Route of the Olympian Project

Decision Notice

Lolo National Forest
Superior Ranger District
Mineral County, Montana

March 2013

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I. DECISION

It is my decision to implement Alternative 2 (Modified Proposed Action) as presented in the Route of the Olympian Environmental Assessment (and described below) with the following modifications:

*Northern Pacific segment 1*

The Northern Pacific railroad grade (Northern Pacific segment 1) between Taft and Saltese will remain open yearlong to all motorized vehicles and continue to be part of the existing groomed snowmobile route in the winter. In other words, there will be no change to the existing travel management status of this segment – it will remain as a road open yearlong to public motorized use. In the Environmental Assessment, Alternative 2 originally proposed to prohibit full-sized motor vehicles during the summer on this segment to provide an ATV trail route where riders wouldn’t encounter full-sized motor vehicles and where people without street-legal ATVs or a driver’s license could ride. However, I received several public comments that were concerned about the loss of full-sized motor vehicle access for fishing recreation along this section of the St. Regis River during the summer. In response to those comments, I have decided to keep this segment of the Northern Pacific railroad grade open to all motorized vehicles. My decision still provides for ATV trail opportunities on Milwaukee segments 2 (from Saltese to Haugan) and 4 (from DeBorgia to St. Regis) during the summer season as these segments will be designated as a motorized trail for vehicles 50 inches or less in width from June 1 to August 31.

*Dominion Tunnel*

In response to public comments that expressed desire to experience driving through a railroad tunnel, I have decided to open the tunnel to public motorized use in the spring and fall seasons. There is sufficient space for vehicles to turn-around and park between the Dominion tunnel and trestle. In the spring and fall seasons, recreationists can drive through the tunnel, park their vehicle, and walk out onto the trestle. The length of the tunnel is relatively short and the sight-distance is adequate to see if there is on-coming traffic before proceeding through the tunnel.

With regard to concerns about issues we’ve had in the past, if vandalism to the Dominion tunnel or trestle becomes a problem and/or the motorized closure on the trestle is violated, the Dominion tunnel will be closed to motorized use.

As it has been in the past, the tunnel will continue to be closed to snowmobile use in the winter season. Because of the lack of snow in the tunnel, these machines can damage the gravel surfacing and drainage features within the tunnel. The Dominion tunnel and trestle are not and have not been part of the designated snowmobile trail system. With this Decision, I am not making any changes to the designated snowmobile route(s).
Access to Trail #248

It has come to my attention that the project design in Alternatives 2, 3, and 5 inadvertently blocked traditional access for motorized users during the summer to Trail #248, which is open to single track motorized use (i.e. motorcycles). Trail #248 begins on the Dominion Creek Road (#810) and crosses Milwaukee segment 1B, which Alternatives 2, 3, and 5 designate as a non-motorized trail in the summer. I will continue to provide motorized access to this trail by maintaining to standard the connector trail between the Dominion Creek Road and the Milwaukee railroad grade to accommodate single track motorized use. In addition, single track motorized vehicles will be allowed to cross the Milwaukee railroad grade to access Trail #248.

Seasons of Use

I have decided to lengthen the summer season on the Milwaukee segments 1A and 1B (from the Hiawatha trailhead to Saltese) by about 12 days to more closely correspond with the open season for the adjacent Route of the Hiawatha bicycle trail. (see Table 2). This extension will encompass the Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends when the adjacent Hiawatha bike trail typically receives a lot of visitor use. This modification will also avoid having motorized traffic driving through the Hiawatha trailhead parking area during these peak weekends.

Details of the Selected Action

The Selected Action designates a multiple use rail trail route and its travel management status on approximately 35.1 miles of the abandoned Milwaukee and Northern Pacific railroad grades located between Taft and St. Regis.

To facilitate the management of a multiple use route system, the railroad grades are divided into logical segments (see Table 1 and Maps 2-5 in Appendix B).

Table 1: Railroad Grade Segments (refer to maps in Appendix B)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segment Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Miles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Milwaukee Railroad Grade</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee 1A</td>
<td>From the Hiawatha trailhead to the Dominion trestle</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Map 2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee 1B</td>
<td>From the Dominion trestle to Saltese</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Map 2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee 2</td>
<td>From Saltese to the National Forest System land boundary</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Map 3)</td>
<td>approximately two miles west of Haugan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee 3</td>
<td>From the Forest Service land boundary west of Haugan to the Forest</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Maps 3 and 4)</td>
<td>Service land boundary approximately three miles east of DeBorgia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee 4</td>
<td>From the National Forest system land boundary east of DeBorgia to the</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Map 5)</td>
<td>intersection with the Little Joe Road (#282) near St. Regis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Northern Pacific Railroad Grade</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Pacific 1</td>
<td>From Dominion Creek to Saltese</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Map 2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>35.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The authorized travel management designation for the Selected Action is displayed in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Travel Management for the Selected Action** (see Table 3 for symbol definitions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segments</th>
<th><strong>Winter</strong> December 1 to snowmelt</th>
<th><strong>Spring</strong> Snowmelt to Friday before Memorial Day (about May 22)*</th>
<th><strong>Summer</strong> Saturday before Memorial Day (about May 23)* to Labor Day (about September 3)*</th>
<th><strong>Fall</strong> Tuesday after Labor Day (about September 4)* to November 30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern Pacific 1: Taft to Saltese</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee 1A: Hiawatha Trailhead to East Dominion</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominion tunnel</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominion trestle</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee 1B: East Dominion to Saltese</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segments</th>
<th><strong>Winter</strong> December 1 to snowmelt</th>
<th><strong>Spring</strong> Snowmelt to May 31</th>
<th><strong>Summer</strong> June 1 to August 31</th>
<th><strong>Fall</strong> September 1 to November 30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee 2: Saltese to Haugan</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee 3: Haugan to DeBorgia</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee 4: DeBorgia to St. Regis</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twomile Bypass Trail</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Dates will slightly vary depending on the specific dates on which Memorial Day and Labor Day actually fall each year.

**Table 3: Definitions of Travel Management Symbols**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>Full-sized motorized vehicles greater than 50 inches wide includes street-legal, licensed motorized vehicles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>Small motorized vehicles include ATVs, motorcycles, and other motorized vehicles 50 inches or less in width</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>Non-motorized uses including bicycling and hiking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>Existing groomed snowmobile trail managed for snowmobile use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>Existing ungroomed snowmobile trail managed for snowmobile use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Symbol]</td>
<td>Over-snow non-motorized uses including cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and dog sledding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In summary,

- During the spring, fall, and winter seasons, all existing legal uses (all motorized and non-motorized) will be maintained. The only change made by this Decision is that the previously closed Dominion tunnel will be open to motorized use during the spring and fall seasons. The Dominion trestle will remain closed to motorized use yearlong and the Dominion tunnel will remain closed to motorized use in the winter. The Twomile Bypass trail to be constructed by this project will be open to motorized vehicles 50 inches or less in width.

- In the summer, Milwaukee segments 1A and 1B (between the Hiawatha trailhead at Taft to Saltese) will be designated as a non-motorized trail. Motorized users can travel on the parallel Northern Pacific segment 1 between Taft and Saltese.

- During the non-snow season, ATVs will still be able to travel from Taft to St. Regis. However, between Taft and Saltese, ATVs will have to use Northern Pacific segment 1 as stated above.

- During the summer season, segments Milwaukee 2 (between Saltese and Haugan) and 4 (between DeBorgia and St. Regis) will be designated as a motorized trail which will allow motorized vehicles (50 inches or less in width) but will restrict full-sized motor vehicles.

- During the summer, full-sized motor vehicle use will continue to be allowed on Northern Pacific segment 1 (between Taft and Saltese) and Milwaukee segment 3 (between Haugan and DeBorgia) but will be restricted on the remaining route segments.

- Non-motorized use will be allowed on all segments throughout the year.

- During the winter, snowmobiles will be allowed on all segments except the Dominion tunnel and trestle.

The Selected Action also includes the following activities:

**Road and Trail Construction**

Bypass/connector roads and/or trails will be constructed at Dominion Creek, Saltese, and Twomile Creek to provide access to the Milwaukee grade at breaks in the route (see Maps 2 and 5 in Appendix B). These roads and/or trails will be designed and constructed to Best Management Practice standards. In addition, newly constructed roads and trails will be surfaced with crushed gravel.

- **Dominion Jump-up Road**: The existing Dominion Jump-up road east of the Dominion trestle will be relocated nearby to avoid a wet area adjacent to the Dominion Creek road (#810) and make the road less steep. Relocation activities will require approximately 800 feet of new road construction to connect with the upper end of the existing road. This new road will be approximately 12 feet wide to provide access for maintenance.
equipment, including the snowmobile trail groomer, as well as seasonal motorized access to Milwaukee segment 1B (see Map 2 in Appendix B). The unneeded portion of the current jump-up road will be decommissioned. Closure activities will include full road prism recontouring, riparian habitat rehabilitation, placement of woody debris on the disturbed area, seeding the recontoured road prism, and weed treatment.

- **Saltese Jump-up Road**: The Saltese Jump-up road will be constructed on National Forest land west of the Saltese trestle to provide access between the Milwaukee grade and the Northern Pacific grade (see Map 2 in Appendix B). The new road will be approximately 1800 feet long and be constructed to a 12 foot width to accommodate full-sized motor vehicles.

- **Twomile Bypass Trail**: A bypass route will be constructed on State of Montana land (pending an easement) west of Twomile Creek to provide access around private land (see Map 5 in Appendix B). The proposed Twomile bypass trail will connect the Milwaukee grade just west of Twomile Creek to the Twomile Creek road (#431). The new trail will provide access for motor vehicles 50 inches or less in width between the Twomile exit from Interstate 90 and the Milwaukee grade to the west.

**Trailheads**
- **St. Regis**: A trailhead will be constructed at the St. Regis Park on National Forest System land, west of the entrance road (see Map 5 in Appendix B). Improvements will include designated parking, restrooms, and trailhead signing. The timing of this activity is dependent on resolution of the break in the route at Twomile Creek.

- **Ward Creek**: Another trailhead will be constructed adjacent to the Ward Creek road (#889), just north of the Ward Creek exit from Interstate 90 (see Map 5 in Appendix B). Improvements will include a parking area and trailhead signing.

**Gates and Barriers**
Gates and barriers will be installed to implement motorized travel restrictions. See Maps 1 through 5 in Appendix B for gate and barrier locations and Table B-1 in Appendix B for a list of gates and barriers.

Persons with disabilities who use a wheelchair (including those that are battery powered) can legally travel where non-motorized use is allowed. A minimum 32-inch wide opening around gates or traffic control devices will be provided for wheelchair access. Other power driven mobility devices will be subject to proposed motorized restrictions. If the mobility device is 50 inches or less in width, it will be considered a “small motorized vehicle”; if over 50 inches in width, it will be considered a “full-sized motorized vehicle”.

