
I. INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Proposed Beartooth Ranger District Travel Management Plan

The Custer National Forest, Beartooth Ranger District is initiating an environmental analysis of Travel Management, addressing visitor and administrative travel. Other Ranger Districts on the Custer National Forest will not be addressed in this environmental analysis. This Travel Management Plan will implement the Custer National Forest and National Grasslands Land and Resource Management Plan (hereafter referred to as the Forest Plan). This Travel Management Plan will identify and establish opportunities for public recreation use and access using the Ranger District's road and trail systems. For each road and trail it will specify the types of uses that are appropriate including pleasure driving, high clearance and off-road vehicle, motorcycle, mountain biking, horseback riding, snowmobiling, All Terrain Vehicle (ATV), hiking, and cross country skiing. The Plan will also establish travel management strategies for subsections of the Beartooth Ranger District called Geographic Areas. This document outlines a Proposed Action that was developed by a Forest Service Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) to provide a beginning for the travel planning process and to focus interested individual and user group participation. The Proposed Action is to help identify areas, roads, and trails where and when specific uses are allowed.

The Forest Service will conduct an environmental analysis in conjunction with the travel planning process. A preliminary list of key issues has been identified. This list will be validated or modified based on input from the public. A range of reasonable alternatives will be developed and analyzed based on public demand for recreation opportunities, capability, and other resource and environmental issues. In short, alternatives will be developed based on the early participation of interested groups, other government agencies (i.e. BLM, State of Montana) and individuals (you) as well as Forest Service specialists. Once a range of reasonable alternatives have been developed an environmental document will be prepared. We will also identify potential resource issues that will be considered in the evaluation of impacts within the environment analysis. The Forest Supervisor of the Custer National Forest will be responsible for making the final decision on a Travel Management Plan. Travel Management decisions in the Upper Stillwater/Cooke City Geographic Area that is administered by the Gardiner Ranger District, Gallatin National Forest will be addressed in the Gallatin National Forest Travel Management Plan currently being developed.

We would like you to review the enclosed Proposed Action, visit those areas of the Ranger District that are of interest to you, and then provide feedback to us that will help build other alternatives or refine the Proposed Action. There are two ways to participate during this first phase. If you would like to provide feedback in writing please send your letter to the Beartooth District Ranger, HC 49 Box 3420, Red Lodge, MT 59068. We also invite you to visit with staff to share your thoughts and ideas on the Beartooth's travel management proposal at (406) 446-2103.

This is the first of several opportunities you will have to participate in the development of the public access and Travel Management Plan for the Custer National Forest, Beartooth Ranger District. Our objectives at this time are to refine and identify any additional issues and develop a range of reasonable alternatives to be considered. We are asking that your input focuses on these objectives. There will be other opportunities for you to participation throughout the process.

The following sections provide guidance on how to review this package and provide comments and information that will be meaningful.

II. PROPOSED ACTION

Proposed Action for the Custer National Forest, Beartooth Ranger District Travel Management Plan

The existing 1987 Travel Plan for the Beartooth Ranger District at one time provided adequate management for a majority of the current roads and trails used by both non-motorized and motorized visitor. However, some concerns regarding the existing travel management plan have been identified and require resolution. Furthermore, although the 2001 Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Travel Plan for both National Forest and BLM Lands in Montana, North Dakota, and portions of South Dakota have been approved by the Northern Regional Forester and BLM Director, additional environmental analysis is necessary to address winter travel, specific areas, roads and trails of the Beartooth Ranger District. The existing Travel Plan is considered both legal and enforceable according to the Special Order signed by the Forest Supervisor on August 21, 1987, and will serve as the starting point for the analysis.

The following is a list of key objectives for the Beartooth Ranger District Travel Management Plan:

1. For each road and trail, specify the types of uses that are appropriate.
2. Develop travel use strategies for each geographic area on the District in conjunction with other land management agencies.
3. Determine how we will implement the Travel Plan with signs, gates, and barriers.
4. Provide an accurate District Travel Management Plan Map for the public.

III. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR A TRAVEL PLAN

Need for a Custer National Forest, Beartooth Ranger District Travel Management Plan

As described in 40 CFR 1502.13, the following section is intended to "briefly specify the underlying purpose and need to which the agency is responding in proposing the alternatives including the Proposed Action".

The Forest Service has identified several needs to revise the existing Travel Plan on the Beartooth Ranger District, Custer National Forest (hereafter known as the Beartooth Travel Plan). These needs are based on the realization that public expectations, demands, and use levels related to motorized and non-motorized travel has changed since approval of the 1987 Travel Plan for the Beartooth Ranger District. Since approval of that Plan, motorized and non-motorized travel technology and use has increased the public's ability to traverse conditions and terrains not previously envisioned. As an example, the 1987 Ranger District Travel Plan did not contemplate the degree of mountain bike or ATV use that occurs. The inappropriate use of some motorized travel activities has led to adverse effects to a number of resources within certain areas of the Ranger District. Unacceptable resource damage includes but is not limited to increased soil erosion, deteriorating watershed and water quality conditions, damage to archeological sites, vandalism, disturbance to wildlife from sight and sound (including Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species), and adverse effects to fragile plant communities.

