Project Area (Geographic Scope)

The following analysis covers the Halfway Malin Project Area. The main access roads to the project area are Eagle Creek Road (FSR 1214) and Bird Creek Road (FSR 338).

Regulatory Framework

Authorities to manage recreation come from the general laws related to National Forest management, including: the Multiple Use-Sustained yield Act of 1960; the Wilderness Act (1964); the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (1968); and the National Forest Management Act (1976); etc. In addition, many specific federal regulations (Code of Federal Regulations), policies (Forest Service Manuals and Handbooks), and other technical manuals and papers direct management of the recreation resource for the Forest Service.

Forest Plan

The 2015 Forest Plan includes goals, desired condition, objectives, standards, and guideline for access and recreation, and inventoried roadless areas; the project area is not within an inventoried roadless area. The Management Areas (MA) within this project area are Wild and Scenic River Corridor MA2b and General Forest MA6. The proposed activities are consistent with all aspects of the 2015 Forest Plan with regard to access and recreation (PF: REC-1).

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum & Analysis Methods

There are no congressionally designated Wilderness Areas within the project area, and the project is not within a roadless area. The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) was reviewed for this project. The ROS setting indicators demonstrate access, remoteness, size, visual characteristics, site management, visitor management, social encounters, and visitor impacts (Project Planning ROS Users Guide Chapter 60, USFS, 1987). According to the current IPNF ROS inventory, the project area falls within two ROS classifications: (1) Roaded Natural and (2) Roaded Modified. These settings are very general and allow latitude within each category. This project will not change ROS settings; therefore, the ROS settings were not used as indicators for analysis.

The recreation experience is considered the basis for this analysis. An overview of recreational use was developed through first-hand knowledge from recreation personnel and public input. It is the experience a particular trail or road allows, and kinds of access to the area, that are often most important to people. This analysis is qualitative and emphasizes anticipated changes in recreation experiences, opportunities, and uses.

Existing Condition and Effects

Access and Recreation:

The primary recreation activities within this area are summer day use and fall hunting activities. The Eagle Creek Road (FSR 1214) and Bird Creek Road (FSR 338) provide access to, but are not within, the project area. Day use in the area includes driving for pleasure with vehicles, motorcycles, and all-terrain vehicles (OHV ≤ 50”); recreational gathering of forest products (e.g., berries, mushrooms); and firewood collecting along the FSR 1214 and FSR 338 and other less traveled connecting routes. Bird and Eagle Creeks also receive light amounts of fishing use. Much of the day use is by recreationists camping at nearby developed campgrounds on the St. Joe River. The area experiences considerable hunting use along area roads and trails during the fall elk and deer seasons, with much lighter use during the bear and mountain lion seasons in the spring and the late fall muzzle load season. During the fall hunting season there is occasional stock use at dispersed sites.

There are two nearby developed campgrounds, Turner Flat and Tin Can Flat, in the immediate area. They are located along the southern boundary of the project area along Forest Highway 50 (FH 50) and the St. Joe River. These are fee campgrounds that receive moderate to high use during the summer and fall, with peak use on holidays and during the fall rifle season. The campgrounds, which accommodate RVs and tents, each have two toilets and a
hand pump for drinking water. There are also approximately 14 dispersed campsites along the FH 50, 5 dispersed campsites along the Eagle Creek Road, and 10 dispersed sites along Bird Creek Road. Recreation use in the area is generally associated with the campgrounds. The portion of the St. Joe River along the southern boundary of the analysis area is used by rafters and kayakers in the spring, and by inner tube floaters during the summer months of July and August. Roadside pull-offs along FH 50, between Turner Flat Campground and FSR 1214, are currently used for river access by floaters running Skookum Canyon. With the exception of Turner Flat Campground, which provides good river access, floaters must park at roadside pull-offs and then bushwhack or traverse steep sections of riverbank to reach the river with their watercraft. A large pull-off, just west of FSR 1214, was paved when FH 50 was improved in the early 1990s, with the intention that it could eventually be developed as a float trailhead.

The St. Joe River is nationally recognized as a blue-ribbon fly-fishing stream; only catch-and-release fishing is allowed. Throughout the season, the St. Joe River along the project area receives moderate to heavy fishing use.

