The public involvement process for the Travel Management Planning Project began in the Fall of 2006. Over the next year, Forest personnel attended a number of meetings with various user groups¹ to gather input on recreational use on the Bitterroot National Forest, listen to their ideas related to nonmotorized and motorized recreation, and discuss the process for travel management.

Meetings were also held with the Montana Departments of Fish, Wildlife and Parks and Natural Resources and Conservation, the Ravalli County Commissioners, and elected state officials. Additionally, communication was initiated with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai and Nez Perce Tribes.

Summer 2007

On July 20, 2007, the Travel Management Planning Project was included on the Bitterroot National Forest’s Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA), which was mailed to individuals, organizations, State agencies, and others interested in management activities on the Forest {PF SOPA-001}. The Travel Management Planning Project has been included on subsequent SOPAs, which are published quarterly {PF

¹ Ravalli County Off-Road Users Association; Selway-Pintler Chapter Backcountry Horsemen; National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council; Coalition of Quiet Users including members from the Friends of the Bitterroot, Wildlands CPR, Sierra Club, Montana Wilderness Association, and Backcountry Horsemen; Ravalli County Fish and Wildlife Association; and the Bitterroot Ridge Runners. Some groups were met with more than once.

SOPA-002 to 031}, and are available on the internet through the Forest's website (www.fs.fed.us/r1/bitterroot/planning).

Fall 2007

During the Fall of 2007, after consideration of public input and initial field reviews by the members of the ID Team, the Proposed Action (*A Starting Point*) was developed, and a scoping letter describing the project and how to comment was mailed to approximately 800 individuals, organizations, businesses, Federal and State agencies, Indian tribes, elected officials, and others on September 24, 2007 {PF SCOPING-004}. A 60 day comment period was provided. A news release was sent to the local media on September 24, 2007 {PF NEWS-004}. Newspaper articles describing the Proposed Action were published in the *Missoulian* and *Ravalli Republic* on September 28, 2007 {PF NEWS-001 and 002}. The Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement was published in the *Federal Register* on October 1, 2007 {PF NEWS-005}. A letter stating that the comment period for the project was to be extended an additional 60 days to January 31, 2008, in response to public request, was mailed to the public on October 22, 2007 {PF SCOPING-025}. A news release concerning the extension was distributed to the local media on October 22, 2007 {PF NEWS-003}.

Winter 2007

On December 27, 2007, a news release announcing public meetings to be held on the travel plan during January 2008 was sent to the local media {PF NEWS-006}. Public meetings were held in Darby, Hamilton, and Stevensville {PF NEWS-008-009}. Additionally, resource specialists were available one day a week at the Supervisor's Office to meet with interested individuals. The comment period was extended for an additional 30 days to February 29, 2008 {PF NEWS-008}.

Fall 2008

On October 10, 2008, a letter updating the public on the status of the project was mailed to the Project's mailing list {PF SCOPING-050}.

Summer/Fall 2009

The Bitterroot National Forest's Travel Management Planning Project DEIS was released for public review and comment on August 5, 2009. Copies of the document, along with full-size maps, were available for review at each of the Bitterroot National Forest offices (Stevensville, Hamilton, Darby, Sula, and the West Fork). Additionally, the maps were on review at public libraries in Stevensville, Hamilton, Darby, and Missoula, MT. A news release announcing the availability of the DEIS and the public involvement schedule was published in the *Ravalli Republic* on August 5, 2009 {PF NEWS-021}. A summary of the DEIS was included as an insert in the *Ravalli Republic* on August 5, 2009 {PF NEWS-016}; this summary was also mailed to the Travel Management Planning Project's mailing list on August 6, 2009 {PF NEWS-017}. The Notice of Availability of the DEIS was published in the *Federal Register* on August 7, 2009 {PF NEWS-020}. The legal notice regarding the availability of the DEIS was published in the *Ravalli Republic* on August 7, 2009 {PF NEWS-019}. On August 11, 2009, an article which described the public involvement activities associated with the release of the DEIS was published in the *Ravalli Republic* {PF NEWS-024}.

On September 2, 2009, a letter extending the comment period on the DEIS for an additional 45 days to November 9, 2009 was mailed to the Travel Management Planning Project's mailing lists {PF DEISPI-024-026}. On September 4, 2009, an article concerning the extension of the comment period was published in the *Ravalli Republic* {PF NEWS-025}. A notice extending the comment period on the DEIS to November 9, 2009 was published in the *Federal Register* on September 25, 2009 {PF NEWS-034}. An article regarding the extension of the comment period was published in the *Bitterroot Star* on October 7, 2009 {PF NEWS-036}. An article containing information regarding the extension of the comment period on the

DEIS, and the weekly open houses to be held at the Forest Supervisor's office, was published in the *Bitterroot Star* on October 14, 2009 {PF NEWS-035}.

Open houses regarding the DEIS were held on Hamilton, Darby, and Stevensville, MT on August 11, 13, and 18, 2009, respectively {PF DEISPI-019-021}. Beginning on August 19, 2009 and ending on November 4, 2009, weekly "walk-in" sessions were held at the Forest Supervisor's office in Hamilton, MT. These sessions were staffed by members of the ID Team, and allowed members of the public to ask questions and view maps {PF DEISPI-030}.

On September 18, 2009, Forest personnel met with members of the Ravalli County Off Road Users Association at their request {PF DEISPI-036}.

Fall 2010

During October 2010, a letter and e-mail containing an update on the status of the Travel Management Planning Project were sent to those who were on the mailing list for the DEIS, as well as those who submitted comments on the DEIS {PF POSTDEIS-008, 011, 012, and 014}.

Winter 2011

On February 22, 2011, a meeting of the Bitterroot National Forest's Leadership Team was held with the newly elected Ravalli County Commissioners. Suzy Foss, Ron Stoltz, and Jeff Burrows attended the meeting and received a briefing on the status of the Travel Management Planning Project {PF POSTDEIS-045}.

Winter 2012

On January 6, 2012, an article regarding the 9th Circuit Court's ruling that the Gallatin National Forest's Travel Management Plan was in violation of the Montana Wilderness Study Act of 1977, with implications for the Bitterroot National Forest's Travel Management Plan Project's motorized use in the Sapphire and Blue Joint wilderness study areas, was published in the *Ravalli Republic* {PF NEWS-059}. A similar article was published in the *Bitterroot Star* on January 11, 2012 {PF NEWS-060}.

On January 26, 2012, Forest personnel met with members of the Bitterroot Quiet Users Coalition, including Wildlands CPR, Bitter Root Back Country Horsemen, Friends of the Bitterroot, Montana Wildlands Association, and the Sierra Club, at their request {PF POSTDEIS-037}.

On February 23, 2012, several members of the Bitterroot National Forest's Leadership Team were invited to provide an update on forest activities to the Ravalli County Commissioners. The presentation included information regarding the Travel Management Planning project {PF POSTDEIS-046}.

How Public Comments on the DEIS Were Considered

A total of 540 original responses (not including duplicative form letters) containing 3,426 comments were received on the DEIS. Responses were received in individual letters, form letters, e-mail, and public meeting comment forms. The majority of responses were individual letters (89 percent), followed by form letters (10 percent), and public meeting comment forms (5 percent).

In terms of the "organizational affiliation" of the respondents, the majority were individuals (94 percent), followed by motorized recreation organizations (1 percent), nonmotorized recreation organizations (1 percent), environmental organizations (1 percent), and bicycling organizations (1 percent).

Responses were received from 19 states. The majority of the respondents were from Montana (61 percent). Another 25 percent of the respondents had no identifiable affiliation. Approximately 5 percent of the respondents were from Washington, and 2 percent were from Oregon.

Regardless of the source or form of the comment, I considered each piece of correspondence. The public comment process is not a quantitative vote but rather a qualitative process designed to ensure that issues related to the project are considered in the analysis. I have reviewed these issues, as shown in the section of this ROD titled Consideration of the Issues (page 23).

The comments received on the Travel Management Planning Project DEIS were addressed through a two-stage process known as “comment analysis,” which is used to record, classify, and respond to the statements, concerns, and questions submitted by the public regarding a project. Comment analysis is intended to help the members of the ID Team explain, clarify, and correct information, statements, or findings contained in the DEIS, and to determine whether additional analysis needs to be included in the FEIS. Additionally, it helps the ID Team and the Responsible Official understand the public’s reaction to a project.

Comment Recording and Classification captured all of the public comments in a database, along with demographic and classifying information. In order to avoid any bias in the treatment of comments, an independent contractor, Bear West Company of Bountiful, UT, was hired to perform the recording and classifying functions. Interdisciplinary Team members wrote the responses to each comment.

For additional information on the comment analysis process, as well as the letters received and the responses to the comments, please refer to Appendix F of the FEIS.

Decision

Decision Criteria

In making my decision for the Bitterroot Travel Management Planning Project, I focused on how well the alternatives analyzed in the FEIS addressed the overall management objectives from the Forest Plan, the purpose and need for the project, and the minimization criteria required by the 2005 Travel Management Rule.

I have considered the analysis contained in the FEIS, along with supporting information located in the Project File, as well as public input, and comments in response to scoping and the DEIS. The FEIS shows a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty and risk. I believe my decision represents the best balance of the need to provide a variety of recreation opportunities, both motorized and nonmotorized, on the Forest while minimizing adverse impacts to the environment. In addition, I had to insure that my decision was in compliance with all applicable laws, regulations, and policies. This includes the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals’ ruling regarding management of Montana Wilderness Study Areas (MWSAs) (December 2011; Citizens for Balanced Use v. McAllister; D.C. No. 9:07-cv-00039 {PF WSA-015}).

The rationale for changes in the motorized designations of some roads, trails, and areas (opening or closing, changing the season of use, or changing the type of vehicle permitted) were based on several issues. Resource concerns associated with motorized use are described in Chapter 3 of the FEIS and include effects on wildlife (big game security), fisheries (bull trout), and soils and water resources (erosion and sedimentation). In other situations, the rationale for changing the designation was based on considerations in addition to resource impacts/concerns. These included conflicts of use between motorized and

nonmotorized uses; legal rulings; changes in agency policy and direction; other project decisions on the Bitterroot National Forest (e.g., Trapper Bunkhouse, Lower West Fork, and Middle East Fork) that preceded the Travel Management Planning Project; and lack of public easements across private land.

I also considered the degree to which each alternative will achieve desired conditions for other resources identified in the 1987 Forest Plan. In addition to the purpose and need statements and issues, I evaluated each alternative based on the following considerations:

- Ø Will the alternative provide opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized uses?
- Ø Will the alternative minimize conflicts between motorized and non-motorized uses?
- Ø Will the alternative minimize damage to forest resources?

Consideration of Issues Raised During Objection

The Draft ROD for this project was issued in April 2015. Twenty-three objections were received in response to the Draft ROD. The Objection Reviewing Officer, Deputy Regional Forester David Schmid, issued his response to the issues raised in the public's objections on July 14, 2015. There were 45 separate issues raised; formal instructions were issued to the Forest to respond to ten of those issues.

In response to those issues:

- Ø I have explicitly described and demonstrated how the minimization criteria were applied and how the impacts of motorized transportation have been minimized. Minimization is discussed in detail on starting on page 16 and in Appendix 5 and Appendix 6 of the ROD.
- Ø The FEIS was updated to include a discussion as to how ridge top trails in alpine and/or elk summer ranges affect elk (FEIS page 3.5-100-103).
- Ø Additional monitoring requirements have been added to clarify how motorized access for dispersed camping will be monitored and what actions will be taken if resource damage is identified during monitoring (ROD pp.57-59 and in Appendix 2 of the ROD).
- Ø A discussion was added to the FEIS clarifying why a project-specific amendment for EHE is preferable to a Forest-wide amendment (FEIS pp. 2-29).
- Ø A discussion was added to the ROD clarifying and showing the impacts to the transportation system if all ML1 and ML2 road segments that cross streams or are within INFISH-defined RHCAs were closed to motorized travel (ROD pp. 46-47)
- Ø I have clarified the need for proactive management to preserve the wilderness character within the MWSAs (ROD pp. 25-27).
- Ø The IDT specialists reevaluated Trail #s 77, 156, 87, 503, 223, 106, and 602 as to whether it is reasonable and feasible to leave parts of these trails open to motorized and mechanized use (ROD pp. 10).
- Ø The IDT specialists reevaluated a specific subset of trails left open to motorized use within IRAs as to the effects to elk habitat and potential erosion. (FEIS pp. 3.5-100 through 3.5-103 and 3.8-6).
- Ø A discussion was added to the ROD in regards to monitoring and how new classes of motorized vehicles will be monitored and management adjustments made into the future. (ROD pp. 57-59)

- Ø A discussion was added to the FEIS and ROD as to how the Ravalli County Natural Resource Use Policy was considered for this project. (FEIS pp. 3.13-2 through 3.13-3 and ROD pp. 47-49)

Description of the Decision

After careful consideration of the alternatives disclosed in the FEIS, I have decided to implement **Alternative 1**, the preferred alternative described in Chapter 2 of the Bitterroot National Forest's Travel Management Planning Project FEIS. However, I am modifying the alternative by prohibiting all summer and over-snow motorized/mechanical transport use in the Sapphire and Blue Joint Wilderness Study Areas. My primary reason for this is to preserve the wilderness character of these areas based on our analysis of the volume and location of motorized/mechanical transport use that was occurring in 1977, when the Montana Wilderness Study Act was signed into law. Additional information regarding my decision will be provided in the section of this ROD titled Rationale for Decision (page 13). From this point forward, the selected alternative will be referred to as **Alternative 1 (Modified)**.

Please refer to Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4, below, for a comparison between **Alternative 1 (Modified)** and **Alternative 2 (Existing Condition)**.

The following summarizes my decision:

- Ø The miles of roads designated open to highway-legal vehicles, both yearlong and seasonally, will decrease slightly by 51 miles (3.5 percent), from 1,456 miles to 1,405 miles.
- Ø The miles of roads designated open to all vehicles (roads open to both highway-legal vehicles and unlicensed ATVs and motorcycles), both yearlong and seasonally, will remain unchanged at 77 miles.
- Ø The miles of double-track trails designated open to vehicles 50 inches or less in width, yearlong (ATV opportunities), will decrease by 74 miles (67 percent), from 110 miles to 36 miles.
- Ø The miles of double-track trails designated open to vehicles 50 inches or less in width, seasonally (ATV opportunities) will increase slightly by 9 miles (1.5 percent), from 550 to 559.
- Ø The miles of single-track trails designated open to motorcycles, yearlong, will decrease by 291 miles (88 percent), from 330 miles to 39 miles.
- Ø The miles of single-track trails designated open to motorcycles, seasonally, will increase by 42 miles (55 percent), from 78 miles to 121 miles.
- Ø There will be no routes designated for the exclusive use of utility vehicles (UTVs)
- Ø Utility vehicles greater than 50 inches in width will be allowed on National Forest System roads open to full size vehicle.
- Ø UTVs less than 50 inches in width will be allowed on National Forest System double-track trails.
- Ø A total of 30 miles of unauthorized routes are being designated as authorized routes; this includes 19 miles of double-track trails, (18 miles would be designated seasonally; approximately 1 mile would be designated to be open yearlong). An additional 11 miles are being designated for use as single-track trails (10 miles seasonally, and 1 mile open yearlong). Approximately 10 miles of double-track trails identified above will be subject to separate, site-specific NEPA analysis and decisions. The routes will be displayed on the map accompanying this document, but they will not

be included on the MVUM until the analysis is completed and the decisions are signed. TR-OHV1-24 will not be included in this decision. This was a proposed connector OHV trail between roads RD496B to RD74985. During the initial field reviews for the Westside Collaborative Vegetation Management Project, it was discovered that the condition of RD74895 is such that it is not sustainable and needs to be decommissioned. Therefore, the proposed 0.75 miles connector TR-OHV1-24 is being dropped from this decision.

- Ø The areas designated open to snowmobile use will decline by 205,141 acres (27 percent) from 748,981 acres to approximately 543,840 acres.
- Ø Motorized/mechanical transport, including bicycles, will be prohibited in the Selway-Bitterroot (including Blue Joint creek), recommended wilderness area (RWA), for summer and over-snow use.
- Ø Motorized/mechanical transport, including bicycles, will be prohibited in the Sapphire and Blue Joint Wilderness Study Areas for both summer and over-snow use. This will include the closure of Trail #39 (Chain of Lakes) to these uses.
- Ø Bicycles will be permitted on all other roads and trails, including those closed yearlong or seasonally to motorized use, with the exception of trails in Designated Wilderness.
- Ø Motorized wheeled access for dispersed camping will be allowed in “corridors” off both sides of the center line of designated roads and trails for a distance of 300 feet, where resource conditions permit such use without causing unacceptable levels of damage. There will be an exception to limit motorized access to camping to the current existing sites within the Magruder Corridor and not allow new camps to be established even if they are within the 300 feet of center line. This is to ensure compliance with the Central Idaho Wilderness Act of 1980 (P.L.96-312).
- Ø There are a limited number of existing sites (20) that are located outside the 300-foot corridor. Routes to these sites will be included on the MVUM and motorized wheeled access for dispersed camping will be extended to these sites.
- Ø Motorized wheeled access between dispersed campsites will be prohibited.
- Ø Motorized wheeled access for dispersed camping will be prohibited within 30 feet of any flowing stream, pond, lake, marsh, or wetland. Camping adjacent to water sources will be permitted; however, access must be by nonmotorized means.
- Ø Parking of motorized vehicles off of designated routes for purposes other than dispersed camping will be limited to parking immediately adjacent to the designated route, in a manner that does not cause resource damage.
- Ø There will be no areas designated for high-challenge motorized activities (hill climbs, mud bogs, play areas, and motor parks).
- Ø There will be no game retrieval off designated routes using motorized means.
- Ø To provide motorized travel opportunities while minimizing effects to natural resources and conflicts of uses, my decision will add a new seasonal use restriction. It will prohibit motorized use on roads and trails during the period 09/01 - 11/30; use will be permitted from 12/02 - 08/31. This change will affect 19 roads and trails totaling approximately 34 miles, and was made in response to

public comments regarding conflicts of uses between non-motorized and motorized archery hunters.

- Ø Approximately one mile of Trail #313 which passes through a culturally-sensitive area of concern to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes will be closed to all motorized vehicles yearlong. This will make permanent the Forest Closure Order dated June 7, 2006 signed by the Bitterroot National Forest Supervisor: “Motorized vehicles are prohibited from the junction of trail 313 and Trail 39 (T.3N, R.17W, Section 7) on the Bitterroot National Forest and then moving North and West to approximately its junction with Trail 19 (T.3N, R.18 W, between Section 1 and 12) on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge N.F.” {PF AGENCY-038}.
- Ø My decision will prohibit wheeled motorized use on Trail #313 yearlong, from south of Cleveland Mountain to its junction with Road #2129, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile north of Cinnabar Saddle. Off-highway vehicles will be rerouted onto Roads #1334 and #13102 lower in the Threemile Creek drainage, and then onto a new OHV trail (TR-FEIS-01) up a ridge from the end of Road #13102 to Road #13154, and back to Trail #313 at its junction with Road #2129. This proposed trail is shown on the map of **Alternative 1 (Modified)**. It will be subject to separate site-specific NEPA analysis and decision. It will not be shown on the MVUM until completed. Road #1334 will be closed to full-sized vehicles at its junction with Road #73878 and will be open to trail vehicles from 06/15 – 08/31, as will Roads #13102 and #13154. Additionally, Road #640 will be closed to all motorized use at the Forest boundary above its junction with Road #1334.
- Ø The Forest was asked to reevaluate trails Trail #77 Railroad Creek, Trail #156 Weasel Creek, Trail #87 Skalkaho-Sleeping Child Divide, Trail # 503 Skalkaho Creek, Trail #223 Little Blue Joint, #106 Razorback Ridge and Trail #602 Deer Creek Point. These trails lead into either the Sapphire or Blue Joint WSA. The portions of these trails within the WSA’s are closed to motorized/mechanical transport with this decision. For the segments outside the WSA the following trails will be open to motorized/mechanized transport up to the WSA boundary: Trail #77, Trail #156, Trail #503, Trail #87 and Trail #106. Reasons for this change include the current lack of resource damage, low potential for conflict with other trail users, terrain favorable for this type of use, maintaining the recreation experience, and trust that users will respect the WSA boundary. For the segments outside the WSA the following trails, (Trail #223 and Trail #602) will be closed to motorized/mechanical transport for their entire length due to the short length of segment outside of the WSA boundary would not provide a quality recreational experience.
- Ø Roads and trails closed to public motorized use will remain available to Forest Service personnel for administrative purposes including wildfire suppression, search and rescue, medical emergencies, permit administration, data collection, noxious weed treatments, general management, and other activities.

