

Legal Notice of Comment Period
 Draft Environmental Impact Statement
 Blackfoot Travel Plan
 USDA - FOREST SERVICE
 Helena National Forest
 Lincoln Ranger District
 Lewis & Clark and Powell Counties, MT

The Lincoln Ranger District of the Helena National Forest (HNF) is seeking comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Blackfoot Travel Plan, which includes a Programmatic Plan Amendment to Standard 4a of the Helena National Forest Plan. The overall objective of the Plan is to provide the public with a safe travel system of designated routes to enjoy, while maintaining consistency with agency travel management regulations and resource protection responsibilities. The project area encompasses approximately 238,000 acres of National Forest System lands outside of the Scapegoal Wilderness.

This DEIS discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from implementing the proposed action, the no action/existing condition and one other action alternative. The action alternatives include changes to the existing motorized and non-motorized route system on the Lincoln District. The action alternatives incorporate comments received from the public. Based on preliminary analysis of the alternatives, forest staff identified the need for a programmatic amendment to the forest standard (Standard 4a) for big game security index in the 1986 Helena Forest Management Plan. The programmatic amendment would replace Helena Forest Plan Standard 4a, which provides direction to maintain or improve big game security which would only apply to the Blackfoot Travel planning area.

The DEIS is available for review at the Lincoln Ranger District, 1569 Highway 200, Lincoln, MT 59639, the Helena National Forest Supervisor's Office at 2880 Skyway Drive, Helena, MT 59602 or via the Helena National Forest webpage at <http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/fs-usda-pop.php?project=308899>. A copy is also available for review at the Helena and Lincoln public libraries.

The analysis within the Blackfoot Travel Plan DEIS and the associated Programmatic Plan Amendment to Standard 4a will result in two separate decisions which consequently require two separate but concurrent public comment periods. These two formal comment periods both began on January 26, 2013, the day after the Notice of Availability of the DEIS was published in the Federal Register. The Blackfoot Travel Plan DEIS formal comment period will be open for 45 days and the Programmatic Plan Amendment formal comment period will be open for 90 days. This comment period provides those interested in or affected by this proposal an opportunity to make their concerns known prior to a decision by the Responsible Official, Kevin T. Riordan, Helena National Forest Supervisor.

Individuals who submit comments during the 45-day comment period for the Blackfoot Travel Plan DEIS will have legal standing to appeal the Record of Decision for the travel plan under 36 CFR 215. If the proposed 36 CFR Part 218 objection process for projects becomes available in the near future, the Forest may elect to utilize it in place of the existing CFR 215 appeal process, in which case, the public would be notified.

Individuals who submit substantive comments during the 90-day comment period for the Programmatic Plan Amendment will be eligible to use the "Pre-decisional Administrative Review Process" (also called an "objection process") rather than an appeal process, as is authorized under the agency's new Planning Rule (36 CFR 219). Substantive comments are those that clearly state issues and concerns and are most helpful when they are focused and clearly articulate the reviewer's concerns and contentions.

How to Comment

Formal comments will be accepted any of the following ways for both the Blackfoot Travel Plan DEIS and the Programmatic Plan Amendment: Electronic: Email comments to comments-northern-helena-lincoln@fs.fed.us and include "Blackfoot Travel Plan" in the subject line and must be submitted in rich text format (.rtf), Word or Word Perfect format (.doc). For electronically mailed comments, the sender should normally receive an electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an acknowledgement of the receipt of comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means. Written: Mail comments to: Helena National Forest, ATTN: Blackfoot Travel Plan, 2880 Skyway Drive, Helena, MT 59602. Fax written comments to: 406-362-4253; Hand-delivered: Deliver comments between 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, to either the Lincoln Ranger District office (1569 Hwy. 200, Lincoln, MT) or to the Helena Forest Supervisor's Office (2880 Skyway Drive, Helena, MT); or Open Houses: Provide your written comments while at one of the open house meetings that will be held at the Lincoln Ranger District office on February 11th and February 28th both beginning at 2 p.m. until 8 p.m. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names, addresses, telephone numbers, and email addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection. If you have questions, contact Lincoln District Ranger Amber Kamps at 406-362-7000 or visit the Helena Forest website at www.fs.usda.gov/helena/.
 February 2, 2013