



United States
Department of Agriculture



Forest Service
Intermountain Region

RECORD OF DECISION

Off-Highway Vehicle Route Designation Project

Bridger-Teton National Forest
Buffalo, Jackson and Big Piney Ranger Districts

Located Within Teton, Lincoln and Sublette Counties, Wyoming

January 26, 2009

Responsible Officials

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This Record of Decision documents the decision we are making with respect to the designated motor vehicle route system on our respective ranger districts. The decision includes which routes are included in the designated system, the season of use, and the type of motor vehicle use allowed. This decision will be implemented through publication of a summer motor vehicle use map in the spring of 2009. Winter snowmobile use is not addressed in this project.

The environmental consequences contained in the Final Environmental Impact Statement were considered in this decision.

Record of Decision

Off-Highway Vehicle Route Designation Project

USDA Forest Service

Buffalo, Jackson and Big Piney Ranger Districts, Bridger-Teton National Forest
Teton, Lincoln and Sublette Counties, Wyoming

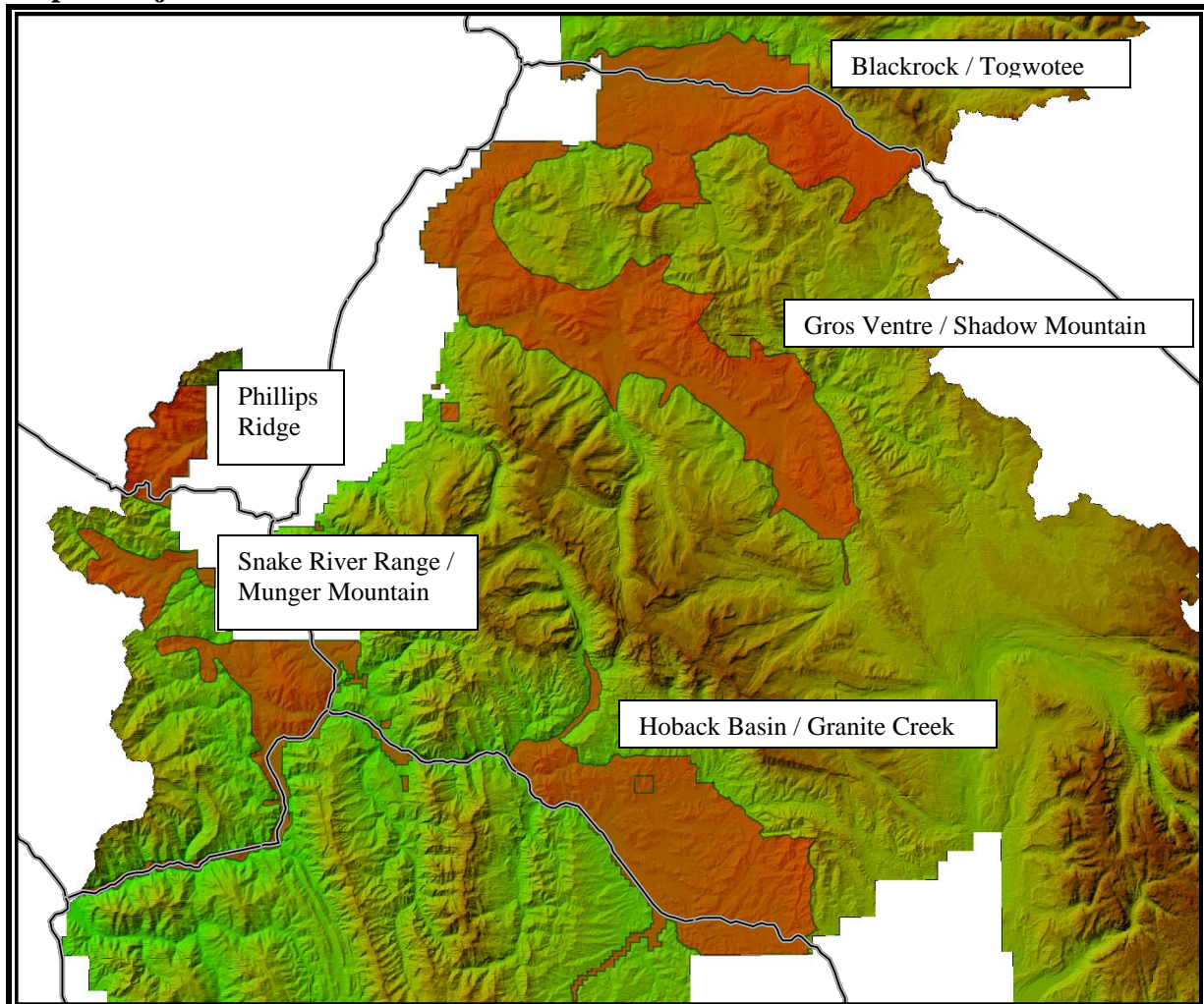
Decision and Rationale for the Decision

Background

On the Bridger-Teton National Forest, there are 255,830 acres that allow unrestricted motorized travel by wheeled vehicles from May 1 through November 30. These areas, shown on Map 1 below, are located on the Buffalo, Jackson, and Big Piney Ranger Districts (which comprise what is administratively known as the “north zone”) and include five geographic areas:

Blackrock/Togwotee, Gros Ventre/Shadow Mountain, Phillips Ridge, Snake River Range/Munger Mountain, and Hoback Basin/Granite Creek.

Map 1. Project Area



Motorized use has a long history on the north zone and is a legitimate and appropriate way for people to enjoy the National Forest, in appropriate places and with proper management. The current travel regulations for the north zone were developed in the late 1970s and 1980s prior to recent technological advances that transformed many aspects of motorized use across the project area. Since the 1980s, motor vehicle use has undergone a transformation from primarily truck travel to a mix of passenger car, truck, ATV, and motorcycle use. In addition, public demand for access to motorized trails has increased. This change has resulted in an unmanaged network of system and non-system roads and trails that is confusing to visitors, reduces the overall quality of the transportation system, causes resource damage and wildlife disturbance, and results in conflicts between people particularly during the fall hunting season.