Table 1 provides details on the changes that will be designated for summer motorized use in **Alternative 1 (Modified)**. Table 2 provides a cumulative comparison between **Alternative 1 (Modified)** and the existing condition (**Alternative 2**). Table 3 provides details on the changes that will be designated for over-snow vehicle use in **Alternative 1 (Modified)**. Table 4 provides a cumulative comparison between **Alternative 1 (Modified)** and the existing condition (**Alternative 2**).

For maps of **Alternative 1 (Modified)** refer to the Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) and the Over Snow Vehicle Use Map (OSVUM), available on the forest website: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot/> and at Bitterroot National Forest offices.

Table 1: Changes from the Existing Condition with Alternative 1 (Modified) (Summer)

Route Status	Alt. 1 Miles
Roads open to highway legal vehicles - yearlong	-41 ¹
Roads open to highway legal vehicles – seasonally ²	-10
Proposed roads open to highway legal vehicles – yearlong ³	0.4
Trails ⁴ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – yearlong	-74
Trails ⁴ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – seasonally	9
Proposed trails open to vehicles 50” or less in width – seasonally ⁵	10
Trails open to motorcycles - yearlong	-291
Trails open to motorcycles – seasonally ⁶	42
Change in total miles open to motorized use	-355

¹ (-) indicates decrease

²Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Transportation analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.1.3 C

³This is a connector between two existing roads which will require additional NEPA analysis and decision. It will be shown on the FEIS map, but will not be included on the MVUM until the analysis is complete

⁴Most of these trails, open yearlong and seasonally, are roads closed to full size vehicles, but open to ATVs and motorcycles; these are known as “coincident routes.” Please refer to the FEIS, Chapter 3, Sections 3.1 (Transportation) and 3.2 (Recreation and Trails) for additional information. Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Recreation and Trails analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 H

⁵These include connectors and a new trail which will require separate NEPA analyses and decisions

⁶Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Recreation and Trails analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 H

Table 2: Comparison of Alternative 1 (Modified) and Alternative 2 (Existing Condition)

Route Status	Alt. 1 (Modified) Miles	Alt. 2 (Existing Condition)
Roads open to all vehicles ¹ - yearlong	10	10
Roads open to all vehicles – seasonally ²	67 ³	67
Roads open to highway legal vehicles - yearlong	846	887
Roads open to highway legal vehicles – seasonally ²	559 ³	569
Proposed roads open to highway legal vehicles – yearlong ⁴	0.4	0.0
Trails ⁵ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – yearlong	36	110
Trails ⁵ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – seasonally	559	550
Proposed trails open to vehicles 50” or less in width – seasonally ⁶	10	0.0
Trails open to motorcycles - yearlong	39	330
Trails open to motorcycles – seasonally ⁷	120	78
Total miles open to motorized use	2,246	2,601

¹Includes highway-legal vehicles and unlicensed ATVs and motorcycles

²Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Transportation analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.1.3 C

³Reflects a recent law in Idaho which required a change in the MVUM for Road #468 (Nez Perce Trail) from “Open to Highway Legal Vehicles- Seasonally” (MVUM 4) to “Open to All Vehicles – Seasonally” (MVUM 2). This change was independent of the Travel Management Planning Project. For additional information, please refer to {PF TRANS-006}.

⁴This is a connector between two existing roads which will require additional NEPA analysis and decision. It will be shown on the FEIS map, but will not be included on the MVUM until the analysis is complete

⁵Most of these trails, open yearlong and seasonally, are roads closed to full size vehicles, but open to ATVs and motorcycles; these are known as “coincident routes.” Please refer to the FEIS, Chapter 3, Sections 3.1 (Transportation) and 3.2 (Recreation and Trails) for additional information. Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Recreation and Trails analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 H

⁶These include connectors and a new trail, both of which will require additional NEPA analyses and decisions. These will be shown on the FEIS map, but will not be included on the MVUM until the analyses are completed and the decisions are signed

⁷Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Recreation and Trails analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 H

Table 3: Changes from the Existing Condition with Alternative 1 (Modified) Over Snow

Area Status	Alt. 1 (Modified) Acres
Acres open to over-snow vehicles – no restrictions	-197,900 ¹
Acres open to over-snow vehicles - seasonally	-7,241
Change in total acres open to motorized use	-205,141

¹(-) indicates decrease

Table 4: Comparison of Alternative 1 (Modified) and Alternative 2 (Existing Condition) Acres Open to Over-Snow Vehicle Use

Area Status	Alt. 1 (Modified) Acres	Alt. 2 (Existing Condition) Acres
Acres open to over-snow vehicles – no restrictions	501,984	699,884
Acres open to over-snow vehicles - seasonally	41,856	49,097
Total acres open to motorized use	543,840	748,981

My decision designates the roads, trails, areas open to motorized use on the Bitterroot National Forest, and documents those designations on the MVUM; it also designates areas on National Forest System lands open to OSV use on a separate OSV use map (OSVUM). It does not address the specific actions which may need to be taken to physically close roads and trails not designated on the MVUM, or to construct the new motorized routes identified in my decision. The physical treatment of closed routes, through decommissioning or placing in long-term storage, will take future administrative access needs, including fire suppression and timber management, into consideration, and will be analyzed in separate, site-specific NEPA projects and decisions when applicable. In addition, some new routes identified in this decision will require site-specific NEPA to disclose the effects associated with constructing the route on the ground. Additionally, Forest permittees currently authorized to use specific routes will continue to be granted motorized access.

Based on public comments received on the DEIS, some members of the public may be under the impression that my decision will prohibit the use of bicycles on all roads and trails on the Bitterroot National Forest. Bicycles are currently prohibited in Designated Wilderness, and this will not change with my decision. My decision will prohibit the use of bicycles on roads and trails in recommended wilderness areas and wilderness study areas to better align recreation uses with the current land-use designations. This will result in the prohibition of bicycles from approximately 68 miles of recommended wilderness areas (RWAs) and approximately 110 miles in wilderness study areas (WSAs). Bicycles, however, will continue to be permitted on all other roads and trails on the Forest.

Forest Plan Amendment

I have decided to include a project specific Forest Plan amendment to address the forest-wide standard relating to Elk Habitat Effectiveness. The wording in the Forest Plan will read:

“Existing elk habitat effectiveness will be maintained or improved within the Travel Management Planning project area.”

Please see Appendix 1 for more information on this project-specific Forest Plan amendment.

Roads in Conflict with the Darby Lumber Lands Watershed Improvement and Travel Management Project

The Darby Lumber Lands Watershed Improvement and Travel Management Project (DLL Project) was designed to reduce road-related sediment entering streams on National Forest System Lands in the Rye and Sleeping Child Creek drainages and therefore, to bring area streams into compliance with Bitterroot Forest Plan and Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) standards, including the 2011 Bitterroot River TMDL. A secondary purpose is to designate several existing roads as part of a sustainable route system for OHV's < 50", along with building several connector trails to form loop routes. The project implements a plan to decommission and store roads (using various treatments), change motorized access on some roads and trails, and add new OHV/motorcycle trail "connectors" to help build several loop routes with the existing roads. It was added to the Bitterroot National Forest SOPA on July 1, 2011. Scoping started on December 16, 2013 and the official comment period on the Environmental Assessment (EA) began on February 13, 2015.

The main objective of the DLL Project is to reduce road-related sediment entering streams. The DLL Project is proposing and analyzing road treatments in addition to making motorized travel recommendations to meet this objective.

The Final Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact were signed on July 2, 2015. Because the DLL project analysis was conducted at a finer scale, I am deferring making a decision on roads and trails that were included in both projects and will let the decision associated with the DLL project make the final designation on those routes. Appendix 3 to this ROD displays the DLL routes that now are designated differently than indicated in the maps and associated tables for Alternative 1 (Modified). In the DLL analysis, Travel Planning was included in the cumulative effects analysis and DLL project was included in Travel Planning cumulative effects. For a complete listing of the routes affected by this deferral, please reference Appendix 3. The DLL Environmental Assessment {PF WAT-015- WAT- 016} Decision Notice/Finding of No Significant Impact {PF WAT - 017} details the effects associated with the decision.

Rationale for Decision

Alternative 1 (Modified) will achieve the objective of providing a manageable system of designated motorized public access that is consistent with the Forest Plan and travel management regulations.

When considering which alternative to choose, my most important consideration was to provide an adequate motorized route system while minimizing potential adverse effects to forest resources and comply with minimization criteria in a manner that is feasible, prudent and reasonable while still meeting the agencies multiple use mandate. **Alternative 1 (Modified)** incorporates input received during public involvement process and will move closer to the goals and objectives in the Forest Plan, motorized travel so that it complies with laws, regulations, policy, and Forest Plan direction.

Generally speaking, adverse environmental impacts were a factor I considered in not choosing **Alternative 2** or **Alternative 3**. Impacts on wilderness study areas, inventoried roadless areas, recommended wilderness areas, wildlife, and aquatic resources were also factors in my decision not to choose **Alternatives 2** or **3**.

Alternative 1 provides for a mix of multiple use activities that would not be available with Alternative 4. A 53% reduction in roads available for motorized travel would occur with Alternative 4 compared to Alternative 1 (Modified). Alternative 4 would eliminate dispersed camping on many established camp sites (FEIS Table 3.2-18), change access to trailheads (FEIS Table 3.2-19), eliminate popular recreational driving loop opportunities (FEIS Table 3.2-20), and result in several drainages with no motorized access (FEIS

Table 3.2-21). This reduction in motorized use would concentrate use in the remaining areas and could lead to increased resource damage on those sites. Some areas that would be closed to motorized use would include: Woods Creek, Ambrose and Willow Creek. Several loop opportunities off the Skalkaho Rye Road, Guide Creek, Blue Joint, Meadow Creek and Trapper Chaffin areas would be eliminated. Refer to Chapter 3.2, pages 41-68 in the FEIS for more details on the differences between Alternatives 1 and 4.

The Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act on 1960 (PF-DIRECTION-012) emphasizes that national forests should be managed to best meet the needs of the American people and be sustainable in the long-term. Motorized use is a legitimate and appropriate way for people to enjoy the national forest and the agency must strike a balance in managing all types of activities on the national forest land (PF-DIRECTION_003). I believe closure of the routes as described in Alternative 4 would decrease the multiple use opportunities that are reasonable and prudent to maintain while Alternative 1 (Modified) provides for a mix of motorized and non-motorized use for a broader range of users and will be sustainable.

In general, compared to **Alternatives 1(Modified)** and **2**, **Alternative 4** will clearly result in more overall resource benefits but would not provide for a quality motorized experience. **While Alternative 3**, with its emphasis on motorized recreation, would result in greater overall benefits for motorized recreation; it would be the least beneficial to wildlife and watershed resources. I believe Alternative 1 (Modified) will achieve the objective of providing a manageable system of designated routes.

Meeting the Purpose and Need

Alternative 1 (Modified) achieves the purpose and need for action, as described below:

1. ***Address conflicts between motorized and nonmotorized uses*** – To address the conflict of uses, I have: 1) designated where motorized and nonmotorized recreation is permitted, and will document those designations on the MVUM, and designate them on the OSVUM; 2) designated large blocks of land sufficient to provide a quiet nonmotorized recreation experience; and 3) approved a new seasonal closure (9/01-11/30) applicable to roads and trails to reduce hunting season conflicts between nonmotorized and motorized archery hunters.
 - a. With respect to 2) above, **Alternative 1 (Modified)** will prohibit summer motorized/mechanical transport use, as well as over-snow vehicle use, in the Selway-Bitterroot (including Blue Joint creek) RWA, which will add approximately 76,365 acres for nonmotorized recreation opportunities outside of Designated Wilderness. Additionally, **Alternative 1 (Modified)** will prohibit summer and over-snow motorized/mechanical transport use in the Sapphire and Blue Joint WSAs, which will add another 101,974 acres for nonmotorized recreation opportunities outside of Designated Wilderness. With respect to the IRAs (inventoried roadless areas), the miles of open roads will be reduced from 9 to 5, a reduction of 55 percent, while the miles of motorized trails will decrease from 312 to 159, a decrease of 153 miles (49 percent). This will increase the area available for summer nonmotorized recreation outside of Designated Wilderness. With respect to over-snow vehicle use in IRAs, the acres available for such use will decrease from approximately 382,913 to 206,084, a change of 176,829 acres (46 percent). This will also increase the area available for winter nonmotorized recreation.
 - b. A number of different approaches for dealing with the conflict of uses issue were offered in public comments in response to scoping and on the DEIS. These were analyzed as Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study in the FEIS. Please refer to Chapter 2, Section 2.5 of that document for additional information.
2. ***Improve quality of the recreational experience*** - **Alternative 1 (Modified)** contains a total of 30 miles of unauthorized routes that are being designated; this includes 19 miles of double-track trails,

(18 miles would be designated seasonally; approximately 1 mile would be designated to be open yearlong). An additional 11 miles are being designated for use as single-track trails (10 miles seasonally, and 1 mile open yearlong). These routes, the majority of which will be designated as trails open to vehicles 50 inches or less in width, will serve as connectors to other routes to form motorized loop opportunities. They will be brought up to current trail standards prior to opening to the public in order to prevent resource damage, including erosion; however, this work will require additional NEPA analysis and decisions. The routes will be shown on the **Alternative 1 (Modified)** map, but will not be included on the MVUM until site-specific NEPA analysis is completed and the decisions are signed. This future NEPA analysis will look at the effects of trail building and will not reexamine motorized designations. Additionally, **Alternative 1 (Modified)** will provide areas for nonmotorized recreation experiences as previously discussed under the heading Address Conflicts between Motorized and Nonmotorized Uses.

3. ***Integrate resource considerations into the route system. For off-road motor vehicle use, the objective is to minimize effects as described at 36 CFR 212.55(b) – Alternative 1 (Modified)*** will reduce the designated motorized route system by about 14% percent and will therefore minimize resource impacts. **Alternative 1 (Modified)** will close approximately 355 miles of roads and trails to summer motorized/mechanical transport use; the majority of these are single-track (motorcycle) trails located within IRAs, WSAs, and RWAs.

With respect to over-snow vehicle use, **Alternative 1 (Modified)** will decrease the acres available for such use by 205,141, with most of the decrease occurring in RWAs, IRAs, and WSAs. This is in response to the need to maintain or improve wilderness character and impacts to mountain goat winter range.

4. ***Address confusion regarding where and when motorized use can occur and what types of vehicles are allowed*** - While I recognize that **Alternative 1 (Modified)** will not substantially simplify the complexity of the current travel map, I believe that the resulting MVUM will be less complex than the current situation and will be able to clearly show the roads and trails open to motorized use with the type and season of use allowed.

Alternative 1 (Modified) will, however, add one new seasonal motor vehicle use restriction to the MVUM. It was developed in response to the Purpose and Need to “Address conflicts between motorized and nonmotorized uses.” The restriction will prohibit motorized use on 19 roads and trails totaling about 34 miles from 09/01 – 11/30; use will be permitted from 12/02 to 08/31. The restriction was developed in response to public comments regarding conflicts between nonmotorized archery hunters and ATV users.

5. ***Ensure consistency with the 2005 Travel Management Rule*** - **Alternative 1 (Modified)** will result in minimization of motor vehicle effects on resources and the publication of an MVUM. Refer to the discussion below and Appendix 5 and Appendix 6 of the ROD for more detail on how **Alternative 1 (Modified)** complies with Minimization Criteria.

In summary, while the other action alternatives would have met these need statements as well, to varying degrees as described in the FEIS, I believe that **Alternative 1 (Modified)** provides the best mix between recreational access and resource protection.

Minimization Criteria (36 CFR § CFR 212.55 (b))

Context for the Decision and How I Applied the Criteria (36 CFR § 212.55 (b) with the Objective of Minimizing Motor Vehicle Use on Trails and Areas

My designations of motor vehicle use off roads require me to consider, with the objective of minimizing, the effects of those designations on the resources and uses listed at 36 CFR 212.55 (b) (TMR).

“Minimization,” as used in the regulations and the underlying Executive Order is not defined. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, “assumes that the TMR requires the Forest Service to comply with the minimization criteria in a manner that is feasible, prudent, and reasonable in light of the agency’s multiple-use mandate” and does not impose an “absolute, discernible limit” on off road motorized use (*WildEarth Guardians v. USFS*, 9th Cir. 2015, No. 12-35434). To that end, the following discussions provide what I believe are important contexts for understanding what minimization means, here and now, on the Bitterroot National Forest. It is also important to the understanding of why I believe my decision represents the feasible, prudent, and reasonable application of these criteria.

Prior to the 1970s, and outside these specific areas, Anaconda-Pintler, Selway-Bitterroot and Frank Church River of No Return wilderness areas and other limited localized prohibitions at that time, motor vehicle use was permissible anywhere on the Bitterroot National Forest, subject only to terrain, vegetation and vehicle performance limitations. However, by the early seventies, off road use of motor vehicles on the BNF was still largely limited to occasional four wheel drive vehicles and routes and some motorcycles and snowmobiles, {PF WSA-003, WSA-004, WSA-005, WSA-006}. Nationally, however, off road use was growing rapidly and environmental concerns were heightened.

In responses to these comments, President Nixon signed Executive Order 11644, as amended by Executive Order 11989 and 36 CFR 212 subpart B and C, addresses use of off-road vehicles on the public lands in 1972. Section 3 of the EO required each agency to, “develop and issue regulations and administrative instructions... to provide for administrative designations of the specific areas and trails on the public lands on which the use of off-road vehicles may be permitted, and areas in which the use of off-road vehicles may not be permitted...” The Forest Service promulgated the necessary regulations (see 43 CFR 20006, May 10, 1978 and 36 CFR 295, 2004).

In 1976, the Bitterroot National Forest adopted, with considerable public participation, its first comprehensive access management plan and map {PF-Reference-001}. This plan’s designations covered the entire BNF and added numerous new area, trail, and road use restrictions encompassing and addressing the most sensitive areas recognized at the time. Over the subsequent decades, my predecessors monitored off road vehicle use and, when new information indicated it was appropriate, amended or rescinded designations. Please refer to the {Project File folder ‘forest_plan_and_monitoring,’ Project File documents FPMON.pdf} for a listing of past monitoring reports. One of the most substantial adjustments came in 2001 with the Off-Highway Vehicle decision (often referred to as the Tri-State decision). That decision amended the BNF Forest Plan and restricted all, wheeled motorized cross-country travel. It eliminated the ORV use with the greatest potential for resource damage and conflict of uses on the BNF. In effect, off road vehicle uses that in 1972 had been only constrained by terrain and vehicle performance limitations were now constrained to established routes that were not otherwise restricted. Thus, our task when we started this current travel planning effort was not to build a new travel plan from scratch. Instead, it was to adjust the existing and already highly tailored plan where new information, including extensive public involvement, indicated it is feasible, reasonable, and prudent to do so. This is the approach set out in Sec. 8 of EO 11644, and this is the approach we took.

Section 8 of the Executive Order then sets out requirements for monitoring use and adjusting designations over time. The “*agency shall monitor the effects of the use of off-road vehicles on lands under their*

jurisdictions. On the basis of the information gathered, they shall from time to time amend or rescind designations of areas or other actions taken pursuant to this order as necessary to further the policy of this order.” For over 35 years now the Bitterroot National Forest has been monitoring the effects of off-road vehicle use and, when necessary to further the policy of this order or to otherwise further the purposes for which the National Forest was established, have amended or rescinded motor vehicle designations.