**Route Maintenance**
The railroad grades along the route will be surfaced with crushed gravel to accommodate both motorized and non-motorized traffic. In addition, brushing of roadside vegetation will be completed to improve sight distance.
Resource Protection Measures
My decision also includes the following resource protection measures:

Weeds
1. Existing weed populations on the railroad grade will be treated with herbicide prior to ground disturbing activities. Subject to approval from the District Weed Coordinator, this requirement may be waived if timing of implementation is such that there is no effective spray season (i.e. spring, summer, or fall) prior to the activity. When possible, weeds will be treated at least one growing season prior to activity.

2. Disturbed sites created by project activities will be seeded with native seed mixtures or the appropriate Lolo National Forest seed mixtures. Straw used for road stabilization and erosion control should be certified weed-free or weed seed-free.

3. All off-road construction equipment will be cleaned of soil and vegetative material prior to entering the project area.

4. Gravel used for surfacing the route will be from a site that has been previously treated for weeds and is currently weed free.

Water Resources
5. Activities will comply with Best Management Practices.

6. Where possible, roadside brushing will not occur within 20 feet of waterways. If brushing cannot be avoided such as for safety reasons, engineering personnel will work with the hydrologist to employ measures to ensure retention of streambank stability, aquatic habitat, and stream shading.

7. Erosion control measures (straw bales, wattles, silt fences, hydro mulching, etc.) will be installed where necessary and remain in place before and during ground disturbing activities. To ensure effectiveness, erosion control measures will remain in place and functional until disturbed sites are stabilized, typically for a minimum period of one growing season after ground disturbing activity occurs.

8. Slash filter windrows will be placed on relief culvert outlets that are within 300 feet of a waterway if there is lack of a vegetative buffer (refer to hydrologist or fisheries biologist).

9. On the newly constructed Saltse Jump-up road, sediment buffering devices will be installed below the fill slope within 300 feet of the St. Regis River.

Visual Quality
10. Saltse Jump-up road construction: Revegetation of disturbed areas will be expedited as much as possible. Suggested measures include:
• Designing cut and fill slopes to have a rough, irregular surface to provide microsites for planting
• Minimizing slope length by creating benches in cut and fill slopes
• Berming topsoil and duff layer of planned disturbed area and respread soil over cuts and fills
• Spreading small diameter slash on cuts and fills in contact with the ground
• Revegetating the cut and fill slopes with an appropriate seed mix including grasses and forbs

Monitoring
With my decision, I am committing to the following monitoring items to ensure protection of natural and cultural resources and public safety:

1. Since parts of the Milwaukee grade are either listed in or are eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places, the Forest Service will continue to inspect the grade. If any degradation to the contributing resources of the historic property is observed, the Lolo National Forest Heritage Program will consult with the Montana State Historic Preservation Office and other interested parties to develop management solutions for restoration or preservation of the affected feature(s).

2. The route will be monitored for the presence of illegal off-road vehicle use, particularly in the vicinity of the proposed Twomile Bypass trail due to the relatively flat terrain in proximity to the creek and private property. If such use is detected, appropriate measures will be taken to block illegal trails and repair any resource damage.

3. Routine monitoring will occur to determine that use of the route is in conformance with the authorized travel management designations. Travel restrictions will be enforced.

4. Monitoring will be conducted at new road and trail construction sites to ensure protection of water quality.

5. Following construction, the vegetative regrowth on the cut and fill slopes on the Saltese Jump-up road will be monitored. If necessary, additional active revegetation measures will be taken to meet visual quality objectives.

6. The route will be monitored for weeds, particularly newly invasive species. Weeds will be treated as needed.

7. Route will be monitored for safety, level of use, and recreation experience. If safety problems arise, or if the desired recreation experiences aren’t being provided due to use levels, conflicts, or other factors, future corrective actions may be taken.
II. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The purpose of the Route of the Olympian project is to designate a multiple use rail trail route and its travel management status (i.e. motorized/non-motorized and seasons of use) on approximately 35.1 miles of two abandoned railroad grades located between Taft (historic railroad townsite) and St. Regis, Montana.

In 1980 when faced with bankruptcy, the Milwaukee Road abandoned the Pacific branch of its railroad line, which included the portion between St. Regis, Montana and Avery, Idaho. Although most of the trestles and bridges were left in place, the rails and ties were salvaged. Some of the land went into private ownership and some went to the Forest Service. The Forest Service recognized the potential for developing a rail trail to enhance recreation opportunities in the area. Railroad grades are well-suited to trail uses because of their gentle grades and historic features and interests.

In 1998, the portion of the grade between Taft, Montana and Pearson, Idaho (west of Olympian project area) opened as the “Route of the Hiawatha” bicycle rail-trail. This portion of the route is entirely under Forest Service jurisdiction and is managed by the Idaho Panhandle National Forest. The trail has become very popular with approximately 37,000 visitors during the 2011 summer season. In the Decision Notice document (1994) that established the Route of the Hiawatha, the Forest Service stated that it would seek opportunities to secure public access to a continuous route from Taft to St. Regis.

Prior to 2007, the portion of the Milwaukee railroad grade between Taft and St. Regis (the proposed Route of the Olympian) was under mixed ownership. The Forest Service owned about 60 percent of the 31-mile route and various private entities owned the rest. Although this section of the route crossed multiple ownership parcels, the grade has been used as an open road by the public for several decades and motorized use is well-established. Since 2007, the Lolo National Forest with assistance from the Five Valleys Land Trust and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, purchased 13 private land parcels for the purpose of developing a rail trail that connects with the existing Route of the Hiawatha. Currently, the Lolo National Forest manages about 95 percent of the route. Approximately 3 percent of the route is comprised of county roads and the remaining 2 percent is owned by private entities.

Prior to the initiation of the Route of the Olympian project, the Forest Service received numerous public comments requesting that the route between Taft and St. Regis be designated to allow for different and, in some cases, exclusive uses. Because of various complexities regarding the route (existing uses, breaks in the route, etc. - see EA pages 4-5) and differing public interests, development of a multiple use route system was identified to be the most appropriate way to balance the existing needs and public desires throughout the year.

III. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Based on the high level of interest from the public on how the route would be managed in the future, the Forest Service decided to form a collaborative group to help with the development of
the proposed action. To initiate this process, the Forest Service held a public meeting on June 2, 2009. Approximately 30 people attended the meeting. A diverse collaborative group was formed that consisted of individuals representing various interests. The group met several times through the summer of 2009 before developing a framework for the proposed action.

On April 15, 2010, the Forest Service mailed a scoping letter describing the proposed action to numerous people and organizations, including local governments, nearby landowners, outfitter guides who use the area, and other agencies and individuals who have expressed interested in receiving information about this type of project. The letter and associated maps were also posted on the Lolo National Forest website.

The Forest Service received 135 comment letters or emails in response to scoping. The letters were split nearly equally between those favoring motorized use and those favoring non-motorized only use. A relatively small number of the letters supported the proposed action as written. Most of the letters recommended fewer restrictions on motorized use or more opportunities for non-motorized use only recreation. These comments were summarized in the content analysis of public comment, which is located within the Project File.

In September 2011, the Environmental Assessment was sent to individuals and organizations that had previously commented on or expressed interest in the project. The EA was also posted on the Lolo National Forest website. The 30-day comment period on the EA began with the publication of legal notice in the Missoulian newspaper on September 23, 2011. Due to the high level of public interest, the comment period was extended another 22 days to November 15th. A public meeting was held on November 1st. At the close of the comment period, 323 comments were received. The Forest Service’s response to these comments is contained in Appendix A of this document.

IV. ISSUES

The Forest Service reviewed the public comments received during the scoping period to identify concerns and issues related to the proposed action. Most of the comments requested either more access for motorized use or for non-motorized use only.

Reasons cited for more motorized use included a desire to retain traditional access for fishing, camping, and an alternative to traveling on Interstate 90 between communities during the summer season. There was a concern that elderly persons and people with disabilities would lose access to the route in the summer. Other comments expressed a desire for more ATV opportunities where riders wouldn’t encounter full-sized motor vehicles.

Reasons cited for more non-motorized-only use opportunities were safety concerns regarding shared use with motorized vehicles; other concerns included reduced quality of recreation experiences due to dust, noise, and potential user conflicts; desire for a healthy, family-friendly recreation opportunity; and a desire for a longer non-motorized use only trail that connects to the existing Route of the Hiawatha bike trail.
These comments provided the framework for the development of additional alternatives. In addition, several public comments recommended various alternatives which the Forest Service considered: some were carried forward and others were dropped from detailed study for various reasons.

Several other public comments also questioned the economics of the project, which were addressed in the EA on pages 25-33.

V. OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

I considered five alternatives in detail. I also considered several other alternatives that were not fully developed. Detailed descriptions of all of these alternatives are contained within Chapter 2 of the EA (pages 10-23) and summarized below.

**ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL**

**Alternative 1 (No Action):** This alternative represents the existing condition where all railroad grade segments, except the Dominion tunnel and trestle, are open roads available for all motorized and non-motorized use throughout the year. None of the travel management changes or other activities would occur.

**Alternative 2 (Modified Proposed Action):** This alternative is a minor modification of the initial Proposed Action, which was changed to include the Twomile Bypass trail and the Saltese and Dominion Jump-up roads. This alternative was developed to provide an equitable balance of multiple use recreation opportunities during the summer season.

**Alternative 3 (Summer Non-motorized Use Only Access):** Provides the most non-motorized use only opportunities during the summer in response to comments that requested more of this type of recreational use. Milwaukee segments 1A, 1B, 2, and 4 from the Hiawatha trailhead to Haugan and from DeBorgia to St. Regis would be designated as non-motorized use only during the summer season.

**Alternative 4 (Motorized Recreation Access):** In response to comments that requested more motorized access, this alternative was developed to provide more ATV trail opportunities in the summer where riders would not encounter full-sized motorized vehicles. In the summer season, full-sized vehicles would be prohibited on Milwaukee segments 1B, 2, and 4, but would be allowed on Northern Pacific segment 1 and Milwaukee segment 3.

**Alternative 5 (Haugan Summer Split):** Serves as a compromise between Alternatives 3 and 4 by providing opportunities for both non-motorized use only and motorized (for vehicles 50 inches or less in width) opportunities in the summer. During the summer, the Milwaukee segments 1A, 1B, and 2 from the Hiawatha trailhead to Haugan would be designated for non-motorized use only. Milwaukee segment 4 from DeBorgia to St. Regis would be closed to full-sized motorized vehicles but would allow ATVs and other motorized vehicles 50 inches or less in width.
**ALTERNATIVES NOT CONSIDERED IN DETAIL**

*Manage the entire route for non-motorized use only*
Numerous public comments suggested that the entire Milwaukee grade be designated for non-motorized use only either year-round or seasonally.