The Bridger-Teton National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (hereafter referred to as the “Forest Plan”) contains direction specifying that wheeled motorized off-highway vehicles (OHVs) must be restricted to routes or open roads designated for that use. In November 2005, the Forest Service promulgated a National Travel Management Rule that prohibits unrestricted motorized travel and requires roads and trails open to motor vehicle use to be designated for such use.

To improve management of public summer motorized use, the Buffalo, Big Piney, and Jackson Ranger Districts designate roads and motorized trails to meet three purposes: (1) Meet identified public needs, improve the quality of the system, and reduce conflicts, (2) Reduce resource impacts, and (3) Improve the ability to maintain routes and enforce travel regulations.

The north zone began working with the public in 2006 to develop the proposed designated route system for wheeled motor vehicles. A scoping document was released on January 5, 2007 and a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (“DEIS”) was released for public review on June 20, 2008. The DEIS documented the analysis of five alternatives including a No Action alternative and an initial preferred alternative to meet the need for a designated motor vehicle route system within the five existing unrestricted motorized use areas. Alternative D was identified as the initial preferred alternative in the DEIS.

Between the draft and final EIS, the alternatives were reviewed for effectiveness in resolving motorized travel planning issues, responsiveness to public concerns, and compliance with agency statutory authority and the travel management rule in 36 CFR parts 212 and 261. The ability of the Districts to implement and enforce the travel plan remained a primary concern.

Decision

This Record of Decision documents the decision we are making with respect to the designated motor vehicle route system on the three ranger districts. The decision includes which routes are included in the designated system, the season of use, and the type of motor vehicle use allowed. This decision will be implemented through publication of a summer motor vehicle use map in the spring of 2009. Oversnow travel between December 1 and May 1 is not addressed in this project.

Based upon the analysis in the Final EIS, review of all alternatives, and public comment, we have decided to implement Alternative D with the modifications described under each geographic area. The modifications to Alternative D incorporate elements of Alternatives B and C and were made in response to public comments received in response to the Draft EIS, information revealed as part of the environmental analyses, and additional on-the-ground field verification of route conditions.

Interdisciplinary team members were fully involved in these modifications in order to fully inform us about the environmental effects prior to making this decision.

Under the modified Alternative D, unrestricted motorized use by wheeled vehicles would be eliminated and a motorized route system would be designated. Map 2 displays the route system that we have decided to designate. Within the project area, the system of designated OHV routes will consist of 392 miles of road and 88 miles of motorized trail. This compares to 407 miles of road and 99 miles of motorized trail under the initial Alternative D. Approximately 180 miles of OHV route (38 percent) would have some kind of seasonal restriction that is more restrictive than allowing season-long use (May 1 – November 30), whereas 28 miles of OHV route would have the most restrictive seasonal closure date (use allowed July 1 – September 9). We caution reviewers to judge the difference between alternatives based on site-specifics and substance rather than on summary statistics. The distribution and location of routes across the landscape is more important and meaningful than simply quantifying the mileage of the alternatives.

It is important to note that this project focuses on designating a motor vehicle route system within those areas of the Bridger-Teton National Forest that currently do not restrict wheeled motorized use to designated routes. A route was generally not included in this project if the primary reason was to connect other areas beyond the boundaries of the unrestricted motorized use areas. Similarly, where new construction is necessary to make a viable loop, the existing segments of trail were not included. Lastly, a complete inventory of non-system routes was not completed for this project, thus it is entirely possible that additional routes exist that could be considered for inclusion in the Forest transportation system. The National Travel Management Rule requires the motor vehicle use map to be published annually with changes made as needed. The fact that some routes were not included in the system being designated in 2008 does not foreclose the opportunity to consider these routes in subsequent decisions.

Blackrock / Togwotee Area

In this area, 112 miles of system road would be available for motorized use. In the interest of consistency and ease of interpretation of the travel regulations, primary routes will generally be open from May 1 through November 30. Secondary, more primitive routes will generally be open from July 1 through November 30 due to the fact that many of these routes are of lower standard and remain wet until later into the summer, and as such are more susceptible to surface damage from motorized use too early in the season. Five miles of trail would be designated and managed for vehicles less than 50" wide and would be available for use between July 1st and November 30th. No trails would be managed specifically for motorcycle use.

Modifications to Alternative D within this geographic area, and the rationale for these changes are listed below:

- Wallace Draw/Uhl Hill motorized trail – This motorized trail will be removed from the transportation system, however the road spur off of Diamond L Road will be retained to the top of the hill. Significant dialogue took place during the comment period regarding this area. The most predominant concerns expressed by partner agencies as well as the general public included a high potential for wildlife disturbance in spite of recent habitat enhancement projects in the area as well as motorized trespass into Grand Teton National Park. This is largely an open area that could not be easily managed and enforced without significant cost expenditure that could be better utilized elsewhere.