Of the periodic adjustments to the BNF Travel Plan over the decades one event is particularly important in framing both the starting point and destination of this current travel planning effort. In 1987 the BNF Forest Plan (FP) was established. The Forest Plan, in essence, defines what the agency’s multiple-use mandate means on the Bitterroot National Forest. As such, it frames what is “feasible, prudent, and reasonable” as I apply the TMR’s “minimization criteria” to this decision. This is important because, on the surface, the EO and TMR criteria only set out to “minimize” certain effects of off-road motor vehicle, implying an “if-an-effect-restrict-use” policy with no mention or explicit allowance for finding balance between the various uses of these National Forest lands; there is no explicit allowance for some amount of conflict or effect. The Forest Plan, under the mandates of the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act and National Forest Management Act, on the other hand, had to tackle this very question. Important programmatic decisions made in the Forest Plan include what lands are suitable for various uses, including motorized uses, and what uses are compatible with each other (or where they may be compatible, even if some level of “conflict” would exist). Furthermore, to accommodate the many uses of these lands, the plan geographically separates some uses providing, for example, non-motorized areas where recreationists can reasonably expect a quiet outdoor experience and others where one should not anticipate the same. I am mindful that forest plans are permissive by nature. While certain uses may be permissible under the plan, the plan itself does not require those uses to occur. Nevertheless, the BNF Forest Plan provides my framework for what is “feasible, prudent, and reasonable” as I applied the TMR’s “minimization criteria” to this decision and, to the extent that current resource conditions allow, I should strive towards achieving the overall balance envisioned by the plan.

Section 3 of the Executive Order, besides requiring the initial designations discussed above, also places constraints and conditions on designations for off-road vehicle use. In general it requires, “that designation of such areas and trails will be based upon the protection of the resources of the public lands, promotion of the safety of all users of those lands, and minimization of conflicts among the various uses of those lands.”

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that the EO and TMRs’ “minimization criteria” apply only to the part of my decision concerning motor vehicle use off-roads. These criteria do not apply to the final decision’s designation of roads, nor do they apply to decisions concerning non-motorized uses. There is a bit of irony in this, given that potential impacts from roads tend to be so much greater than that of a trail in a similar location. The BNF Forest Plan anticipated expanding the Forest’s road system by hundreds of miles to meet FP objectives and access needs. Instead, we have achieved a net reduction in roads and made important repairs to the remaining system to minimize impacts to the same resource values the EO and TMR minimization criteria are intended to protect.

Congress has established the purposes for which National Forests are to be managed. “National Forests are established and shall be administered for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes” and these surface resources are to be administered for, “multiple use and sustained yield” (Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960).

“Multiple use” means: The management of all the various renewable surface resources of the national forests so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the needs of the American people; making the most judicious use of the land for some or all of these resources or related services over areas large enough to provide sufficient latitude for periodic adjustments in use to conform to changing needs and conditions; that some land will be used for less than all of

the resources; and harmonious and coordinated management of the various resources, each with the other, without impairment of the productivity of the land, with consideration being given to the relative values of the various resources, and not necessarily the combination of uses that will give the greatest dollar return or the greatest unit output.” (16 U.S.C. § 531).

Included is the entire definition of “Multiple use” from the Act here because, in considering and applying the language of the E.O. to National Forest lands, it must be considered in context of the laws that existed at the time it was enacted as well as in light of all the laws Congress has passed. This affects how we consider, weigh, and manage all the resources and values of our National Forests and, in this case, the Bitterroot National Forest.

Except for the comparatively limited focus of the E.O., there are only nominal differences in practice between the Executive Order’s purpose to “minimize conflict among the various uses of those lands” and the responsibility to integrate and manage the “various renewable surface resources of the national forests so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the needs of the American people.” This dual integration requirement is a daunting task. However the Executive Order, the Multiple-use Sustained Yield Act, Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act, and National Forest Management Act neither require nor anticipate that the current decision be the ultimate answer for all time. Each anticipate periodic adjustment as conditions and needs change.

Finally, these designations aren’t for all time. As with previous adjustments, what is right for today will be monitored and further adjusted over time? As before, I have emergency closure authority at hand for urgent needs such as resource damage or user safety, and through an established public process, I can consider new proposals adjusting motorized use as monitoring results suggest.

In summary, off road motorized use has never been a huge problem on the BNF (compared to some national examples) and when problems have occurred they’ve been taken care of. The BNF has managed off-road use appropriately over the years, and this adjustment to the existing tailored plan is in response to today’s issues, policies, regulations, and management needs. With this incremental change, the Forest continues its trend from the lightly regulated situation in 1972 to the current contrasting situation, with its multiple layers of resource protection.

Compliance with (36 CFR § 212.55 (b)) – Minimization Criteria

Access management is one of the most controversial issues currently facing federal land managers. The Forest Service approaches access and travel management with the recognition that it affects every program and every person served. The overarching aim is to seek a mix of access opportunities on NFS lands while considering physical conditions, resource needs, user conflicts, and user safety. Providing a “fair” allocation between different forest users is a challenging task and the BNF recognizes it cannot equally meet the needs of all recreation groups.

When designating public off-road motor vehicle use on National Forest System trails and areas on National Forest System lands, the 2005 Travel Management Rule requires Forests to consider effects on National Forest System natural and cultural resources, public safety, provision of recreational opportunities, access needs, conflicts among uses of National Forest System lands, the need for maintenance and administration of roads, trails and areas that would arise if the uses under considerations are designated; and the availability of resources for that maintenance and administration of roads, trails and areas, and the availability of resources for maintenance that would arise if the roads, trails and areas are designated.

To meet the intent of 36 CFR 212.55(b) I directed the ID team to review the details of the CFR and review all proposed trails and areas in respect to the four criteria provided (see below) and the condition and characteristics of the project area. This process would be used for evaluation summer as well as over snow

vehicle use also. I also asked the IDT to review Switaliski and Jones (2012), a peer-reviewed paper on off-road vehicle Best Management Practices (BMP), for additional direction in planning OHV routes and to apply those reasonable BMP's, {Project File folder: Recreation, REC-079}. Also please refer to Appendix 5- Minimization of the ROD and Appendix 6- which details the process for screening and selecting routes. Also, {Project File Folder "Public Involvement- Scoping (09/2007-8/2009), SCOPING-007 Appendix B - Details and explanation of changes proposed to snowmobile use by route and by District}.

- Damage to soil, watershed, vegetation, and other forest resources;
- Harassment of wildlife and significant disruption of wildlife habitats;
- Conflicts between motor vehicle use and existing or proposed recreation uses of National Forest System or neighboring Federal lands; and
- Conflicts among different classes of motor vehicle uses of National Forest System lands or neighboring Federal lands.

For example, when considering this decision in terms of minimization I incorporated the following:

Damage to soil, watershed, vegetation, and other forest resources:

- Motorized wheeled access for dispersed camping will be prohibited within 30 feet of any flowing stream, pond, lake, marsh, or wetland. Camping adjacent to water sources will be permitted; however, access must be by nonmotorized means.
- Motorized wheeled access for dispersed camping will be allowed in "corridors" off both sides of the center line of designated roads and trails for a distance of 300 feet, where resource conditions permit such use without causing unacceptable levels of damage. There will be an exception to limit motorized access to camping to the current existing sites within the Magruder Corridor and not allow new camps to be established even if they are within the 300 feet of center line. This is to ensure compliance with the Central Idaho Wilderness Act of 1980 (P.L.96-312).
- Parking of motorized vehicles off of designated routes for purposes other than dispersed camping will be limited to parking immediately adjacent to the designated route, in a manner that does not cause resource damage.
- There will be no areas designated for high-challenge motorized activities (hill climbs, mud bogs, play areas, and motor parks).
- There will be no game retrieval off designated routes using motorized means.
- Utilize OHV Ranger for local education/outreach to motorized users.
- Apply BMP's when conducting road and trail maintenance to reduce impacts to watersheds.
- Restrict motorized use in IRA's to insure long-term ecological processes remain intact.

Harassment of wildlife and significant disruption of wildlife habitats:

- Road and motorized trail closures included in **Alternative 1 (Modified)** increase the wildlife core security area during the summer in all five hunting districts and across the Forest as a whole. The core security area across the entire Forest would increase by about 16 percent. Substantial increases in core security areas throughout the Forest during the summer may improve the health and vigor

of some elk herds by reducing the amount of time and energy expended moving away from disturbance.

- My decision expands nonmotorized areas, partly to reduce disturbance to elk and encourage elk to stay on public land, and partly for reasons unrelated to elk. **Alternative 1 (Modified)** establishes some additional archery season closures, although many seasonal closures will continue to apply only during the rifle season.
- With respect to over-snow vehicle use, **Alternative 1 (Modified)** will decrease the acres available for such use by 205,141, with most of the decrease in RWAs, IRAs and WSAs. This is in response to the need to maintain or improve wilderness character and minimize impacts to mountain goat winter range.
- Discourage expansion of snow compacting activities and meet Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction (NRLMD) objectives by prohibiting over-snow vehicle use on about 85,000 acres of mapped lynx habitat.
- Prohibit use of over-snow vehicles in Tepee Creek would reduce disturbance to elk.
- Prohibit over-snow use in some high elevation areas that contain predicted wolverine denning habitat.
- Reduce potential for human disturbance and mortality to bighorn sheep during the winter by reducing human presence in some of the steep open grassy habitats preferred by sheep for winter range.

Conflicts between motor vehicle use and existing or proposed recreation uses of National Forest System or neighboring Federal lands:

- Approximately one mile of Trail #313 which passes through a culturally-sensitive area of concern to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes will be closed to all motorized vehicles yearlong.
- To provide motorized travel opportunities while minimizing effects to natural resources and conflicts of uses, my decision will add a new seasonal use restriction. It will prohibit motorized use on roads and trails during the period of 09/01- 11/30; use will be permitted from 12/02 – 08/31. This change was in response to public comments regarding conflicts of uses between non-motorized and motorized archery hunters.
- By designating proposed trails for ATVs, planning would be done to change these to a more sustainable design using USFS trail specifications, thus enhancing safety, the recreation opportunity, and resource protections. Better control of ATV travel is expected, reducing potential resource impacts and conflicts of use. Clearer understanding by the public would result in better user compliance on National Forest System lands
- While a number of public commenters questioned the management of recommended wilderness areas as the creation of “de facto” wilderness areas in lieu of action by Congress, the Forest Service has an affirmative obligation to manage RWAs for the social and ecological characteristics that form the basis for that recommendation, until congress decides whether or not to designate the areas as Wilderness. I am not creating wilderness; rather, I am trying not to establish or continue uses that would affect the wilderness character of these areas, and possibly jeopardize their designation as Wilderness in the future.

Conflicts among different classes of motor vehicle uses of National Forest System lands or neighboring Federal lands:

- After carefully considering the available options for maintaining the wilderness character in the Sapphire and Blue Joint WSAs as it existed in 1977, I have decided to close these areas to snowmobiling and other over-snow vehicle uses. I am also prohibiting summer motorized use and bicycling as well. I feel we have an obligation to manage WSAs for those social and ecological characteristics to preserve wilderness character. These actions assure that Congress' intent for these areas will be honored while preserving their potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.
- A reduction in the miles of motorized routes has the potential to increase conflict of uses between motorized and nonmotorized uses, to concentrate users, and to displace some users, which may impact some visitors' recreation experiences. By concentrating motorized activities in smaller areas, such as in the Rye Creek area, it is reasonable to expect that the noise levels would increase in those areas, and decrease elsewhere. Individuals that are displaced may have a strong personal connection to these areas, and are likely to feel adversely impacted.
- On the other hand, decreasing the miles of routes for motorized use increases the miles available for nonmotorized uses, providing for additional quiet areas. Fewer road miles and larger nonmotorized areas would provide a greater potential to meet the experiences sought by nonmotorized users.
- Closing motorized roads and trails in IRAs would provide large blocks of quiet areas, to protect those roadless characteristics that have been identified by nonmotorized users as providing solitude, tranquility, and a more primitive recreation experience. Additionally, there would be benefits to wildlife, including a lack of disturbance and increased security, and to other resources including soils and water resources.

These specific criteria referred to as "minimization criteria" apply when designating trails and areas, changing trail and area designations such as type of vehicle and season of use, or making a decision to no longer designate a previously designated trail or area. Consideration of the minimization criteria does not apply to the designation of roads.

Application of the minimization criteria requires a sufficient analysis to allow consideration of minimizing effects in compliance with E.O. 11644 and E.O. 11989. Minimizing effects, however, does not mean eliminating all effects. Eliminating all effects would prevent the Forest from meeting the purpose and need for this project which is to designate a system of roads, trails and areas to meet transportation, access, and recreation objectives. Considering minimization of impacts suggest that the Forest have a designated system to meet transportation and recreation needs, while minimizing the impacts from that designated system to an acceptable level.

Through this process, the ID Team identified trails and areas where it was apparent adverse resource effects associated with use of motorized vehicles were occurring. These included stream bottoms with trails running along them as well as inventoried roadless areas (IRA). In the IRAs, conflicts between motorized and nonmotorized uses were occurring. Those seeking a quiet, nonmotorized experience were finding that experience disturbed by the noise and other effects associated with the operation of motorized vehicles.

The ID Team proposed minimizing the impacts of motorized vehicles on resources by closing trails/areas yearlong to motorized uses, by instituting seasonal restrictions on the time periods when motorized vehicles could be operated, or by changing the type of vehicle(s) which could be operated on trails and areas. Each

of these actions has the effect of minimizing effects to resources, based on the particular situation of each trail or area.

The members of the ID Team did not consider every trail or area on the Forest for possible change of designation. The ID Team considered those trails or areas that were:

- Ø brought up during meetings and discussions with user groups,
- Ø commented upon in response to internal and external scoping and on the DEIS,
- Ø part of other Forest projects (e.g. Trapper Bunkhouse and Lower West Fork) that superseded the Travel Management Planning Project.
- Ø past Monitoring that brought up issues

“Unauthorized” or “user-created” routes were also considered for designation. There were also instances where changes to one route triggered a change to another. For example, if a route was designated to be closed, then any route connected to it that had no other access would need to be closed as well.

Please refer to {Project File folder “process.” Project File document PROCESS-001.pdf: Process for Selecting Routes to be Considered for Travel designation Changes in the Travel Management Planning Project action, DEIS, and FEIS/ROD}. In addition, see Appendices G (Summary of All Routes Screened During DEIS Preparation), H (Changes Between DEIS and FEIS to the FEIS regarding the rationale for why changes were proposed for specific routes, (roads and trails), or why not change was needed), I (All route Designations After FEIS), and Appendix J (Summary of Change DEIS to FEIS Over snow). Also, {Project File document “Public Involvement- Scoping (09/2007-8/2009), SCOPING-007 Appendix B - Details and explanation of changes proposed to snowmobile use by route and by District}.

The Forest has been managing motor vehicle access for decades. For example, numerous past and present projects considered access management on the Forest. The following EAs and EISs considered access management: Lost Lick, Camp Reimel, Reynolds Lick, Meadow Mink Springer, Fern Creek, Huck Trap, Nez Perce, Warm Springs, Slate Hughes, Lyman, Middle East Fork, Trapper Bunkhouse, Lower West Fork, Martin Creek, and Three Saddle. These projects totaled approximately 296,500 acres of National Forest System lands. Reasonably foreseeable projects which include minimum road analysis or access management, or both, include the Darby Lumber Lands Watershed Improvement and Travel Management Project and the Meadow Vapor Project (These projects would cover an additional 125,000 acres of National Forest System lands). These projects have included road and trail closures, changes to the season of use, changes to the type of vehicles allowed and other mitigations.

The Forest has also been managing over-snow vehicle use for several decades. The Forest currently has 748,981 acres open to motorized over-snow vehicle use for most or all of the winter season. These areas were closed because of critical winter ranger or because they are recommended wilderness or WSA's or non-motorized recreation under the 1987 Forest Plan. There have not been changes to areas restricted to over-snow vehicle use for several years. The Travel Management Planning Process will result in the publication of an OSVUM, Over Snow Vehicle Use Map.

Conclusion

36 CFR §212.55 (b) does not require that every designation choice be made in favor of natural resources. By including the above measures and constraints in my decision, I believe that I have, to the best of my ability, with the motorized designations in **Alternative 1 (Modified)** complied with the intent of 36 CFR §212.55(b) to minimize resource effects in a feasible, prudent and reasonable manner in light of the Forest Service's multiple-use mandate.

Consideration of the Issues

Significant issues result from the anticipated effects of implementing a proposed action based on environmental resources. Issues are unresolved conflicts regarding effects of the proposed action that are identified during internal and external scoping efforts. In Section 1501.7, the Council on Environmental Quality NEPA regulations requires the Forest to "...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)..."

Significant issues were identified following the public scoping period as described in the earlier section of this document as well as in detail in FEIS chapter 2. I used these issues to develop the range of alternatives and then to compare all alternatives to each other; this detailed analysis is included in the project record and summarized in FEIS chapter 3.

One of the primary criteria I considered in making my decision was how the alternatives addressed the following issues.

Issues Pertaining to Summer Motorized/Mechanical Transport

Motorized/Mechanical Transport Use on Roads and Trails in Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) Impacts Their Roadless Characteristics

Alternative 4 would have the largest reduction of miles designated for motorized use, followed by **Alternative 1 (Modified)**. There would be no change with Alternative 2, and Alternative 3 would see an increase in the miles of trails designated for motorized use. Alternative 3 would have the greatest number of miles of motorized routes within the IRAs, followed by Alternative 2, and **Alternative 1 (Modified)**. Alternative 4 would have the least.

Closing motorized roads and trails in IRAs would provide large blocks of quiet areas, to protect those roadless characteristics that have been identified by nonmotorized users as providing solitude, tranquility, and a more primitive recreation experience. Additionally, there would be benefits to wildlife, including a lack of disturbance and increased security, and to other resources including soils and water resources.

Under Alternative 4, trails in all IRAs would be closed to motorized use, while in **Alternative 1 (Modified)**, reductions would occur in the following IRAs: Allan Mountain, Blue Joint, Sapphire, Selway-Bitterroot, and Stony Mountain. Under Alternative 3, the increase in trails designated for motorized use would occur in the Sapphire and Selway-Bitterroot IRAs.

Alternative 4 would have the greatest positive impact on the roadless characteristics, followed by **Alternatives 1 (Modified)**, 2, and 3. Closing trails to motorized use would result in fewer motorized users, which would increase the opportunity for isolation from the sights, sounds, and presence of motorized use, while the reduction in the use/presence of motorized vehicles would result in improvements in Natural Integrity and Apparent Naturalness.

Alternative 3 would manage the most miles of motorized routes of any action alternative within the IRA areas. Alternative 3 would have the greatest negative effect on natural integrity and apparent naturalness. All other action alternatives would manage fewer miles of motorized routes and would better maintain natural integrity and apparent naturalness.

Under **Alternative 1 (Modified)** and Alternative 4, a decrease in the miles of routes available for motorized use has the potential to increase conflict of uses between motorized and nonmotorized uses, to concentrate uses, and to displace some users, depending upon the use the area receives, which has the potential to impact some visitors' recreation experiences. By concentrating motorized activities in smaller areas, it is

reasonable to expect that the noise levels would increase in those concentrated use areas, and decrease elsewhere. Individuals that are displaced that may have a strong personal connection to these areas are likely to feel adversely impacted. Users desiring off-road opportunities would experience changes with the closure of unauthorized routes and routes closed for resource reasons.

On the other hand, decreasing the miles of routes for motorized use increases the miles available for nonmotorized uses, providing for additional quiet areas. Fewer road miles and larger nonmotorized areas would provide a greater potential to meet the experiences sought by nonmotorized users. Nonmotorized users would be able to hike, horseback ride, and bicycle on motorized routes, and could encounter motorized vehicles.

I believe **Alternative 1 (Modified)** strikes the best mix between the alternatives in regards to the management of IRAs. Not only does this alternative best meet the Purpose and Need, it also would reduce impacts to IRA's by reducing motorized access in some of these areas while meeting the multiple use mandate in other areas of the Bitterroot National Forest and comply with minimization criteria as described on pages 16-22 of this ROD and Appendix 5 and Appendix 6 of the ROD.

Motorized/Mechanical Transport Use on Roads and Trails in Montana Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) Impacts Their Wilderness Attributes

Congress passed the Montana Wilderness Study Act (MWSA) (P.L. 95-150) in 1977. The Act created two WSAs on the Bitterroot National Forest, the Sapphire WSA and the Blue Joint WSA. According to Section 3(a) of the MWSA: "Except as otherwise provided by this section, and subject to existing private rights, the wilderness study areas designated by this Act shall, until Congress determines otherwise, be administered... so as to maintain their presently existing wilderness character and potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System." {PF DIRECTION-004}.