An alternative that designated the entire Milwaukee grade to non-motorized use only was considered but dropped due to the existing needs for motorized access on Segment 3:
- Portions of segment 3 (see Maps 6 and 7 in Appendix B) are county road on which the Forest Service has no jurisdiction
- Segment 3 provides the only access to some private land. Under the Alaska Native Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), the Forest Service is required to permit reasonable access to private property.
- Portions of Segment 3 provide access to a powerline, which requires periodic maintenance. Portions of Northern Pacific segment 1 and Milwaukee segments 1B, 2, and 4 also provide access to a powerline.

In addition, portions of the Milwaukee grade are used in the winter as part of a well-established groomed snowmobile trail system that operates through an agreement between the Nightriders Snowmobile Club and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks.

*Manage the entire route for multiple use (both motorized and non-motorized) year round*
This is essentially the No Action Alternative (Alternative 1) because all motorized and non-motorized uses are currently allowed on the railroad grades except for the Dominion tunnel and trestle.

*Allow ATV use on the Milwaukee grade from the Hiawatha trailhead to Saltese in the summer*
Alternative 4 would provide access in the summer for ATVs and other small motorized vehicles 50 inches or less in width on Milwaukee segment 1B from east of the Dominion trestle to Saltese. Alternative 1 (No Action) currently allows motorized use on this segment. However, an additional alternative that allows motorized use in the summer on Milwaukee segment 1A from the Hiawatha trailhead to the Dominion tunnel was not developed due to the existing high use levels at the Hiawatha trailhead. Allowing ATV use from that trailhead during the summer would add to the congestion in the trailhead parking area, which would be a safety concern.

In addition, because the Dominion tunnel and trestle are closed to motorized use yearlong, there are no other legal motorized connector routes to this segment. Alone, Milwaukee segment 1A would only provide a 3.4-mile (6.8 miles round trip) ATV riding opportunity which would be fairly limited given vehicle speeds. During the recent renovation of the Dominion trestle, safety features (e.g. guard rails) were designed for non-motorized use due to cost. Thus, an alternative that included modifying the travel management status to allow motorized use across the trestle was not carried forward.
Provide full-sized motorized vehicle access in the summer from Taft to Saltese; Saltese to Haugan; and DeBorgia to St. Regis for fishing on the St. Regis River. These route segments make up the majority of the proposed Route of the Olympian. This alternative would very closely resemble the existing condition, which is represented by Alternative 1 (No Action).

VI. RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION

After careful consideration, I have selected Alternative 2 with some modifications as described in Section I of this document. I have made my decision based on information in the EA supported by Project File documents and review of public comments received on this project. My criteria for making this decision was based on how well the management actions analyzed in the EA address the Purpose and Need for the project and considered the issues that were raised during the initial scoping process and the comment period on the EA. In choosing the Selected Action, I have determined that my decision is consistent with all laws, regulations, and agency policy. I have considered the potential for cumulative effects. I believe my decision provides the best balance of management activities to respond to the Purpose and Need, issues, and public comments, while complying with all applicable laws and regulations.

My decision seeks to balance the existing needs and public desires along the route throughout the year. These desires include managing public motorized and non-motorized use along the abandoned railroad grades. This decision considers and addresses effects on public safety, recreational opportunities and access needs, conflicts among uses, and the need for maintenance and administration of the route.

Meeting Purpose and Need
The purpose of the Route of the Olympian project is to designate a multiple use rail trail route and its travel management status on approximately 35.1 miles of two abandoned railroad grades located between Taft and St. Regis. Prior to the initiation of the Route of the Olympian project, the Forest Service received numerous public comments requesting that the route be designated to allow for different and, in some cases, exclusive uses. Some people desired that the route be open to non-motorized use only (primarily bicycles) to extend the Route of the Hiawatha non-motorized recreational opportunity to St. Regis. Other people recommended that the route be left as it currently is to allow all motorized and non-motorized uses on the route. And yet other people requested that the route be made into a motorized all-terrain vehicle (ATV) trail. It became evident early on that designating the travel management status would not be easy as there are numerous and, in some cases, competing interests for the route. In addition, several unique situations involving the route make this project more complex:

- Motorized use is well-established on the route and has been for 30+ years providing access for recreation (e.g. hunting and fishing) and serving as an alternate (to Interstate 90) travelway between towns and as a connection to other motorized routes.
- Portions of the railroad grades are used as part of an established groomed snowmobile trail system in the winter.
- Two short stretches of the Milwaukee grade (one near Haugan and the other near DeBorgia) totaling about 1.1 miles are county road (located in Milwaukee segment 3).
• Several segments of the Milwaukee grade and the Northern Pacific grade provide access for powerline maintenance.
• Segments of the Milwaukee grade provide the only motorized access to some private lands (located in Milwaukee segment 3).
• The route is not currently continuous due to breaks in the route at Saltese and Twomile Creek because of private land holdings.
• The Dominion trestle was repaired in 2010/2011 and safety features added (e.g. guardrail cables). These safety features were designed to meet engineering standards for non-motorized use as opposed to motorized use due to the significantly lower cost.

Because of these complexities and differing public interests, development of a multiple use route system was determined to be the most appropriate way to balance the existing needs and public desires throughout the year. This multiple use route system was designed to provide for different types of recreational opportunities during different times of the year on different segments of the route.

I selected Alternative 2 with modifications because I believe it best meets the purpose and need by providing the most equitable balance of multiple use recreation opportunities.

• During the spring, fall, and winter seasons, the railroad grades will remain as open roads or snowmobile routes allowing all existing established uses along the route to continue. The Dominion trestle will still be closed to motorized use throughout the year, but the Dominion tunnel will be open to motorized use in the spring and fall.
• During the summer, Milwaukee segments 1A and 1B will be designated as a non-motorized trail to extend the existing Route of the Hiawatha non-motorized only recreation opportunity to Saltese. Currently there is a break in the route between Saltese and Haugan, thus Saltese makes a logical terminus for a contiguous, non-motorized trail.
• During the summer, Milwaukee segments 2 and 4 will be designated as a motorized trail to provide an opportunity for ATV riders to use the route without encountering full-sized motor vehicles.
• During the summer, the Northern Pacific segment 1 and Milwaukee segment 3 will remain open to all motorized vehicles providing for the continuation of established uses.

Overall, during the summer season, there will be some portion of the route available for all types of users and recreational experiences: approximately 11 miles will be an open road allowing for all motorized use; about 9 miles will be designated as a non-motorized trail; and about 15 miles will be a motorized trail open to small motorized vehicles 50 inches or less in width or less.

Table 4: Alternative Comparison of Recreational Opportunities Provided During the Summer Season

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-motorized trail</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>24*</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>12.6*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(non-motorized use only)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Motorized Trail</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15.4*</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>20.3*</td>
<td>15.4*</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Vehicles 50 inches or)</td>
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---|---|---|---|---|---
less in width allowed | | | | | |
Open Road (all motorized vehicles allowed) | 35.1 | 11.1* | 7.1 | 11.1* | 7.1

*Miles are not contiguous

Consideration of Public Comment

In addition to the Purpose and Need, I also considered how well each alternative responds to the concerns and desires of the public. I considered all public comments, including those that did not support the project or had specific concerns regarding the project. Individual comments received on the Route of the Olympian Environmental Assessment are addressed in Appendix A of this document.

Motorized vs. Non-Motorized Use

The majority of comments I received expressed support for either motorized or non-motorized use. Traditionally these railroad grade segments have had yearlong motorized use even though portions of them were previously in private ownership. I certainly respect the desire of those who wish to maintain that established use. However, I also have a duty to consider other public interests. As discussed above, I selected Alternative 2 with modifications because I believe it best balances those interests during the summer season and provides for a variety of recreation experiences. The current established uses of these railroad grade segments will not be affected during the winter, spring, and fall seasons.

In response to comments that desired a non-motorized use only recreation opportunity, I decided to designate Milwaukee segments 1A and 1B from the Hiawatha trailhead to Saltese as a non-motorized trail during the summer season. I believe this section provides the best option for a non-motorized trail opportunity on the Route of the Olympian at the present time because it is contiguous with the existing Route of the Hiawatha non-motorized trail. Connecting this segment of Route of the Olympian to the existing Route of the Hiawatha will provide a total of about 23 miles of a non-motorized use only opportunity. Currently there is no legal public access from Saltese to other portions of the route except via Interstate 90, which is not conducive to non-motorized travel. Thus, I decided to end the non-motorized trail in Saltese. An alternate route for motorized users from Taft to Saltese is available via Northern Pacific segment 1.

In response to comments that desired an ATV recreation opportunity where riders would not encounter full-sized motorized vehicles, I decided to designate Milwaukee segments 2 and 4 as a motorized trail during the summer. Because of this trail designation, riders without street legal ATVs or a driver’s license will be able to recreate on this portion of the route during the summer. These segments would also be open to non-motorized use.

As described in Section I of this document, I decided to keep segment Northern Pacific 1 open yearlong to all motorized use in response to comments that were concerned about loss of full-sized motorized vehicle access for fishing recreation during the summer along that section of the route.
St. Regis River. Segment Milwaukee 3 will also remain open yearlong to all motorized traffic because it provides access to private land and two portions are county road.

Separation of Motorized and Non-Motorized Uses
I received many comments, primarily from proponents of motorized use, that questioned the separation of motorized and non-motorized use and recommended that all segments of the route be open to everyone at all times. On the other hand, I received many comments primarily from proponents of non-motorized use who were concerned about safety of having non-motorized and motorized use on the same segments at the same time. These comments also were concerned about dust, noise, and potential conflicts with motor vehicles.

There are numerous opportunities on the Lolo National Forest for non-motorized recreationists to avoid potential conflict with motor vehicles via trails and gated roads. There are also numerous opportunities for motorized recreationists on open Forest roads. However, I recognize that railroad grades provide a unique opportunity for all recreationists due to their gentle grades and historic features and interests. I selected Alternative 2 with modifications because I think it is very important to provide for a variety of recreation experiences for which some separation of uses is needed.

Although about 25 percent of the Route of the Olympian will be designated a non-motorized trail during the summer, non-motorized users will have access to the entire route. They can choose to use those segments that are best suited to the experiences they desire. ATV riders will still be able to travel the entire length of the route from Taft to St. Regis, but will have to use Northern Pacific segment 1 (between Taft and Saltese) to bypass the non-motorized trail on Milwaukee segments 1A and 1B during the summer season.

I recognize that my decision will reduce access for full-sized motor vehicles along about 64 percent of the route during the summer season (about 3 months). However during the summer season, full-sized motor vehicle access will be retained on Northern Pacific segment 1, between Taft and Saltese, and on Milwaukee segment 3, between Haugan and DeBorgia. While not a preferred option for some people, Interstate 90 does provide an alternate route for full-sized motor vehicles.