- Diamond L Road (Route number 30180) – Adjacent parallel roads at end of this road will be eliminated in favor of one single route with a clearly defined turnaround spot at the end of the road. This road provides important hunter and game retrieval access.
- Burro Hill, North Fork Spread Creek (30290), Grizzly Creek roads and Rosie’s Ridge Road (30060) and spurs: The season of use will be modified on these roads allowing use from July 1 – November 30 and some spurs off of Rosie’s Ridge will be removed except for a portion of the western most spur which provides access for camping and firewood gathering. To protect wildlife and prevent road damage, the later opening date is necessary. Spur road 30069B will be open to motorized use from May 1 through November 30 since it provides access to private land.
- Four-Mile Meadow road spurs (north of Togwotee Highway and south of Turpin Resort): Based on use monitoring, site visits, and discussions with Turpin Resort, these spur roads are receiving limited use. Accordingly, the spur which originates in T45N, R112W, Section 26 and extends into T45N, R112W, Section 24 will be designated open to motorized use back to the second fence from July 1 through November 30. The remaining road spurs in this area will be closed to motorized use.
- Sagebrush Flat road: This road will be closed to motorized use beyond the cabin. The cabin is the key destination and offers an appropriate place to create a clear turn-around.
- Skull Creek Meadow Road: This route was changed from a road to a 50” motorized trail reflecting how the route is currently being used. The route is currently gated and receives a fair amount of ATV use largely due to its attraction as a scenic riding opportunity. Analysis revealed that the route is very sustainable but significant funding would be required to allow safe passage by full sized vehicles due to landslides just past the gate. This route offers potential opportunities for a manageable loop trail. Designating a loop trail is outside the scope of this decision but is not precluded as part of a future potential decision.
- Squaw Basin area routes: The season of use was modified allowing use from July 1 until November 30 due to the high elevation of this area and typically late spring melt off. Route 30010’s southeastern terminus will be at the treeline at the junction with the spur road heading south. This will allow a reasonable level of motorized access to this area while still keeping motorized travel out of wet areas further to the east and reduces the probability of motorized trespass onto the Shoshone National Forest.
- Lost Lake roads: The road to Lost Lake will be removed as a motor vehicle route. It has been gated for years, is too steep and eroded to be suitable for full size vehicles and current Forest Plan direction prevents management of this route solely as an OHV trail due to management emphasis on providing habitat security for conservation of grizzly bear. However, the lower road is in good condition and accesses well-used campsites. This road will be extended to the campsites at the pond and a road spur near the highway will be added but the season of use will be changed allowing use from July 1 through November 30 since this is a high elevation area with a typically late snowmelt.

- Holmes Cave trailhead: A short road spur will be added and an improved trailhead will be constructed at or near the site being used as a staging area for the Togwotee highway reconstruction project. The season of use will be from May 1 through November 30.
- Togwotee Lodge connector trail: This short connector trail is being added to the transportation system. During the time period between draft and final EIS, this connector was constructed by WYDOT as part of the Togwotee highway reconstruction project. The primary purpose of this connector was safety - to allow snowmobiles to cross underneath the highway. From a safety standpoint, it also makes sense to allow ATVs and motorcycles to use this route rather than crossing the highway.

Gros Ventre Area (including Shadow Mountain and Ditch Creek)

In this area 91 miles of road, 39 miles of 50" trail or trail managed with no width restriction, and 10 miles of motorcycle trail would be available for motorized use. Most areas on the Forest provide important wildlife habitat, but on the Jackson District, the Gros Ventre is particularly so. Therefore, as an example, wildlife considerations were given extra weighting in the designations between Turpin and Slate Creek, which is used by a diverse mix of wildlife. Shadow Mountain on the other hand offers an opportunity to relieve use on the Gros Ventre by offering sustainable trails that offer family riding opportunities in extremely scenic settings with fewer wildlife conflicts.

Modifications to Alternative D in this geographic area and the reasons for these changes are:

- Horsetail – Slate Creek trail and Red Hills trails connector: These routes provide a connector between the horsetail and Slate Creek loops making an extensive loop system. Unfortunately additional field review revealed that neither route is in a sustainable location. The lower route has been obliterated by falling debris. Both pass through habitat that the Forest Service, the Wyoming Game and Fish, and other partners have spent tens of thousands of dollars on improving. Therefore, these routes are not designated in the final alternative.
- Slate Creek loop: Based on recommendations by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, a seasonal closure to improve elk security during the hunting season was added to the eastern branch of the Slate Creek loop between the Haystack and Bear Paw forks. This closure creates a large core area for elk and protects the most vulnerable sections of trail on this loop.
- Bacon Creek ridge: The route along Bacon Ridge is primarily used during hunting season, but otherwise does not provide access to a distinct location. It is closed in the final decision for resource protection and to improve wildlife habitat.
- Gros Ventre road: A June 1st seasonal restriction was added to the Gros Ventre road above the Slate Creek junction to address a few different issues brought up in the DEIS. Currently the road is open on May 1st. A concern raised by Wyoming State Trails is the need for fewer more consistent seasonal restrictions in a given area to make the motor vehicle use map more user friendly. Consequently a more standard season was applied to all routes in the upper part of the drainage. The primary driver for the June 1st date is the need to reduce road damage while the road beds are soft, particularly once winter range restrictions are lifted on May 1st and antler gatherers rush to the collection areas around the

feed grounds. This restriction should also help reduce motorized intrusions into the Gros Ventre Wilderness that is often associated with “May Day”. A gate will be installed to enforce this restriction.

- R Trail (upper Gros Ventre road): Some respondents, including Wyoming State Trails asked that the Forest Service maintain this route as open to the Gros Ventre River crossing, partly for more riding opportunities, and partly as a potential connector route to the motorized system on the Pinedale Ranger District. The route closely parallels the Gros Ventre Wilderness along its entire length and is very remote making it difficult to patrol. In the final decision, this route is open to summer use up to the junction at Horn Ranch so that access to private lands and dispersed camping sites can be maintained. This route will still be used as a designated snowmobile route in the winter. There is a motorized route in Bacon Creek that would be a more logical connector route to Pinedale were that decision to be made in the future so no future options are foregone with this decision.
- Gros Ventre road spurs (including Yellowjacket Flat): Several short spur routes to popular dispersed campsites were added as open to motorized use in the modified alternative to assure that current opportunities were maintained at suitable sites.
- Ditch Creek road: The seasonal restriction on this route was moved from an opening date of May 1st to June 1st to reduce the amount of road damage in the spring. A gate will be installed to enforce this restriction.
- South Fork Ditch Creek trail: In the DEIS, this trail was given a unique season to allow motorized access only during the hunting season. Use on this route prior to this period results in conflicts with permitted activities on National Forest by the Teton Science School that are highlighted in Forest Plan Desired Future Conditions for that area. This route is closed in the final decision to eliminate the unique season and make the MVUM easier to enforce.
- Shadow Mountain road spurs (south and west of summit): Currently several user created routes are being developed in this area due to gentle terrain and open vegetative conditions. The route system in this area cannot be effectively managed, and some illegal trespass is occurring into Grand Teton National Park. Routes to suitable dispersed campsites have been maintained, but the road spurs that approach the park have been closed to avoid enforcement issues and trespass.
- Shadow Mountain roads (north of summit): The routes in this area offer spectacular views of the Teton Mountain Range and provide an ideal setting for family friendly ATV rides by locals and visitors. A few existing trails are added to create additional loop opportunities. Portions of Forest Roads 340 and 345 will be designated as “trails with no width restrictions” so that access to dispersed camping areas can be maintained while allowing families to legally ride the loop system. This is the only location on the North Zone where this designation is used and it does complicate the motor vehicle use map. However, having this riding option is expected to reduce day use in the Gros Ventre and should better and more safely meet the needs of non-local visitors that tour with rented ATVs.