A U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling (Citizens for Balanced Use and Montana Wilderness Association et al. v. McAllister, December 2011, D.C. No.9:07-cv-00039) {PF WSA-015} has a direct bearing on my decision regarding the use of motorized/mechanical transport in WSAs. The Court ruled that the Forest Service must consider how the wilderness character of the relevant wilderness study area, particularly the opportunities for solitude it offered, has been maintained despite an increase in the volume of motorized and mechanized recreation in the area since 1977.

Currently, summer and over-snow motorized vehicles and bicycles are permitted in both the Sapphire and Blue Joint WSAs. The Forest researched historic use and examined trends, both local and statewide, in an attempt to determine a reliable amount (volume) of use level. Very little data was found to substantiate the volume of use or location of motorized/mechanical transport in these WSAs in 1977, when the MWSA law went into effect. Additionally, there was no data regarding current motorized and bicycle use levels. In the FEIS, available information on *where* use was occurring in the WSAs in 1977 was examined {PF WSA-023}; Based on this limited information, motorized use in the WSAs was restricted to those routes and areas where use was determined to be likely in 1977.

The lack of data regarding the volume of historic and current use limits my decision space related to motorized/mechanical transport use in the Sapphire and Blue Joint WSAs. Analysis of regional and national recreation-use data from the 1970s indicates that motorized/mechanical transport use levels in the two WSAs were likely much lower than exist today {PF WSA-003, WSA-004, WSA-005, and WSA-006}. The increase in use from 1977 to today is applicable across all uses (ATVs, motorcycles, snowmobiles, and bicycles) and seasons. The only information on use levels specific to either WSA is empirical information contained in a letter dated October 23, 1985 from Bitterroot National Forest Supervisor Robert Morgan estimating use levels in the Sapphire WSA accessing from the Bitterroot National Forest side {PF WSA-

008}. This information was adjusted using regional and national recreation data to determine an estimate for snowmobile use in the entire Sapphire WSA in 1977. The estimated use level in 1977 is very low, somewhere between 47 and 70 participants per season {PF WSA-004}. This converts to approximately 3 to 4 participants per weekend over a 16 week winter over-snow season (12/01-04/01).

Since the Forest does not have data specific to the Blue Joint WSA, estimates from the Sapphire WSA, with adjustments based on other data, were used. However, given all of the assumptions, specifically one assigning the same proportion of use in the Sapphire WSA to use in the Blue Joint WSA from 1977 to 2009, the estimates are rough, and suggest the magnitude of the change in relative terms is more accurate than the actual estimates of use. In other words, while the exact numbers of motorized/mechanized users is not known, it is clear that the current amount of use has far surpassed the 1977 levels.

An examination of national recreation use data was done to help resolve the issue and concluded that mountain biking was not likely occurring in either the Sapphire or Blue Joint WSAs in 1977. Because mountain biking (mechanical transport) is prohibited in Designated Wilderness, current use in the Sapphire and Blue Joint WSAs detracts from the wilderness character that was present in 1977, the date of the pertinent legislation.

After careful consideration of the available historic regional, state, and national data for use levels of summer and over-snow motorized vehicle and bicycle use, I am not able to determine use levels in 1977 with any reasonable degree of confidence. The data clearly indicates motorized use in the WSAs, both summer and winter, has more than doubled since 1977. The evidence also suggests mountain biking has grown from non-existent in 1977 to a common activity today.

I am confident, however, that even the limited available data on use levels in the WSAs indicates a substantial increase over 1977 levels. Therefore, some restriction on the volume and location of use is necessary to maintain the areas' 1977 wilderness character. I considered establishing a limited quota permit system to restrict snowmobiling in the Sapphire WSA to match the 1977 estimated use level. However, implementing a permit system with multiple entry points in an area without geographic features to help users determine their location in the WSA would be extremely challenging. Given the relatively low use levels that would be allowed, and the obligation placed on the Bitterroot and Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forests to implement and monitor a limited quota permit system, I do not consider this a practical option. I also considered a limited quota permit system for summer motorized use in the Sapphire WSA, and for summer motorized or snowmobiling in the Blue Joint WSA. However, due to the lack of base line data on 1977 use levels with which to establish even a theoretical quota, I am not implementing a permit system for these areas.

After carefully considering the available options for maintaining the wilderness character in the Sapphire and Blue Joint WSAs as it existed in 1977, I have decided to close these areas to snowmobiling and other over-snow vehicle uses. I am also prohibiting summer motorized use and bicycling as well. I believe we have an obligation to manage WSAs for those social and ecological characteristics to preserve wilderness character. These actions assure that Congress' intent for these areas will be honored while preserving their potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Motorized/Mechanical Transport Use on Roads and Trails in Areas Recommended for Wilderness Designation (RWAs) in the Forest Plan Impacts Their Wilderness Attributes

Recommended wilderness areas (RWAs) are inventoried roadless areas which were recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System by the 1987 Bitterroot National Forest Plan. As stated in the FEIS "...for Congress to designate these areas as wilderness, the management actions and

decisions affecting these areas must be made in a consistent manner that provides for protection and preservation of those special [wilderness] attributes.”

The Bitterroot National Forest Plan provides land and resource management direction for the Forest through the use of management areas (MA). In the Forest Plan, the Selway-Bitterroot RWA (including Blue Joint creek), is located in MA 6. As stated in the Forest Plan the goal for MA-6 is, “Pending action by Congress, manage to maintain the presently existing wilderness characteristics and potential for inclusion in the wilderness system” (USDA Forest Service 1987a, p. III-41).” Recreation standard (3) for MA 6 states “Continue current uses which do not detract from wilderness values. Transitory uses such as chainsaws, trail bikes and snowmobiles are appropriate if permitted by the Forest’s Travel Plan” (USDA Forest Service 1987a, III-41). In parts of these RWAs, uses have changed or certain types of use have increased greatly, degrading the wilderness character of these two areas and conflicting with standard (3).

Areas recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) should be managed to protect not only the attributes that resulted in their recommendation but also those areas potential for inclusion in the NWPS. Therefore, in the interest of preserving their wilderness attributes until such time as Congress makes the decision regarding wilderness designation, I have decided to prohibit the use of motorized/mechanical transport on the roads, trails, and areas in the Selway-Bitterroot RWA (including Blue Joint creek). If the level of such use is permitted to continue or increase, the suitability of the areas to be recommended as wilderness may change. This would put the Forest out of compliance with its Forest Plan, and eliminate the opportunity for me to continue to recommend the areas, and reduces the opportunity for Congress to designate these areas, as wilderness.

To designate these areas as wilderness, the management actions and decisions affecting them must be made in a consistent manner that provides for protection and preservation of their wilderness character. These considerations need to address resource conditions and social values, including the loss of solitude, noise, and isolation from others. If the long term desire for the areas is wilderness designation, it makes sense to me to manage them in a manner consistent with the Forest’s recommendation. If Congress makes a decision to drop the areas from further consideration, management direction for the areas will be reconsidered.

Additionally, allowing uses that do not conform to wilderness character creates a constituency that will have a strong propensity to oppose recommendation and any subsequent designation legislation. Management actions that create this operating environment will complicate the decision process for Forest Service managers and members of Congress. It is important that when the wilderness recommendations are made to Congress that they be unencumbered with issues that are exclusive to the wilderness allocation decision.

In response to the DEIS, the Forest received a number of comments from members of the mountain biking community, both local and national, regarding prohibiting mechanical transport use, including bicycles, in the RWAs. They feel that mountain bikes do not physically impact these areas, nor do they have the same impacts as motorized vehicles. I recognize that some types of motorized/mechanical transport may have different physical impacts on the landscape. However, prohibiting bicycles and other types of mechanical transport acknowledges there are impacts on the social and biotic environment that do not show as physical “scars” on the land, but which are inconsistent with the wilderness character I am responsible for maintaining.

A number of public commenters also questioned the management of recommended wilderness areas as the creation of “de facto” wilderness areas in lieu of action by Congress. The Forest Service has an affirmative obligation to manage RWAs for the social and ecological characteristics that form the basis for that recommendation, until congress decides whether or not to designate the areas as Wilderness. I am not

creating wilderness; rather, I am trying not to establish or continue uses that would affect the wilderness character of these areas, and possibly jeopardize their designation as Wilderness in the future.

None of the alternatives would designate any miles of roads open to motorized/mechanical transport within RWAs. **Alternatives 1 (Modified)** and **4** would not designate any miles of trails for motorized or mechanical transport. **Alternative 2** would designate 39.7 miles of motorized trails and 67.8 miles for mechanical transport, while **Alternative 3** would designate 63.6 miles of motorized trails and 67.8 miles for mechanical transport.

All alternatives would have a positive impact on wilderness attributes as they would not designate any miles of roads open to motorized/mechanical transport within RWAs. **Alternatives 1 (Modified)** and **4** would have the most positive impact on wilderness attributes as they, additionally, would not designate any miles of road or trails open to motorized/mechanical transport. **Alternative 3** would have the greatest adverse impact by designating motorized use on 63.6 miles of trails, followed by **Alternative 2**, which would designate motorized use on 39.7 miles of trails.

The quality of the experience for those seeking nonmotorized recreational activities would have the greatest potential to be enhanced under **Alternative 4**. Due to the amount of nonmotorized areas proposed, coupled with the Designated Wilderness, recommended wilderness, and WSAs on the Forest, it is expected that those desiring a nonmotorized experience would be able to meet their expectations.

Alternatives 1 (Modified) and **4** negatively affect motorized and mechanized transport users by closing the miles of trail available to motorcycles/bicycle riders where those trails occur in RWAs. This would ensure that long-term ecological processes remain intact and operating because the areas would not be subject to current or potentially increased future ground disturbance associated with motorized vehicles in particular. This area would appear less developed than at present because the sights and sound associated with motorized use would not occur. This would protect the existing high value of the areas for providing primitive recreation experiences and ensure the area retains its wilderness qualities.

Under **Alternatives 1 (Modified)** and **4**, a decrease in the miles of routes available for motorized use has the potential to increase conflict of uses between motorized and nonmotorized uses elsewhere, to concentrate uses, and to displace some users, depending upon the use the area receives, which has the potential to impact some visitors' recreation experiences. By concentrating motorized activities in smaller areas, it is reasonable to expect that the noise levels would increase in those concentrated use areas, and decrease elsewhere. Individuals that are displaced that may have a strong personal connection to these areas are likely to feel adversely impacted. Users desiring off-road opportunities would experience changes with the closure of unauthorized routes and routes closed for resource reasons.

On the other hand, decreasing the miles of routes for motorized use increases the miles available for nonmotorized uses, providing for additional quiet areas. Fewer road miles and larger nonmotorized areas would provide a greater potential to meet the experiences sought by nonmotorized users.

I have determined **Alternative 1 (Modified)** strikes the best mix between the alternatives in regards to the management of RWAs. This alternative meets the Purpose and Need, and also reduces impacts to RWA's by reducing motorized/mechanical access in these areas while meeting the multiple use mandate in other areas of the Bitterroot National Forest and complying with minimization criteria as described on pages 16-22 of this ROD and Appendix 5 and Appendix 6 of the ROD.

The Designation of Motorized Routes Affects Motorized and Nonmotorized Recreation Opportunities by Altering the Amount, Type, and Season of Motorized and Nonmotorized Routes

In **Alternative 1 (Modified)**, all designated motorized trails would be identified for use either by ATVs (single track vehicles would also be allowed) or single track vehicles (ATVs would not be allowed). By designating proposed trails for ATVs, planning would be done to change these to a more sustainable design using USFS trail specifications, thus enhancing safety, the recreation opportunity, and resource protections. Better control of ATV travel is expected, reducing potential resource impacts and conflicts of use. Clearer understanding by the public would result in better user compliance on National Forest System lands

Alternative 1 (Modified) will decrease the amount of motorized routes currently available by 355 miles. **Alternative 3** would have increased the amount by 82 miles while **Alternative 4** would decrease the amount by 1,378 miles. **Alternative 1 (Modified)** provides the best balance of motorized travel opportunities while minimizing impacts to resources.

A reduction in the miles of motorized routes has the potential to increase conflict of uses between motorized and nonmotorized uses, to concentrate users, and to displace some users, which may impact some visitors' recreation experiences. By concentrating motorized activities in smaller areas, such as in the Rye Creek area, it is reasonable to expect that the noise levels would increase in those areas, and decrease elsewhere. Individuals that are displaced may have a strong personal connection to these areas, and are likely to feel adversely impacted.

On the other hand, decreasing the miles of routes designated for motorized use increases the miles available for nonmotorized uses, providing for additional quiet areas. Fewer road miles and larger nonmotorized areas would provide a greater potential to meet the experiences sought by nonmotorized users.

Unauthorized routes to be designated on the MVUM would total 30 miles under **Alternative 1 (Modified)**. This would create new opportunities for motorized users, enhancing their recreational experience. Some of the routes proposed to be designated would not be shown on the MVUM until separate site-specific NEPA analysis and decisions are completed and the routes exist on the ground. Increasing the miles of routes for motorized use has the potential to result in additional conflict of uses between motorized and nonmotorized users in specific areas, and increased noise, which has the potential to impact some visitors' recreation experiences. Unauthorized routes not designated on the MVUM would be closed to motorized vehicle use. Additionally, the Forest Service can expend funds for maintenance and improvements,

With respect to the Continental Divide Scenic Trail (CDNST) (#9), under **Alternative 1 (Modified)**, the trail would provide a nonmotorized trail system totaling 25.3 miles in length that would require minimal maintenance. **Alternative 3** proposes 25.3 miles open to single track vehicles. However, having a motorized section of trail between segments of nonmotorized trail on either end would complicate management, and be confusing to the public. **Alternative 1 (Modified)** provides the best option for consistent management of the CDNST.

With respect to the Forest's ability to fund trail operations, maintenance, and improvements, **all alternatives** would be sufficiently covered by the historical level of funding. By reducing the miles of routes designated for motorized use on the MVUM, inspections would become timelier, and maintenance would occur soon after an issue was identified, keeping any impacts to adjacent forest resources to a minimum.

With respect to the recreation opportunity spectrum, ROS would not change with **any alternative**. Although the miles available for each setting may differ, the ROS is not affected.

Designation of Motorized Routes Impacts Water Resources, Fish and Aquatic Habitat, Soils, Wildlife, and Invasive Plants

Water Resources, Fish and Aquatic Habitat

Alternative 1 (Modified) will decrease motorized-access related sediment risk in 11 6th-level watersheds with 303(d)-listed (water quality impaired) streams and avoid an increase in motorized use-related sediment for all watersheds with listed streams. While it will not reduce sediment as much as Alternative 4, it has a greater reduction than either Alternative 2 or 3.

The largest reductions in sediment would come from reducing the amount of road within 100 feet of streams, which is considered to be the highest risk area for sediment production. 300 feet was used as the potential maximum distance for road sediment transport. **Alternative 1 (Modified)** would result in a reduction in the miles of roads within 100 feet of streams of about 5 percent, compared to **Alternative 2**, which would result in the highest number of miles of open roads within 100 and 300 feet of streams. **Alternative 3** is practically identical to **Alternative 2**. However, **Alternative 4** would result in substantially improved conditions for fisheries, the result of an approximately 33 mile decrease (-50 percent) in roads within 100 feet of streams, compared to **Alternative 2**. Findings would be similar with respect to the miles of roads within 300 feet of streams.

The miles of open motorized trails within sediment-contributing distance of streams vary among the alternatives. Relative to **Alternative 2**, **Alternatives 1 (Modified) and 4** decrease the amount of open motorized trail within 100 feet of streams. In contrast, **Alternative 3** increases the amount of open motorized trail. With respect to the open motorized trails within 300 feet of streams, relative to **Alternative 2**, **Alternatives 1 (Modified) and 4** decreases the amount and **Alternative 3** increases the amount of motorized trail.

With respect to the miles of open motorized trails within 100 and 300 feet of streams, **Alternative 3** would contain the highest number of miles, followed by **Alternative 2, Alternative 1 (Modified), and Alternative 4**. However, the effects to fish and aquatic habitat from designated trails from any of the alternatives is minor relative to the effect of roads, due mainly to the relatively narrow width of the trails.

Overall, Alternative 1 (Modified) will improve overall conditions for water resources and aquatic habitat resources. While there are differences between Alternatives 1 (Modified) and Alternative 4 in this regard, I am confident that the improvements provided by Alternative 1 (Modified) will continue to move the project area toward desired conditions and to a greater extent than Alternative 2 or 3 while still providing important motorized recreation opportunities.

Soils

Forest roads and trails can affect site productivity by removing and displacing top-soil during initial construction, compacting subsoils and changing the microclimate. This can result in the reduction or loss of rooting capacity, water infiltration, and microbiological activity, and the ponding of water, surface runoff, and accelerating erosion. However, minimal new construction is proposed as part of the Travel Management Planning Project: **Alternative 1 (Modified)** proposes approximately 10 miles of new construction, which equates to a loss of nearly 25 acres of soil productivity, compared to the existing condition (**Alternative 2**). Loss of soil productivity from new construction would be negligible considering the size of the existing transportation system and the overall Bitterroot National Forest's land base. **Alternative 1 (Modified)** will result in a reduction in motorized routes on sensitive soils more so than the existing condition (**Alternative 2**) and **Alternative 3**.

Alternative 4 would have the least impact on the Soils resource, followed by **Alternative 1 (Modified)**, **Alternative 2**, and **Alternative 3**. The biggest difference between the alternatives would be the acres of sensitive soils with the potential to be disturbed in corridors used for motorized wheeled access for dispersed camping. Use of motorized vehicles off of designated routes which cross sensitive soils to access dispersed camp sites can degrade soil productivity, and cause rutting as well as displacement and compaction. The acres of sensitive soils located within motorized access corridors for dispersed camping are as follows: **Alternative 3** (18,244 acres); **Alternative 2** (17,187 acres); **Alternative 1** (15,554 acres), and **Alternative 4** (5,130 acres).

Motorized routes on soils sensitive to erosion have the potential to increase erosion, which may affect water resources and fisheries in those locations where eroded sediments are capable of reaching streams.

Alternative 3 contains 113 miles of routes on soils with high erosion potential, followed by **Alternative 2** (107 miles), **Alternative 1 (Modified)** (101 miles), and **Alternative 4** (56 miles). **Alternative 4** would result in the largest reduction in miles of routes open to motorized travel on soils with high erosion potential, followed by **Alternative 1 (Modified)**. **Alternative 3** would result in an increase in motorized routes located on high erosion potential soils. There would be no change with **Alternative 2**.

Wildlife

Lynx

Compared to the existing condition, **Alternative 1 (Modified)** would reduce effects to lynx by reducing wheeled motorized access to parts of the Forest. This in turn would reduce the risk of human-caused mortality and disturbance to transient lynx or lynx that may occupy the Forest in the future. **Alternative 2** would not change the existing level of cumulative effects to lynx because it would not change existing motorized access. **Alternative 3** would increase the miles of roads and trails in lynx habitat open to wheeled vehicles. These changes in motorized access would incrementally increase cumulative effects to lynx, which is likely to be slightly negative for transient lynx or lynx that may occupy the Forest in the future.

While **Alternative 1 (Modified)** would not benefit lynx as much as **Alternative 4**, it is more beneficial than **Alternatives 2 and 3**. **Alternative 2** would not change the existing level of cumulative effects to lynx because it would not change existing motorized access. **Alternative 3** would increase the area of mapped lynx habitat open to over-snow vehicle use slightly, and would increase the miles of roads and trails in mapped lynx habitat open to wheeled vehicles. These changes in motorized access would incrementally increase cumulative effects to lynx, which is likely to be slightly negative for transient lynx or lynx that may occupy the Forest in the future. **Alternative 4** would reduce cumulative effects to lynx by reducing over-snow and wheeled motorized access to mapped lynx habitat in parts of the Forest. This in turn would reduce the risk of human-caused mortality and disturbance to transient lynx or lynx that may occupy the Forest in the future.