In the future, the Forest Service could consider modifications to the travel management designations I am making in this document if public access is acquired around the existing breaks in the route and on the parallel Northern Pacific railroad grade or if monitoring of use patterns indicates a need for change. If this were to occur, another environmental analysis with full public participation would be undertaken.

Dominion Tunnel & Trestle
I received several comments requesting that the Dominion tunnel and trestle be open to all motorized use (full-sized vehicles, ATVs, and snowmobiles). Both of these features are currently closed to motorized use and have been for many years although unauthorized use did occur. As discussed on page 1 of this document, I have decided to allow motorized use through the tunnel during the spring and fall seasons to respond to public comments that expressed desire to experience driving through a railroad tunnel. However, the tunnel will continue to be closed
to snowmobile use in the winter because snowmobiles can damage the gravel surfacing and drainage structures due to the lack of snow in the tunnel. The Dominion tunnel and trestle have never been part of the official designated snowmobile trail system. With this Decision, I am not making any changes to the designated snowmobile route(s).

I received numerous requests to allow motorized use on the Dominion trestle. When the trestle was repaired in 2010/2011 safety features were added (e.g. guardrail cables). Due to funding constraints, these safety features were designed to meet engineering standards for non-motorized use as opposed to motorized use, which would have been significantly more costly. Because of the standard of safety features that are currently in place, motorized use will not be allowed on the trestle. These safety features could be upgraded in the future to accommodate motorized use, but the current priority for funding is to acquire public access for the two existing breaks in the route at Saltese and Twomile Creek, to complete the maintenance on the route (gravel surfacing), and construct the jump-up roads, Twomile bypass trail, and trailheads. In considering the overall route, the critical break in the route for motorized use is at the Saltese trestle. The Saltese trestle is privately owned and there is no simple bypass around it that does not involve other private land. If public access is acquired to remedy this break in the route, the Forest Service could consider modifying the travel management designations for the Route of the Olympian and upgrading the safety features on the Dominion trestle at some time in the future. Until such time, motorized users will still be able to travel from Taft to Saltese without the use of Dominion trestle via Northern Pacific segment 1.

VII. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

In accordance with 40 CFR 1508.13 and direction provided in the Forest Service Handbook (FSH 1909.15, Chapter 40, Section 43.1), I have determined that the management actions included in the Selected Action of the Route of the Olympian project do not constitute a major Federal action, and that the implementation of this Decision will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Accordingly, I have determined that an environmental impact statement (EIS) need not be prepared for this project. I have followed the implementing regulation for NEPA (40 CFR 1508.27) and other criteria for determining the significance of effects.

Before making my determination, I carefully reviewed and considered the following information:

- The direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of these actions as documented in the EA for the Route of the Olympian project.
- The analysis documentation in the Project File
- Comments received since the initiation of the project

I have reviewed the management actions included in the Route of the Olympian project for “significant impact”. The implementing regulations for NEPA (40 CFR 1508.27) provide
criteria for determining the significance of effects. Significance, as used in NEPA, requires consideration of both context and intensity.

(a) Context. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance will usually depend upon the effects in the locale, rather than the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant (40 CFR 1508.27).

The effects of the Selected Action are limited in context. The project activities encompass a limited area, construction activities will be of limited duration (likely a 3-5 year period), and use and maintenance of the route will continue for the long term. Effects are generally local in nature and are not likely to significantly affect regional or national resources.

Resource Protection Measures (EA, pages 19-21; Decision Notice, pages 6-7) are incorporated into the Selected Action to minimize and avoid adverse impacts to the extent that such impacts will be almost undetectable and immeasurable, even at the local level.

Within the context of the landscape as a whole, or at the local level, the ecological consequences are not found to be significant in either the short or long term.

(b) Intensity. This refers to the severity of impact. The following ten aspects are considered in the evaluation of intensity (40 CFR 1508.27).

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

Both beneficial and adverse effects have been taken into consideration when making a determination of significance. While there will be beneficial effects, this action does not rely on those effects to balance adverse environmental impacts. Detailed Specialist Reports located within the Project File and summarized in the EA contain comprehensive effects analyses. The findings in these specific resource reports form the basis for my decision.

It is my determination, based on review of these analyses and consultation with Resource Specialists, that the Selected Action will not have significant direct, indirect, or cumulative effects on the environment. All effects would be small or short-lived. None is deemed irreversible or irretrievable and do not set in motion further effects.

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety

The relative safety of the route and various route uses was considered during this analysis. I received several comments that expressed safety concerns about mixing non-motorized and motorized use. Other comments were concerned about shared use by full-sized motorized vehicles and small motorized vehicles 50 inches or less in width. The Selected Action was designed to address these concerns by designating different uses for various segments during the summer season. During the summer, Milwaukee segments 1A and 1B will be designated as a non-motorized trail and segments 2 and 4 will be designated as a motorized trail (allowing
motorized vehicles 50 inches or less in width). Segments Northern Pacific 1 and Milwaukee 3 will be designated as open roads. As with all other motorized trails and roads on the Forest, non-motorized users can use the motorized trail and the open roads at their own discretion. Safety signs will be placed along the route to notify travelers of the potential for other uses (motorized and non-motorized) on the trail, lower motorized vehicle speeds, and upcoming road intersections.

Road maintenance will include the application of crushed aggregate (i.e. gravel) on the entire route to provide a safe, smooth, and uniform surface for all motorized and non-motorized users. Additional maintenance activities will include roadside clearing and brushing, which will provide for good sight-distance along the route.

I believe that the Selected Action provides for a reasonable level of safety consistent with laws and regulations and is not likely to have any significant impact on public health or safety.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or ecologically critical areas

Project activities will not adversely affect any historic or cultural sites (EA, page 50). Although the Milwaukee railroad grade is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the project will not affect its inclusion on the Register because the railroad grade is already used as a road. The project area does not contain any parklands, prime farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecological critical areas. The railroad grades run parallel to the St. Regis River and cross several streams. However, the project will not affect these features or their associated riparian areas due to project design and applied Resource Protection Measures (EA, page 20; and Decision Notice, pages 6-7).

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial

Based on the limited context of the project, my review of the public comments received, and the analysis documented in the EA and Project File, I do not find any highly controversial effects to the human environment. In the NEPA context, “highly controversial” does not encompass all public opposition to a proposed action, but instead only applies to a substantial dispute as to the size, nature, or effect of an action.\footnote{Indiana Forest Alliance, Inc. v. United States Forest Service 325 F.3d 851 (10th Cir.2003) citing Wetlands Action Network v. United States Army Corps of Engineers, 222 F.3d 1105 (9th Cir.2000); Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project v. Blackwood, 161 F.3d 1208, 1212 (9th Cir.1998) citing Greenpeace Action v. Franklin, 14 F.3d 1324, 1335 (9th Cir.1993); Sierra Club v. United States Forest Service, 843 F.2d 1190, 1193 (9th Cir.1988) (accord); LaFlamme v. Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 852 F.2d 389, 400-01 (9th Cir.1988)} This does not mean that there is not opposition or lack of support for certain aspects of the project. While some have disagreed with the proposal or its need, there has been no controversy about the effects disclosed in the analysis. In other words, although some may not support the decision, the comments did not materially question the effects analysis on scientific grounds.
I conclude that the effects of the Selected Action are not considered highly controversial by professionals, specialists, and scientists from associated fields of forestry, wildlife biology, soils, botany, fisheries, hydrology, or recreation resources.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk

Based on my review of public comments received on this project and the analysis documented in the EA and Project File, I conclude that there are no uncertain or unique characteristics in the project area which have not been previously encountered or that will constitute an unknown risk to the human environment.

A technical analysis (EA and Project File) that discloses potential environmental impacts (which is supportable with the use of accepted techniques, reliable data, and professional judgment) has been completed, and I believe that the impacts of implementing this decision are within the limits that avoid thresholds of concern.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration

The Route of the Olympian project is a site-specific project that does not set precedence for future actions or represent a decision in principle about future considerations. Any proposed future project must be evaluated on its own merits and effects. The Selected Action is consistent with the Lolo National Forest Plan and the capabilities of the land.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individual insignificant but cumulative significant impacts

Connected, cumulative, and similar actions have been considered and included in the scope of the analysis. The analysis accounts for past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Based on my review of the analysis and disclosure of effects in the EA, specialists’ reports, Biological Assessments and Evaluations, and other analyses in the Project Record, I conclude that the Route of the Olympian project will not contribute potential cumulative adverse impacts (EA, pages 25-54).

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources

A comprehensive evaluation of heritage resources was conducted and the Forest archaeologist determined that there will be no adverse effects to known sites (EA, page 50). Although the Milwaukee railroad grade is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the project will not affect its inclusion on the Register because the railroad grade is already used as a road. Forest heritage personnel will continue to inspect the railroad grade. If any degradation to contributing resources of the historic property is observed, Forest staff will consult with the Montana State Historic Preservation Office and other interested parties to develop management
solutions for restoration or preservation of the affected property (Decision Notice, page 7; EA, page 21).

9. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973**

This project will not adversely affect any threatened or endangered species or its habitat.

The Selected Action consisting of travel management designation of the route, road maintenance, connector route and trailhead construction, and installation of traffic control devices will not adversely affect Threatened bull trout or designated critical habitat. Best Management Practices will be used during road maintenance activities and construction of connector routes and trailheads to minimize potential ground disturbance and protect water resources. Despite these measures, the Selected Action has the potential to temporarily yield a minor amount of sediment to the St. Regis River during implementation of road maintenance activities on the portions of the railroad grades that are in close proximity to water. However, the quantity would be low and likely indistinguishable from other existing sediment sources in such a large watershed that is approximately 223,000 acres in size. Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USWS) was conducted and a Biological Opinion was issued by USFWS on February 15, 2013. Specifically, the USFWS concurred that the project will not likely jeopardize the continued existence of bull trout or result the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat.

10. **Whether the proposed action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law requirements imposed for the protection of the environment**

The Selected Action meets all federal, state, and local laws, including those for heritage resources (EA, page 50), water quality (EA, page 48), and threatened and endangered species (EA, pages 46, 49, and 51). It also meets the National Environmental Policy Act disclosure requirements (Route of the Olympian Environmental Assessment).

VIII. **FINDINGS REQUIRED BY LAWS, REGULATIONS, AND POLICIES**

I have determined that my decision is consistent with the laws, regulations, and agency policies related to the project. The following summarizes findings required by major environmental laws.

**National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)**

NEPA requires Federal agencies to: (a) use a systematic interdisciplinary approach in planning and decision-making; (b) consider the environmental impact of proposed actions; and (c) consider alternatives to the proposed action. I find that the analysis process and documentation of the Route of the Olympian project is consistent with NEPA.
**National Forest Management Act (NFMA)**

**Consistency with the Forest Plan**
On March 23, 2012, The U.S. Department of Agriculture issued a final planning rule for National Forest System land management planning (2012 Rule). For the Lolo National Forest, where the Forest Plan was developed under a prior planning rule, 36 CFR 219.17(c) of the 2012 Rule explains, “This part supersedes any prior planning regulation. No obligations remain from any prior planning regulation, except those that are specifically included in a unit’s existing plan. Existing plans will remain in effect until revised.” Except for the plan consistency provisions, none of the requirements of the 2012 regulations apply to projects or activities.