Munger Mountain / Snake River Range (Mosquito Creek, North Fork Fall Creek)

In this area there will be 67 miles of road, 0 miles of 50" trail, and 14 miles of motorcycle trail available for motorized use. Munger Mountain is a popular destination for motorcyclists who want to ride single-track trail after work, and it is identified as the most important area on the District to this user group. The area is also a popular for hiking and mountain biking. It is located in DFC 12, which emphasizes wildlife habitat.

Modifications to Alternative D in this geographic area and the reasons for these changes are:

- **Munger Mtn east route from summit:** This is the single-track motorcycle route that connects Munger summit to the Ross Plateau. It was left open in the DEIS, but was closed to provide more effective and secure habitat for elk based on a request by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department. The closure also avoids creating conflicts not ending a route at the private land boundary.
- **50" motorized trails off Cottonwood Road:** A short loop route shown as open in the DEIS does not connect as originally mapped. Therefore, this has been corrected in the final chosen alternative.
- **Minor change in gate location – Mosquito Creek:** The existing gate on the Mosquito Creek road will be moved to the junction at the residence on the north side of the road in the lower part of the drainage. The gate will not be open until June 1st in order to prevent road damage in the spring.
- **Taylor Mountain road:** This road is located within the Palisades WSA. The authorized road that existed prior to creation of the WSA is located on a landslide and is steep and badly eroded. Therefore, it has been closed in the final decision. There is an alternate unauthorized route that was left open in the DEIS. The origin of this route is not known and if created after 1984 would likely not be consistent with the need to maintain wilderness character as required by the Wyoming Wilderness Act.
- **Fall Creek road spurs:** Route spurs to popular dispersed campsites were added in the chosen alternative to provide recreational opportunities.

Phillips Ridge

In this area, 10 miles of road and 0 miles of motorized trail will be available for motorized use. Primary use of the roads in this area is to access hiking and mountain biking trails, dispersed camps, hunting areas, and to gather wood.

Modifications to Alternative D in this geographic area and the reasons for these changes are:

- **Road spur on Phillips Ridge:** A short spur to a point used by paragliders and for dispersed camping was added between draft and final to accommodate these existing uses.

Hoback Basin / Granite Creek

In this area, 112 miles of system road would be available for motor vehicle use including the Hoback highway. Forest roads would be open May 1st until November 30th. Nineteen miles of trail would be designated and managed for vehicles less than 50” wide and would be available for use between May 1st and November 30th. This includes trails in the Raspberry Ridge and Sled Runner area. No trails would be managed specifically for motorcycle use.

There were few changes from the existing conditions in the Hoback Basin area through this analysis. Routes were designated to prevent watershed damage, provide for wildlife protection and offer a mix of dispersed recreation opportunities. The Dell/Jack Creek roads are retained in the transportation system since they are managed by Sublette County and provide access to both National Forest System land and private land. The Shoal Creek, Riling Draw, Parody Draw, Sour Moose loop, Rim Draw, Sled Runner, and Fisherman/Slide Creek roads are being retained to provide access to a variety of recreational opportunities including dispersed camping, popular non-motorized trails and outfitter camps. The last portion of the Fisherman Creek route past the outfitter camp is located in the Shoal Creek WSA, however our analysis found that this road predated designation of the WSA. No change from the existing condition in 1984 is planned. The Hoback Ranches road is being retained since it is under permit to the Hoback Ranches Improvement District and provides access into the subdivision as well as access to dispersed campsites.

Routes managed for vehicles 50” or less in width are generally being retained as shown in the initial preferred alternative (Alternative D) except for the modifications noted below. Routes being retained as 50” motorized trails include the Jenny Lake Loop, Raspberry Ridge loop, Sledrunner loop, and Mill Creek trail. Both the Raspberry Ridge and Sledrunner loops were old roads that are being converted to motorized trails to protect watershed values, provide an opportunity for scenic family motorized touring, and provide safety for motorized users.

All roads and motorized trails in this area are open from May 1 – November 30 with the exception of the Riling Draw road which is open from July 1 – November 30. The later date for Riling Draw is necessary to protect elk calving areas behind the feedground.

Modifications to Alternative D in this geographic area and the reasons for these changes are:

- Raspberry Ridge road: The terminus of this road was changed so that the road ends on a large flat on top of the ridge where there is more opportunity for vehicle parking and unloading of ATVs or motorcycles and less potential for damage to natural resources.
- Riling Draw: A small section of the Riley Draw route at the very end is being closed. This small section is deteriorating and only accesses a small area of an old timber sale.
- Sledrunner Creek road spur: One road spur was added off of the Sled Runner road to retain access to a popular campsite.
- North Fork Fisherman Creek trail: This trail has been removed as a motorized trail and will now be managed for non-motorized use. It was briefly available as a motorized trail for the past 8-10 years. However, it is within the Shoal Creek WSA and further analysis

revealed it was not open to motorized use prior to 1984. The route also has steep side hills and wet areas that would require reconstruction to make the route sustainable for OHV use. Such an action would be inconsistent with the Congressional direction for the WSA.

- Porcupine Creek trail: The portion of this trail that was located within the Shoal Creek WSA was removed since further analysis revealed it was not on the Forest transportation system as a motorized trail prior to 1984.
- Granite Creek road spurs: Five short road spurs were added off of the Granite Creek road to retain access to popular dispersed campsites. Field verification over the summer found that these sites were more than 300 feet from the Granite Creek road thus it is necessary to designate the spurs to retain access to these sites.

