

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

Twin Falls District
Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve
400 West F Street
Shoshone, ID 83352

**DECISION RECORD
for the
Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve Comprehensive Travel
Management Plan
NEPA No. ID-230-2007-EA-332**

I. Decision

I have decided to select the Proposed Action for implementation. Based on my review of the EA and project record, I have concluded that the proposed action was studied in sufficient detail to allow me to make an informed decision about this project.

I have selected this alternative because it effectively provides a Travel Management Plan which satisfies the purposes for which the Monument was established, the intent and direction established in the Monument Management Plan (MMP), and provides a travel network capable of accommodating the transport of people and equipment in a way that is appropriate for the Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve, while protecting the objects of interest present in the Monument.

This decision applies only to lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

My decision will allow for the implementation of the Proposed Action which will fulfill the Agencies obligation to complete a Comprehensive Travel Management Plan for the Monument. My decision includes:

Travel Plan Route Closures

Routes that Lead to a Pristine Zone Closure

All or portions of route segments 828 and 12216 (~2 miles) will be closed because these routes lead into MMP Pristine Zone allocations. These routes will be closed to the nearest intersection outside the Pristine Zone, rather than abruptly closing the route at the boundary of the Pristine Zone.

Routes that are Redundant, Unused, or Unneeded

All or portions of route segments 772, 773, 774, 777, 779, 780, 781, 793, 802, 803, 819,

854, 860, 872, 874, 3411, 3416, 3424, 3436, 12208, 12209, 12210, 12212, 12217, 12219, 12220, 12223, 12234, and 12243 (~56 miles) will be closed because they are redundant, unused, or unneeded. Redundant means at least one other available route exists to the same destination or serves the same purpose. Unused means no justifiable purpose for the route was identified during scoping or planning, and the route shows signs of vegetative recovery or is now invisible due to overgrowth or was obliterated during fire rehabilitation work. Unneeded routes were identified as having no justifiable useful purpose.

Limit Access for Resource Protection, Retain Access for Facilities Maintenance and Resource Management

All or portions of route segments 772, 775, 785, 12224, 12225, 12226, 12227, and 12233 (~19 miles) are designated for administrative access only because the routes were identified as located in, or leading to sensitive resources, or are exclusively used for administrative purposes. They will be closed to all motorized or mechanized use except authorized administrative access.

Routes Identified for Seasonal/Temporal Closures

Sage-Grouse Seasonal Closures

All or portions of route segments 714, 732, 740, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 788, 790, 791, 810, 841, 849, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 873, 874, 875, 876, 877, 878, 3206, 3218, 3228, 3229, 3231, 3232, 3405, 3407, 3408, 3409, 3410, 3412, 3413, 3414, 3419, 3426, 3427, 3428, 3429, 3430, 3433, 3438, 3439, 12211, 12213, 12241, and 12242 (~167 miles) will be closed to motorized or mechanized use as depicted on Map 2 of the EA from March 15 to May 1 from 6 pm to 9 am for all but authorized administrative use to protect sage-grouse. Based on current Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) lek data, active leks will be buffered and closures will be applied to routes or areas within 0.6 mile of an active lek. In some cases management discretion was used to extend closures to logical intersections or to large areas of affected routes. As lekking data changes through annual monitoring, this list of seasonal route and area closures will be updated and applied to active sage-grouse leks identified annually by the IDFG.

Active Sage-grouse Lek Area Occupancy Restrictions

In areas within 0.6 miles of active sage-grouse leks from March 15 to May 1 between the hours of 6 pm to 9 am, motorized use and trailing of livestock on designated Roads and Primitive Roads will be authorized for the administration of permitted livestock operations.

While normal grazing within these areas will be allowed, based on the most current IDFG data, areas within 0.6 miles of identified active leks will be closed to bedding of sheep from March 15 to May 1 from 6 pm to 9 am. Based on the most current IDFG data, areas within 0.6 miles of identified active leks will be closed to trailing of livestock off of designated Roads and Primitive Roads from March 15 to May 1 from 6 pm to 9 am. Trailing of permitted livestock is allowed on designated Roads and Primitive Roads. The active lek

areas will be signed by agency staff, and a map provided to permittees each year before the start of the grazing season.

Prior to the grazing season, BLM will work with livestock permittees to identify appropriate bed grounds in areas of high sage-grouse lek concentrations.

When unplanned-for circumstances prohibit livestock movement beyond the no occupancy areas, permittees must notify BLM immediately to identify appropriate areas to allow bedding or passage.

Big Game Winter Habitat Seasonal Closure

BLM and IDFG have identified areas within the Monument as Big Game Winter Habitat. Due to the low amount of motorized or mechanized use in the area, there is not an immediate need to implement seasonal big game winter restrictions to motorized or mechanized use in any areas of the Monument at this time. Seasonal closure of routes to the general public will apply in identified Big Game Winter Habitat areas from January 1-March 31, if and when IDFG, BLM and NPS identify a threat, through research, field observation or identified issues or conflicts, to wintering big game resulting from increased motorized or mechanized use.

This seasonal closure will not apply to livestock permittees or other authorized administrative motorized use. Seasonal route and area closures will change on an ongoing basis to reflect changes in Big Game Winter Habitat areas. All closures will be identified in advance through public notification in news media, and informational signage at entrances and within the Monument. The Travel Map will also be updated to identify these changes when they occur.