NFMA requires that projects and activities be consistent with the governing Forest Plan (16 USC 1604 (i)). The Lolo National Forest Plan establishes management direction for the Lolo National Forest. This management direction is achieved through the establishment of Forest Plan goals and objectives, standards and guidelines, and Management Area goals and accompanying standards and guidelines.

This decision is consistent with the standards, goals, and objectives of the Lolo National Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service 1986).

**Suitability for Timber Production**
Although a minor amount of vegetation removal will take place during bypass trail, jump-up road, and other facility construction, timber harvesting is not associated with this project. Therefore, NFMA provisions related to timber harvesting do not apply.

**Necessity of Roads**
NFMA requires that “all roads are planned and designed to re-establish vegetation cover on the disturbed areas within a reasonable period of time, not to exceed ten years…unless the road is determined necessary as a permanent addition to the national Forest Transportation System.” (16 USC 1608(b)). It also requires that road construction be designed to “standards appropriate for the intended uses, considering safety, cost of transportation, and impacts on land and resources.” (16 USC 1608(c)).

A transportation plan was completed for the project. I have authorized the construction of two short segments of road (less than ½ mile in length) to provide access to the Milwaukee railroad grade. The Dominion Jump-up Road (approximately 800 feet) will replace a poorly located existing road to provide access for maintenance equipment as well as seasonal motorized access to the Milwaukee railroad grade. The Saltese Jump-up (approximately 1500 feet) will provide access to the Milwaukee railroad grade west of the Saltese trestle. These roads will be located in Forest Plan management areas 16 and 24 that allow road construction. These short road segments were carefully located and designed to minimize potential environmental effects while providing necessary access. These roads will be constructed to Best Management Practice standards.

Based on these actions and the analysis documented in the EA, I believe this project meets the intent of the NFMA road requirements.
**NFMA Diversity**
The NFMA specifies that land management plans provide for diversity of plant and animal communities based on the sustainability and capability of the specific land area in order to meet overall multiple-use objectives, and within the multiple-use objectives, preserve the diversity of tree species similar to that existing in the region (16 USC 1604 (g)(3)(B)). The Forest Plan contains an array of components that contribute to the plant and animal (terrestrial and aquatic) habitat capability of the Lolo National Forest. Based upon consideration of these components of the Forest Plan, the Biological Assessments/Evaluations, and the analysis in the EA, I find this decision will continue to provide for a diversity of native species.

**Endangered Species Act**

Under provisions in the Act, Federal agencies are directed to seek to conserve endangered and threatened species and to ensure that actions are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any of these species. Biological assessments (BA), which disclose the effects of the project on threatened and endangered species, were prepared by Forest Service biologists with the following ESA determinations:

- Grizzly Bear – no effect (Wildlife Report, page 25; EA, page 51)
- Canada Lynx – no effect (Wildlife Report, page 30; EA, page 51)
- Water howellia and Spaulding’s catchfly – no effect (Botany Report, page 2; EA, page 46)
- Bull Trout – not likely to adversely affect (Fisheries Report, pages 16-17; EA, page 49)

**Bull Trout and Bull Trout Critical Habitat**
The Selected Action consisting of travel management designation of the route, road maintenance, connector route and trailhead construction, and installation of traffic control devices will not adversely affect bull trout or designated critical habitat. The potential temporary yield of a minor amount of sediment from road maintenance activities on the railroad grades will not jeopardize the continued existence of bull trout or result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with this finding (USFWS Biological Opinion dated February 15, 2013).

**Clean Water Act and State Water Quality Standards**

Upon review of the Route of the Olympian EA and the Hydrology and Fisheries reports in the Project File, I find that the activities associated with the Selected Action will comply with the Clean Water Act and Montana State Water Quality standards through application of best management practices.

**National Historic Preservation Act**

The Milwaukee railroad grade is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, but the Northern Pacific railroad grade is not considered eligible. A comprehensive evaluation of historic resources was conducted and no adverse effects to these resources are expected because the railroad grade is already used as a road. Continued use of the grade as a travelway will not
change the historical condition. The Forest Service will continue to monitor the Milwaukee railroad grade to observe the condition of the resource. If any degradation to the contributing resources of the historic property is observed, the Forest Service will consult with the Montana State Historical Preservation Office and other interested parties to develop management solutions for restoration or preservation of the affected feature(s). The Selected Action is consistent with Forest Plan direction and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

IX. APPEAL PROVISIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.14. A written appeal must be submitted within 45 days following the publication of the legal notice of this decision in the Missoulian, the newspaper of record. It is the responsibility of the appellant to ensure their appeal is received in a timely manner. The publication date of the legal notice of the decision in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Appellants should not rely on date or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Paper appeals must be submitted to:

USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
ATTN: Appeal Deciding Officer
P.O. Box 7669
Missoula, MT 59807
Office hours: 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
ATTN: Appeal Deciding Officer
200 East Broadway
Missoula, MT 59802

Electronic appeals must be submitted to: appeals-northern-regional-office@fs.fed.us

Faxed appeals must be submitted to: Fax: (406) 329-3411

In electronic appeals, the subject line should contain the name of the project being appealed. An automated response will confirm your electronic appeal has been received. Electronic appeals must be submitted in MS Word, Word Perfect, or Rich Text Format (RTF).

It is the appellant's responsibility to provide sufficient project- or activity-specific evidence and rationale, focusing on the decision, to show why my decision should be reversed. The appeal must be filed with the Appeal Deciding Officer in writing. At a minimum, the appeal must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14, and include the following information:

- The appellant’s name and address, with a telephone number, if available;
- A signature, or other verification of authorship upon request (a scanned signature for electronic mail may be filed with the appeal);
- When multiple names are listed on an appeal, identification of the lead appellant and verification of the identity of the lead appellant upon request;
- The name of the project or activity for which the decision was made, the name and title of the Responsible Official, and the date of the decision;
• The regulation under which the appeal is being filed, when there is an option to appeal under either 36 CFR 215 or 36 CFR 251, subpart C;
• Any specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks and rationale for those changes;
• Any portion(s) of the decision with which the appellant disagrees, and explanation for the disagreement;
• Why the appellant believes the Responsible Official’s decision failed to consider the comments, and;
• How the appellant believes the decision specifically violates law, regulation or policy.

If an appeal is received on this project there may be informal resolution meetings and/or conference calls between the Responsible Official and the appellant. These discussions will take place within 15 days after the closing date for filing an appeal. All such meetings are open to the public. If you are interested in attending any informal resolution discussions, please contact the Responsible Official or monitor the following website for postings about current appeals in the Northern Region of the Forest Service: www.fs.usda.gov/goto/r1/appeal-meetings.

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may begin on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

Further information about this decision can be obtained from Beth Kennedy during normal office hours (weekdays, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) at the Superior Ranger District Office (Address: 209 West Riverside Avenue, PO Box 460, Superior, MT 59872; Phone/voicemail: (406) 822-3954.

3/7/13
Date

Tawnya Brummett
District Ranger
APPENDIX A

Response to Comments on the Environmental Assessment

In September 2011, the Route of the Olympian Environmental Assessment was mailed to individuals and organizations that had previously commented on or expressed interest in the project. The 30-day comment period on the EA began with the publication of legal notice in the Missoulian newspaper on September 23, 2011. Due to the high level of public interest, the comment period was extended another 23 days beyond the original 30-day comment period until November 15, 2011. At the close of the comment period, 323 comment letters and emails had been received.

Many comments received simply expressed a preference for motorized or non-motorized use or support for a particular alternative. Other comments were more specific to note concerns or questions about the various proposed management actions. Due to the relatively high number of public responses to the EA and the fact that many of the comments were similar in nature, comments were grouped by common theme. The Forest Service’s response to these comments is provided below.

Economics

1. Comment: Motorized or non-motorized use will contribute to the local economy.

The following are samples of comments concerning economics:

Motorized use

“The abandoned railroad grades are also the lifeline to travel between local businesses.” (222 comments)

“Limiting our ability to ride there will limit the tourism dollars spent with the merchants.” (222 comments)

“We rode with 52 other members (N ID ATV) just last weekend to the Silver Dollar Bar for lunch. With each member having lunch, some buying items in the gift store and some buying fuel at the local gas station (that contributes to the local economy). Last year we rode with over 250 riders, again each having lunch at the Silver Dollar.” (#16)

“On average motorized recreational activities have higher spending levels. Please realize that these spending levels support the local businesses almost year round. Without this outside support business would fold. The West End of Mineral County businesses are particularly vulnerable.” (#79)

“Many towns in MT and ID survive solely on the summer and winter recreation they can provide and many are now facing more trail closures.” (#86)
“The motorized group from WA, ID & MT contribute a tremendous amount, $735,467. spent by ATV enthusiasts in 2005 in Mineral County according to the Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research at the University of Montana.” (#100)

Non-motorized use

“This Olympian Trail will likely bring 10,000 to 20,000 visitors to our county within two years of its opening. This is the greatest potential economic boost for Mineral County in 20 years and perhaps the greatest it will encounter in the next 20 years!” (#13)

“I believe maintaining this trail non-motorized will bring in tourists from far and wide to enjoy such an opportunity. The economic benefits would be significant.” (#56)

“The non-motorized group does not contribute that much to the local community.” (#100)

“I was pleased to see the wisdom in recognizing the value of this project and how it will contribute to the economy of Mineral Co. MT. The analysis of economic benefits is good and the idea to have a good portion of the trail be non-motorized is critical to the success of this project and will maximize the economic benefit to Mineral Co. and its residents.” (#110)

“The study found overnight cyclists spent an average of $98/day whereas day cyclists spent $13. Their trail goes through urbanized areas with many services which is very different from the rural nature of this trail, however, I think the significant impact traveling cyclists can have on the local communities around the trail is worth noting.” (#248)

Forest Service Response: Economics of the project are discussed in the Route of the Olympian Environmental Assessment (EA) on pages 25-33. The analysis documented in the EA which was based on recreation studies, suggests that the economic impact of motorized vs. non-motorized use is not substantially different. The difference is not necessarily attributed to the type of use (motorized or non-motorized), but rather depends on the type of trip (day use or overnight) and type of visitor (local or non-local). The analysis suggests that decreases in use by one user group could likely be offset by increases in use by other user groups, leading to little change overall. Of course, economic impact of the Route of the Olympian will also depend on the number of visitors.

