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November 2010

# Blackfoot Travel Plan

## Proposed Action Scoping Document

### Helena National Forest, Lincoln Ranger District



The Helena National Forest (HNF) is proposing changes to the existing non-winter motorized public access routes and prohibitions within the non-wilderness lands on the Lincoln Ranger District (LRD). Consistent with the Forest Service travel planning regulations, the resulting available public motorized access routes and areas would be designated on a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM). Upon publishing the MVUM, public use of a motor vehicle other than in accordance with those designations would be prohibited. At the same time, the Forest proposes to physically close, store, decommission, relocate, and construct certain roads and trails.

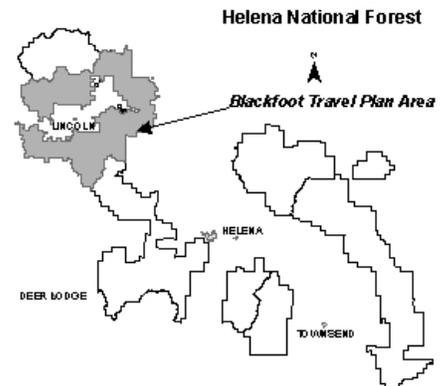
The project area includes about 321,500 acres of public land, located in Lewis & Clark and Powell Counties. The proposal responds to the goals and objectives outlined in the Helena National Forest

Plan and helps move the Forest toward the desired conditions described in the Plan.

The Blackfoot Travel Plan was originally initiated in 2003 as part of a Forest-wide Travel Planning effort. At that time a Proposed Action was developed and comments were received. Due to budget constraints and large-scale fires the planning was halted. In 2005, the Forest Service issued new travel planning regulations nationwide which changed the scope of the proposals from the 2003 Blackfoot efforts and emphasized collaboration with the public as part of developing proposed changes.

Through discussions with forest users, landowners, agencies, Forest Service specialists, local government, recreation groups and advocacy groups, and from reviewing written comments, proposed changes have been identified and are dis-

cussed in this document. Recreation opportunities and other uses are to be provided while simultaneously meeting Forest Plan standards for fish and wildlife habitats, soil and watershed health, and prevention and control of noxious weed spread. The Blackfoot Travel Plan Proposed Action only identifies changes to routes on National Forest System lands.



### **Purpose and Need for the Blackfoot Travel Plan**

Under **36 CFR 212, Subpart B, Designation of Roads, Trails, and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use**, the Forest Service is required to designate all roads, trails, and areas open to motor vehicles on a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM). Designation is to include class of vehicle and, if appropriate, time of year for motor vehicle use. A given route, for example, could be designated for use by motorcycles, ATVs, or street-legal vehicles. Upon publishing the MVUM, public use of a motor vehicle other than in accordance with those designations would be prohibited (**36 CFR 261.13**). These decisions will be made locally, with public input and in coordination with state, local, and tribal governments. These decisions will also be made to provide diverse recreation opportunity, including non-motorized uses.



The existing system of available public motor vehicle routes and areas on the Lincoln Ranger District are the culmination of multiple agency decisions over recent decades. The purpose of the Blackfoot Travel Plan is to ensure public motor vehicle use continues to be manageable and consistent with the Forest Plan and current travel management regulations.

Lastly, these decisions will ensure compliance with the Forest Plan and Interagency requirements for grizzly bear security and habitat within the recovery zone. Please see Page 3 for a detailed discussion of effective closures for grizzly bears.

### **Definitions (36 CFR 212.1)**

**Road** – A motor vehicle route over 50 inches wide, unless identified and managed as a trail.

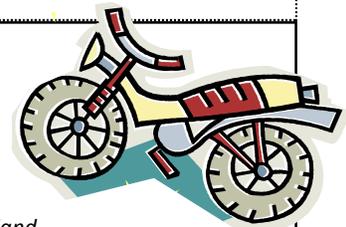
**Trail** – A route 50" or less in width or a route over 50" wide that is identified and managed as a trail.

**Forest road or trail** – A road or trail wholly or partially within or adjacent to and serving the NFS that is determined to be necessary for the protection, administration, and utilization of the NFS and the use and development of its resources

**Off Highway Vehicle (OHV)** – Any motor vehicle designed for or capable of cross-country travel on or immediately over land, water, sand, snow, ice, marsh, swampland, or other natural terrain

**Motor vehicle** – Any vehicle which is self-propelled, other than: (1) A vehicle operated on rails; and (2) Any wheelchair or mobility device, including one that is battery-powered, that is designed solely for use by a mobility-impaired person for locomotion and that is suitable for use in an indoor pedestrian area.

