

Lands Program

by Sharlene Larance, Realty Specialist

This program covers everything that has to do with lands; i.e., land exchanges, purchases, rights-of-way acquisition, rights-of-way grants, non-recreation special use authorizations, Small Tracts cases, and Townsite cases, to name a few.

For land adjustments, the objective is to change an ownership pattern so that it is beneficial to both the general public and a specific landowner. This should benefit the public in one or more aspects such as wildlife enhancement or additional recreation opportunities.

Rights-of-way acquisitions and grants are important for assuring continued access to National Forest lands. The Forest also grants easements to other government entities and qualified private individuals when appropriate.

Non-recreation special use authorizations allow for private use of public lands to a qualified applicant. These uses may include road access, utility access, and animal grazing use.

Currently the Forest is working on 2 land purchases, 5 land exchanges, 5 Small Tracts cases, 1 Townsite project, several road rights-of-way acquisition projects, while administering approximately 273 special use permits. The Forest receives anywhere from 35 to 50 special use authorization applications per year.

Resource specialists and land surveyors are closely involved in most lands cases. A project must be determined to be to the net benefit of the public before it can be completed.

Get Yer Burning Permits, Right Here!

Jerry Meyer, Public Affairs Officer

If you live in Lewis and Clark County, we're going to save you a couple of miles of driving if you need a burning permit. Until this spring, the permits were available at the Dispatch Center on the northeast end of the Airport Complex. Now the permits will be issued from the Helena Supervisor's Office at 2880 Skyway Drive, directly across from the airport terminal. Office hours at the S.O. are 8:00 to 4:30 on weekdays. We also will accept telephone requests for permits and will issue them by mail. Please allow 3 to 5 working days for delivery by mail. The phone number is (406) 449-5201, ext. 0.

As in the past, if you were issued a permit in the last two years, we will send you a 2004 permit by about mid-March. However, if you have never had a prior need to conduct open burning, you

will need to provide pertinent information in order to obtain a permit.

Open burning is generally allowed from March 1 to November 30, but may be restricted due to fire danger or air quality conditions. You must call 447-8293 prior to ignition on each day you plan to burn to ascertain whether burning is allowed. From September 1 to November 30, you must also call the Ventilation Hotline at 1-800-225-6779 to insure that air quality conditions allow for burning.

We wish to remind people contemplating open burning of vegetative material that they assume full responsibility for this potentially risky undertaking. Additional information on responsibilities and the activities authorized will be provided to those issued a permit.

Cabin Rental Program Growing in Popularity

Dave Payne, Recreation Planner

In 1988 the Helena National Forest initiated a program to convert administrative cabins into recreation lodges making them available to the public. First among the cabins offered for rent was the Kading Guard Station located south of Elliston. This new endeavor on the Helena Forest proved extremely successful. Positive feedback and requests from visitors for other rental facilities clearly indicated a public desire to expand the recreation lodging program.

Consequently, since the program's first year, six more Forest Service cabins have been added. The Townsend District administers three cabins: Bar Gulch Cabin (east of Canyon Ferry Reservoir), Thompson Guard Station (Big Belt Mountains) and Eagle Guard

Station (west of Townsend). Located a short distance off Highway 200, Cummings Cabin is on the Lincoln Ranger District. Both the Indian Flats Cabin (near Hogback Mountain) and the Strawberry Lookout Cabin (Elkhorn Mountains) are situated on the Helena Ranger District.

Each rental cabin offers a unique recreation experience and forest setting. Although rustic, the facilities provide endless opportunities to enjoy dispersed recreation activities such as hiking, cross-country skiing, mountain biking, snowmobiling, horseback riding, OHV riding, fishing, and hunting. In addition, the cabins present a quiet, natural environment for rest and contemplation.

The number of cabin permits issued continues to grow each year. Based on the recreation experience and the nominal cost involved, the popularity of the rental cabin use is not surprising. While the cabins are in high demand on weekends and holidays, there are a few periods during the year when they remain unoccupied. Recreation managers, aware of the increased use, recognize the need to add more rental cabins.

To inquire about availability and to schedule a cabin rental, contact the corresponding ranger district for the cabin you would like to visit. Reservations may be made up to six months in advance. The stay limit is five nights with check-in and check-out times both set at 2:00 p.m. As a courtesy to

others who may wish to rent the cabins, it is requested that any cancellations be made ten days in advance.

Based on the growing popularity of the rental cabin program throughout the Forest Service, the Helena National Forest is working to further expand the program. Three additional cabins are currently being improved to ensure they will be available in the future. If you're seeking an opportunity to spend more time on your local National Forest, please consider the cabin rental program. Visit the Forest website for more information and to view pictures of the cabins.