The Selected Action provides opportunities for all types of recreation uses (motorized and non-motorized) along different portions of the route. As authorized in the Decision Notice, ATVs will continue to have a route from Taft to St. Regis during the non-snow season. The only change to existing use made by this Decision is that ATVs will need to use Northern Pacific segment 1 between Taft and Saltese as an alternate route to Milwaukee segments 1A and 1B during the summer. Because ATV use along the route would remain largely unaffected, the economic impact from this activity would likely remain unchanged. Similarly, the Selected Action makes no changes to winter recreation opportunities, thus this Decision will not result in a change to the local economy during the snow season. By providing a non-motorized use only opportunity between Taft and Saltese during the summer may encourage at least some of the
current Route of the Hiawatha (mostly bicycle) users to spend a little more time (and perhaps money) in Mineral County.

Monitoring use trends along the route over time will provide an opportunity to determine which segments attract the most visitors and what, if any, changes this project has to the local economy. The economic impact of the Route of the Olympian may also depend on the ability of the various local businesses to attract a variety of customers.

**Established Motorized Use**

**2. Comment:** Motorized travel along the railroad grades is an established use and should continue.

“The Route of the Olympian has been used as an open road by the Public for several Decades and motorized use is well established.” (#100)

“Historic use of this system has included mainly motorized travel for many, many years.” (#107)

“This railroad grade has been used by motorized vehicles for many years and should continue.” (#176)

**Forest Service Response:** Although the public has used the railroad grade segments as open roads for several decades, the majority of the Milwaukee railroad grade right-of-way was in private ownership until 2007. Thus, public citizens traveling the route were essentially in trespass in certain areas. The local snowmobile club has a lease agreement with one landowner to use his parcels as part of the groomed snowmobile route during the winter which may have given the impression that public use was allowed year round on the Milwaukee railroad grade.

The Selected Action maintains all established uses, including motorized use, during the spring, fall, and winter seasons. The only exception is that the Dominion tunnel will also be open to motorized travel in the spring and fall seasons. During the summer season, ATV use will continue to be allowed from Taft to St. Regis. However between Taft and Saltese, ATVs will need to use Northern Pacific segment 1 when the parallel Milwaukee segments 1A and 1B are designated as a non-motorized trail.

During the summer, full-sized motor vehicles will be allowed on Northern Pacific segment 1 and Milwaukee segment 3 but restricted along the remainder of the route to provide for other recreational opportunities and experiences.

**Use Dates/Timing**

**3. Comment:** The season use dates for Route of the Olympian should match the Hiawatha trail dates.

“A dedicated non-motorized trail is essential in the weeks matching the Hiawatha Trail.” (#13)
“We support non-motorized use from May 23 to September 30 which is generally consistent with the Route of the Hiawatha operations.” (#84)

**Forest Service Response:** In the Selected Action, the opening date for the summer season non-motorized trail on Milwaukee segments 1A and 1B will match the opening date for the adjacent Hiawatha trail, which is the Saturday before Memorial Day (approximately May 23rd). Since the designation of Milwaukee segments 1A and 1B as a non-motorized trail during the summer will in essence extend the existing Hiawatha non-motorized trail opportunity, it makes sense that the start dates for these two trails be the same.

However, the closing dates for both trails will not correspond. The closing date for the non-motorized use only trail segment of the Route of the Olympian will be the Tuesday after Labor Day to allow motor vehicle access during the archery hunting season on Milwaukee segments 1A and 1B. The Hiawatha trail typically remains open until September 30. Labor Day weekend is a peak visitor weekend for the Hiawatha trail which is why the Route of the Olympian non-motorized trail will be kept open through the holiday. After Labor Day when school has started, use on the adjacent Hiawatha trail generally declines.

The Forest Service will monitor use levels over time to determine if the season of use dates should be adjusted to better meet public needs.

**4. Comment:** The summer season dates should be extended for non-motorized use.

“The definition of summer season should be changed to June 1 to September 30. September should be reserved for non-motorized uses.” (#26)

“We urge you to extend the non-motorized period to include the spring and fall months.” (#3)

“We are especially pleased to see that the “summer season” dates, when there is the least motorized use, is extended to September 30 in this alternative (3).” (#33)

**Forest Service Response:** The Selected Action extends the season use dates for the non-motorized trail on Milwaukee segments 1A and 1B by about 12 days beyond what was displayed in the EA for Alternative 2. The season of use for the non-motorized trail will encompass Memorial and Labor Day holiday weekends. At the current time, these dates will not be extended further because of the demand for motorized vehicle access during several hunting seasons.

**5. Comment:** “Following the end of winter season, the trail will be muddy, soft, and subject to rutting, mudholing and significant surface degradation from motorized vehicles until late spring or summer when it becomes dry and firm. At a very minimum the trail should be closed to “All Motorized” during the Spring season.” (#26)

**Forest Service Response:** The railroad grade is constructed of large rock and gravel, and has been in place for over 100 years. The surface is more durable than a hiking trail or forest access road built on native material. Even with relatively little maintenance and continued motorized
use on the previously private sections, the grade has few soft areas in the spring. Additionally, the Forest Service will manage the railroad grades like any other open road during spring break up or fall rains. If road conditions are poor, the Forest Service can issue a road closure order which temporarily closes the road to motorized use until road conditions improve.

**Commercial Use and Fees**

6. **Comment:** Commercial use and fees should or should not be applied to the Route of the Olympian.

“We hope no fees will be assessed for non-motorized uses of the Route of the Olympian. If fees must be assessed, we believe they should be assessed on a sliding scale of expected environmental and infrastructure impact which would mean the lowest fees for non-motorized users with the exception of motor vehicle parking area fees.” (#33)

“Lookout Associates propose the incorporation of the Milwaukee Road section from the East Portal to the east end of the Dominion Creek Trestle within the Route of the Hiawatha Recreation Complex and will commit to maintenance responsibilities of that section.” (#84)

“I trust there will be opportunity for guide services to operate on the trail and formally request herein, that that be the case.” (#110)

“It would not be out of line to extend non-motorized all the way to Saltsee, thus making another shuttle easy to implement.” (#171)

“Any consideration of user fees on the route should be limited to parking-lot fees for motor-vehicles. This would allow the unhindered no-charge passage of thru-hikers and thru-cyclists who will have origins and destinations far beyond this project’s boundaries.” (#271)

“Don’t let it get ‘commercialized’. Let it stay wild and scenic.” (#301)

**Forest Service Response:** This Environmental Assessment and Decision Notice address travel management designation, seasons of use, and infrastructure work to make the route useable. This project does not include proposals for fees or commercial use. At this time, the Forest Service has not considered this possibility of fees or commercial use primarily because route is not currently contiguous due to breaks at Saltsee and Twomile Creek.

If at such time public access is acquired around the breaks in the trail making the route complete and if fees are considered at that time, the Forest Service would conduct another analysis which would include full public involvement.

**Use on the Route of the Hiawatha**

7. **Comment:** “If the Olympian route is only open to bikers certain times of the year then the Hiawatha Trail should be open to motorized use certain times of the year as well.” (#76)
Forest Service Response: This project does not include any proposal to modify the management of the Route of the Hiawatha. The Route of the Hiawatha is administered by the Idaho Panhandle National Forest.

Utility Terrain Vehicles (UTVs)

8. Comment: Utility Terrain Vehicles (UTVs) should be allowed on the Route of the Olympian.

“This needs to include side by sides.” (#79)

“I do have concerns on the 50 inch wide rule.” (#282)

“Many ATV rides have graduated to UTV’s. The random number of 50” should be increased to 60” in order to allow these wider vehicles access to the Route.” (#299)

“UTV’s are preferred by many, especially the senior population. These recreationists are a growing sector and they deserve recognition and deserve a place on the trail.” (#299)

Forest Service Response: The Forest Service definition of an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) is any motorized off-highway vehicle 50 inches or less in width, that travels on three or more low-pressure tires with a seat designed to be straddled by the operator (Forest Service Manual 7700; Lolo National Forest Travel Plan). The typical width of Utility Terrain Vehicles (UTVs) is approximately 58-64 inches, similar to the widths of many small cars, jeeps, and pick-up trucks. Thus, the difference between UTVs and full-sized motor vehicles becomes blurred from a management standpoint. If the width limitation is increased to allow for UTVs, then many other vehicles (e.g. small cars, jeeps, and pick-up trucks) would qualify for use on the route. This situation would not meet the intent to provide a recreational opportunity where ATV riders would not encounter full-sized motor vehicles.

In the spring and fall seasons, UTVs and full-sized motor vehicles can use all segments of the route except the Dominion trestle and Twomile bypass trail. In the summer season, UTVs and full-sized motor vehicles can use Northern Pacific 1 between Taft and Saltese and Milwaukee segment 3 between Haugan and DeBorgia for a total of approximately 11.1 miles.

Infrastructure

9. Comment: “Roadway turnouts, parking areas – observation sites- picnic sites and safety provisions such as guardrails or similar protections in zones which have fill slopes steeper than 35 degrees have not been mentioned. All are necessary to accommodate multiple use.” (#312)

Forest Service Response: Trailheads and other facilities are described in the EA on page 12. The Forest Service has standard road and trail design features. The infrastructure constructed for this project will be consistent with these standards.

10. Comment: “Cyclists need more restroom facilities. Only 3 locations in 35 miles is not adequate.” (#312)
Forest Service Response: The number and location of restroom facilities will be evaluated as use increases.

Motorized Access for Other Recreation

11. Comment: Concerns about loss of motor vehicle access for fishing along the St. Regis River.

“Trucks and SUV’s use sections to obtain river access for fishing throughout the year.” (#67)

“Fishermen who have enjoyed these trail options (side by sides) should be allowed continued access.” (#79)

“Alternatives 2, 3, 4 all restrict fishing during the summer season.” (#100)

“The only good way the locals have to get to the river is on the old Milwaukee ROW.” (#171)

“The majority of these people are older and drive vehicles to access the river and this is the only access to the river.” (#278)

“We both favor Alternative 4 mainly for the fishermen who have been forgotten in all the other alternatives.” (#304)

Forest Service Response: Not all segments of the railroad grades provide suitable fishing access. In some areas, the railroad grade is much higher than the river or Interstate 90 is between the railroad grade and the river. As described in the EA (pages 41-42), full-sized motor vehicles can presently access about 21.6 miles of the St. Regis River from either the Northern Pacific or Milwaukee railroad grades.

In response to public comments, the Selected Action was modified to allow all motorized use on Northern Pacific segment 1 located between Taft and Saltese throughout the year. This modification provides the same access for full-sized motor vehicles to the St. Regis River during the summer season as Alternative 4. The Selected Action also allows all motorized use along the route during the spring and fall.

During the summer, Northern Pacific segment 1 and Milwaukee segment 3 will provide access to approximately 10.6 miles of the St. Regis River for full-sized motor vehicles. This represents about 50 percent of the total 21.6 miles of the route that currently accesses the river. There is also full-sized motor vehicle access for fishing on old Highway 10 going east from the Henderson exit and at each of the Interstate 90 exits.