**Unclassified** – Term used by the Forest Service when mapping user-created routes. All roads in newly acquired lands are also shown in the existing condition as "unclassified."



The Proposed Action was developed by an Interdisciplinary Team (IDT), incorporating input gathered from the collaboration conducted and public comments received since 2003. Elements considered in the development process:

- Roads and trails currently designated as closed are not assumed to remain designated as closed.
- Known user-created and unclassified routes were identified and determined for future management.
- Construction opportunities were considered to better provide recreational opportunities.
- System roads and trails with season of use and the type of motorized use were identified.
- Making the travel management map simple and concise to improve public usefulness, and also to alleviate enforcement and management problems.
- Coordination occurred with the Bureau of Land Management, MT Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation, and other private landowners to identify those access routes necessary for land management.
- An emphasis was placed on providing a diversity of recreation opportunities that minimize effects on the land and resources, promote public safety, and control conflicts with other uses of NFS lands; opportunities for a broad spectrum of both motorized and non-motorized uses were recognized.
- Three route types were identified to be included in the Travel Plan:
  1. Roads: open to vehicles that meet the requirements of state laws
  2. Motorized trails: open to vehicles 50 inches wide or less; or open to single-track vehicles only
  3. Non-motorized trails: open to all types of non-motorized uses
- For the purposes of this Proposed Action, the term ‘user-created routes’ refers to the development of motorized routes created from repeated cross country travel. These routes have not been planned for, but have appeared in recent years.
- Some roads proposed for storage, obliteration, or other travel changes are scheduled to be treated under the August 2010 Forest-wide Hazardous Tree Removal Project. These changes are proposals, which means these proposals could change during the NEPA process and decision. Until a decision is made, these routes will remain open and safety hazards mitigated.

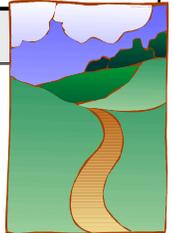
**Summary of Changes to the Existing Condition**

**Changes to Public Motorized Access**  
 The following changes are proposed to the existing motorized public access routes and prohibitions within the non-wilderness lands on the Lincoln Ranger District. See map online for specific locations.

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Changing currently <b>Closed Yearlong</b> routes or <b>User-created</b> routes to <b>Open with Seasonal Restrictions</b>                         | 1.8  |
| Changing from one <b>Seasonal restriction</b> to a different <b>Seasonal restriction</b>   | 5.1  |
| Changing currently <b>Closed Yearlong</b> or <b>User-Created</b> routes to being <b>Open Yearlong</b>  | 6.7  |
| Changing current <b>Seasonally Restricted</b> routes to become <b>Open Yearlong</b>  | 9.4  |
| *Storage of currently <b>Open Routes</b>   | 82.1 |
| Changing <b>Open Seasonally</b> or <b>Open Yearlong</b> routes to <b>Closed Yearlong</b>   | 2.5  |
| *Closure of <b>User-Created</b> routes (estimated)   | 7.9  |
| *New <b>Motorized Trails</b> created from <b>Seasonally Restricted, Open Yearlong, User-Created,</b> and previously <b>Decommissioned</b> routes | 41.4 |
| <b>Single-Track Motorized Trail</b> created from <b>Double-Track Motorized Trail</b>   | 1.5  |

**Changes to Transportation Facilities**  
 The following changes are proposed to the existing transportation system (facilities) i.e. physical activities. See map online for specific locations.

|  |      |
|--|------|
| <b>New Road Construction</b>   | 1.6  |
| <b>Storage</b> of currently <b>Closed</b> routes ( <i>storage definition on page 3</i> )   | 65.5 |
| * <b>Storage</b> of currently <b>Open Routes</b>   | 82.1 |
| <b>Obliteration</b> of <b>Closed Yearlong, Open Yearlong,</b> or <b>User-Created</b> routes  | 8.1  |
| * <b>Closure</b> of <b>User-Created</b> routes (estimate)  | 7.9  |
| *New <b>Motorized Trails</b> created from <b>Seasonally Restricted, Open Yearlong, User-Created,</b> and previously <b>Decommissioned</b> routes | 41.4 |
| <b>Non-Motorized Trails</b> created from <b>Closed</b> or <b>User-Created</b> routes   | 5.5  |
| <b>Non-Motorized Trails</b> created from <b>Open</b> or <b>Seasonally Restricted</b> routes  | 1.5  |
| <b>Non-Motorized Trails</b> created from <b>Single</b> or <b>Double-Track Motorized</b> routes   | 13.7 |
| New <b>Mountain Bike Trails</b> —On National Forest within scope of proposal   | 33   |



\*double counting due to changes applicable to both sections.