Management Requirements associated with the selected Alternative

1. **Allowable distance off designated routes:** For access to established campsites, motor vehicles may travel up to 300 feet off designated roads where allowed under the motor vehicle use map (MVUM). No travel corridor is allowed off designated motorized trails however, in accordance with provisions of the motor vehicle use map, “motor vehicle designations include parking along designated routes and at facilities associated with designated routes when it is safe to do so and when not causing damage to National Forest System resources”. This provision recognizes that from a practical standpoint, one vehicle width from the edge of the route surface may be necessary to park a vehicle, allow another party to pass, or perform a repair.
2. **State Statutes:** Roads would be available for ATV and motorcycle use where mixed vehicle use has been determined to be appropriate, however children under 16 would not be able to legally ride on the roads per State statute since a drivers license is required for operating an off-road vehicle on roads. State statutes governing the operation of off-road vehicles apply to all alternatives. Regulations regarding noise emissions and mufflers are also governed by the State.
3. **Field Implementation:** Patrol coverage and on-the-ground signing with educational and enforcement visitor contacts will continue. Field patrol coverage and signing are essential for implementation of the designated OHV system. We will seek partnerships and grant funding to assist with implementing the designated OHV route system.
4. **Exemptions for motorized travel off designated routes:** Exemptions to off-road travel as described in 36 CFR 212.51(a) are allowed. Exemptions fall into three categories – emergencies, administrative activities, and activities allowed under special use permits. Examples of emergency exemptions include fire, law enforcement, and search and rescue activities. Administrative activities include noxious weed control, wildlife management, and vegetation management (timber, fuel reduction). Activities allowed under special use permits include firewood gathering, wildlife research, livestock operations, access to private lands, and outfitter-guide operations associated with assigned campsites. This special use permit category of exemptions requires specific authorization from the appropriate Line Officer, detailing when, where, who, and under what circumstances motorized travel is allowed.

5. **Emergency closures:** The Forest Supervisor may continue to issue temporary emergency closures based on a determination of considerable adverse effects pursuant to CFR 212.52(b)(2). This includes considerable adverse impacts to soil, vegetation, wildlife habitat, or cultural resources. The agency can maintain this closure until the effects are mitigated and measures are implemented to prevent future recurrence.
6. **Route maintenance and reconstruction:** Under this alternative, we recognize that maintenance or reconstruction may be needed on designated routes to improve their sustainability. Site-specific environmental analyses will be conducted prior to any route reconstruction. Basic maintenance will occur on all routes designated as part of the Forest transportation system. Best Management Practices will be used to control erosion and runoff on all designated motorized routes. These practices include, but are not limited to waterbars, culverts, dips, and drainage ditches to control flow.
7. **Unauthorized routes:** Non-system routes not approved or intended for future editions of the Motor Vehicle Use Map will be closed and stabilized, rehabilitated, or obliterated as funds allow. Further site-specific environmental analysis is not needed to close a route but may be conducted to determine the appropriate method of closure.
8. **Trailheads:** A small trailhead area will be constructed in the Munger Mountain area east of Rock Creek to accommodate a few vehicles and provide area and recreation use information. The boundaries of the trailhead will have a constructed barrier to funnel use to the trail while preventing dispersed use. This is necessary for resource protection. In other locations, where increased use from all forms of recreation is a concern or where an entry point is needed, trailheads would be designed to accommodate limited parking.
9. **Cultural resources:** The Forest Service will continue to monitor, assess, prioritize, mitigate and/or rehabilitate routes that adversely impact cultural resources. Appropriate mitigation measures will be developed in consultation with the SHPO and the Tribes. Mitigation of effects may include barriers, fencing and signage. Site-armoring techniques could be incorporated into specific project plans to help protect sites. Trails can more easily be re-routed around sites than can roads. Installing signs or fences at prehistoric sites is generally not effective as these methods could draw attention to the site location rather than discourage use of the site area. Other forms of mitigation treatments may include detailed resource documentation or producing a relevant historic document or publication for public distribution.
10. **Noxious weeds:** Educational information regarding noxious weeds will be distributed via trailhead signing, on the motor vehicle use map and in Forest Service or Wyoming State ORV program publications. As implementation of the designated OHV system moves forward, we will include requests for funding early detection, control and monitoring of noxious weeds. We will continue to treat new infestations aggressively and monitor re-vegetated areas, damaged areas, trailheads, and closed routes for noxious weeds. We will enlist OHV users, volunteers and clubs to detect and report noxious weeds.

Rationale

In selecting the modified Alternative D, we were guided by four key needs that became apparent during this process:

- Recognition that this portion of the Forest is highly valued for its abundance and diversity of wildlife resources and there is high interest for wildlife habitat protection among both residents and visitors.
- Recognition that most visitors come to the area for the scenery and opportunity to view wildlife. Relatively easy to moderate motorized loop trails that are highly scenic offer the quality most visitors seeking a motorized “tour” desire.
- Recognition that the Forest is best suited for providing dispersed camping opportunities in contrast to the more developed opportunities available in campgrounds, National Parks, guest resorts and in towns. Thus, there is a need to retain road spurs that can be realistically maintained over time and provide access to summer and fall campsites.
- Recognition that any designated motor vehicle route system will only be as successful as our ability to implement it. Thus, there is a need to reduce complexity as much as possible particularly with respect to management of seasonal restrictions.

The changes to Alternative D, though generally minor in scope, are done for important reasons. These designations are within the range of what was analyzed under the alternatives presented in the DEIS and FEIS. Potential environmental and social impacts are generally less than disclosed for the initial Alternative D since fewer miles or routes are opened, plus some modifications clearly reduce resource impacts and improve wildlife habitat security due to location. Our decisions are based on a review of the record that shows thorough consideration of relevant scientific information, a consideration of opposing views submitted by the public and cooperating agencies, and acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information as documented in the FEIS and the project file. A Travel Analysis and Mixed Used Safety Assessment conducted for this project also informed our decision. All practical means, within the scope of this project, to avoid or minimize environmental harm have been adopted.