Additionally, the existing 1987 Beartooth Ranger District Travel Plan does not conform to current Forest Service Regional direction and sign standards related to public travel on National Forest System

roads. As a result, enforcement is difficult to achieve by the Forest Service. The revision of the Travel Plan for the Beartooth Ranger District will provide clear guidance to forest users, comply with Forest Service direction and be enforceable.

Other Federal laws, regulations and policies that compelled the Beartooth Ranger District to revise the existing Travel Plan include the Off-Highway Vehicle Environmental Impact Statement, Record of Decision and Plan Amendment for Montana, North Dakota and portions of South Dakota (1/2001); and the Interagency Conservation Strategies approved for the Grizzly Bear.



The scenic Beartooth Pass Highway designated as an All American Road

Purpose for a Beartooth Ranger District Travel Management Plan

The purpose for the Proposed Beartooth Ranger District Travel Management Plan is to:

1. Provide for a range of public access and recreational use of the road and trail system.
2. Bring road and trail use into compliance with laws, regulations, and management direction. Implement the

uniform Northern Region Access and Travel Management Guide (ATM).

3. Provide for public understanding of the types and season of use allowed for each road and trail by developing a proper and consistent travel management signing plan and implementation strategy.
4. At the time the Forest Plan was approved site specific decisions were made for some roads and trails. For instance, in management Area C, travel is permitted on Forest Road 3009 year long, and in Management Area R, vehicle travel is limited to the West Fork Rock Creek Road #71, Silver Run Road #1476, and the jeep trail up Nichols Creek. As part of the Proposed Action the Forest Plan would be amended to delete these site specific actions from the Forest Plan and that direction for roads and trails would be in the Beartooth Travel Management Plan.
5. Identify administrative use and permitted exceptions throughout the Ranger District by developing an applicable written policy.
6. Resolve the high level of confusion the public and administrators currently have in interpreting the existing restrictions shown in the 1987 Beartooth Ranger District Travel Management Plan.
7. Provide for public understanding of the areas authorized for snowmobile use.

Management Direction

The Forest Service must comply with laws, regulations, and policies in the management of the Custer National Forest. The Forest Plan is a part of this legal and policy framework within which the Forest Service must conduct the analysis for the Beartooth Travel Management Plan. Other parts of this framework are the laws, regulations and policies which have been established since approval of the Forest Plan, and some of which are enumerated later in this section. This section is divided into two subsections; the first describes Forest Plan direction, as it relates to the Proposed Action. The second is a partial listing of the laws, regulations, and policies that make up the framework within which the Forest Service manages the Custer National Forest.

Forest Plan forest-wide goals, objectives and standards that relate to travel management are found in Chapter II, pages 3-39. Applicable Management Area direction is found in Chapter III, page 41-99 in the Forest Plan.

The forest-wide objectives for facilities is that the Forest transportation system required by this plan will be constructed and managed to minimize adverse impacts on the resources, while providing access to public lands for the public and for the management of the resources.

The Forest Plan provides broad programmatic direction for travel management on the Custer National Forest. The Beartooth Travel Management Plan will implement Forest Plan direction through specific strategies for the types of use and season(s) of use for roads and trails on National Forest System lands on the Beartooth Ranger District.



ATV use on the Beartooth Ranger District has increased substantially in the last few years

The following table explains the Management Area direction which appears to be the most applicable when discussing and analyzing travel management on the Beartooth Ranger District.

