



NEWS RELEASE

Lolo National Forest

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State of the Rattlesnake Report Issued

Missoula, MT. – Since 1992, the Missoula Ranger District has been monitoring conditions in the Rattlesnake National Recreation Area and Wilderness (RNRAW) using standards developed under a system called Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC). The Ranger District just finished summarizing the 16th Annual Limits of Acceptable Change Report – sometimes referred to as the “State of the Rattlesnake.”

The RNRAW LAC based Management Direction was approved in 1992 and made part of the Lolo National Forest Plan. The LAC report provides a summary of resource conditions, use trends, management activities and issues in one of Missoula’s favorite backyard recreation areas. The 2008 report indicates increased visitor use of the Rattlesnake Wilderness, but also a decrease in hunter impacts from the three year old early elk hunt compared to 2007, which is attributed to increased hunter education efforts conducted by the Forest Service and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks. The report also showed a decrease in law enforcement violations in the National Recreation Area (NRA). That decrease was attributed to increased law enforcement presence in the recreation area, according to the Missoula Ranger District recreation staff.

The report revealed positive results from education and law enforcement initiatives by Forest Officers – including increased law enforcement patrols and contacts.

For what is know as the “South Zone” of the **National Recreation Area** (the area generally within three miles of the main trailhead) the report showed:

- The majority of the visitors are hikers (50 %), followed by bicyclists (42%). Other popular activities included horseback riding, jogging, fishing and backpacking
- Law enforcement violations were down, with most violations being for camping outside of designated areas, dogs-off leash, alcohol and drug use, and parking outside of designated areas.

Land and resource management activities in the **National Recreation Area** included

- Completion of 81.6 miles of trail maintenance in partnership with the Montana Conservation Corps; 2.7 miles of trail construction/relocation, and 1.5 miles of trail drainage improvement
- Nearly ten acres of noxious weed control
- Completion of the Sawmill Gulch fuels reduction project
- No human/bear conflicts, which district officials attribute to food storage requirements and partnership work with the Middle Rattlesnake Bear Task Force. There were no reports of bears removing food from backpacks or campsites
- A new Special Order prohibiting predator and non-game trapping in the Rattlesnake NRA and adjacent lands in a collaborative effort with Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to minimize the potential of trapping conflicts in the NRA.

Management activities and monitoring in the **Rattlesnake Wilderness Area** indicated:

- The majority of wilderness visitors were from the Missoula area – nearly 90% – and 61% were hikers

- Leave No Trace presentations were provided for nearly 900 people
- Restoration of two user-created trails was completed This work include obliteration and naturalizing of over one mile of illegal trail
- There was a decrease in food storage violations, likely the result of the district providing bear food storage poles and increased education and awareness efforts of Wilderness Rangers
- All 50 miles of trail in the wilderness were maintained

In 2008 Missoula Ranger District officials also noted an increase in large groups in the NRA, and a Special Order was signed to make the existing LAC group size standard an enforceable rule in order to reduce user conflict.

In the **National Recreation Area**, non-system trail development, noxious weeds, and transient camping in the South Zone were documented as the most significant management issues. In the **Rattlesnake Wilderness**, officials cited noxious weeds, low-flying aircraft, and early elk hunter impacts as the most significant management challenges.

For additional information please contact Andy Kulla at (406) 329-3962, or the Lolo National Forest Public Affairs Office at (406) 329-1024.

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