We appreciate the complexity, emotion, and controversy associated with travel management. We do not take this travel management decision lightly as this important issue touches all aspects of the Forest Service mission. It has implications for all those who care about and use the Buffalo, Jackson, and Big Piney Ranger Districts. The Bridger-Teton National Forest, known for world-class headwaters, wildlife, wilderness, and wildlands, is an integral part of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. The significance that local, regional, national, and international publics assign to this area has figured prominently in our route designation decisions. Throughout the public process on this route designation project, the interdisciplinary team and we have listened carefully to the perspectives and ideas offered by all interested parties. A multitude of situation specific judgments and tradeoffs are incorporated into this final decision reflecting the intent to balance our multiple use and resource protection responsibilities. These tradeoffs are documented in more detail within the project record. Given the nature of this decision, it is clear that no individual or interest group is likely to find all aspects of our decision to their liking.

Due to the comprehensive nature of this decision and tremendous amount of route specific data that has been relied upon, we acknowledge that there may be unknown omissions or errors in the database for the selected alternative. There may also be unintended consequences and unforeseen difficulties that will need to be addressed as we implement the new travel plan. This is not a rationale for not making a decision but rather an indication that the only way to succeed is to use an adaptive approach. Public support is vital to make the motorized travel plan work. We encourage sustained public participation and commit to listen and to work cooperatively to monitor our travel management plan for success and failure. We will adapt our management based on what we learn.

This decision does not address every possible consequence associated with use of motorized routes and facilities. No single project can do so. However, this decision makes substantial progress on many fronts. First and foremost, this project ends the allowance of unrestricted wheeled motorized cross-country travel by generating a Motor Vehicle Use Map that will explicitly designate where and when motorized use is authorized and for what types of vehicles. We are confident that we have addressed many existing and potential resource impacts through specific route designations using options that include seasonal restrictions and obliteration. Key examples include route designation changes made to protect heritage resources, the Gros Ventre wilderness, critical big game winter range, pronghorn migration routes, sage grouse leks, grizzly bear habitat, and native cutthroat fisheries. Current user preferences, use conflicts, and enforcement considerations have been thoughtfully integrated into the chosen alternative, unlike the existing travel plan that is outdated and largely ineffective. The selected alternative will result in a travel plan that is simpler to understand and much more consistent with adjoining National Park, National Wildlife Refuge, National Forest System, and State lands than what exists currently. This process has improved our understanding of the challenges that are not being addressed by this decision, and that information will guide us as we pursue future endeavors.

We recognize that case law and policy regarding inventoried roadless areas is in flux and could trigger future changes to our current plans depending on the outcomes, though we think this unlikely. This project does not construct any new routes and no unauthorized roads are being designated as open in inventoried roadless areas or within the Palisades or Shoal Creek Wilderness Study Areas. As such the selected alternative does not affect potential for wilderness consideration or preempt changes to management of the motorized system if dictated by future court rulings.

When compared to the other alternatives, Alternative D as modified is preferred for several reasons. It is the most inclusive and complete with regards to the incorporation of site-specific comments from individuals, advocacy groups, and other government entities that commented on the DEIS. As such, it achieves the best balance between competing interests. Public comments received during the DEIS helped us reassess which routes are appropriate to add, remove, or further restrict. The interdisciplinary team and the rangers evaluated each site-specific comment prior to finalizing this decision.

Alternative D as modified is the culmination of a route evaluation process that has benefited from iterative improvement as we have continually studied the route system, gathered new data, and solicited and received input. Relative to the current motorized travel plan, the selected alternative makes a substantial number of important improvements for enforceability and resource protection, and provides a better balance of recreational opportunities than exists currently. Based on the existing inventory, Alternative D as modified maintains most existing dispersed camping

opportunities while addressing cross-country travel impacts that have been occurring from unrestricted travel to and between sites. Over time, the Districts will designate access routes to all dispersed campsites, which will replace the 300-foot exemption corridor that is part of this decision.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, we considered four other alternatives, which are discussed below. Alternative B was the environmentally preferred alternative. A more detailed comparison of these alternatives can be found in the Final EIS.

Alternative A

No Action

Alternative A is the No Action alternative. Under this alternative, OHV management would be guided by the current 2002 travel plan for the Jackson, Buffalo, and a portion of Big Piney Ranger Districts. Motorized use would not be restricted to designated trails within the grey areas displayed on the travel map. Only roads and trails currently included in the Forest transportation system would be eligible for maintenance funds. Motorized routes would not have vehicle class designations, thus there would be a tendency for routes to increase in width over time as ATVs rode single-track trails or full-size vehicles drove on motorized trails. While this alternative does not meet the project purpose and need, it is required to be analyzed to serve as a baseline for comparing the effects of other alternatives.

Alternative B

Alternative B would minimize the number of designated OHV routes. Under this alternative, unrestricted motorized use would be eliminated and replaced with a limited system of designated motorized routes. In general, Alternative B designates roads and trails that are currently on the Forest transportation system (except for Level 1 closed roads) and increases the miles of routes that have seasonal restrictions. It includes the least number of motorized routes compared with other action alternatives. As such it is the environmentally preferred alternative. Alternative B was developed to address environmental issues, particularly issues regarding the potential effect of motorized routes on inventoried roadless areas and Wilderness Study Areas and issues regarding potential wildlife effects in key habitat areas. We did not select this alternative in whole because we believe that the public is better served by a decision that can be reasonably implemented and garner a better level of public support. Due to the magnitude of modification to the existing route system in Alternative B, there would be tremendous resistance to these changes that would not achieve a commensurate gain in resource protection.

Alternative C

Alternative C would use seasonal restrictions more than closures for the designated OHV system. This alternative was developed to address environmental issues, particularly issues regarding the potential effect of OHV routes on wildlife habitat security and soil or watershed concerns. This alternative is intended to provide more motorized access than Alternative B with a mix of opportunities for full-size vehicle travel, vehicles 50 inches or less wide, and motorcycle travel. Motorized trail opportunities would primarily be available during the summer months from July through August. Alternative C does not meet the purpose and need as well as the selected alternative, but features from Alternative C that helped address public concerns and the purpose and need are incorporated into the final decision.