Recreation Special Uses:

One outfitter/guide holds a special use permit for big game hunting activities (e.g., elk, deer, bear, mountain lion) within the area. Bird and Eagle Creek Roads provide part of the access for the outfitter's operations. The outfitter uses stock and foot to access interior portions of the area via closed roads and system trails. There is an outfitter camp at a dispersed site on Bottle Creek, adjacent to FH 50.

Summer Trails:

There is just one trail within the project area; Malin Ridge Trail 197. The Trail 197 is a 7 mile trail starting from the St. Joe River corridor Wild and Scenic River. The most enjoyable section of Trail 197 is the first mile from the trailhead where one will find a fine diversity of forest plant species, which includes a forest of Douglas-fir, western redcedar, tamarack, and ponderosa pine. After the first mile the trail climbs up a ridge via two long switchbacks, before passing through an old harvest unit, and then follows a logging road terminating at FSR 1280.

At this time, Trail 197 is one of the least used of the face trails along the St. Joe River because there are no connecting loops or destinations to draw people’s interest; furthermore, the trail is long (< 6 miles) for hikers, follows a road at the top (not what hikers normally look for), and it always has abundant blowdown of large trees blocking the trail. The trail is not a high priority for trail clearing, and often it is late in the summer or early fall before it is cleared. The highest use of Trail 197 is during the hunting season. Up to 2016 this trail has been designated as non-motorized; however, the 2016 Travel Management Decision Notice changed the trail’s designation to seasonal (May 22nd to September 5th) single track motorized use (i.e., motorcycle). Due to this new access designation there is likely to be more use on Trail 197. Possible loop routes available to users will require some road riding to access other trails; therefore, Trail 197 is likely to always be a lightly used trail.

Except for the St. Joe River corridor, Trail 197 travels through areas that have experienced harvesting activities for decades; therefore, when people travel up into this area they will come across harvest units, gates and roads. Trail 197 connects to FSR 1280, which connects FSR 1214 to FSR 338. The 2016 Travel Management Decision designates FSR 1280 for OHV ≤ 50” use, but Trail 197 is designated for seasonal single track motorized use only. OHV ≤ 50” use on roads in the project area is common.

Winter Trails:

In general, the area receives very little winter use by snowmobiles or cross-country skiers; there are no groomed or cross-country ski trails. FH 50 does receive some snowmobile use during the winter, when the road is not used for logging, and the road is occasionally groomed for snowmobiles as far up as Bluff Creek (FSR 509).

Effects

Recreation Experience

Except for Trail 197, the recreation experience described above is only likely to experience temporary impacts from the proposed project activities. There will be temporary effects due to logging traffic, and road construction and reconstruction. There will be temporary interruptions in access to certain roads and the upper portion of Trail 197.
There may be a temporary loss of access to certain dispersed sites along roads used for timber harvesting timber, but
the current dispersed sites will be retained and not be affected. Proposed road construction would likely begin in
2018, and the timber sale would likely be logged from 2019 to 2021. Mitigation, such as signing for the logging
traffic, will alleviate some of the inconvenience to the public.

The hunting public will likely be pleased at having some clearing of trees. Due to the seasonal restriction for Trail
197, hunting off trail would be non-motorized only.

If there is winter logging in the area the outfitter would benefit, since roads are often plowed which allows easier
access for mountain lion hunting; however, the outfitter may experience some hunting access interruptions in the
spring and fall due to logging operations.

In Alternative B, the proposed action, Trail 197 will be impacted by logging road construction. The new road will
cross the trail at one location; road crossings on trails diminish the experience for all users. The new road will also
parallel Trail 197, and for about a half mile segment of the trail travelers will be in view of the new road (within
approximately 50ft to 200ft).

In Alternative C the new road does not affect Trail 197.

OHV ≤ 50” recreation would not be affected by this project; other than temporary effects from traffic and road
construction.

**Cumulative Effects**

Past, present, and reasonably foreseeable activities, along with the action alternatives, continue to have effects on
recreationists in the area. For this project area, activities relevant to recreation are: trail uses, trail maintenance,
outfitting, timber harvesting, road construction and maintenance, camping, berry picking, hunting and fishing. None
of these activities are expected to have anything but minor effects on the recreation experience.

The existing condition is a result of all previous actions. Compared with the existing condition, the cumulative
effects of the proposed activities on access and recreation is slight to none.