

# RECREATION

## A-6 Off-road Vehicle Damage and Travel Plan

OUTPUT, MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTION, EFFECTS TO BE MEASURED	REPORTING PERIOD & FREQUENCY	VARIABILITY WHICH WOULD INITIATE FURTHER EVALUATION
Off-road vehicle damage	Annually	Conflicts with Forest Management Area goals.
Travel Plan effectiveness	Annually	Increase of 20 or more situations or variances.

### METHODS

This monitoring report documents the results of monitoring of a travel plan agreement for winter recreation on portions of the Little Belt Mountains developed through a settlement agreement with parties to an appeal of travel plan decisions in the Big Snowy Mountains. The agreement was the result of extensive dialog with parties to the appeal and called for an interim administrative order to implement the agreement until a final decision was made on travel planning for the Jefferson Division (Little Belt, Castles and north half Crazy Mountains). The agreement specified that the Lewis and Clark Forest would monitor winter use to help insure compliance with the travel plan provisions of the agreement. Monitoring was to consist of at least 6 field visits to verify snowmobile use and contact with snowmobile use groups. Representatives for the Montana Wilderness Association, Great Falls Cross Country Club, and Montana Snowmobile Association were to accompany Forest Service employees on these visits. Authority to implement the agreement was issued under Special Order LC 05-02 A and B signed on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

Actual on the ground monitoring of the agreement began February 2006. Although notified of planned monitoring trips, none of the monitoring trips conducted to date have had participation with other parties to the agreement. Neither the District nor Forest has been notified by other parties to the agreement to participate in monitoring they may initiate nor has the Forest been provided any information regarding motorized and non-motorized use in the closure areas by the other parties.

Signs were purchased in March 2006 stating "AREA RESTRICTION/CLOSED TO SNOWMOBILES". To date, 18 signs have been posted in key locations in the O'Brien Creek, Jefferson Creek, Mizpah and Deadman closure areas. Maps outlining the closure areas and the signed Special Order LC 05-02 are posted at all exiting winter trailhead locations.

Since development of the special order, the Jefferson Division Winter Recreation Technician has conducted a total of 14 monitoring trips, (8 monitoring trips in 2006 and 6 monitoring trips as of February 6, 2007) at various locations around the closure areas. Table A-6a outlines areas monitored and dates on which monitoring took place.

Area Name	Deadman	Ranch Creek	O'Brien Creek	Silvercrest	Jefferson Creek	Middle Fork	Big Snowies
2006 Monitoring	2/4, 2/12, 2/19, 2/26, 2/28	2/28, 3/2	2/12, 2/26, 3/2	2/4, 2/25, 2/26	2/19, 2/23, 2/25, 2/26, 3/02	2/26	
2007 Monitoring	1/14	1/14, 1/21	1/14, 1/21, 2/6	1/14, 1/27, 1/28, 2/2, 2/6,	1/14, 1/21, 1/27, 1/28, 2/2, 2/6		

The Belt Creek Ranger District Winter Recreation Technician regularly makes contact with snowmobilers, snowmobile club members, and other users informing them of the area closures. The special order and area closure maps are also posted at trailhead locations and the District Office. These postings include four locations at the Snowmobile Parking Lot off Highway 89, one at the Deadman Trailhead, and at the O'Brien Trailhead.

In the February 2007 Great Falls Snowmobile Club monthly newsletter, the club has advised all users of the existing motorized restrictions and area closures for the Jefferson Zone.

Additional efforts to assist in informing the public of the Winter Recreation Agreement will include an updated 2007 snowmobile user map that will display the restricted areas.

Results of the last two years of monitoring indicated that some snowmobile violations into the non-motorized areas are occurring on a sporadic basis. This may be attributable to lack of signing/education and information of the restrictions in the specific area where the intrusions are occurring. Other noncompliance issues are attributable to variations in topography and vegetation and difficulties in correlating on-the-ground features to the closure boundary map. Areas where meadows and large openings in the forest, which are appealing to snowmobilers, are adjacent to the mapped closure boundary have experienced the greatest number of closure order violations. These are particularly apparent along the headwaters of the O'Brien Creek drainage and adjacent to the boundary of the O'Brien Creek closure and along the northeast boundary of the Deadman closure. The Middle Fork Judith has experienced some closure violations in the Sand Point and Big Deer Point areas where existing roads provide easy access into the Wilderness Study Area (WSA).

Table A-6b summarizes the results of monitoring.

<b>Table A-6b Violations Summary</b>	
<b>Closure Area</b>	<b>Violation Location</b>
Deadman	Infractions observed in Sec.'s 11 & 12, T12N, R8E, adjacent to "A" trail and meadow. Snowmobile use evident along first 1/8 mile of Deadman cross-country ski trail.
Ranch Creek	Intrusions have been limited to the access points off Ranch Creek road where the closure area borders "T" trail in sec's 19 and 20 T12N, R8E
O'Brien Creek	Infractions observed adjacent to "A" trail and large meadow in sec. 29, T13N, R 8E. and adjacent to private land along the southeast boundary of the closure.
Silvercrest	Minor infractions occurring around the Winter Recreation Parking Lot and the Silvercrest Ski Trail System.
Jefferson Creek	No violations observed
Middle Fork	East of Musselshell warming hut into WSA in section 26, T12N, R9E. Violations observed off Sand Point RD 6418 into WSA in sec's 14, 15, and 22, T12N, R9E. and Big Deer Point area in sec's 19 and 20, T13N, R9E.
Big Snowies	No monitoring completed

## **EVALUATION**

Efforts will continue to provide public information on and enforcement of travel management. The Forest anticipates issuing a travel plan decision for the Little Belt, Castles and northern portion of the Crazy Mountains in summer 2007. This decision will essentially supercede the interim administrative order. The Forest will continue to monitor travel plan effectiveness and off-road vehicle damage under the new travel plan. A motor vehicle use map will display routes and areas open to motor vehicle travel and will become the public information map for travel plan enforcement.