Wolverine

Compared to the existing condition, **Alternative 1 (Modified)** would reduce effects to wolverines by reducing wheeled motorized access to parts of the Forest that are predicted wolverine habitat. This in turn would reduce the risk of human-caused disturbance or mortality to wolverines. **Alternative 2** would not change the existing level of cumulative effects to wolverines because it would not change existing motorized access. **Alternative 3** would increase effects to wolverines by increasing wheeled motorized access to parts of the Forest that are predicted wolverine habitat. This in turn would increase the risk of human-caused disturbance or mortality to wolverines.

While **Alternative 1 (Modified)** would not benefit wolverine as much as Alternative 4, it is more beneficial than Alternatives 2 and 3. **Alternative 1 (Modified)** would reduce cumulative effects to wolverines by reducing over-snow and wheeled motorized access to parts of the Forest that are predicted wolverine habitat. This in turn would reduce the risk of human-caused disturbance or mortality to wolverines. **Alternative 2** would not change the existing level of cumulative effects to wolverines because it would not change existing motorized access. **Alternative 3** would increase cumulative effects to wolverines by increasing over-snow and wheeled motorized access to small parts of the Forest that are predicted wolverine habitat. This in turn would increase the risk of human-caused disturbance or mortality to wolverines. **Alternative 4** would reduce cumulative effects to wolverines by reducing over-snow and wheeled motorized access to large parts of the Forest that are predicted wolverine habitat. However, for the most part, cumulative effects at this reduced level would be negligible, as they are generally short-term in nature, would occur at different times of the year, would be distributed across the Forest, and are not concentrated in one area.

Bighorn Sheep

Compared to the existing condition, **Alternative 1 (Modified)** would reduce the potential for human disturbance and mortality to bighorn sheep during the summer by reducing human presence in some of the steep, open grassy habitats preferred by sheep for summer and winter range. **Alternative 1 (Modified)** would increase the area of sheep summer habitat that is outside the zone of motorized influence. Reducing disturbance would lessen the chance for displacing sheep to less suitable habitat, which could increase the risk of predation. It would also reduce the potential for poaching losses to the sheep populations in these areas. This alternative would not affect the vegetative habitat suitability for sheep. The net effect from this combination of factors to local sheep populations is expected to be positive.

Alternative 1 (Modified) would reduce the risk of motorized disturbance to bighorn sheep during both summer and winter more than **Alternatives 2 or 3**, but less than **Alternative 4**. **Alternative 3** would increase the risk of motorized disturbance to bighorn sheep during both summer and winter slightly compared to **Alternative 2**, substantially more than **Alternative 1 (Modified)**, and very substantially compared to **Alternative 4**. **Alternative 4** would reduce the risk of motorized disturbance to bighorn sheep during both summer and winter substantially compared to **Alternatives 2 or 3**, and somewhat more than **Alternative 1 (Modified)**.

Elk

Elk Habitat Effectiveness (EHE)

The EHE percentage across the Montana portion of the Forest would increase by about 4.5 percent under **Alternative 1 (Modified)**, with most of the improvement occurring in HDs 204 and 250. Elk habitat effectiveness percentages in all HDs, except HD 204, and at the Forest level, would exceed the recommended minimum amount (Lyon 1983) when evaluated at these larger scales, although some third-order drainages within each HD would not meet the EHE standard in the Forest Plan. Changes in EHE percentage under **Alternative 1 (Modified)** are expected to have only minor influences on elk population numbers. Road closures are widely distributed, and are generally not concentrated within any particular elk herd unit.

Elk habitat effectiveness percentages would not change under **Alternative 2** at either the Forest or the HD scale. Elk habitat effectiveness percentages in all HDs, except HD 204, and at the Forest level, would exceed the recommended minimum amount (Lyon 1983) when evaluated at these larger scales, although some third-order drainages within each HD would continue to not meet the EHE standard in the Forest

Plan. Changes in elk population numbers in the Bitterroot drainage would not be the result of changes in EHE percentages.

The EHE percentage across the Montana portion of the Forest would not change under **Alternative 3**, but would decline slightly in HD 261. Elk habitat effectiveness percentages in all HDs except HD 204, and at the Forest level would exceed the recommended minimum amount (Lyon 1983) when evaluated at these larger scales, although some third-order drainages within each HD would not meet the EHE standard in the Forest Plan. Changes in EHE percentage under **Alternative 3** are expected to have only minor influences on elk population numbers. Roads whose status would change are widely distributed, and are generally not concentrated within any particular elk herd unit.

The EHE percentage across the Montana portion of the Forest would increase by about 15 percent under **Alternative 4**, with substantial improvement occurring in HDs 204, 250, and 261, and modest improvement in HD 270. Elk habitat effectiveness percentages in all hunting districts and at the Forest level would exceed the recommended minimum amount (Lyon 1983) when evaluated at these larger scales, although some third-order drainages within each hunting district would not meet the EHE standard in the Forest Plan. These relatively substantial increases in EHE in several of the hunting districts, and at the Forest-wide scale, would result from closing about 438 miles of roads that are currently classified as open. The widespread increases in EHE percentages under **Alternative 4** would be strongly positive for elk populations. However, it would still be difficult to quantify whether any future changes in elk populations were the direct result of changes in EHE because so many other factors influence elk populations.

Because of this dilution of effects, changes in EHE percentages under **Alternatives 1 (Modified), 2 and 3** are unlikely to have a measureable effect on total elk population numbers in the Bitterroot drainage.

Elk Habitat Effectiveness Index

The EHE Index percentage across the Montana portion of the Forest would increase by about 3.5 percent under **Alternative 1 (Modified)**, with improvement spread fairly evenly among all the hunting districts. Increases in the EHE Index under **Alternative 1 (Modified)** would positively influence elk numbers to some degree by increasing the effectiveness of elk habitat through reducing the risk of human disturbance to elk. Changes in the EHE Index percentage under **Alternative 1 (Modified)** are expected to have only minor influences on elk population numbers. Road and trail closures are widely distributed, and are generally not concentrated within any particular elk herd unit.

The EHE Index percentage would not change at the Forest scale or in any of the hunting districts under **Alternative 2**. Changes in elk population numbers in the Bitterroot drainage would not be the result of changes in EHE Index percentages.

The EHE Index percentage across the Montana portion of the Forest would not change under **Alternative 3**, but would decline slightly in HDs 204 and 261. **Alternative 3** would negatively influence elk populations to some degree by reducing the effectiveness of elk habitat through increasing the risk of human disturbance to elk. Changes in the EHE Index percentage under **Alternative 3** are expected to have only minor influences on elk population numbers. Reductions in road and trail closures are widely distributed, and are fairly minor.

The EHE Index percentage across the Montana portion of the Forest would increase by about 29 percent under **Alternative 4**, with substantial improvement occurring in all HDs. Increases in the EHE Index percentage under **Alternative 4** would be strongly positive for elk populations. However, it would still be difficult to quantify whether any future changes in elk populations were the direct result of changes in EHE Index percentages because so many other factors influence elk populations.

Because of this dilution of effects, changes in EHE percentages under **Alternatives 1 (Modified), 2 and 3** are unlikely to have a measureable effect on total elk population numbers in the Bitterroot drainage.

Elk Security Area (Rifle Season)

Elk Security Area percentage across the Montana portion of the Forest would increase by about 33 percent under **Alternative 1 (Modified)**, with most of the increase located in HDs 250, 261, and 270. The security area percentage in HD 261 would exceed the recommended minimum amount. Security area percentages in all the other hunting districts, and at the Forest level, would improve substantially, but would remain below the recommended amount. This increase in security area percentage in many areas across the Forest would reduce elk vulnerability to hunting mortality to some extent, which would help elk herds recover in some areas where numbers have been below objectives.

The security area percentage would not change at the Forest scale or in any of the hunting districts under **Alternative 2**. Security area percentages would remain well below the recommended level in all hunting districts and at the Forest-wide scale. Elk would remain highly vulnerable to hunting mortality, which could continue to suppress elk numbers in many areas across the Forest.

The security area percentage across the Montana portion of the Forest would increase by about 12 percent under **Alternative 3**, with moderate increases located in HDs 250 and 261, and a small increase in HD 270. Security area percentage would decrease a small amount in HD 240. The security area percentage in HD 261 would meet the recommended minimum amount, while the percentages in the other hunting districts and at the Forest level would remain well below the recommended amount. These relatively small increases would probably have only minor impacts to elk vulnerability, and would be unlikely to have quantifiable effects on elk population numbers.

The security area percentage across the Montana portion of the Forest would increase by about 60 percent under **Alternative 4**, with substantial increases located in HDs 204, 250, 261, and 270, and a small increase in HD 240. The security area percentage in HDs 250 and 261 would meet the recommended minimum amount, while the percentages in HDs 240 and 270 and at the Forest scale would approach the recommended amount. This large increase in security area percentage in many areas across the Forest would substantially reduce elk vulnerability to hunting mortality, which would help elk herds increase across the Forest.

Elk Security Area Index (Archery Season)

The elk security area index percentage across the Montana portion of the Forest would increase by about 35 percent under **Alternative 1 (Modified)**, with substantial increases located in HDs 204, 250, 261, and 270, and a minor increase in HD 240. The security area index percentage would more than double in HD 261, but would remain slightly below the recommended minimum amount. Elk security area index percentages in HDs 204, 250, and 270 would improve considerably, but would remain well under the recommended minimum level. This increase in security area percentage in many areas across the Forest would reduce elk vulnerability to hunting mortality during the archery season to some extent, which would help elk herds recover in some areas where numbers have been below objectives. It would also reduce the tendency of elk to leave summer ranges early and move to private land in an effort to avoid hunting pressure.

The security area index percentage would not change at the Forest scale or in any of the hunting districts under **Alternative 2**. Security area index percentages would remain well below the recommended level in all hunting districts and at the Forest-wide scale. Elk would remain highly vulnerable to hunting mortality, which could continue to suppress elk numbers in many areas across the Forest. This alternative would not

reduce the tendency of elk to leave summer ranges early and move to private land in an effort to avoid hunting pressure.

The security area index percentage across the Montana portion of the Forest would increase by about 4 percent under **Alternative 3**, with a substantial increase located in HD 261 and a minor increase in HD 270. Security area index percentages would decline slightly in HDs 240 and 250, and would be eliminated in HD 204. The security area index percentage would almost double in HD 261, but would remain somewhat below the recommended minimum amount. Security area index percentages in HDs 240, 250 and 270 would remain well under the recommended minimum. HD204 would no longer provide any elk security area during the archery season. With the exception of HD 261, these relatively small changes would probably have only minor impacts to elk vulnerability, and would be unlikely to have quantifiable effects on elk population numbers. This alternative would not reduce the tendency of elk to leave summer ranges early and move to private land in an effort to avoid hunting pressure, and might even exacerbate that tendency in some cases. **Alternative 3** does not extend any seasonal closures on roads currently open to full- to include the bow season, but does apply an archery season closure to a number of roads and trails currently open to ATVs and/or motorcycles either seasonally or year long. It also opens some routes that are currently closed to all motorized use.

The security area index percentage across the Montana portion of the Forest would increase by about 91 percent under **Alternative 4**, with substantial increases located in HDs 204, 250, 261, and 270 and a minor increase in HD 240. The security area index percentage would more than triple in HD 261, and would exceed the recommended minimum amount. The security area index percentage in HD 250 would more than double, but would remain slightly below the recommended minimum amount. Security area index percentages in HDs 204 and 270 would improve considerably, but would remain somewhat below the recommended minimum level. This substantial increase in security area index percentages in many areas across the Forest would reduce elk vulnerability to hunting mortality during the archery season to a large extent, which would help elk herds recover in some areas where numbers have been below objectives. It would also reduce the tendency of elk to leave summer ranges early and move to private land in an effort to avoid hunting pressure.

Wildlife Core Security Areas

Road and motorized trail closures that are included in **Alternative 1 (Modified)** would increase the wildlife core security area during the summer in all five hunting districts and across the Forest as a whole. The core security area would almost triple in HD 204, double in HD 261, and increase by about 19-31 percent in HDs 250 and 270. Core security area in HD 240 would only increase by a small amount, because most of this hunting district is in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness or adjacent recommended wilderness or other areas without roads, and there are few opportunities to increase the core security area by closing roads or trails. The core security area across the entire Forest would increase by about 16 percent. Substantial increases in core security areas throughout the Forest during the summer may improve the health and vigor of some elk herds by reducing the amount of time and energy expended moving away from disturbance. However, disturbance during the summer in the absence of hunting pressure is not likely to cause elk to abandon summer ranges for winter ranges

Alternative 1 (Modified) would reduce the risk of human-caused disturbance and hunting mortality to elk somewhat compared to the existing condition, but less than Alternative 4. Alternative 3 would have increased the risk of human-caused disturbance and hunting mortality to elk slightly from the existing condition. Alternative 4 would reduce the risk of human-caused disturbance and hunting mortality to elk somewhat more than Alternative 1, but substantially more than either Alternatives 2 or 3.

My decision expands nonmotorized areas, partly to reduce disturbance to elk and encourage elk to stay on public land, and partly for reasons unrelated to elk. **Alternative 1 (Modified)** establishes some additional archery season closures, although many seasonal closures will continue to apply only during the rifle season. Most of Trail #313 will be closed to motorized use in **Alternative 1 (Modified)**, although the segment between Cinnabar Saddle and Sawmill Saddle will be motorized. Motorized trails were not included in EHE calculations because the EHE standard applies only to roads, but an EHE Index was created that does include trails as an additional way to compare the effects of the alternatives.

An alternative that meets the EHE standard without a project-specific Forest Plan amendment was considered, but not analyzed in detail because it would have eliminated motorized access to important recreational facilities such as major road systems, popular trailheads, and several lookouts. These include heavily-used roads such as Railroad Creek Loop (#711), Two Bear (#720), Blue Mountain (#5778), and the Nez Perce Pass Road (#468); trailheads for trails to St. Mary Peak (#116), Palisade Mountain (#44), and McCart Lookout (#436); and the Willow Mountain and Lookout Mountain lookouts. The FEIS did change the analysis method for elk security during the archery season as requested by commenters.

Mountain Goats

Alternative 1 (Modified) would reduce the risk of motorized impacts to mountain goats during the summer more than Alternatives 2 and 3. Alternative 3 would be the only alternative that would increase the risk of motorized impacts to goats during the summer. **Alternative 1 (Modified)** would reduce the cumulative effects to mountain goats by reducing trail miles open to motorized use in goat summer range. This would reduce the potential for human disturbance and mortality to goats during the summer. Alternative 2 would not change the existing level of cumulative effects to mountain goats because it would not change existing motorized access. Alternative 3 would increase cumulative effects to mountain goats by increasing trail miles open to motorized use in goat summer range. This would increase the potential for human disturbance and mortality to goats during the summer.

Fisher and American Marten

Alternative 1 (Modified) would reduce the risk of human-caused disturbance and trapping mortality to fishers and martens somewhat more than the Alternative 2 and Alternative 3, but less than Alternative 4. **Alternative 1 (Modified)** would reduce cumulative effects to fishers and martens by reducing over-snow and wheeled motorized access to parts of the Forest that are fisher and marten habitat.

Gray Wolf

Alternative 1 (Modified) would reduce the risk of motorized human-caused disturbance or mortality to wolves, and enhance availability of prey more than the Alternative 2, but less than Alternative 4. **Alternative 1 (Modified)** and Alternative 4 would reduce cumulative effects to wolves by reducing motorized access to parts of the Forest. This in turn would reduce the risk of human-caused mortality and disturbance to wolves, and to their ungulate prey base. Alternative 3 would reduce the miles of roads open to motorized use slightly, while increasing the miles of trails in remote areas open to motorized use. On balance, Alternative 3 would increase cumulative effects to wolves to some extent.

Wildlife Summary

Alternative 1 (Modified) will improve the overall conditions for wildlife. While there are differences between **Alternative 1 (Modified)** and Alternative 4 in this regard, I am confident that the improvements provided by **Alternative 1 (Modified)** will continue to move the project area toward desired conditions for

these species and that it will do so to a much greater extent than the existing condition (Alternative 2) or Alternative 3 while still providing important motorized recreation opportunities.

Invasive Plants

All alternatives would have routes designated open to motorized vehicles which have invasive plants located along them. **Alternative 3** would have 58 trails, **Alternative 2** would have 31 trails, **Alternative 1 (Modified)** would have 17 trails, and **Alternative 4** would have one trail. Invasive plants will continue to spread along all open routes at their current rate, as travel corridors are an invasive plant vector.

Alternative 3 would reopen 36 miles of routes; **Alternative 1** would reopen 25 miles of routes, **Alternative 4** would reopen 1.5 miles, while **Alternative 2** would not reopen any miles.

Motorized Wheeled Access for Dispersed Camping Impacts Soils, Rare Plants, and Invasive Plants

Soils

Alternative 4 would have the least impact on the soils resource, followed by **Alternative 1 (Modified)**, Alternative 2, and Alternative 3. The biggest difference between the alternatives would be the acres of sensitive soils with the potential to be disturbed in corridors used for motorized wheeled access for dispersed camping. Use of motorized vehicles off of designated routes which cross sensitive soils to access dispersed camp sites can degrade soil productivity, and cause rutting as well as displacement and compaction.

Alternative 1 (Modified) and Alternative 4 would cumulatively reduce the amount of sensitive soils present in motorized wheeled access corridors for dispersed camping sites when compared to the existing condition and Alternative 3. This reduction is due to a decrease in the overall amount of open motorized routes for **Alternative 1 (Modified)** and Alternative 4.

Rare Plants

All alternatives would have routes designated open to motorized vehicles which have rare plants located along them. As long as motorized vehicles stay on designated routes, rare plants and their habitat would not be adversely affected. Limiting motorized travel off of roads and trails beyond the 300 foot dispersed camping corridor will reduce the risk of spreading invasive plant species which impact rare plant species and rare plant habitat.

There would be little cumulative effects to rare plants in all alternatives. **Alternative 1 (Modified)** will have less impact to rare plants than the existing condition (Alternative 2).

Invasive Plants

Alternative 1 (Modified) will allow motorized wheeled access for dispersed camping within a 300 foot corridor off both sides of designated routes; under **Alternative 1 (Modified)** the corridors will be extended to those sites identified on the MVUM. Alternative 4 would allow motorized wheeled access for dispersed camping within a 150 foot corridor on either side of designated routes. Alternatives 1, 3, and 4 would contain the prohibition against motorized wheeled access for dispersed camping within 30 feet of any flowing stream, pond, lake, marsh, or wetland; Alternative 2 would not contain the prohibition. Limiting motorized travel off of roads and trails beyond the 300 foot dispersed camping corridors will reduce the risk of spreading invasive plant species.

Alternative 4 would have the least impact from motorized wheeled access for dispersed camping because of the smaller corridor size; however, **Alternative 1 (Modified)** will have somewhat less impacts than the existing condition and Alternative 3.

Motorized wheeled access to dispersed camping is identified as an acceptable use in the project area under the 2001 Tri-State OHV Decision and the 2005 Travel Management Rule, and we have observed (PF FPMON-003 through FPMON-036) that, in general, this has occurred within acceptable environmental limits. Additionally, the analyses suggest that most dispersed campsites on the Bitterroot National Forest have already been developed, along with access to the sites, while natural barriers, including standing and down trees, large rocks, thick vegetation, water features, and abrupt topographic changes, limit the opportunities to develop new sites. Where site-specific issues have occurred, we have issued closures for resource protection (36 CFR §295.5) and repaired any resource damage utilizing boulders, gravel, etc. to define and armor sites. I have this tool available when needed; therefore, the Forest will continue this practice under **Alternative 1 (Modified)**. I feel this is consistent with the 2001 Tri-State OHV Decision; the 2005 Travel Management Rule; Executive Order 11644 (Use of Off-Road Vehicles on Public Lands); the Bitterroot Plan and Forest Service Manual 7700 (Travel Management).

Alternative 1 (Modified) will reduce the number and miles of designated roads and trail available, effectively reducing the number of designated routes which could be used for motorized wheeled access for dispersed camping. Monitoring of dispersed camping sites and the access routes will continue (ROD Appendix 2). Additionally, a number of Conditions of Use are listed in Chapter 3, Section 3.2 (Recreation and Trails), Sub-Section F in the FEIS. These will also help to avoid or minimize any adverse effects attributable to this activity.

