

YFMP Completes 7th Year With Help of Diverse Partners

By Liz Burke, Conservation Education Specialist

The Youth Forest Monitoring Program (YFMP) is a seven-week field internship for high school students who live near the Helena National Forest. Despite budget challenges, 2004 was a great year. As federal dollars tightened, several partners stepped up to the plate to help make this program a success by providing additional support.

Over the years, students from Boulder, Clancy, Helena, Jefferson City, Montana City, Townsend, and Lincoln have participated. YFMP is a forest ecology and career training opportunity that challenges students to consider forest health on public lands. Students complete one week of training by forest scientists and local educators on topics of forest ecology and field monitoring techniques. After this training, students split into teams, each focusing on one of the following study areas: streams, soils, and weeds. Students spend the remaining six weeks conducting measurements and observations at monitoring sites throughout the Helena National Forest. At the end of the program, students submit data to the Forest and present their observations and recommendations to Forest Service employees and the public. In 2004, YFMP



The 2004 crew studied recreation impacts in the Scapegoat Wilderness after the 2003 wildfire

students monitored 27 sites throughout the forest.

Support in 2004 came from various program partners. Crucial financial funding came from Jefferson and Lewis & Clark County commissioners who decided to provide "Title 3" funds, which are Federal dollars distributed annually to counties with Federal land holdings. The terms of Title 3 disbursements specify that the money be must utilized for natural

resource-related projects. Additional partners included University of Montana – Helena College of Technology who provided workspace for the students, including access to computer labs and computer staff support, and the Montana Discovery Foundation who provided administrative help and financial assistance for supplies and equipment.

Plans are currently under way for YFMP 2005. Program partners listed above have continued their support for this year, in addition to a new partnership with the Tri-Counties Resource Advisory Committee (Deerlodge, Granite and Powell Counties). Applications for new students will be accepted until May 6th. For more information call 495-3713.



Recreation Survey Results

By Dave Payne, Recreation Planner

In 2003, the Helena National Forest participated in a National Visitor Use Study. The survey was designed and implemented by all National Forests to provide statistically reliable information about recreation use. Visitor use information was gathered for both the type and amount of recreation activity. In 2004, final results of the 2003 recreation survey were released.

Based on survey information obtained from personal interviews and traffic counts, there were an estimated 528,855 visits to the Helena National Forest in 2003. Approximately 74% of the 823 individuals who agreed to be interviewed indicated their primary purpose for visiting the Forest was recreation. While it's important to note that 26% of Forest visitors were there for other purposes, recreation use was the focus of the study.

The survey provided interesting statistics regarding profiles of those who visited the Helena Forest. Of the total number of visitors, over 78% were Montana residents. Men were more inclined to frequent the Forest than women, 82.6% vs 17.4%.

Somewhat surprising, almost 24% of Forest visitors were under the age of 16. Of the remaining visitors, approximately 55% were between the ages of 30 and 60.

One objective of the recreation study was to determine the range of activities enjoyed by Forest visitors. Survey questions were developed to identify the percentage of visitors participating in general recreation activities. During 2003, the top five recreation activities in terms of total use were:

ACTIVITY	% PARTICIPATING
1. Viewing Wildlife	63.32
2. Hiking/Walking	62.04
3. Viewing Natural Features	60.33
4. Relaxing	54.13
5. Driving For Pleasure	41.15

Most individuals visit the Helena Forest to enjoy a variety of recreation activities. However, there is often one primary activity that specifically draws recreationists to the Forest. As identified

during 2003, the top five recreation activities in terms of primary use were:

ACTIVITY	% PARTICIPATING
1. Hunting	36.46
2. Other Non-Motorized	11.71
3. Hiking/Walking	9.06
4. Gathering Forest Products	8.47
5. OHV Use	5.46

Recreation information obtained in 2003 provides a one-year estimate of visitor use. Survey results should not be viewed as an absolute representation of recreation activity because it does not address other influences such as weather and forest fires. A second visitor survey scheduled for 2008 will help provide a more complete picture of recreation use on the Helena National Forest. Visitor information from 2003 and future surveys will ensure the Helena Forest is managed to provide the appropriate type and mix of recreation opportunities desired to meet public need.