In 2002-2004 the HNF completed a roads analysis on a forest-wide scale for Maintenance Level (ML) 1-5 roads to comply with Subpart A. This analysis followed the process outlined in USDA Forest Service Washington Office FS-643, "Roads Analysis: Informing Decisions about Managing the National Forest Transportation System." This report provides decision-makers with critical information to develop road systems that are safe and responsive to public needs and desires, are affordable and efficiently managed, have minimal negative ecological effects on the land and are in balance with available funding for needed management actions. The IDT used the Forest Roads Analysis report as an additional tool in identifying the minimum road system, and creating the Proposed Action.

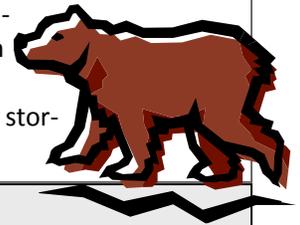
### ***Proposed Storage of Roads***

In the "storage" classification, roads are intended to be self-maintaining in a non-use status for up to 20 years. This is accomplished through re-contouring or obliterating access points which may include rock or earth barriers, and may include the removal of culverts to restore watercourses to natural channels and floodplains. The remainder of the roadbed would remain intact so the road could be easily rebuilt for future use.

The routes being proposed for "storage" will provide effective closures for grizzly bears. On the LRD, the entire area north of Highway 200 is within the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE) Grizzly Bear recovery zone. The Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee manages habitat within the NCDE and guidelines have been developed to address open and total route densities, and secure habitat. Secure habitat, also referred to as core areas, is defined as areas "free of motorized access during the non-denning period."

To satisfy the requirements of secure habitat, road closures must effectively prevent motorized access. As defined, gates do not constitute "effective closures," however, entrance obliterations do. Therefore, the "storage" classification would count as an effective closure only if the first 1/4 mile of the road was ripped and berms put in place.

The planning area south of Highway 200 is not in the grizzly bear recovery zone, and roads proposed for storage would be closed with gates.



### ***The Tables on Page 2 include the following elements:***

- The South Fork of Poorman Road #4134 is being proposed for relocation to eliminate the five stream crossings with fords of the South Fork of Poorman Creek. Currently there are 4 active channel fords (2 tributary crossings and 2 channel crossings) as well as one undersized culvert crossing that make up the 5 crossings. The proposed 0.37 mile reroute would eliminate all of the above, but would require one new crossing (culvert or bridge) on a tributary. This road is a Lewis and Clark County road; however the relocation would be on National Forest land. Funding for this project would be a cooperative with Lewis and Clark County, the Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited, and the Lincoln Ranger District.
- Routes with issues such as no public access through a legal easement, multiple stream crossings, continual rutting, and/or poor location have been identified by specialists and through collaboration, and are proposed for decommissioning. Known problem areas include the Trail #U-1825 along 7-Up Pete creek (2.9 miles), which has all issues mentioned above. Roads #293-B1 and 293-E1 (1.86 miles) and #4080 (0.5 miles) in the Alice Creek drainage are also ready to be decommissioned due to stream crossings and poor location.
- New Construction is being proposed in three areas. The first would be 0.38 miles on Road #1006 to be able to access Rooster Bill gulch. The second area proposed for new construction is in T14N RogW, in Lincoln Gulch, where motorized trail connections would be constructed, approximately 0.8 miles.
- In the tracts of land recently acquired from The Nature Conservancy in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd gulch, Cadotte, and Bartlett drainages, 0.38 miles of new motorized trail will be constructed, and a 0.2 mile section of road will be constructed through private property in order to give highway legal vehicles access to the newly acquired land. In this proposal, some of the roads in this area are proposed to be open to public motorized vehicles (less than 50 inches), while the remainder are not needed for management and are proposed to be put into storage or decommissioned.
- Several historically used roads are inaccessible to the public due to road decommissioning done prior to 2003. Road #4081-A1, 4080-A1, and 4080-B1 (approximately 2.5 miles) are proposed for decommissioning, due to the Continental Divide Trail (which is non-motorized in this area) preventing motorized vehicle access.
- The IDT also proposes that vehicle access within 300 feet of an open, designated road would be allowed to access dispersed camping sites as long as it does not result in resource damage such as rutting, fording of streams, crossing of wet meadows, new user-created routes/hill climbs, or noxious weed spread.

