

such as rutting, crossing of wet meadows, or notable noxious weed spread.

To protect resources, the proposed action features the flexibility to restrict motorized use in the 300-foot zone in local situations if unacceptable resource damage occurs.

5. Stream fording by motorized vehicles is not allowed unless it is a part of a designated route (over snow vehicles are excluded from this feature as long as a stream is frozen).

6. Three categories of restrictions have been applied to identified routes. They are:

- \* October 15–December 1 (big game security),
- \* December 2–May 15 (winter range protection), and
- \* Yearlong.

Unique situations generating a need to temporarily modify the travel plan will use special orders or other methods on a case-by-case basis. These may include but are not limited to spring thaw, game retrieval, Grizzly Bear emergence, calving areas, firewood gathering, and non-ambulatory disabled access.

7. Off-route travel with respect to wheeled motorized vehicles is restricted per the 2001 State-wide OHV decision or as otherwise described in this proposed action.

8. Canada lynx conservation strategy has been applied resulting in no net increase in designated and/or groomed over-the-snow routes and snowmobile play areas in lynx habitat (generally higher elevation spruce/fir forest).

9. Access to private land holding within the National Forest Boundary was considered in developing the proposed action.

10. Routes with mixed traffic (street-legal and non-street-legal and licensed and unlicensed drivers) have been identified and typically are short segments. Some of these situations may be a mix of highway vehicles with ORVs or snowmobiles. These potential shared uses are highlighted to heighten the awareness to users of these routes. This shared use will be addressed as an administrative decision and is therefore not appealable within this process.

11. Routes that are open for motorized use, restricted yearlong, or restricted seasonally will be signed accordingly. Sites that have unique concerns or high resource values at risk, such as a bald eagle nest site, will be gated to increase closure effectiveness. Existing gates will continue to be used where appropriate.

12. To guide decisions about access to private lands that are located within the National Forest Boundary, the proposed action includes guidelines that consider private landowner needs as well as

protection of resources on the National Forest System lands.

This proposal may not meet all Forest Plan standards such as wildlife security direction. These potential concerns will be fully analyzed in the EIS. If not fully compliant with the Forest Plan, appropriate actions will be taken; e.g. modify the alternative or propose site-specific Forest Plan amendments.

### Project Area Descriptions

*South Belts:* The South Belts project area includes federal land administered by the USDA Forest Service from Mt. Boulder-Baldy near Confederate Gulch south to the Dry Creek watershed, west to the Forest boundary to other ownership and east to the Forest boundary to other ownership.

*Divide:* The Divide project area includes federal lands administered by the USDA Forest Service. It includes those National Forest system lands within the 10-Mile Creek drainage and the Little Blackfoot River drainage. Also included are those Federal lands that lie north of State Highway 12 to the Helena Ranger District-Lincoln Ranger District boundary near Nevada Mountain. The portion of the Helena Ranger District that lies within the Little Prickly Pear drainage is excluded from this analysis.

*Blackfoot:* The Blackfoot project area includes federal land administered by the USDA Forest Service. It includes the Helena National Forest Boundary north of the Scapegoat Wilderness, south to the Lincoln and Helena Ranger District boundary near Nevada Mountain, west to the Lolo National Forest boundary and east over the Continental Divide.

### Responsible Official

The decisionmaker for these three project areas is the Forest Supervisor for the Helena National Forest.

### Nature of Decision To Be Made

Incorporated in the following decisions is Forest Plan direction in providing a range of quality recreation, including motorized and non-motorized opportunities while implementing multiple Forest land and resource objectives and visitors' needs. The key decision points will include the following:

- \* Which roads, trails, and areas are appropriate for which types of public motorized and non-motorized use?
- \* Which roads, trails, and areas would have seasonal restrictions to protect wildlife or other resources?
- \* Whether or not a Forest Plan amendment(s) would be required?

The identified travel corridor connectors for local route systems will

be evaluated and analyzed for future site-specific decisions.

### Scoping Process

There are several options for you and/or your organization to make comments and participate in the process.

1. If you have substantive comments to the proposed action, please request a scoping package where you may fill out the attached Comment Sheet and return it to us. Your substantive comment must be specific to this proposed action to be helpful in this process. If possible, typed comments are most readily scanned for content identification purposes and comments can also be e-mailed, using the same general outline as the comment sheet, to:

*r1\_helena\_webmaster@fs.fed.us*. In the subject line at this site, please include the following: Attention Public Affairs Officer.

2. Information about the Forest Travel Plan, including this scoping statement and the comment sheet, will be posted on the Helena National Forest Web site at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/helena/projects>. Information will be on the Web site by April 21, 2003.

3. There will be some public meetings in June and July of 2003. Please contact this office for specifics.

Your substantive response will be included in this analysis process. Your response should be specific and include reasons why you feel it should be considered. The key or significant responses will be used to formulate alternatives, prescribe mitigation measures, or be analyzed in environmental effects.

*Early Notice of Importance of Public Participation in Subsequent Environmental Review:* A draft environmental impact statement will be prepared for comment. The comment period on the draft environmental impact statement will begin in July of 2003 from the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes the notice of availability in the **Federal Register**.

The Forest Service believes, at this early stage, it is important to give reviewers notice of several court rulings related to public participation in the environmental review process. First, reviewers of draft environmental impact statements must structure their participation in the environmental review of the proposal so that it is meaningful and alerts an agency to the reviewer's position and contentions. *Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDC*, 435 U.S. 519, 553 (1978). Also, environmental objections that could be raised at the draft environmental impact statement stage but that are not raised until after completion of the final