Draft Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)
Caribou Loop Connector Project

USDA Forest Service
Soda Springs Ranger District
Caribou-Targhee National Forest
Caribou County, Idaho

Introduction

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 (42 U.S.C.A. §4321 to 4370(h)), Council on Environmental Quality implementing regulations (40 C.F.R. Parts 1500 to 1508 (1978)), Forest Service supplemental regulations and guidance (36 C.F.R. Part 220, National Environmental Policy Act Compliance (2008), and Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1901.15, National Environmental Policy Act Handbook (2010)), the Caribou-Targhee National Forest (CTNF), Soda Springs Ranger District (Forest Service) has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) and a Draft DN-FONSI for the Caribou Loop Connector Project, located in Caribou County, Idaho (Township 5 South, Range 44 East, Section 23 of the Boise Meridian). The EA is incorporated by reference into this DN-FONSI with citations included as appropriate.

The Forest Service proposes to create a motorized OHV trail by using 4,300 feet of an existing, old road bed and including minor construction (installing an OHV bridge, culverts, and a cattle guard) to provide a safe motorized trail route between the Tincup Road and the Lanes Creek Cutoff Road. (EA, Sections 1.2 to 1.4). The EA analyzed the potential effects of one action alternative and the no action in response to the purpose and need of the proposal (EA, Section 2.0).

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

Based upon my review of the EA, I have decided to implement Alternative 2 (proposed action) and associated mitigation measures and monitoring (EA, Sections 2.2.2, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5 and 4.0).

I have selected the proposed action because it meets the purpose and need of the project proposal, does not result in significant environmental effects, is consistent with the standards and guidelines of the Caribou Revised Forest Plan (Caribou RFP) (no amendment required), and would be implemented in compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and policies. (EA, Sections 1.3, 1.6, 2.1, and 3.0).

Other Action Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered the following action alternative that was ultimately not carried forward for analysis due to not meeting the purpose and need for the project proposal (EA, Section 2.2):

- Alternate location south of Highway 34.

Public Involvement and Scoping

The Forest Service listed the project proposal in the Schedule of Proposed Actions on November 9, 2016, notified the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes on November 4, 2016, and provided for a 30-day public scoping period (November 9, 2016 to December 8, 2016) (initiated by publishing a legal notice in the Idaho State Journal on November 9, 2016), and provided individual notice to requesting parties. Aside from agency permitting and consultation communications, the Forest Service did not receive any comments warranting further consideration or analysis in the EA. As a result, the scope of the EA analysis was determined by the Forest Service Interdisciplinary Team, and focused on the resources holding the most potential for significant effects, namely: water quality and wildlife. (EA, Sections 1.7 and 1.9).
Finding of No Significant Impact

Based on my review of the EA, I have determined that the proposed action will not have significant effects on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of potential environmental effects (40 C.F.R. §1508.27, and FSH 1909.15_05) in addition to the initial criterion of avoiding significant effects, as discussed in the EA (EA, Sections 1.3, 2.1 and 3.0).

In terms of context, the potential effects of the proposed action to water resources and wildlife would be local and confined to the project area as a result of incorporating mitigation measures, effectiveness monitoring, and future adjustments that may be made to ensure effects remain with the scope of this EA’s analysis (EA, Section 3.0 and 4.0).

In terms of intensity, the proposed action may result in adverse effects to water quality, fisheries and wildlife as a result of construction and proximity of the project area to Muddy Creek and Tincup Creek. For all resource categories, the Forest Service has integrated mitigation measures (best management practices, design features) and monitoring (water quality) into the proposed action to avoid and minimize adverse effects. Compliance with consultation/permit terms and conditions would ensure that potential effects to fisheries and water quality are further minimized, with beneficial effects extending to wildlife species. Effects to other resources are none to negligible, although standard mitigation measures would apply to some resources (i.e., pollution prevention measures). In addition, the action would not affect public health and safety, unique characteristics of the geographic area, or result in the potential for significant cumulative effects. The action is routine and does not present any uncertain, unique or unknown risks and does not establish precedent or represents a decision in principle about a future action/consideration with significant effects. Finally, the action is consistent with applicable Caribou RFP standards and guidelines (considering mitigation measures and monitoring) and would be implemented in compliance with applicable laws, regulations and policies. (EA, Sections 3.0 and 4.0).

Therefore, I have determined that further analysis in the form of an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not warranted and an EIS will not be prepared.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

As explained in the EA, the proposed action is consistent with applicable Caribou RFP standards and guidelines and would be implemented in compliance with applicable laws, regulations and policies (EA, Sections 1.6, 1.8.2, and 3.0). No additional findings are required in this DN-FONSI.

Administrative Review and Objection Rights

This decision is subject to objection pursuant to 36 CFR Part 218, Subparts A and B. The objection must be filed by way of regular mail, fax, e-mail, hand-delivery, or express delivery with the Objection Review Officer: Garth Smelser, USDA Forest Service, Intermountain Region – mail: 324 25th Street, Ogden, Utah 84401; fax - 801-625-5277; or email - objections-intermtn-regional-office@fs.fed.us with Subject: Caribou Loop Connector Project.

The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered objections are: 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic objections must be submitted in a format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc). 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.

Objections, including attachments, must be filed within 45 days from the publication date of this notice in the Idaho State Journal, the newspaper of record. Attachments received after the 45-day objection period will not be considered. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Those wishing to object this project should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.
Individuals and entities as defined in 36 CFR §218.2 who have submitted timely, specific written comments regarding a proposed project or activity that is subject to these regulations during any designated opportunity for public comment may file an objection (36 CFR 218.5) unless the issue raised in the objection is based on new information that arose after the opportunity for comment (36 CFR §218.8(c)). The notice of objection must meet the content requirements at 36 CFR §218.8.

**Implementation**

If no objections are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, June 15, 2017.

For further information concerning the Caribou Loop Connector Project, contact Bryan Fuell at (208) 547-4356 during normal business hours or via email (bfuell@fs.fed.us).

Approved by:

Bryan K. Fuell  
District Ranger  
Soda Springs Ranger District  
Caribou-Targhee National Forest

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