Alternative E

Alternative E would maximize the number of designated OHV routes. This alternative was developed to address issues raised during public scoping that the proposed action did not offer sufficient opportunities for motorized travel. The intent of this alternative is to maximize opportunities for motorized travel while still addressing resource concerns. In general, system roads and system trails are retained under this alternative and more miles of motorized trail are proposed to be added to the system compared with other alternatives. However, this does not mean that all roads and trails that currently exist on the ground would be included as part of the designated OHV system. Many non-system roads and trails have sustainability or manageability issues that preclude adding them to the system. Though preferable to No Action, this alternative has the most environment impacts among the action alternatives and does not meet the purpose and need as well as Alternative D as modified.

Public Involvement

As described in the background, the need for this action arose in November 2005 when the National Travel Management Rule was published. The Notice of Intent to prepare a Draft EIS to designate roads and motorized trails within portions of the Bridger-Teton National Forest was published in the Federal Register on January 5, 2007. The proposed designated OHV route system was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during scoping from December 27, 2006 through February 5, 2007. In addition, as part of the public involvement process, the agency worked extensively with the public to develop the proposed action prior to beginning the formal environmental analysis process. Two Wyoming State departments – Wyoming Game and Fish Department and Wyoming State Trails Program – are cooperating agencies for this project and have provided assistance. A series of workshops were held in May 2006 to hear from citizens with input received about how they use the areas being analyzed in this project, specific concerns, desirable attributes of a designated road and motorized trail system, and ideas for balancing public use and resource values. This input was combined with resource information to develop an initial proposal. The initial proposal was then posted on the Forest Service website for public comment and two open houses were held. The proposed designated OHV route system published in the Federal Register generated 1300 public comments. Using the comments from the public and other agencies, the interdisciplinary team identified seven issues regarding the effects of the proposed action. Main issues of concern included:

1. Effects on opportunities for motorized recreation
2. Effects on opportunities for non-motorized recreation
3. Effects on route sustainability and potential for sedimentation into water sources
4. Effects on wildlife including threatened, endangered, and sensitive species and management indicator species
5. Effects on the character of inventoried roadless areas, Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and National Parks
6. Effects on cultural resources
7. Effects on the agency's ability to manage the OHV system

To address these concerns, the Forest Service created the alternatives described above. To further involve the public, the Forest Service sponsored an informational workshop on motorized recreation and wildlife in February 2007 and then held a workshop in March 2007 to gather ideas to help formulate the alternatives. A series of field trips were held in late summer/fall of 2007 and an informational workshop was held on May 6, 2008 to introduce the alternatives and the Draft

EIS. The Notice of Availability for the Draft EIS was published in the Federal Register on June 20, 2008 with public comment accepted through August 5, 2008. Review of the Draft EIS generated 216 public comments.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision to select Alternative D with the modifications described above is consistent with the intent of the forest plan's long term goals and objectives listed on pages 112-121. The project was designed in conformance with forest plan standards and incorporates appropriate Forest Plan guidelines for the Desired Future Condition categories 3, 6S, 7, 8, 10, and 12. (Forest Plan, pages 173 to 246). A Biological Assessment has been prepared for endangered, threatened, proposed, and non-essential experimental population species and their critical habitat known or suspected to occur within the project area to comply with the Endangered Species Act. Determinations indicate the selected alternative will have no effect on the threatened Canada lynx and their proposed critical habitat and will not likely jeopardize the continued existence of the non-essential experimental population of Northern Rocky Mountain gray wolf. Biological Evaluations were also prepared for Intermountain Region 4 sensitive plant and animal species and their habitats known or suspected to occur within the project area. The evaluations determined that the project will have no impact on six sensitive wildlife species, and may impact individuals or habitat of 10 sensitive wildlife species, but will not likely contribute to a trend toward federal listing or loss of viability to the population or species. We have considered the effects of this project on high priority migratory bird species and their primary breeding habitats within the proposed project area to comply with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act USC 703-711 and Executive Order #13186 (FEIS: Chapter 3, and Wildlife Technical Report). The selected alternative contains several provisions to protect high priority habitats for migratory birds, such as (a) seasonal and year round road and trail closures to minimize motorized disturbance during the breeding/nesting seasons, (b) closures and vehicle type restrictions through forested habitats to reduce the removal of snags and large downed log habitats for personnel use firewood, and (c) off-road motorized travel closure through rangelands to reduce the spread of noxious weeds through native habitats of migratory birds. Implementation of modified Alternative D will contribute to stable or improved habitat capability for migratory birds in the project area.

We have considered the effects of this project on low income and minority populations and concluded that this project is consistent with the intent of the Environmental Justice Act of 1994 (EO 12898). The local community was notified of this project through the public participation process. This project contributes to the economic well being of regional and local communities by maintaining or enhancing wildlife and scenic values and by providing access opportunities for commercially outfitted and guided motorized tours or vehicle rentals, hunting and fishing, harvest of personnel use firewood for residential heating, etc.

Cultural resource survey reports were prepared for the State Historic Preservation Office and they have provided a letter of concurrence with the report findings. The specialist report for Special Area designations supports that the selected alternative is consistent with the Wyoming Wilderness Act and with the National Roadless Conservation Rule. The specialist report for hydrology supports that the selected alternative is consistent with the Clean Water Act and the engineering report supports that the selected alternative is consistent with the requirements for mixed vehicle use on roads proposed to be added to the Forest Transportation System.

Implementation

Implementation Date

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215.

The appeal must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, or express delivery) with the Appeal Deciding Officer in the Intermountain Region USFS, 324 25th Street, Odgen, UT 84401; or by fax to 801-625-5277. Kniffy Hamilton, Bridger-Teton Forest Supervisor, is the Appeal Deciding Officer for this project.