Issues Pertaining to Over Snow Motorized Recreation

Designating Acres Open to Over-Snow Vehicle Use Impacts Recreational Experiences

Alternative 3 would result in an increase in the number of acres (4,679) available for over-snow vehicle use, while **Alternatives 1 (Modified)** and **Alternative 4** would show decreases of 205,141 acres and 388,543 acres, respectively. **Alternative 2** would show no change. Under **Alternative 3**, conflicts of use and safety issues between motorized and nonmotorized over-snow users, as well as noise impacts, would continue and potentially escalate.

Under **Alternative 1 (Modified)** and **Alternative 4**, nonmotorized over-snow users would see an increase in large quiet areas, which would allow them to experience solitude and quiet in a more remote recreation setting. Many nonmotorized recreation users feel that their expectations for a quiet recreation experience cannot be met in areas where motorized recreation occurs. However, motorized users may feel displaced from their favorite riding areas as well as experiencing concentration of use.

Alternative 4 would have the largest reduction in acres available for over-snow vehicle use, followed by **Alternative 1 (Modified)**. There would be no change for **Alternative 2**, and **Alternative 3** would see an increase. **Alternative 3** would have the greatest number of acres for over-snow vehicle use, followed by **Alternative 2**, **Alternative 1 (Modified)**, and **Alternative 4**.

Over-snow vehicle use has little lasting impact on the natural features or landscape. Roadless characteristics would only be impacted during a portion of the year (the season of winter begins around December 20-21, and ends around March 19-21, though there could be snow covering the ground on the Forest from November until March, depending upon the location), and some for only a short time basis.

Alternative 4 would have the greatest positive impact on the roadless characteristics, followed by **Alternatives 1 (Modified), 2, and 3**. Closing areas to over-snow vehicle use would result in fewer motorized users, which would increase the opportunity for isolation from the sights, sounds, and presence of motorized use; while the reduction in the use/presence of motorized vehicles would result in improvements in Natural Integrity and Apparent Naturalness.

Overall, **Alternative 4** would manage the least miles of over-snow routes of any action alternative. **Alternative 4** would have the greatest positive effect on natural integrity and apparent naturalness. All other action alternatives would manage greater acres of over-snow use.

Alternatives 1 (Modified) and 4 propose to reduce the number of acres available for motorized over-snow use, with **Alternative 4** showing the greatest reduction due to closure of RWAs across the Forest, including the Sapphire and Blue Joint WSAs, goat habitat areas in the Willow and Moose Creek areas, and the adjustment of the northern border of the Stony Mountain IRA. Additional closures to IRAs are the Allan Mountain, Sleeping Child, North Big Hole, Sapphire, and those IRAs adjacent to the Bitterroot portion of the Sapphire WSA.

Alternative 1 (Modified) removes the opportunity for motorized over-snow use in RWAs across the Forest, the Sapphire and Blue Joint WSAs, the goat habitat areas in the Willow Creek and Moose Creek areas and the northern border of the Stony Mountain IRA. Additional acres in the Camas Creek area been opened to motorized over-snow travel in **Alternative 1 (Modified)**.

As a result, the nonmotorized over-snow user would see an increase in large quiet areas, which would allow them to experience solitude and quiet in a more remote recreation setting. However, motorized users may feel displaced from favorite riding areas as well as concentration of use. Many nonmotorized recreation users feel that their expectations for a quiet recreation experience cannot be met in areas where motorized recreation occurs.

Designating Areas Open to Over-Snow Vehicle Use Affects Wintering Wildlife

Lynx

Compared to the existing condition, **Alternative 1 (Modified)** would reduce effects to lynx by reducing over-snow access to parts of the Forest. This in turn would reduce the risk of human-caused mortality and disturbance to transient lynx or lynx that may occupy the Forest in the future. Alternative 2 would not change the existing level of cumulative effects to lynx because it would not change existing motorized access. Alternative 3 would increase the area of lynx habitat open to over-snow vehicle use slightly. Alternative 4 would reduce effects to lynx to a greater degree than Alternative 1 (Modified) by reducing oversnow access to mapped lynx habitat, mostly in recommended wilderness areas, WSAs and some IRAs.

Wolverine

Compared to the existing condition, **Alternative 1 (Modified)** would reduce effects to wolverines by reducing over-snow access to parts of the Forest that are predicted wolverine habitat. This in turn would reduce the risk of human-caused disturbance or mortality to wolverines. Alternative 2 would not change the existing level of cumulative effects to wolverines because it would not change existing motorized access. Alternative 3 would increase effects to wolverines by increasing over-snow access to parts of the Forest that are predicted wolverine habitat. This in turn would increase the risk of human-caused disturbance or mortality to wolverines. Alternative 4 would reduce effects to wolverines to a greater degree than Alternative 1 (Modified) by reducing oversnow access to predicted wolverine habitat, mostly in recommended wilderness areas, WSAs and some IRAs.

Elk

Alternative 1 (Modified) would prohibit over-snow vehicle use in the Teepee Creek winter range during the winter to reduce disturbance to elk that winter in this area. This closure, plus additional over-snow vehicle area closures in some recommended wilderness, WSAs, and some IRAs would reduce the percentage of elk winter range on the Forest open to over-snow vehicles to about 62.9 percent (163,179 acres). Over-snow vehicle use would be prohibited in about 16 percent (31,370 acres) of the elk winter range currently open to such use for this alternative. Many of the areas included in this total are steep, heavily timbered, and rocky, and receive little over-snow vehicle use at present. These additional closures would reduce motorized disturbance to wintering elk to some extent, but it would be difficult to quantify any changes to herd numbers or health as a result.

Mountain Goats

Alternative 1 (Modified) would reduce the risk of motorized impacts to mountain goats during the winter more than Alternatives 2 and 3 but not as much as Alternative 4. Alternative 3 would be the only alternative that would increase the risk of motorized impacts to goats during the winter. **Alternative 1 (Modified)** would reduce the cumulative effects to mountain goats by prohibiting over-snow vehicle use in some goat winter ranges. This would reduce the potential for human disturbance and mortality to goats during the summer and winter. Alternative 2 would not change the existing level of cumulative effects to mountain goats because it would not change existing motorized access. Alternative 3 would increase cumulative effects to mountain goats by allowing over-snow vehicle use in one small area of goat winter range that is currently closed to such use. This would increase the potential for human disturbance and mortality to goats during the winter.

Wintering Wildlife Summary

Alternative 1 (Modified) will provide an improvement over the existing condition overall for wildlife. While there are differences between **Alternative 1 (Modified)** and Alternative 4 in this regard, I am confident that the improvements provided by **Alternative 1 (Modified)** will continue to move the project area toward desired conditions for these species and that it will do so to a much greater extent than the existing condition (Alternative 2) or Alternative 3 while still providing important motorized recreation opportunities.

Issues Pertaining to Specific Trails

Trail #39 (Chain of Lakes)

Trail #39 is an ATV trail located partially within the Sapphire WSA. The trail was constructed as an access road during the Sleeping Child Fire of 1961. It is approximately 6.5 miles in length, and runs from Road #726 to the Bitterroot Rock Creek Divide Trail #313. It is currently open yearlong to motorized use (ATVs and motorcycles). The trail provides the ATV enthusiast with an opportunity to ride through high alpine meadows, subalpine larch stands, and rugged rocky terrain. The steep and rocky trail conditions make this suitable for intermediate-to-advanced riders. The conditions also make it difficult to control erosion from motorized use.

I have decided to close Trail #39 to summer motorized/mechanical transport use, over-snow vehicle use, and bicycles, yearlong. This will help move the area towards one of the Recreation standards for MA 5, stated on III-37 (6) "*Pending resolution by Congress, that portion of the management area within the boundary of Montana Study Act areas will be administered according to the goals and standards established for Management Area 6*" (USDA Forest Service 1987a).

Analysis of regional and national recreation-use data from the 1970s indicates that motorized/mechanical transport on this trail were likely much lower than exist today {PF WSA-003, WSA-004, WSA-005, and WSA-006}. The increase in use from 1977 to today is applicable across all uses (ATVs, snowmobiles, and bicycles) and seasons. The only information on use levels is empirical information contained in a letter dated October 23, 1985 from Bitterroot National Forest Supervisor Robert Morgan estimating use levels in the Sapphire WSA accessing from the Bitterroot National Forest side {PF WSA-008}. An examination of national recreation use data was done to help resolve the issue and concluded that mountain biking was not likely occurring in either the Sapphire or Blue Joint WSAs in 1977. Because mountain biking (mechanical transport) is prohibited in Designated Wilderness, current use in the Sapphire and Blue Joint WSAs detracts from the wilderness character that was present in 1977, the date of the pertinent legislation.

After careful consideration of the available historic regional, state, and national data for use levels of summer and over-snow vehicle and bicycle use, I am not able to determine use levels in 1977 with any reasonable degree of confidence. The data clearly indicates motorized use in the WSAs, both summer and winter, has more than doubled since 1977. The evidence also suggests mountain biking has grown from non-existent in 1977 to a common activity today.

I am confident, however, that even the limited available data on use levels in the WSAs indicates a substantial increase over 1977 levels. Therefore, some restriction on the volume and location of use is necessary to maintain the areas' 1977 wilderness character. I considered establishing a limited quota permit system to restrict snowmobiling in the Sapphire WSA to match the 1977 estimated use level. However, implementing a permit system with multiple entry points in an area without geographic features to help users determine their location in the WSA would be extremely challenging. Given the relatively low use levels that would be allowed, and the obligation placed on the Bitterroot and Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forests to implement and monitor a limited quota permit system, I do not consider this a practical option. I also considered a limited quota permit system for summer motorized use in the Sapphire WSA, and for summer motorized or snowmobiling in the Blue Joint WSA. However, due to the lack of base line data on 1977 use levels with which to establish even a theoretical quota, I am not implementing a permit system for these areas.

After carefully considering the available options for maintaining the wilderness character in the Sapphire and Blue Joint WSAs as it existed in 1977, I have decided to close these areas to snowmobiling and other over-snow vehicle uses. I am also prohibiting summer motorized use and bicycling as well. These actions assure that Congress' intent for these areas will be honored while preserving their potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

The decision process to close this trail was extremely difficult for me. I appreciate that it is a very popular trail, and is one of two "true" ATV trails on the Forest, and that it provides a unique experience for motorized users by allowing them to access a high-elevation alpine area. I also know that the trail has been popular with motorized enthusiasts for a number of years as a destination for groups and families. However, in order to maintain the wilderness character of the Sapphire WSA as it existed in 1977, in compliance with the Montana Wilderness Study Act, I have decided to close the trail to summer motorized/mechanical transport use (including bicycles) and over-snow vehicle use.

Trail #313

The Bitterroot/Rock Creek Divide Trail #313 was constructed in the early 1900s to provide access for fire protection and several fire lookouts along the Rock Creek Divide. This trail historically traversed much of the length of the Sapphire Crest, from Eightmile Saddle to what is now the Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness. Tread width along the trail varies from full size vehicle width to single track, with roads replacing some portions of the trail. The terrain varies from wide-open ridge tops to steep timbered sections, lending itself

to a variety of recreational experiences. The trail crosses back and forth along the Divide, and is located alternately on the Bitterroot, Beaverhead-Deerlodge, and Lolo National Forests along most of its length.

Designation of where motorized use is allowed on Trail #313 has a complicated history, which has resulted in confusion and conflicts between motorized and nonmotorized uses.

Trail #313 generated considerable public comment during the scoping phase of the project and in response to the DEIS. In general, motorized users wanted the entire length of the trail open to motorized use, while nonmotorized users wanted the trail closed to motorized use. My decision addresses concerns raised by the public by providing both user groups with recreation opportunities along Trail #313. To summarize my decision, motorized use is prohibited where #Trail 313 crosses into the Sapphire Wilderness Study Area, and is also closed to motorized use in areas where the trail bisects large unroaded areas that are best managed for nonmotorized recreation experiences.

The changes to Trail #313 will reduce disturbance to elk using the corridor between the Welcome Creek Wilderness and the Threemile Wildlife Management Area during the fall, winter, and spring seasons. It will also enhance wilderness values by reducing noise.

I am closing Section #313.5 (Southern end of the historical site closure to near the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest Trail #8202 intersection; Intersection with B-D NF Road #8671) to motorized vehicles. With the closure of Trail 39, there will be no place for motorized users to go once reaching the intersection with Trail 39. There will be no motorized means to get on this particular section of Trail 313 from the Bitterroot National Forest.

I am closing Section #313.6 from mile post 1.75 to 2.70 (Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest Road #8107 to one mile south of B-D NF Road #8107) and Section #313.6 from mile post 2.70 to 5.94 (One mile south of Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest Trail #8107 to the Anaconda Pintler Wilderness) to motorized travel to be consistent with management on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest.

Additionally, my decision relocates the motorized route from south of Cleveland Mountain to about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile north of Cinnabar Saddle. This new location will provide a motorized route that will address concerns about motorized use on Trail #313 adjacent to the Welcome Creek Wilderness on the Lolo National Forest.

Findings Related to Laws and Regulations

To the best of my knowledge, my decision is consistent with all laws, regulations, and agency policy relevant to this project.

Executive Order 11644 as Amended by Executive Order 11989

These Executive Orders address the use of off-road vehicles on public lands. It requires the Forest Service and other federal land management agencies to “establish policies and provide for procedures that will ensure that the use of off-road vehicles on public lands will be controlled and directed so as to protect the resources of those lands, to promote the safety of all users of those lands, and to minimize conflicts among the various uses of those lands” (section 1). The Executive Order directs agencies to designate the “specific areas and trails on public lands on which use the off-road vehicles may be permitted, and areas in which the use of off-road vehicles may not be permitted” (section 3).

In addition to the specific motorized recreation management reflected in the travel maps, the 1987 Bitterroot Forest Plan considered off-road vehicle use per the Executive Order and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) implementing regulations at 36 CFR 219/21(g) (1982 Rule) when it allocated motorized and nonmotorized use in specific management areas.

Section 8 of the Executive Order includes requirements for monitoring the effects of off-road vehicle use and adjusting designations as needed. It states “the agency shall monitor the effects of the use of off-road vehicles on lands under their jurisdiction.” On the basis of the information gathered, they shall from time to time amend or rescind designations of areas or other actions taken pursuant to this order as necessary to further the policy of this order.”

The Bitterroot National Forest monitors the effects of off-road vehicle use {PF FPMON-003 through FPMON-036} and when necessary, to further the policy of this order or to otherwise further the purposes for which the Forest was established, amends or rescinds motor vehicle use designations. Sections 3.1 and 3.2 of Chapter 3 in the FEIS document the history of managing motorized recreation on the Forest.

In addition to the requirement for designating where off-road vehicles may or may not be permitted, section 3 of the Executive Order requires “that designation of such areas and trails will be based upon the protection of the resources of the public lands, promotion of the safety of all users of those lands, and minimization of conflicts among the various uses of those lands.

I believe the effects of off-road vehicle use on the Bitterroot National Forest have been further “minimized” by my decision. As discussed in the Rationale section of this ROD, and in Chapter 3 of the FEIS, we have been actively managing this use since the first Travel Plan was put in place in 1976. Previous and ongoing management actions, both programmatic and site-specific, have reasonably reduced and minimized the adverse effects of off-road vehicle use and conflict among the uses of the Forest. I find the FEIS for the Travel Management Planning Project demonstrates continuing consideration of the minimization criteria required to protect the resources of the Bitterroot National Forest, to promote the safety of users, and to minimize conflicts among the various uses of those lands.

Montana Wilderness Study Act

Section 3(a) of the Montana Wilderness Study Act states, “Except as otherwise provided by this section, and subject to existing private rights, the wilderness study act designated by this Act shall, until Congress determines otherwise, be administered by the Secretary of Agriculture so as to maintain their presently existing wilderness character and potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.” (91 STAT. 1244).

As noted on pages 6 and 8 of this document, with supporting discussion on pages 25-27, I have decided to prohibit motorized/mechanical transport use in the Sapphire and Blue Joint wilderness study areas for both summer and over-snow vehicle use to be consistent with the Act.

The Travel Management Planning Project will comply with the Montana Wilderness Study Act to “...maintain their presently existing wilderness character...” by closing the Sapphire and Blue Joint WSAs to snowmobiling and other over-snow vehicle uses. I am also prohibiting summer motorized use and bicycling in the Sapphire and Blue Joint WSAs.

National Forest Management Act (NFMA)

On April 9, 2012 the Department of Agriculture issued a final planning rule for National Forest System land management planning (2012 Rule) 77 FR 68 [21162-21276]). None of the requirements of the 2012 Rule apply to projects and activities on the Bitterroot National Forest, as the Bitterroot Forest Plan was developed under a prior planning rule (36 CFR §219.17(c)). Furthermore, the 2012 Rule explains, “[The 2012 Rule] supersedes any prior planning regulation. No obligations remain from any prior planning regulation, except those that are specifically included in a unit’s existing plan. Existing plans will remain in effect until revised” (36 CFR §219.17).

Bitterroot National Forest Plan

Forest Plan Consistency

Management activities are to be consistent with the Forest Plan ((16 USC 1604 (i)). General management direction for the Bitterroot National Forest is found in the Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), which established Forest-wide and management area standards and (Forest Plan, Chapter II), a number of which are applicable to this project.

Each section of Chapter 3 of the FEIS, where the effects of the Travel Management Planning Project on the resources are analyzed, contains a section titled Consistency with the Forest Plan, Laws, and Regulations. The section lists the applicable forest-wide and management area standards, and how the project complies with them.

I have evaluated the alternatives in terms of meeting Forest Plan standards. **Alternative 1 (Modified)**, will meet Forest Plan standards, including the site-specific amendment described above, and will contribute toward reaching Forest Plan goals and objectives. Consistency with these standards can be found throughout the FEIS {pp.3.1-28, 3.2-72, 3.3-150, 3.4-34, 3.5-144, 3.6-40, 3.7-21, 3.8-20, 3.9-34, 3.10-22, 3.11-12, and 3.12-4}.

The Forest Plan provides for maintaining diversity through management standards. The Travel Management Planning Project is consistent with the Forest Plan as stated above. The biological evaluations and biological assessments prepared for the fisheries, threatened and endangered plants, and wildlife resources confirm that this project will not impact the viability of sensitive, threatened and endangered species.

For applicable Plan standards and guidelines, please refer to Appendix 4.

For additional information, please refer to the Endangered Species Act, below.

Clean Water Act

Compliance with the Clean Water Act is discussed in the Water Resources analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.6.5.C in the FEIS (pp.3.6-42 to 3.6-44). Based on the measures outlined in the FEIS, **Alternative 1 (Modified)** will protect soil and water resources, and meets the requirements of the Clean Water Act.

Montana State Regulation

Compliance with the Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) (16.20.603) pertaining to best management practices (BMPs) is discussed in Water Resources analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.6.5.B in the FEIS (pp.3.6-41 to 3.6-42). Based on the measures outlined in the FEIS, **Alternative 1 (Modified)** protects soil and water resources, and meets the requirements of ARM 16.20.603.

Endangered Species Act (ESA)

The ID Team's botanist, fisheries biologist, and wildlife biologist evaluated **Alternative 1 (Modified)** in regards to effects to threatened and endangered plants, fish, and wildlife species, respectively (FEIS, pp.3.5-10 to 3.5-26, 3.5-147, 3.5-148; 3.7-4 to 3.7-21, 3.7-26 to 3.7-27; and 3.9-7 to 3.9-34).

As there are no threatened and endangered plant species known to occur on the Bitterroot National Forest, consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) was not required, and a biological assessment (BA) was not prepared. A biological evaluation (BE) for sensitive plants was prepared, and is

incorporated into the Rare Plants (Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Plants, Species of Concern, and Forest Species of Interest) analysis in Chapter 3, Section 3.9 of the FEIS (FEIS, p.3.9-28 to 3.9-34).

Formal consultation with the USFWS regarding effects to the threatened bull trout was initiated in January 2010 when a BA was sent for their review {PF FISH-004}. The USFWS replied with a Biological Opinion in February, 2012 {PF FISH-011}, that states "... the implementation of the proposed project is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the bull trout in the West Fork Bitterroot River and Bitterroot River core areas or the coterminous listing of bull trout," and that "...actions as proposed, are not likely to destroy or adversely modify bull trout critical habitat."