Forest Plan Management Area	Forest Plan Management Area Emphasis	Forest Plan Management Area Travel Management Goal
Management Area B	Intensive Range Management	Semi-primitive motorized, and roaded natural recreation opportunities will be provided. The arterial and collector system will be maintained for public use.
Management Area C	Key Wildlife Areas	Travel is permitted on Forest Road 3009 (now know 2008) yearlong. The need for jeep roads in Mill Draw, Ruby Draw, Gold Creek and the NF Line Creek will be analyzed using input from interested groups and agencies. All other roads in this management area will be closed from 12/1 to 5/15.
Management Area D	Habitat Management for Selected Wildlife Species	The travel plan for these areas will provide reasonable access for public recreation, hunting, and range maintenance and administration, but will confine motorized vehicles to specific road and trails during critical periods to protect wildlife and other resources. Access control structures may be used to protect occupied, sensitive habitat areas. Access control might extend outside the boundary of the management areas if necessary to provide a buffer from traffic.
Management Area E	Energy and Mineral Production	The recreation setting will generally be roaded natural and rural, although small areas of semi-primitive motorized will occur throughout the area. Arterial and collector roads, when constructed, will be maintained for public use.
Management Area F	Developed Recreation Sites	The recreation setting will vary among the developed sites from semi-primitive, motorized, roaded-natural, and rural. Sites will be characterized by predominately natural or natural-appearing environments to substantially modified natural environment. Roads will be maintained for safety, soil and water protection, and to provide for travel of passenger carrying vehicles. If specific campgrounds are seasonally closed, the roads within them will also be closed.
Management Area G	Timber Management	The recreation setting will generally be roaded natural and rural, although small areas of semi-primitive motorized will occur throughout the area. Roads within this management area are generally multiple use roads, exceptions may be some of those constructed for minerals development. Road management will be determined by the long-term needs of mineral and timber management. Locations will serve long-term use for all resources. Use and travel restrictions will be considered to benefit or reduce adverse impacts to wildlife. The road will be a part of the Forest Transportation System and may be closed when not needed.
Management Area H	Recommended for wilderness classification	These areas are closed to motorized vehicle use to avoid deterioration of the existing environment. Dispersed use will be allowed, but no support facilities will be constructed. A portion of the Lost Water Canyon area is proposed as a RNA and those value will be protected (see Management Area L). No new trails will be constructed. Trail maintenance standards will provide for public safety and protection of the soil and water resource. Tributary trails on the Beartooth RD will be maintained. The recreation setting will be primitive and semi-primitive non-motorized, mostly characterized by essentially unmodified natural environment.
Management Area I	Congressionally Designated Wilderness	A primitive recreation setting will be provided, including the opportunity for solitude with emphasis on no-trace camping ethics.
Management Area L	Research Natural Areas	Recreation use will not be encouraged. Roads and other facilities will not be constructed in these areas. Existing public roads and trails may be retained. Reconstruction will be allowed for public safety and protection of the soil and water resources.
Management Area M	Riparian Areas	The recreation setting will be semi-primitive non-motorized. Where road and/or trails exist, the setting may be semi-primitive motorized, roaded-natural appearing or rural. Motorized use will be restriction to existing roads and trails. Where use or existing trails is causing resource damage, the trail will be relocated or the damage eliminated by other means if the trail can not be relocated.
Management Area P	Administrative Sites	Management area goal is “to provide adequate facilities for the administration of the Custer National Forest”.
Management Area Q	Wild Horse Territory	Semi-primitive non-motorized and semi-primitive motorized recreation opportunities will be provided. Motorized recreation opportunities will be limited to those existing along the Tillett Ridge Road. The BLM and FS will coordinate to enforce Off-Road Vehicle restrictions. No trails will be constructed within the area. The area will be considered as an “Avoidance Area” when considering the placement of utility corridors. No new roads will be constructed. The Tillett Ridge Road and the road to the Little Ice Cave will be maintained.

Forest Plan Management Area	Forest Plan Management Area Emphasis	Forest Plan Management Area Travel Management Goal
Management Area R	Protect and maintain high quality water for public domestic use.	Vehicle travel is limited to the West Fork Rock Creek Road #71, Silver Run Road #1476, and the jeep trail up Nichols Creek. No motorized travel will be permitted on the Basin Lake Trail (Forest Trail #61). Trail #61 will be closed to horse use except during fall big game hunting season. The existing road system is adequate for resource management needs except for mineral resource development activities, in which case roads will not be constructed on slopes of 30% or greater. Exceptions may be made for short distances, i.e. on quarter mile or less, where this will minimize the total impact to the area. The Nichols Creek road will be retained as a primitive road and portions relocated. Maintenance will be for protection of soil and water. Any reconstruction on Road #71 will be limited to that necessary for safety and protection of soil and water. Temporary approaches for existing roads will be allowed for timber management activities. Roads to the existing recreation residences will be administered under special use permits. The Silver Run road will be closed at the first creek crossing and the old sheep drive to Ingles Creek will be closed to motorized vehicles. Silver Run ski touring trail will be closed to all motorized vehicles yearlong unless specifically authorized.
Management Area T	Scenic area along US 212 (Beartooth Scenic Byway)	The Visual Quality Objective for this Management Area will be Retention. Signs, visitor facilities and interpretative development may occur along the highway, but will be designed in harmony with the landscape. Off-road vehicles, other than snow machines operating on snow, will be prohibited throughout the area. The history and appearance of the 1948 burn in Upper Rock Creek will be preserved for study and interpretation. The interpretative overlook at Rock Creek Vista will be maintained. During the current planning period the Forest will provide toilet facilities at Parkside. No new roads will be constructed to facilitate use of surface resources. Roads may be constructed to facilitate use of subsurface resources with due regard for visual quality and other resources.



1935 photo by K. D. Swan and his caption reads "A great turn on the road brings a view northwest to the high plateau across Rock Creek"