The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered appeals are: 8:00 am – 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic appeals must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to: appeals-intermtn-regional-office@fs.fed.us. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to an electronic message, a verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature is one way to provide verification.

Appeals, including attachments, must be filed within 45 days from the publication date of this notice in the Casper Star Tribune, the newspaper of record. Attachments received after the 45 day appeal period will not be considered. The publication date in the Casper Star Tribune, newspaper of record, is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Individuals or organizations who submitted comments during the comment period specified at 215.6 may appeal this decision. The notice of appeal must meet the appeal content requirements at 36 CFR 215.14.

Contact Person

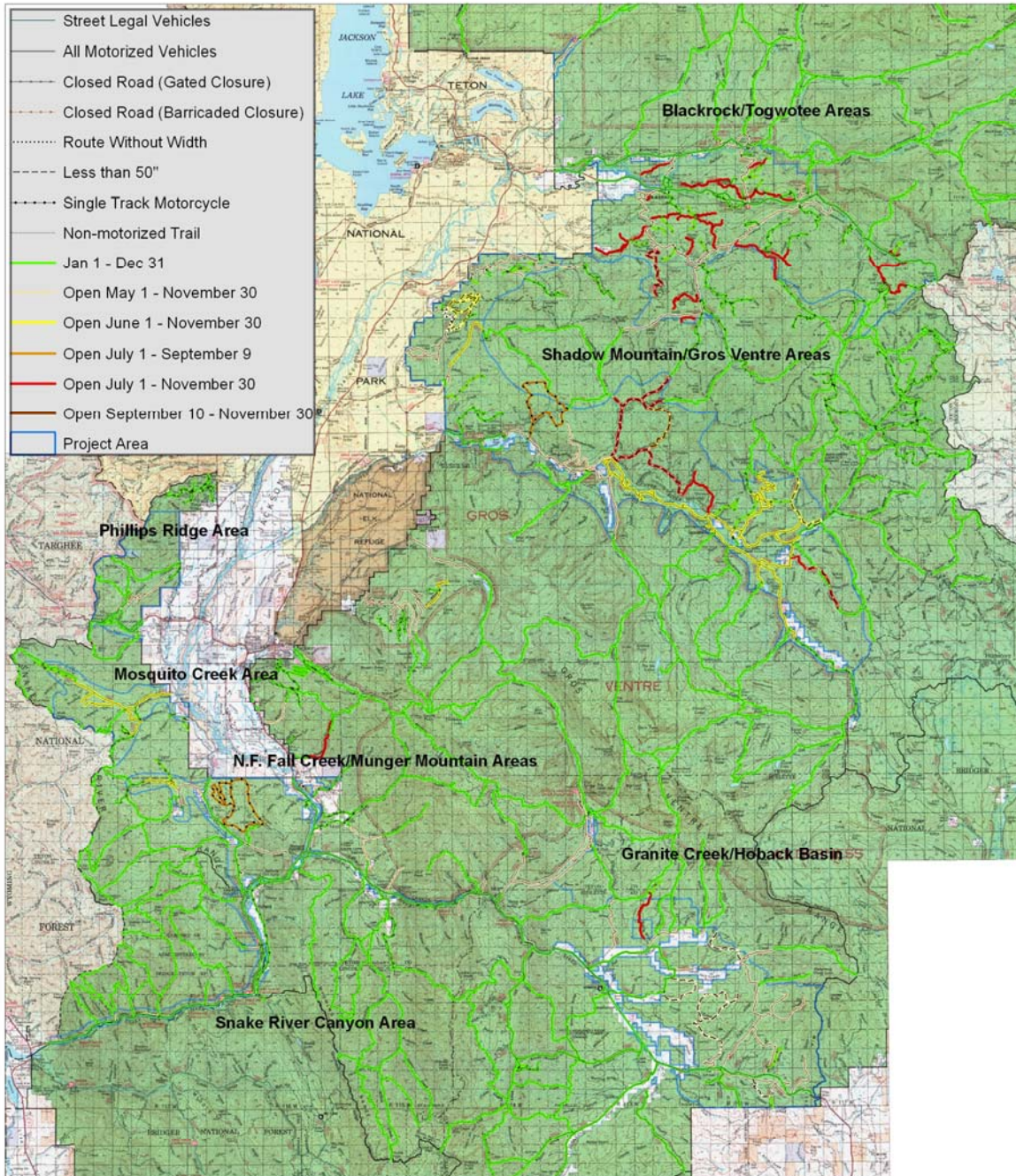
For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Linda Merigliano or David Wilkinson, Project Leaders, Bridger-Teton National Forest, PO Box 1689, Jackson, WY 83001; phone (307) 739-5400.

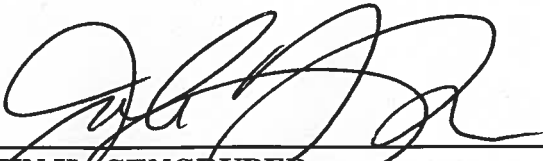
Conclusion

We are pleased to announce this decision. During implementation of this project we look forward to working with our partners and the public to provide a sustainable, motorized route system on the Big Piney, Buffalo and Jackson Ranger Districts.

Map 2. Modified Alternative D

Modified Alternative D (North Zone BTNF)





JOHN HAGENGRUBER
District Ranger
Buffalo Ranger District

Jan. 26, 2009

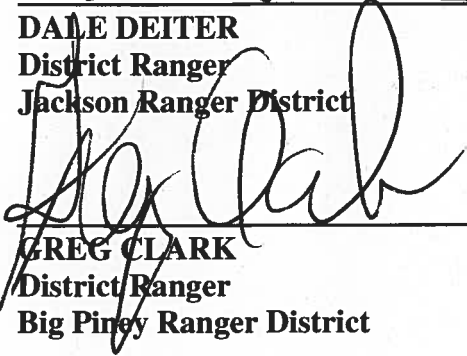
DATE



DALE DEITER
District Ranger
Jackson Ranger District

Jan. 26, 2009

DATE



GREG CLARK
District Ranger
Big Piney Ranger District

Jan. 26, 2009

DATE

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