A BE for the sensitive westslope cutthroat trout and western pearlshell mussel was prepared, and incorporated into the Fisheries and Aquatic Ecology analysis in Chapter 3, Section 3.7 of the FEIS (FEIS, p. 3.7-26 to 3.7-27).

On July 2, 2013, the USFWS issued an updated list of threatened, endangered, and candidate species that may be present on the Bitterroot National Forest. The list added Canada lynx as a transient species that may be present in secondary/peripheral habitat on the Forest. The Forest initiated informal consultation with USFWS regarding project effects to the Canada lynx in August 2013 by sending a BA for their review {PF WILD-171}. The BA concluded that the effects determination for implementing **Alternative 1 (Modified)** is May Effect, Not Likely to Adversely Effect. The USFWS responded with a Letter of Concurrence dated September 6, 2013 in which they acknowledged the BA's determination that **Alternative 1(Modified)** is not likely to adversely affect lynx, and confirmed that formal consultation on lynx is not required {PF WILD-172}. No critical habitat for lynx has been designated within or in the proximity of the Bitterroot National Forest, so the Travel Management Planning Project would have no effect on lynx critical habitat.

The U.S. Forest Service Northern Region Office developed a Programmatic Biological Assessment (BA) for North American Wolverine {PF WILD-177} that addressed the effects of routine Forest Service activities throughout the Region on wolverines. The programmatic BA found that routine Forest Service activities described in FEIS Appendix A were not a threat to wolverines. Routine activities included in FEIS Appendix A that are pertinent to the Travel Management Planning Project include new permanent or temporary road construction, road maintenance, road closures, re-opening closed roads, trail maintenance, construction or reconstruction, dispersed camping and other recreation, developed recreation, and recreation special uses. None of these activities were found to be a threat to wolverines. This programmatic BA was submitted to USFWS for review on May 20, 2014. USFWS concurred with the No Jeopardy finding in the Programmatic BA in a letter dated May 23, 2014 {PF WILD-178}. The effects determination for the Travel Management Planning Project tiers to the Northern Region Office Programmatic BA for wolverine {PF WILD-177}, and is therefore covered by USFWS concurrence with the BA's finding of No Jeopardy for the activities proposed in the EIS {PF WILD-178}.

A BE for terrestrial wildlife species on the Forest that are classified as sensitive by the Regional Forester was incorporated into the Wildlife analysis in the FEIS (Chapter 3, Section 3.5). Sensitive wildlife species for the Bitterroot National Forest include American peregrine falcon, bald eagle, bighorn sheep, black-backed woodpecker, Coeur d'Alene salamander, fisher, flammulated owl, gray wolf, long-eared Myotis, long-legged Myotis, northern bog lemming, northern leopard frog, western big-eared bat, western toad, and wolverine (which is also proposed for listing under ESA).

On October 3, 2014, the USFWS listed the western population of the yellow-billed cuckoo as a threatened species. USFWS subsequently added yellow-billed cuckoo to the list of threatened, endangered, and candidate species that may be present on the Bitterroot National Forest in riparian habitats with cottonwoods and willows. The effects determination for this species in the Travel Management Planning

Project FEIS is No Effect for **all alternatives**. A No Effect determination does not require consultation with USFWS.

On January 12, 2016, USFWS published a 90-day finding on a new petition to list the Northern Rocky Mountain Distinct Population Segment (DPS) of the fisher as an endangered or threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) (USDI Fish and Wildlife Service 2016). USFWS found that the petition presented substantial scientific information indicating that the Northern Rocky Mountains DPS of the fisher may warrant federal protection as a threatened or endangered species. With this notice, USFWS initiated a 12-month review of the status of the fisher to determine whether federal listing of this DPS of the fisher is warranted. If FWS determines that federal listing of the fisher is warranted, the status of the DPS would be changed to Proposed for listing, and another review period would commence. Potential listing of the fisher as endangered or threatened would take a minimum of two years from the start of the status review. In the interim, the Northern Rocky Mountain DPS of the fisher is not protected under the ESA, but continues to be classified as a Sensitive species by the Northern Region. Potential listing does not change the analysis of project effects to fisher or the effects determination for fisher.

USFWS initiated a previous 12-month status review of the Northern Rocky Mountain DPS of the fisher on April 15, 2010 (USFWS 2010a). After an evaluation of the best scientific and commercial information available regarding the conservation status and potential threats, a June 30, 2011 decision determined that the fisher in this region did not warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act at that time (USDI Fish and Wildlife Service 2011).

Environmental Justice Act

Executive Order 12898 directs federal agencies to identify and address the issue of environmental justice: adverse human health and environmental effects that disproportionately impact minority and low-income populations.

No local minority or low-income populations were identified in the Travel Management Planning Project analysis area during scoping or effects assessment. **Alternative 1 (Modified)** will have no adverse effects to human health and safety, or environmental effects to minority or low-income populations. For additional information, please refer to the Environmental Justice process paper {PF ENVIR-JUSTICE-001}.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

I believe Alternative 1 (**Modified**) provides adequate conservation measures for migratory birds. Overall, impacts on forest land birds are expected to be minimal and are not expected to impact species viability (FEIS, Chapter 3, p.3.5-147).

National Historic Preservation Act

Formal consultation has been completed with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes {PF AGENCY-003, 004, 016, and 029}. Additionally, travel management planning was also discussed with the Nez Perce Tribal Preservation Office in 2005 and 2006, and during informal meetings with the Tribal Chairman. **Alternative 1 (Modified)** is not expected to affect any cultural resources. Recognizing that the potential exists for unidentified sites to be encountered and disturbed during project implementation, there is a project design feature (See Appendix 2) authorizing the closure of roads, trails, or trail segments which provide access to identified sensitive archeological sites.

The Northern Region of the Forest Service, which includes the Bitterroot National Forest, maintains the following programmatic agreements with the State Historic Preservation Officers of Montana and Idaho:

MONTANA: “Programmatic Agreement Among the USDA Forest Service Northern Region (Montana), the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the Montana State Historic Preservation Officer Regarding Cultural Resources Management on National Forests in the State of Montana. ”

IDAHO: “Programmatic Memorandum of Agreement Between the USDA Forest Service Northern Region, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer Regarding Cultural Resources Management on Specified National Forests in the State of Idaho.”

Heritage and Tribal interests are regulated by federal laws that direct and guide the Forest Service in identifying, evaluating, and protecting heritage resources. **Alternative 1 (Modified)** will comply with these federal laws {FEIS, p.3.11-12}.

Climate Change

I recognize that motorized vehicles emit greenhouse gases that contribute to global climate change. This project does not authorize whether or not motorized activity occurs on the Forest, but rather where it may occur. There is no data to indicate that the general public will meaningfully alter the amount of their motorized use because of the designation of routes on the Bitterroot National Forest. Under **Alternative 1 (Modified)**, less area would be available for motorized use than is currently available, but there is no indication that would result in less motorized use by the general public. It is almost impossible to determine whether there would be a corresponding increase or decrease in greenhouse gas emissions, including carbon dioxide, nitric oxide, and methane, attributable to the Travel Management Planning Project. Furthermore, “Because greenhouse gases mix readily into the global pool of greenhouse gases, it is not currently possible to ascertain the indirect effects of emissions from single or multiple sources (projects)” {PF DIRECTION-009}.

Other Considerations

Suggested Closure of all ML1 and ML 2 Road Segments that Cross Streams or are within INFISH-defined RHCAs

During the Objection Process, one of the objectors suggested that all ML1 and ML2 road segments that cross streams or are within INFISH-defined RHCAs should be closed to motorized travel or document why this is not feasible.

All Management Level (ML) 1 and 2 roads proposed to be open to motorized access in Alternative 1 (Modified) that intersected a 300’ wide buffer (INFISH Riparian Habitat Conservation Area or “RHCA” buffers) on the either side of perennial and intermittent streams (600’ wide total width) were selected as a group that would potentially be closed with the proposed remedy. Any roads in the same ML that were “orphaned” by the closure of this group were also added in, as they would not be accessible. Finally, all roads proposed for map code 7 and 8 (closed to full size year-round and opened to OHVs < 50” or less, yearlong or seasonally, respectively) were reviewed for a visual estimate of closure due to being “orphaned” by the above closures, or were within RHCA buffers themselves. Approximately 75% of this map code or vehicle class would be closed to satisfy the proposed remedy.

With this proposed remedy, approximately 568 miles of ML1 and 2 roads currently open to full-size vehicle access would be closed due to their intersection with RHCA buffers, and another 51 miles would be closed due to being “orphaned”. This would be a 42% reduction (Alt 1 – modified proposed 1,482 miles, minus 619 miles) in access for this class of vehicle Forest-wide. Approximately 446 miles of road and trail currently proposed to be open only to OHVs < 50” or less with Alt 1 (modified) would also be closed. When added to the full-size routes that would be closed with this remedy, approximately 47% of the total

motorized access (Alt 1 – modified proposed 2,246 miles, minus 1,065 miles) currently proposed with Alt 1 – modified would be closed to motorized access.

After reviewing the results of this exercise, and discussing the results with my staff, I believe there would be both benefits and drawbacks to this remedy. Aquatic and wildlife resources would benefit from the reduced disturbance and related road sediment. Non-motorized recreationists may also benefit, but access to several trailheads and areas would become much more difficult. Road maintenance costs may decrease, but the Forest would still be responsible for responding to resource issues like culvert failures, as this project does not include storage or obliteration treatments. Certain types of motorized recreation, such as personal use wood cutting, dispersed camping using motorized access, and simply driving in the forest would be negatively affected, as the ML 1 and 2 roads that would be closed by this proposed remedy are an important source of these activities and enjoyment of the forest. The concentration of motorized use on remaining roads may also produce unintended consequences.

The selection of Alternative 1 (Modified) already reduces the amount of motorized access by a substantial amount, and provides for improved conditions for all resources. Several new, large areas would be completely non-motorized if the objectors suggestion was implemented, creating new opportunities for those who prefer “quiet” areas to recreate. The chosen alternative also provides reasonable motorized access to many areas that have been historically available for this type of use.

It is my determination the Forest’s current approach of managing road systems through smaller project-area analyses provides the detail needed to reduce resource effects and maintain reasonable access. There are also no existing laws which require closure of these selected existing roads. This remedy would result in a huge reduction in motorized access within management areas that legally allow motorized use, and without the fine-scale detail of smaller project area analysis, may not produce the results suggested by the objector. I do not find it reasonable and prudent to choose this remedy within the multiple-use context in which it would occur.

Ravalli County Natural Resource Use Policy

The Ravalli County Natural Resource Use Policy (RCNRUP) was signed and adopted by the Ravalli County Board of Commissioners on November 21, 2012. The policy was developed to help guide the county with their involvement with public land managers. The Ravalli County Natural Resource Use Policy contains Goals and Objectives for how the county would like to see natural resources within the county managed.

There are Goals and Objectives outlined in the policy in relation to Roads and Trails: Access and Transportation on pages 11-13 of the RCNRUP and in Appendix D to the policy. There are 8 goals total related to access and transportation. Below are the relevant goals that relate to the Bitterroot Travel Plan.

Goal	Objectives
Maintain the historic right to travel over public lands whenever necessary for human safety and emergency ingress and egress, especially for wildfire control, in the pursuit of farming, ranching, timber harvest, mining, recreational	Objective B: Keep rights of way going to and inside public lands open for cultural, economic, social, recreational, hunting, fishing and public safety purposes, including access for suppression of wildfires and safety of fire fighters.

Goal	Objectives
activities, motorized vehicle use, access to irrigation infrastructure and other historic uses.	Objective D: Decommissioning - Ravalli County is opposed to road and trail closures and/or decommissioning. There shall be no net loss of Forest Service roads/trails. We support additional roads/trails.
Allow and encourage the full range of recreational activities in Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs).	Objective A: Existing recreational uses in Recommended Wilderness Areas (RWAs) and Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) will continue until such time as Congress finalizes the classification.
	Objective B: No road or trail in an IRA will be designated for non-motorized use without meaningful coordination with Ravalli County, local interested parties, and appropriate agencies.
Encourage and facilitate responsible (as defined by NOHVCC) Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) recreational opportunities.	Objective A: Outside Designated Wilderness Areas and some developed recreation facilities, no area, road, or trail should be designated exclusively for non-motorized use. Exceptions to this policy can be made through the coordination process when visitor safety issues can be demonstrated and documented.
Promote motorized access for recreational opportunities.	Objective A: All non-wilderness areas should be available to over the snow vehicles.
	Objective B: Modernize the Forest Service definition of an A TV.
	Objective C: Develop and designate recreational opportunities for high clearance vehicles.
	Objective D: Seasonal closures of areas, roads, and trails may be desirable for the protection of wildlife, road and trail tread, and watersheds. These seasonal closures will be determined by coordination among Ravalli County and appropriate agencies.

As stated in the Purpose and Need (p. 2), the overall objective of this project is to provide a manageable and sustainable system of designated public motorized routes and areas within the Bitterroot National Forest, consistent with and to achieve the purposes of the Forest Plan and the travel management regulations at 36 CFR 212 subpart B. The interdisciplinary team reviewed the relevant goals and objectives of the natural resource policy. There are some goals that align with purpose and need of the project

however; there are some conflicts or inconsistencies between the Bitterroot Travel Plan and the county Natural Resource Policy.

The policy states on page 23, “Road and Trail Closures and Restrictions - It is the policy of Ravalli County to keep as many roads and trails available yearlong for economic, management and recreational uses as is practically possible. However, Ravalli County recognizes that some roads and trails may necessarily be closed or seasonally restricted for resource and wildlife management purposes. These closures and restrictions should be thoroughly and meaningfully coordinated among State and Federal Agencies, Ravalli County.” I feel this is one area where the Bitterroot Travel Plan and the County policy are in alignment. The IDT used the screening process to thoroughly evaluate what motorized access to maintain on Forest roads and trails.

The policy states on page 25, “The 1977 Montana Wilderness Study Act established two Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) in Ravalli County (Sapphire WSA and Blue Joint WSA) totaling 89,000 acres. It is the policy of Ravalli County that management prescriptions for WSAs should allow existing uses to continue and existing routes to be maintained until such time as Congress designates those areas as Wilderness.” This statement is one of the areas where the Bitterroot Travel Plan and County policy are not in alignment. As described on pages 25-27, I have given my rationale for why I believe motorized/mechanical transport cannot be continued in the MWSAs at this time.

The Bitterroot National Forest will continue to notify the Ravalli County Commission during future project development and implementation and will consider the applicable pieces of their Natural Resource Use Policy. I understand county representatives perceive issues regarding effects related to motorized access. The FEIS economic/social and recreation chapters discuss these impacts, but I acknowledge the counties still dispute whether my decision will strike the correct balance between ecological protection and local economic need. I recognize the public is dependent on access and use of the Forest. I believe a productive working relationship between the Forest and county governments is vital for successfully implementing this Plan.

Elderly and Disabled Populations

During the Objection Process, several concerns from the public arose that I would like to address. There were several comments and concerns related to how the Travel Plan will affect the disabled and elderly population. Several objectors felt that Alternative 1 (Modified) discriminated against the disabled and elderly populations. All people, including the elderly or those with disabilities, may use their motor vehicles on roads, trails, and areas designated for such use and identified on the MVUM. Restrictions on motorized use that are applied consistently to everyone are not discriminatory. This was addressed in the FEIS, Chapter 3.2 – Recreation and Trails on page 3.2-9. This concept also applies to providing special provisions for aging populations that may have limited mobility.

Forest Areas “Open” to Motorized Travel

Another concern raised during the Objection Process that I would like to clarify is related to the amount of the Forest that is “open” to various forms of recreation. The amount of Forest open to a particular type of recreation is not measured by the amount of trail that traverses through a particular area. The Bitterroot Forest Plan contains management area direction that directs where and what type of recreation is appropriate. There is a Forest-wide management objective that states the Forest will “provide for the current mix of dispersed recreation by maintaining about 50 percent of the Forest in wilderness, about 20 percent in semi-primitive motorized recreation and about 30 percent in roaded areas.” The Forest currently maintains these recreation opportunities as allocated in the plan. This decision does not change that direction or reallocate any areas on the Forest.

Other Alternatives Considered

Alternative 2 – No Action (Existing Condition)

The No Action alternative is required under NEPA regulations (40 CFR §1502.14(d)). It represents the existing condition, and provides a baseline against which the effects of implementing the “action” alternatives are compared.

Alternative 2 would defer implementation of the 2005 Travel Management Rule, and would not result in the publication of a MVUM. It is represented by the current (2005) Bitterroot National Forest travel plan map and supporting prohibitions. Permissible motorized uses include those roads, trails, and areas not otherwise prohibited, including use of an undetermined number of unauthorized routes which were created prior to the 2001 Tri-State Decision. Under **Alternative 2**, motorized wheeled access for dispersed camping would continue to be permitted in accordance with the 2001 Tri-State Decision (USDI/USDA Forest Service 2001b).

Bicycles would be permitted on all roads and trails outside of designated wilderness, including those closed to motorized use, and those located in recommended wilderness areas.

Table 5 shows the status of motorized routes and the number of miles for **Alternative 2**:

Table 5: Alternative 2. Route Status and Number of Miles (Summer)

Route Status	Miles
Roads open to all vehicles ¹ - yearlong	10
Roads open to all vehicles –seasonally ²	673
Roads open to highway legal vehicles - yearlong	887
Roads open to highway legal vehicles – seasonally ²	5693
Trails ⁴ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – yearlong	110
Trails ⁴ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – seasonally	550
Trails open to motorcycles - yearlong	330
Trails open to motorcycles – seasonally ⁵	78
Total miles open to motorized use	2,601

¹ Includes highway-legal vehicles and unlicensed ATVs and motorcycles

² Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Transportation analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.1.3 C

³ Reflects a recent law in Idaho which required a change in the MVUM for Road #468 (Nez Perce Trail) from “Open to Highway Legal Vehicles-Seasonally” (MVUM 4) to “Open to All Vehicles – Seasonally” (MVUM 2). This change was independent of the Travel Management Planning Project. For additional information, please refer to {Project File folder ‘transportation,’ Project File document TRANS-006.pdf}.

⁴ Most of these trails, open yearlong and seasonally, are roads closed to full size vehicles but open to ATVs and motorcycles; these are known as “coincident routes.” Please refer to the FEIS, Chapter 3, Sections 3.1 (Transportation) and 3.2 (Recreation and Trails) for additional information. Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Recreation and Trails analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 H

⁵ Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Recreation and Trails analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 H

H

Over-snow

The No Action alternative for over-snow motorized recreation would continue existing management direction; none of the changes described in Alternative 1 (Modified) would be implemented. Existing prohibitions of snowmobiling use would continue.

Table 6 shows the total acres of areas open to for over-snow motorized use with Alternative 2:

Table 6: Alternative 2. Acres Open to Over-Snow Use

Area Status	Acres
Acres open to over-snow vehicles – no restrictions	699,884
Acres open to over-snow vehicles seasonally	49,097
Total acres open to motorized use	748,981

Alternative 3 – Motorized Emphasis

Alternative 3 was developed to respond to public comments on the “original” Proposed Action that the designation of specific motorized routes may affect motorized opportunities by altering the amount, type, and season of motorized use. Concern was expressed by motorized recreationists that motorized access was being restricted, and that there was a need for additional motorized opportunities.

Based on public comments received in response to the DEIS, and internal Forest Service review, a number of changes were made to **Alternative 3** in this FEIS. Many of these were applicable to specific roads, trails, and areas mentioned in comments. Others were made in response to comments pertaining to closing motorized trails leading to Designated Wilderness areas, and prohibition of mechanical transport in recommended wilderness.

The criteria utilized in the development of **Alternative 3** were the same as those considered in the DEIS, as listed below, with the exception for allowing motorized/mechanical transport in the Selway-Bitterroot and Blue Joint recommended wilderness areas.