12. Comment: Concern about potential loss of motorized access for hunting.

“Old Milwaukee Right-of-Way is hunting access for locals.” (#171)

“I have been riding motorbikes, four wheelers, and snowmobiles since I’ve been a kid. I use the railroad grade to access some of the best hunting areas around here.” (#307)
Forest Service Response: The Selected Action will maintain all existing motorized use along the route during the spring and fall seasons. There will be no restrictions on full-sized motor vehicle use along the route during the big game rifle hunting season except on the Dominion trestle and Twomile Bypass trail. The only restriction on full-sized motor vehicle use during any hunting season would be on Milwaukee segments 1A and 1B during the Labor Day weekend, which overlaps with the opening day of archery season. Milwaukee segments 1A and 1B would be open to all motor vehicle access on the Tuesday after Labor Day for the remainder of the fall hunting seasons.

Motorized Access for ATVs

13. Comment: Concern about potential loss of motorized access for ATVs.

“I love your country but your constant closing of (ATV) riding trails makes it less and less likely we will continue to visit.” (#23)

“I have continued to lose areas where I can recreate in a motorized setting. One of those areas was the Route of the Hiawatha. I do not wish to lose more areas in the future.” (#44)

“There are too few motorized routes available for OHV recreationists at the present time. This condition combined with the massive motorized closure trend should preclude the consideration of any motorized road or trail closures.” (#67)

“If you eliminate ATV use in one area you need to replace it elsewhere and pay the cost.” (#243)

“There is getting to be less and less areas that families and seniors can ride ATV’s in this area.” (#255)

Forest Service Response: Under the Selected Action, ATVs will continue to be allowed to travel the entire route from Taft to St. Regis during the non-snow seasons. The only restriction for ATV use during the summer season is on Milwaukee 1A and 1B between Taft and Saltese. However, the parallel Northern Pacific segment 1 will continue to be available for motorized use.

Motorized Access for the Mobility Impaired

14. Comment: Concern that restrictions on motorized use would limit access for people with mobility impairments.

“In the group that we ride with, there are many elderly that like to get out to where they no longer can walk or hike.” (#74)

“If the plan chosen limits the route to non-motorized use I feel that the elderly and the handicap are being discriminated against.” (#76)
“The trail need to be left to full motorized use to aid in getting the elderly and handicap out to enjoy the public lands.” (#76)

“Being disabled this is one of the few enjoyable things I have left, riding to the Silver Dollar Bar.” (#103)

“I would like to see a few days a month, though, to allow those with physical or age related disabilities to be able to use the trail.” (#121)

“The use of these areas would not be for those who are too lazy to hike and walk the trails, but also for those of use that are elderly and/or handicapped. Many environmentalists seem to feel it is unnecessary to allow us to have access to the beautiful landscape of MT.” (#160)

“Now that I am nearly 75 years old, I am finding that my access to the areas I enjoyed as a much younger man, are extremely limited. Please do not shut me out of these areas. I do have the same rights as those who want to enjoy the wonders of nature; However, I now must use mechanized means to accomplish this.” (#201)

“Many of us who use OHV’s are getting up in years, have disabilities and need to have access to riding areas that we can also get to the grand views that the forest can provide.” (#208)

“This historical route is and should remain a motorized compliment to the Route of the Hiawatha Bicycle Trail for the many visitors who for one reason or another cannot ride a bicycle.” (#216)

“We are getting too old to walk or cycle, so ATV’s are the only way we are able to get out and enjoy this great country of ours.” (#231)

“Quite a number of these people are disabled and this access is important to them.” (#278)

“I can’t ride a bike but I 4 wheel. If you close this trail I will not be able to use it. It isn’t fare for those of us who can’t ride bikes. Not to mention I am a Disabled Vet. I belong to the Disable Veterans of America. Don’t we have some rites also?” (#303)

**Forest Service Response:** In the Selected Action, motor vehicle use is allowed on all sections of the route (except the Dominion Trestle and Twomile bypass trail) during the spring and fall seasons. In the summer, full-sized motor vehicles are allowed on Northern Pacific segment 1 and Milwaukee segment 3 for a total of about 11.1 miles. Also in the summer, ATVs can use the entire length of the route from Taft to St. Regis. However between Taft and Saltese, ATVs will need to use Northern Pacific segment 1 when the parallel Milwaukee segments 1A and 1B are designated a non-motorized trail.

**15. Comment:** “If I am disabled I am discriminated against if my UTV is over 50 inches wide. If I am unable to ride my ATV because of a physical reason with your new proposal I would be unable to enjoy the forest because my UTV is over 50 in wide.” (#282)
**Forest Service Response:** As stated in the response to Comment 8, UTVs can use the entire Route of the Olympian (except the Dominion trestle and Twomile bypass trail) during the spring and fall seasons. During the summer, UTVs can use Northern Pacific segment 1 between Taft and Saltese and Milwaukee segment 3 between Haugan and DeBorgia, for a total of approximately 11.1 miles.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states that “no otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity… conducted by any Executive agency.”

The Forest Service regulations implementing Section 504 repeated this requirement in section 15e.130 General prohibitions against discrimination. (a) “No qualified individual with a disability shall on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity conducted by the agency.”

Persons-with-Disabilities are subject to the same travel restrictions as all other forest users. The restrictions apply to the vehicle and not to the person. People may travel by wheelchair or by other power-driven mobility devices (OPMDs) as defined by the Department of Justice, subject to width requirements for that class of vehicle.

In order for a vehicle to be considered an OPMD it must meet a 2 part definition- “a device, including one that is battery-powered, that is (1) designed solely for use by a mobility-impaired person for locomotion, (2) and that is suitable for use in an indoor pedestrian area.” UTVs, ATVs, and pickup trucks do not meet either part of this definition.

16. **Comment:** “The plan calls for gravel surface and wheel chairs are very difficult to move in gravel.” (#76)

**Forest Service Response:** The surfacing will be compacted gravel which is suitable for wheelchair use.

**Noise and Dust**

17. **Comment:** Motorized use results in noise and dust, which can be unpleasant for other recreationists.

“Allowing motorized on the same trail [as non-motorized use] … would also make it very unpleasant.” (#12)

“I support the non-motorized option because there are continuously more places to take a motorized vehicle and less places to get away from the pollution and noise they create.” (#34)
“(with motor vehicles on the trail) at the very least, they (non-motorized users) would be dissuaded from using it and we would lose a precious chance for family recreation and quiet enjoyment of the beauty here.” (#60)

“I support non-motorized quiet recreation on the abandoned rail line.” (#121)

“ATV riders are aware of dust and either have masks or space themselves out. Adding slow bikes to this environment is a relations disaster waiting to happen. Bicyclists are not prepared to handle the dust they would encounter.” (#159)

“I have driven up the canyon numerous times and noticed an enormous cloud of dust half filling the entire canyon. Sure enough, you eventually spot the four-wheeler(s) over on the ROW. I don’t notice this problem with vehicles, since it is too rough to drive very fast in a car/truck. So I would think at a minimum you would want some dust control.” (#171)

“Even the motorized vehicles with responsible and respectful drivers still disrupt natures’ stillness with their noise and smell.” (#186)

“Non-motorized use is compatible with the quiet trails approach to recreational access.” (#247)

“While in theory motorized and non-motorized uses can co-exist, the reality is that the noise, dust and danger of motorized use drive away non-motorized users.” (#253)

“Dirt track roads/paths will get chopped up by motorized use and make them less usable for non-motorized users.” (#271)

There are far fewer places where one can bike, hike, and ski without conflicts with motorized use which can use logging roads for motorized travel.” (#272)

“Sharing those routes with motorized vehicles detracts from the experience. Noise and exhaust fumes aren’t natural.” (#275)

“The dust problem could be alleviated by speed limits and by application of a dust palliative which is currently being used on the roadway from Interstate 90 to the Hiawatha trailhead.” (#283)

“The noise from motorized vehicles is minimal as all vehicles are muffled by law.” (#283)

**Forest Service Response:** The Selected Action designates a non-motorized use only trail opportunity during the summer that connects the existing Hiawatha non-motorized trail to Saltese, providing a total of 23 miles of this type of trail experience. The remainder of the route is also open to non-motorized use, but visitors will need to consider what type of recreation experience they would enjoy and select the trail segment(s) that are appropriate.

During dry periods, dusty conditions will likely be present on some of the motorized route segments. The application of compacted gravel surfacing and encouraging lower vehicle speeds
may help reduce some of the dust production. Depending on observed conditions, dust abatement may be considered in specific locations.

Virtually the entire route is within sight and sound of Interstate 90, which provides a constant hum of background noise. On quieter sections of the route, the sound of motorized vehicles would likely overcome the background noise of the Interstate. Under Montana State law, all ATVs ridden off-highway are required to comply with the 96 decibel sound limit.

**Safety**

**18. Comment:** Concern about the safety of having motorized and non-motorized use on the same trail.

“Allowing motorcycles and 4-wheelers on such a narrow trail would be extremely dangerous for the bicyclers (adults and often wobbly children on bicycles and tricycles). Allowing motorized on the same trail would put those families at extreme risk.” (#12)

“If motorized recreation dominates the route, it will become unsafe and unpleasant for non-motorized users.” (#33)

“Children, older adults (like me) and anyone not used to much bicycling could easily have accidents because of motor vehicles on the trail.” (#60)

“Families will most likely not elect to bicycle the Route of the Olympian knowing that motorized vehicles are also allowed on the trail.” (#84)

“The appeal to families in particular is much stronger in a non-motorized setting as any parent would be concerned with a young child on a bike on a trail where there was also motorized use.” (#110)

“This is a really special opportunity to let one area be machine free and safe for bikes to ride on this trail.” (#184)

“Many drivers of motorized vehicles tend to view shared trails as “theirs” and are inconsiderate and sometimes downright rude or unsafe to bikers and hikers on those trails.” (#186)

“As a senior citizen who enjoys biking, I want to be sure that safe bike trails are preserved for less aggressive bike riders. The very young and most older riders can’t handle many of the roads and trails I the area. Railroad grades are wonderful option for us.” (#275)

“Families with young children should not have to contend with motorized vehicles speed and exhaust while negotiating the trail.” (#290)

“The higher speed of motorized vehicles raises the danger level.” (#275)
“There is a common perception by the non-motorized community that there is a terrible danger of accidents in mingling with the motorized users. I would suggest that this is a perception that is NOT based in fact. The snowmobile community gets along just fine with the non-motorized community. There have been no incidents where anybody has been injured or run off the trail by a snowmobiler.” (#299)

**Forest Service Response:** The Selected Action designates a non-motorized use only trail opportunity during the summer that connects to the existing Hiawatha non-motorized trail, providing a total of 23 miles of this type of trail experience. The Selected Action also designates a motorized trail during the summer on Milwaukee segments 2 and 4. Other segments of the route will be managed as open Forest roads. Although non-motorized users will have access to the entire route during all times of the year, it is their discretion to use those segments that will provide the recreation experience they desire. All route segments will be well signed as to the type of use allowed. Signs will also notify travelers to expect other forms of recreation traffic along the route.