## A Note on Collaboration on the Blackfoot Travel Plan

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When the new Travel Rule came out in 2005, an emphasis was placed on collaboration and utilizing the knowledge and views that diverse groups using the National Forest have. A collaborative group was formed to look at the LRD with the goal of finding a balance of motorized and non-motorized trail systems, which could be used to develop into a Proposed Action.

Collaboration has been on-going since 2008 with the following groups: Great Falls Trail Bike Riders Association, National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council, MT Trail Vehicle Riders Association, MT Wilderness Association, International Mountain Bike Association, community of Lincoln, Lincoln Chamber of Commerce, MT Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, and the MT Backcountry Horsemen.

In addition to proposing a motorized trail system, the LRD, with the help of the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce is exploring options to create a mountain bike trail system. This collaboration has resulted in trail experts visiting Lincoln to analyze and recommend a new trail system.



## How the Public Can Get Involved

At this stage of the planning process, site-specific public comments are requested to learn where the public wishes to keep access, or has compelling reasons to decommission routes, and to identify significant issues and alternatives to the Proposed Action. Comments meeting these criteria will be reviewed by the IDT to determine how they can best be addressed in the planning effort.

After comments are received and analyzed, the IDT will use these comments to:

- ⇒ develop Design Criteria to reduce, minimize, or prevent resource impacts (*Winter 2010*)
- ⇒ develop alternatives to the Proposed Action (*Spring 2011*)
- ⇒ disclose the effects of implementing the Proposed Action and its alternatives (*Spring/Summer 2011*)

To be most useful to the IDT, please make your comments as site specific as possible. You are invited to participate in this planning effort by telling us what important issues in the project area you think should be addressed in the environmental document.

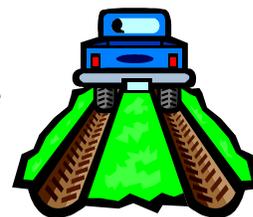
## Keep In Touch

Per the requirements of 40 CFR 1501.7, public comments are being requested regarding the scope and effects of the Proposed Action. The names and addresses of those who comment in response to this solicitation will be considered part of the public record, and will be available for public inspection. The formal comment period will occur upon release of the draft EIS. Call Amber Kamps—District Ranger, or Jackie Heinert—Project Leader, for more information: (406) 362-7000. This document is also available online at [http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/helena/projects/blackfoot\\_travel.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/helena/projects/blackfoot_travel.shtml)

Submit written comments by **November 30, 2010** to **Lincoln Ranger District, 1569 Hwy 200, Lincoln, MT 59639** or to the email address: [comments-northern-helena-lincoln@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-northern-helena-lincoln@fs.fed.us) and include the words “**Blackfoot Travel Plan**” in the subject line. Please indicate if you would like to be removed from the mailing list.

Staff members will be available from **4-7:00 pm on November 18 and November 30** to visit with the public, view maps and proposals, and discuss site-specific comments. By request, the District Ranger and Project Leader can be available to meet with clubs and groups at their meetings.

In order to reduce printing and postage costs, and paper usage, maps of the entire Blackfoot Travel Plan Proposed Action were not printed and mailed in this document. All maps are available to view online at [http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/helena/projects/blackfoot\\_travel.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/helena/projects/blackfoot_travel.shtml). Copies are also available at the following locations: Lincoln Ranger District, Helena National Forest Supervisor’s Office, and the Lincoln Public Library. You may request a hard copy by contacting the Lincoln Ranger District office.



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# Proposed Blackfoot Travel Plan Comment Sheet

Submit written comments by **November 30, 2010** to *Lincoln Ranger District, 1569 Hwy 200, Lincoln, MT 59639* or to the Helena National Forest email address: *comments-northern-helena-lincoln@fs.fed.us* and include the word “*Blackfoot Travel Plan*” in the subject line. Please indicate if you would like to be removed from the mailing list.

YOUR NAME \_\_\_\_\_

YOUR ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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59639

*Help us plan for the forests of tomorrow, today*