The following are in addition to the Features Common to All Action Alternatives described in Section 2.2.4:

- Ø Increase motorized use on routes in wilderness study areas (WSAs) and inventoried roadless areas (IRAs)
- Ø Motorized/mechanical transport use allowed in recommended wilderness areas
- Ø Bicycles would be permitted on all roads and trails, including those closed yearlong or seasonally to motorized use
- Ø Designate routes that scored high for recreation opportunity during the route screening process, but were not opened in the “original” Proposed Action as open
- Ø Designate routes with low recreation value: no loop, “short time in the saddle”, and no destination as closed
- Ø Allow motorized wheeled access for dispersed camping up to 300 feet from a designated route
- Ø Allow motorized wheeled access to identified (mapped) dispersed campsites greater than 300 feet from a route.
- Ø Develop loops/connectors for trails open to vehicles 50 inches or less in width
- Ø Open closed roads if they provide a recreational opportunity and low resource concerns
- Ø Change implementation dates for seasonal closures to reduce uses conflicts in regards to rifle versus bow season

Table 7 shows the changes in the miles of motorized routes for Alternative 3 compared to the existing condition (Alternative 2):

Table 7: Alternative 3. Proposed Changes (Summer)

Route Status	Miles
Roads open to highway legal vehicles - yearlong	-14 ¹
Roads open to highway legal vehicles – seasonally ²	8
Proposed roads open to highway legal vehicles – yearlong ³	0.4
Trails ⁴ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – yearlong	-38
Trails ⁴ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – seasonally	47
Proposed trails ⁵ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – seasonally	10
Trails open to motorcycles - yearlong	-40
Trails open to motorcycles – seasonally ⁶	109
Change in total miles open to motorized use	82

¹(-) indicates decrease

²Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Transportation analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.1.3 C

³This is a connector between two existing roads which will require separate NEPA analysis and decision. It will be shown on the FEIS map, but will not be included on the MVUM until the analysis is complete

⁴Most of these trails, open yearlong and seasonally, are roads closed to full size vehicles, but open to ATVs and motorcycles; these are known as “coincident routes.” Please refer to the FEIS, Chapter 3, Sections 3.1 (Transportation) and 3.2 (Recreation and Trails) for additional information. Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Recreation and Trails analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 H

⁵These include connectors and a new trail, both of which will require separate NEPA analyses and decisions. These will be shown on the FEIS map, but will not be included on the MVUM until the analyses are completed and the decisions are signed

⁶Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Recreation and Trails analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 H

The proposed changes include 35 miles of unauthorized routes (20 miles for vehicles 50 inches or less in width, 15 miles for motorcycles) to be designated on the MVUM.

Table 8 shows the total number of miles of motorized routes for Alternative 3:

Table 8: Alternative 3. Route Status and Number of Miles (Summer)

Route Status	Miles
Roads open to all vehicles ¹ - yearlong	10
Roads open to all vehicles – seasonally ²	67 ³
Roads open to highway legal vehicles - yearlong	873
Roads open to highway legal vehicles – seasonally ²	577 ³
Proposed roads open to highway legal vehicles – yearlong ⁴	0.4
Trails ⁵ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – yearlong	72
Trails ⁵ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – seasonally	597
Proposed trails ⁶ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – seasonally	10
Trails open to motorcycles - yearlong	290
Trails open to motorcycles – seasonally ⁷	187
Total miles open to motorized use	2,683

¹Includes highway-legal vehicles and unlicensed ATVs and motorcycles

²Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Transportation analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.1.3 C

³Reflects a recent law in Idaho which required a change in the MVUM for Road #468 (Nez Perce Trail) from “Open to Highway Legal Vehicles- Seasonally” (MVUM 4) to “Open to All Vehicles – Seasonally” (MVUM 2). This change was independent of the Travel Management Planning Project. For additional information, please refer to {Project File ‘transportation,’ Project File document TRANS- 006.pdf}.

⁴This is a connector between two existing roads which will require separate NEPA analysis and decision. It will be shown on the FEIS map, but will not be included on the MVUM until the analysis is complete

⁵Most of these trails, open yearlong and seasonally, are roads closed to full size vehicles, but open to ATVs and motorcycles; these are known as “coincident routes.” Please refer to the FEIS, Chapter 3, Sections 3.1 (Transportation) and 3.2 (Recreation and Trails) for additional information. Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Recreation and Trails analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 H

⁶These include connectors and a new trail, both of which will require separate NEPA analyses and decisions. These will be shown on the FEIS map, but will not be included on the MVUM until the analyses are completed and the decisions are signed

⁷Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Recreation and Trails analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 H

Over-snow

The criteria utilized in the development of **Alternative 3** were the same as those considered in the DEIS, as listed below, with the exception for allowing motorized/mechanical transport use in the Selway-Bitterroot and Blue Joint recommended wilderness areas. These are in addition to the Features Common to All Action Alternatives described in Section 2.2.4.

- Ø Include motorized use in portions of wilderness study areas (WSAs) and inventoried roadless areas (IRAs).
- Ø Motorized/mechanical transport use allowed in recommended wilderness areas
- Ø Opportunities for additional motorized recreation - areas currently closed which could be opened.

Table 9 shows the change in acres of areas associated with **Alternative 3** compared to the existing condition (**Alternative 2**):

Table 9: Alternative 3. Proposed Changes (Over-Snow)

Area Status	Acres
Acres open to over-snow vehicle use – no restrictions	4,679
Acres open to over-snow vehicle use- seasonally	0
Change in acres open to motorized use	4,679

Table 10 shows the total acres of areas open for over-snow motorized use with **Alternative 3**:

Table 10: Alternative 3. Acres Open to Over-Snow Use

Area Status	Acres
Acres open to over-snow vehicle use – no restrictions	704,563
Acres open to over-snow vehicle use - seasonally	49,097
Total acres open to motorized use	753,660

Alternative 4 – Non-Motorized Emphasis

Alternative 4 was developed to respond to public comments on the “original” Proposed Action that the designation of specific motorized routes may affect nonmotorized recreation opportunities by altering the amount, type, and season of motorized and nonmotorized routes. Concern was expressed by nonmotorized users regarding the need for additional nonmotorized opportunities. Additionally, nonmotorized users identified two other issues: motorized use on roads and trails within inventoried roadless areas impacts their roadless characteristics, and motorized use in wilderness study areas impacts their wilderness character.

Based on public comments received in response to the DEIS, and internal Forest Service review, a number of changes were made to **Alternative 4** as described in this FEIS. Many of these were applicable to specific roads, trails, and areas mentioned in comments. Others were made in response to comments including closing motorized trails leading to Designated Wilderness areas, motorized use in wilderness study areas, motorized use on coincident routes, and effects of motorized use on roads and trails on water quality and fisheries.

Some of the criteria utilized in the development of **Alternative 4** were the same as those considered in the DEIS, as listed below, with the exception that the use of motorized/mechanical transport in recommended wilderness areas would be prohibited, was added for clarification. Additionally, two other criteria: reduce motorized use in inventoried roadless areas (IRAs), and no motorized/mechanical transport use allowed on routes in wilderness study areas (WSAs) was added. These are in addition to the Feature Common to All Action Alternatives described in Section 2.2.4:

- Ø Reduce motorized use in inventoried roadless areas (IRAs)
- Ø No motorized/mechanical transport use allowed on routes in wilderness study areas (WSAs)
- Ø No motorized/mechanical transport use allowed on routes in recommended wilderness areas (RWAs)

- ∅ Bicycles would be permitted on all other roads and trails, including those closed yearlong or seasonally to motorized use
- ∅ Most coincident routes (roads closed to full-size vehicles but open as trails for use by ATVs and motorcycles) would be closed yearlong to motorized use
- ∅ Change implementation dates for seasonal closures to reduce uses conflicts in regards to rifle versus bow season.
- ∅ Close routes that scored high for resource concerns during the route screening process (steep slopes, erosion, bull-trout, elk security, sensitive plants, etc.), but were not closed in the “original” Proposed Action
- ∅ Close routes with low recreation value for closure: no loop, “short time in the saddle,” no destination as identified during the route screening process
- ∅ Allow motorized wheeled access for dispersed camping up to 150 feet from a designated route
- ∅ Allow motorized wheeled access to identified (mapped) dispersed campsites greater than 150 feet from a route
- ∅ Close routes to create large quiet blocks which could provide solitude experience.
- ∅ Close routes if other access is available (parallel routes; other routes within ¼ mile)

Table 11 shows the changes in the miles of motorized routes for **Alternative 4** compared to the existing condition (**Alternative 2**):

Table 11: Alternative 4. Proposed Changes (Summer)

Route Status	Miles
Roads open to highway legal vehicles - yearlong	-312 ¹
Roads open to highway legal vehicles – seasonally ²	-140
Proposed roads open to highway legal vehicles – yearlong ³	0.4
Trails ⁴ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – yearlong	-100
Trails ⁴ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – seasonally	-434
Trails open to motorcycles - yearlong	-324
Trails open to motorcycles – seasonally ⁵	-68
Change in total miles open to motorized use	-1,378

¹(-) indicates decrease

²Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Transportation analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.1.3 C

³This is a connector between two existing roads which will require separate NEPA analysis and decision. It will be shown on the FEIS map, but will not be included on the MVUM until the analysis is complete

⁴Most of these trails, open yearlong and seasonally, are roads closed to full size vehicles, but open to ATVs and motorcycles; these are known as “coincident routes.” Please refer to the FEIS, Chapter 3, Sections 3.1 (Transportation) and 3.2 (Recreation and Trails) for additional information. Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Recreation and Trails analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 H

⁵Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Recreation and Trails analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 H

The proposed changes include 3 miles of unauthorized routes (for vehicles 50 inches or less in width) to be designated on the MVUM.

Table 12 shows the total number of miles of motorized routes for **Alternative 4**:

Table 12: Alternative 4. Route Status and Number of Miles (Summer)

Route Status	Miles
Roads open to all vehicles ¹ - yearlong	10
Roads open to all vehicles – seasonally ²	67 ³
Roads open to highway legal vehicles - yearlong	575
Roads open to highway legal vehicles – seasonally ²	429 ³
Proposed roads open to highway legal vehicles – yearlong ⁴	0.4
Trails ⁵ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – yearlong	10
Trails ⁵ open to vehicles 50” or less in width – seasonally	116
Trails open to motorcycles - yearlong	6
Trails open to motorcycles – seasonally ⁶	10
Total miles open to motorized use	1,223

¹Includes highway-legal vehicles and unlicensed ATVs and motorcycles

²Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Transportation analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.1.3 C

³Reflects a recent law in Idaho, which required a change in the MVUM for Road #468 (Nez Perce Trail) from Open to Highway Legal Vehicles- Seasonally” (MVUM 4) to “Open to All Vehicles – Seasonally” (MVUM 2). This change was independent of the Travel Management Planning Project. For additional information, please refer to {Project File folder ‘transportation,’ Project File document TRANS-006.pdf}.

⁴This is a connector between two existing roads which will require separate NEPA analysis and decision. It will be shown on the FEIS map, but will not be included on the MVUM until the analysis is complete

⁵Most of these trails, open yearlong and seasonally, are roads closed to full size vehicles, but open to ATVs and motorcycles; these are known as “coincident routes.” Please refer to the FEIS, Chapter 3, Sections 3.1 (Transportation) and 3.2 (Recreation and Trails) for additional information.

⁶Descriptions of seasons of use are provided in the Recreation and Trails analysis, Chapter 3, Section 3.2.3 H

Over-snow

The criteria utilized in the development of **Alternative 4** were the same as those considered in the DEIS, as listed below, with the exception that use would be excluded in most inventoried roadless areas (IRAs). These are in addition to the Features Common to All Action Alternatives described in Section 2.2.4.

- Ø Exclude motorized use in WSAs and most IRAs, with the exception for most of the Tolan Creek IRA and a portion of the Stony Mountain IRA
- Ø No motorized /mechanical transport use allowed in recommended wilderness areas
- Ø No motorized use in identified mountain goat closure areas
- Ø Address resource concerns regarding wildlife including mountain goats and elk

Table 13 shows the change in acres of areas associated with **Alternative 4** compared to the existing condition (**Alternative 2**):

Table 13: Alternative 4. Proposed Changes (Over-Snow)

Area Status	Acres
Acres open to over-snow vehicle use – no restrictions	-381,302 ¹
Acres open to over-snow vehicle use - seasonally	-7,241
Change in acres open to motorized use	-388,543

¹(-) indicates decrease

Table 14 shows the total acres of areas open to over-snow motorized use with **Alternative 4**:

Table 14: Alternative 4. Acres Open to Over-Snow Use

Area Status	Acres
Acres open to over-snow vehicle use – no restrictions	318,582
Acres open to over-snow vehicle use - seasonally	41,856
Total acres open to motorized use	360,438

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

The Council on Environmental Quality defines the environmentally preferred alternative as “...the alternative that will best promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA’s section 101 (42 U.S.C. 4321). Ordinarily, the environmentally preferable alternative is that which causes the least harm to the biological and physical environment; it also is the alternative which best protects and preserves historic, cultural, and natural resources” (36 CFR §220.3). This definition could be generalized to mean the alternative that best balances negative impacts with benefits.

Alternative 4 does the most towards integrating resource considerations into the Forest’s Transportation System as it has the least impact on the biological and physical environment (soils, water resources, fisheries and aquatic habitat, wildlife, wilderness, recreation and trails, and rare plants) as well as the cultural and socio/economic resources. It would accomplish this by designating the fewest miles of roads and trails, and areas, open to motorized/mechanical transport use for both summer and over-snow use. It would prohibit such use in recommended wilderness areas and wilderness study areas, and reduce such use in inventoried roadless areas. This would help minimize the conflicts between motorized and nonmotorized uses. Additionally it would only allow motorized wheeled access for dispersed camping up to 150 feet from a designated route.

Considering these factors, I conclude that **Alternative 4** is the environmentally preferred alternative. Please see pages 14-15 for my rationale in not selecting Alternative 4.

Monitoring

During the objection process on the Draft ROD, the issue of monitoring was raised concerning motorized access for dispersed camping. The Forest has a history of monitoring dispersed camping on the Forest and closing sites when resource damage has been found. Resource damage can be minimized by hardening the access route and parking area with gravel to prevent surface erosion, or defining the parking area with large boulders. For example, motorized vehicle use to dispersed campsites along the Lost Horse Corridor has

been defined with large boulders and hardened with gravel parking areas to minimize stream bank erosion from vehicles parking too close to the creek. Impacts associated with dispersed campsites located along Skalkaho Creek have also been mitigated by placing large boulders and defining parking areas to keep vehicles off the stream banks. This mitigation activity has minimized resource concerns while allowing the public to enjoy these areas. Future monitoring of riparian areas will indicate where additional mitigation measures are necessary.

Appendix 2 of the ROD, Table 1-Design Features, provides a list of items to be monitored for Travel Planning. This includes such monitoring items as monitoring dispersed campsites and access roads, roadless character and wilderness attribute monitoring, monitoring for rutting, vehicle-caused streambank damage or tracks approaching closer than the 30' "no drive zone", and tire tracks crossing wetlands or spring/seeps. Monitoring will also include looking for any new "user-created" roads. When monitoring reveals impacts, actions to be taken by the Forest will include placing barriers (boulders, berms, posts, etc), signing to alert the public, and any restoration work necessary to rehabilitate the damage. Several specialist reports (3.2-9, 3.7 pp.4 and 22; 3.8 pp.8; 3.9 pp. 35; 3.10 pp. 9; 3.11 pp. 6), reinforce the importance of monitoring the effects of dispersed campsites and prescribing actions as needed. Future monitoring will also include monitoring for rutting, vehicle-caused streambank damage or tracks approaching closer than the 30' "no drive zone", and tire tracks crossing wetlands or spring/seeps. Monitoring will also include looking for any new "user-created" roads. When monitoring reveals impacts, actions to be taken by the Forest will include placing barriers (boulders, berms, posts, etc), signing to alert the public, and any restoration work necessary to rehabilitate the damage.

As mandated under 36 CFR §212.57 (Monitoring) of the 2005 Travel Management Rule, the Bitterroot National Forest will monitor for any unauthorized routes not designated on the MVUM. Additionally, the Forest will monitor the use and effects of new forms of motorized and mechanical transport (including bicycles) on the roads, trails, and areas where such use is designated. A number of resource analyses in Chapter 3 of the FEIS, including Water Resources, Soils, Fish and Aquatic Habitat, Invasive Plants, and Rare Plants, describe the environmental effects associated with continued motorized use on unauthorized trails. The effects include sedimentation production and erosion, safety concerns, loss of soil productivity, and the potential for invasive plants introduction and spread. Monitoring will continue to occur for use on unauthorized trails. Similar actions to those listed above for dispersed camping will be taken when damage is found.

Discussion in Section 2.4 of the FEIS, describes implementation monitoring as a standard procedure intended to assess whether a project was implemented as designed. Monitoring is also intended to catch and assess problems quickly so that corrective measures can be taken. If or when these situations arise, adjustments will be made on the basis of the desired and predicted outcomes discussed in the Record of Decision and this FEIS. The Bitterroot National Forest has the authority, under 36 CFR §295.5, to initiate emergency closures of roads, trails, or areas for up to one year to protect water, soil, and fisheries resources which are negatively impacted or adversely affected by motorized vehicle use.

Monitoring results provide Forest Service Line Officers and employees, Regional and Washington Offices, Congress, and the general public information on the progress and results of implementing Forest projects, including the Travel Management Planning Project. The Bitterroot National Forest's Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report contain a number of monitoring items which are applicable to motorized/mechanical transport use on the Forest. These include Invasive Weeds-Item 10; Water and Sediment Yield-Item 17; Cumulative Watershed Effects-Item 19; Riparian Area Condition-Item 22; Road Construction, Mitigation, and Maintenance-Item 24; Off-Highway Vehicle Effects on Lands-Item 28; Recreation Site and Trail Use Effects on Land-Item 29; and Law Enforcement Efforts on the Bitterroot

National Forest. Please refer to the {Project File folder 'forest_plan_and_monitoring,' Project File document FPMON.pdf} for a listing of past monitoring reports.

Several sources of funding are available for monitoring; however, no assignment of funding sources will be made at this time, as the future availability of funds for monitoring is unknown. Project monitoring is dependent upon available funding, however the forest has been diligent in conducting monitoring in the past and it is expected that these efforts would continue {refer to Project File Folder 'forest_plan_and_monitoring', PF-SOILS-002}.

Determination of Non-Significant Forest Plan Amendment

Implementation of **Alternative 1 (Modified)** will require a site-specific amendment to the Bitterroot Forest Plan (1987) (FEIS, p. 1-13). Therefore, my decision will modify language in the Forest Plan pertaining to the Forest-wide standard for Elk Habitat Effectiveness as described previously in this document on page 12. Appendix 1 discusses this amendment in further detail.

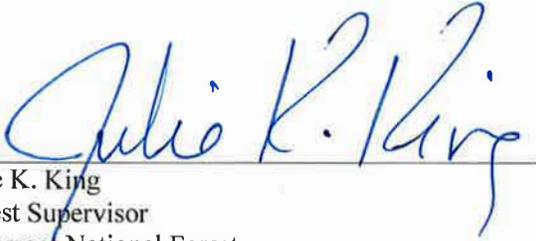
Section 1926.51 of the Forest Service Directives (www.fs.fed.us/emc/nfma/index5.html) gives guidance for determining what constitutes a "significant amendment" under NFMA. I have determined, based on this guidance, that this site-specific forest plan amendment is not significant because it will not significantly alter the long-term relationship between levels of multiple-use goods and services originally projected; and, it will not have an important effect on the entire land management plan or affect land and resources throughout a large portion of the project area during the planning period. The public has been notified of the necessity for this amendment throughout the NEPA process for the Travel Management Planning Project. This amendment and discussion can be found in Appendix 1.

Implementation

Implementation of the Bitterroot Travel Planning Project is scheduled to begin immediately. As required by the 2005 Travel Management Rule, a motor vehicle use map (MVUM) and over-snow vehicle use map (OSVUM) will be published and available upon the signing of the ROD.

Further Information and Contact Person

For additional information concerning this decision contact Julie King, Forest Supervisor, Bitterroot National Forest, 1801 N. First, Hamilton, MT., (406) 363-7121. Information is also available at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/bitterroot>



Handwritten signature of Julie K. King in blue ink, written over a horizontal line.

Julie K. King
Forest Supervisor
Bitterroot National Forest

DATE May 11, 2016