The physical features of the route itself generally promote safe travel. The railroad grades are relatively straight and level, providing for good sight distance. The railroad grades also average about 14 feet wide allowing adequate space for passing. Gravel surfacing will be placed along the route to provide a safe, smooth, and uniform surface for all motorized and non-motorized use.

If safety problems arise due to use level, conflicts, or other factors, future corrective actions may be taken.

**Dominion Tunnel and Trestle**

19. **Comment:** Motorized use should be allowed on the Dominion tunnel and trestle.

*Allow motorized use without restriction including the right to use the Dominion Trestle and Tunnel.* (222 comments)

“The Forest Service is always telling us they have no money for suggested projects, yet they are willing to spend thousands of dollars on the Route of the Olympian. Example Taxpayer money on the Dominion Tunnel and Trestle, that we the motorized taxpayer cannot use.” (#100)

“Open the Dominion Tunnel & Trestle to motorized traffic as well.” (#100)

“I would like to see the Dominion trestle and tunnel open to ATV’s.” (#282)

“Several places throughout the EA referenced to the FS1994 decision notice designating the Dominion Tunnel and Trestle as a non-motorized segment. I question why a 0.3 mile section in the middle of the railroad grade was closed to all forms of traffic except non-motorized which interrupts what could have been a continuous road for all travel.” (#283)
"As a member of the collaborative group that came up with the proposed action, it was NOT agreed that the Dominion Tunnel and Trestle be non-motorized year-round." (#299)

"I would like to see an additional alternative or amended alternative presented that states the Dominion tunnel/trestle be open during the shoulder seasons for motorized use and snowmobile use during the winter season pending additional funding to bring the trestle up to motorized engineering specifications." (#299)

**Forest Service Response:** In response to public comment, the Selected Action was modified to authorize motorized use through the Dominion tunnel during the spring and fall seasons. However, the tunnel will continue to be closed to snowmobile use in the winter because snowmobiles can damage the gravel surfacing and drainage features due to the lack of snow in the tunnel. The Dominion tunnel and trestle have never been part of the official designated snowmobile trail system.

The Dominion trestle will continue to be closed to motorized use year round because the safety features (guard rails) currently do not meet the standards for motorized use. These safety features could be upgraded in the future to accommodate motorized use, but the current priority for funding is to acquire public access for the two existing breaks in the route at Saltese and Twomile Creek, to complete the maintenance on the route (gravel surfacing), and construct the jump-up roads, Twomile bypass trail, and trailheads. In considering the overall route, the critical break in the route for motorized use is at the Saltese trestle. The Saltese trestle is privately owned and there is no simple bypass around it that does not involve other private land. If public access is acquired to remedy this break in the route, the Forest Service could consider modifying the travel management designations for the Route of the Olympian and upgrading the safety features on the Dominion trestle at some time in the future. Until such time, motorized users will still be able to travel from Taft to Saltese without the use of Dominion trestle via Northern Pacific segment 1.

**Public Meetings**

**20. Comment:** Additional public meetings should have been held in the Missoula area.

"We regret that apparently there will be no public meetings held in the Missoula area, the nearby population center that values community support for expanded recreational opportunities on public lands and that consequently, the non-motorized advocates have not been adequately represented." (#33)

"The public process regarding the Route of the Olympian should be expanded to include informational and comment sessions in Missoula because it is the nearest population center." (#271)

**Forest Service Response:** Public meetings are typically held in the communities closest to the proposed project. Public meetings were held in DeBorgia, St. Regis, and Superior. Attendees included people from Missoula and from as far away as Darby.
Interested parties can request public meetings at other locations. However, the Forest Service did not receive any requests to conduct meetings in Missoula or Missoula County.

Trail #248

21. Comment: “One area of concern for us is access to trail #248 with the proposed actions. As the trail is now, access is from the Milwaukee railroad grade. Your map shows access from Dominion Creek road, although this is unused and unusable at the present time. The alternatives presented would eliminate access to this trail thereby reducing the recreation opportunities for our user group and effectively closing the trail. If proposed actions 2, 3 or 5 are to be implemented in the final decision, we strongly recommend that access is provided for motorcycles to trail #248.” (#107)

Forest Service Response: Thank you for bringing this to our attention as the maintenance of motorized access to this trail was inadvertently overlooked during the planning phase of this project. Trail #248 is currently open to single track motorized use. The Selected Action will continue to provide motorized access to this trail by maintaining to standard the connector trail between the Dominion Creek Road and the Milwaukee railroad grade to accommodate single track motorized use. In addition, single track motorized vehicles will be allowed to cross the Milwaukee railroad grade to access Trail #248.

Storm Peak Trailhead

22. Comment: “We recommend the Storm Peak trailhead have access for motorcycles to trail #808 without seasonal restrictions.” (#107)

Forest Service Response: The Route of the Olympian project did not propose nor did the Decision Notice authorize any modifications to the existing travel management designation of the Storm Peak Trail #808. Trail #808 will continue to be open to single track motorized use from the Storm Peak trailhead.

Mineral Access

23. Comment: “The proposed Olympian road and trail closures will limit access for mineral development, prospecting for gemstones.” (#209)

Forest Service Response: The Selected Action does not limit access for mineral development or prospecting because the entire route is open to full-sized vehicles during the spring and fall seasons with some segments remaining open year round. The Selected Action will not change the existing access to or on any Forest Service roads that are located in the vicinity of the railroad grades.

1994 Decision Notice for Route of the Hiawatha

24. Comment: “Why are you still considering the Twomile Bypass? This decision was already made in the 1994 Route of the Hiawatha Notice of Decision under Alternative F.” (#299)
“In the 1994 Route of the Hiawatha Notice of Decision under Alternative F, it was decided that a bypass for snowmobiles be constructed around the Saltese Trestle. Why has this decision not been achieved?” #299

**Forest Service Response:** The commenter is correct that the 1994 Decision Notice for the Route of the Hiawatha indicated that a bypass would be constructed at Twomile Creek and around the Saltese trestle. However, the Decision Notice or Environmental Assessment did not identify a specific location for the bypass routes or an implementation plan as to how this would be accomplished. The 1994 Decision Notice also recognized that the overall project to establish the Route of the Hiawatha would be implemented in stages over time as funding was available. It must also be noted that up until 2007, the Forest Service only managed approximately 60 percent of the Milwaukee railroad grade between Taft and St. Regis. Opportunities and funding became available to acquire the majority of the outstanding parcels to provide public access along the route. The Forest Service is continuing to pursue opportunities to remedy the existing breaks in the Route of the Olympian at the Saltese trestle and Twomile Creek.

This Route of the Olympian project will construct a bypass trail at Twomile Creek to provide access between the Twomile Road and the Milwaukee railroad grade to the west for vehicles 50 inches or less in width. However, there is still no connection between the Twomile Road and the Milwaukee grade to the east. Land ownership has changed in the Twomile Creek area since 1994 and has allowed for a better location of the bypass trail authorized in the Route of the Olympian Decision Notice which did not exist nearly 20 years ago.

**Summer Trails Project**

25. **Comments:** “In 2008 I was involved in a community group formed by the Superior Ranger District called the Summer Trails project to manage motorized use. Since the introduction of the Route of the Olympian, the Summer Trails project has taken a back seat, or should I say vanished from the picture. What Happened? We still don’t have our EA.” (#100)

“If the Olympian becomes non-motorized, you may just as well throw out the Summer Trails project. All the time and money spent on this would have been wasted.” (#299)

**Forest Service Response:** Due to other Forest priorities, and funding and staffing constraints, the Summer Trails project was temporarily placed on hold. The Selected Action will have no effect on the ATV trails proposed in the Summer Trails project.
APPENDIX B

Maps of the Selected Action
See Map 7 for details
Route of the Olympian Superior Ranger District Haugan Map 6

Legend

Trail Route on County Road
Railroad Grade - Private land
Public Use Prohibited

This map was created on: 2/26/2013 10:50 AM
The AcrMap project can be found in: T:\FS\NFS\Lolo\Project\Superior\NEPARouteofOlympian\GIS\Data\ROTO\Maps1thru4.mxd
### Appendix B

**Table B-1: Gate Locations** (number in table corresponds to gate numbers on maps)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Gate Location</th>
<th>Road</th>
<th>Segment</th>
<th>Selected Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Removable bollards at the Hiawatha Trailhead</td>
<td>Milwaukee grade</td>
<td>Milwaukee 1A</td>
<td>All motor vehicle closure Saturday before Memorial Day – Labor Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gate west of Dominion Tunnel</td>
<td>Milwaukee grade</td>
<td>Milwaukee 1A</td>
<td>Winter closure of the tunnel to motorized use (i.e. snowmobiles) to protect the road surface</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gate west of Dominion Trestle</td>
<td>Milwaukee grade</td>
<td>Milwaukee 1A</td>
<td>Yearlong closure to all motorized use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Gate east of Dominion Trestle</td>
<td>Milwaukee grade</td>
<td>Milwaukee 1B</td>
<td>Yearlong closure to all motorized use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dominion Jump-up road</td>
<td>Dominion Jump-up road</td>
<td>Milwaukee 1B</td>
<td>All motor vehicle closure Saturday before Memorial Day – Labor Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Milwaukee grade near Saltese Jump-up road</td>
<td>Milwaukee grade</td>
<td>Milwaukee 1B</td>
<td>All motor vehicle closure Saturday before Memorial Day – Labor Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Gate on Saltese Jump-up Road</td>
<td>Milwaukee grade</td>
<td>Milwaukee 2</td>
<td>Full-sized motor vehicle closure 6/1 - 8/31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Gate west of Haugan</td>
<td>Milwaukee grade</td>
<td>Milwaukee 2</td>
<td>Full-sized motor vehicle closure 6/1 - 8/31 to the west</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Gate east of DeBorgia</td>
<td>Milwaukee grade</td>
<td>Milwaukee 4</td>
<td>Full-sized motor vehicle closure 6/1 - 8/31 to the east</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Gate west of Ward Creek</td>
<td>Milwaukee grade</td>
<td>Milwaukee 4</td>
<td>Full-sized motor vehicle closure 6/1 - 8/31</td>
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<td>Gate east of Ward Creek</td>
<td>Milwaukee grade</td>
<td>Milwaukee 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Gate east of Twomile</td>
<td>Milwaukee grade</td>
<td>Milwaukee 4</td>
<td>Full-sized motor vehicle closure 6/1 - 8/31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Gate at Little Joe road (#282)</td>
<td>Milwaukee grade</td>
<td>Milwaukee 4</td>
<td>Full-sized motor vehicle closure 6/1 - 8/31</td>
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