Upgrades

Fire Roads

All or portions of route segment 792 (~3 miles) will be upgraded between the Craters of the Moon Lava Field and Bear Trap Cave to aid wildfire suppression as a fuel break, and as an important location to stage indirect firefighting tactics. This is intended to prevent frequent wildfire from crossing the “gap” area between the unburnable lava, and provides an opportunity to stop these wildfires before they have a chance to spread into areas on either side of the route.

Improved Access for Visitors, Resource Management, and Fire Suppression

All or portions of route segments 3217, and 3414 (~18 miles) will be upgraded to a Road in order to facilitate travel for the purposes of fire suppression, visitor use and resource management.

Parking Areas

Hardened parking areas for motorized vehicles will be developed in three locations to prevent wildfire starts from hot exhaust systems and to reduce impacts to vegetation related to parking vehicles near popular features in the expanded Monument. According to the BLM’s Recreation Management Information System (RMIS) data visitor use is currently

low, 3326 visits estimated in 2008, in the expanded portion of the Monument. Because of this, the identified parking areas will initially be limited to approximately 1000 square feet in size, and designed to accommodate approximately five passenger vehicles or light trucks. The areas will be delineated with barriers (such as basalt boulders) and graveled to provide a stable surface and prevent erosion.

Parking areas will be monitored for non-native invasive plants and noxious weed infestations and treated as needed.

Parking areas will be developed at the following locations:

- Junction of route segment 873 and 876, on the northeast corner of the intersection near Pissant Butte feature.
- Junction of route segment number 32184 and unnamed E-W route segment, at the intersection of South Park Well.
- Junction of route segment 793 and 740, adjacent to Bear Trap Cave.

“Toolbox” for Route Closures

See pages 11-13 of the EA for a description of how closed routes will be rehabilitated in order to remove them from the landscape.

Snowmobiles

Snowmobiles and over-the-snow motorized or mechanized vehicles are restricted to designated routes, except for authorized administrative use. No over-the-snow routes are designated on NPS lands.

Monitoring

Because visitor use is low on the expanded portion of the Monument, specific data is lacking and current and emerging trends are not well understood. However, **RMIS** data estimated 3326 recreational visits and 4178 visitor use days in 2008, and the amount of recreation use in the expanded Monument appears to be steady. Visitor use data related to travel and transportation within the Monument would be collected through the use of vehicle counters and other methods to identify a more accurate picture of how the Monument is being used, and what visitor use trends exist or are emerging.

Currently there is only one existing lek route monitored by Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) to track active sage-grouse leks within the Monument, located in the North Laidlaw Park area. At least two new routes or other similar methods of monitoring active sage-grouse leks would be created in the southern and eastern portions of the Monument. One would be established near the Bear Trap Cave area in the southern portion of the Monument, and another in the south part of Laidlaw Park leading to the eastern boundary.

Data related to Big Game Winter Habitat would be obtained from IDFG on an ongoing basis and, in combination with BLM and NPS’s best available data, used to identify areas

where wintering wildlife may experience changing levels of motorized or mechanized vehicle disturbance. If monitoring identifies a conflict, the Agencies in cooperation with IDFG, will consider implementing Big Game Winter Wildlife Habitat closures as analyzed in this Travel Plan.

Permittees and other regular users of the expanded Monument transportation system would be asked to support data collection through various means, including visitor use reports, wildlife observation logs, authorized administrative use logs, and other methods.

Authorized Administrative Access

For the purpose of this Travel Management Plan the term “Administrative Access” is defined as motorized or mechanized special access and considerations not extended to the general public. The Agencies recognize there are periodic needs for cross-country motorized or mechanized access. To the extent possible, cross-country travel will be minimal and utilized only when necessary.

Decisions to authorize administrative motorized or mechanized cross country access will be made on a case-by-case basis. The BLM Monument Manager or NPS Superintendent, or delegate thereof, will consider the resource values involved, potential effects of the activity, and appropriate/reasonable mitigation measures to be applied before rendering a decision. In most cases, prior written approval will be required to authorize motorized or mechanized cross country administrative access. Determinations of authorized access for motorized or mechanized cross country travel related to the administration of livestock activities, where practical, will be made in advance of the grazing season. Emergency response requires no prior authorization. The NPS will authorize administrative access on NPS managed lands, and BLM will authorize administrative access on BLM managed lands.

Livestock permittees will be granted motorized and mechanized administrative access to conduct normal day to day operations, consistent with current practices. However, to the extent possible, motorized or mechanized cross-country travel will be minimal and utilized only when necessary.

Administrative access needs of an urgent non-emergency nature, as determined by the authorized official, may be granted verbally prior to need, to be followed up with written documentation. Authorized administrative access by law enforcement entities, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, as well as the agencies, will be determined prior to granting access.

II. Other Alternatives Considered

The EA (p.19) describes the No Action alternative that was considered in detail. The No Action alternative was not selected because Proclamation 7373, which expanded the Monument, required that a transportation (i.e. travel) plan be prepared that addresses the actions, including road closures or travel restrictions, necessary to protect the objects identified in Proclamation 7373. The Record of Decision for the Monument Management

Plan (MMP), and the MMP itself identified the travel plan to be completed as the first and highest priority implementation-level plan.

Another alternative, the “All Primitive Roads Closed Alternative” was considered, but eliminated from detailed study. Because the MMP calls for continued administrative access, self-directed motorized experiences, and access for wildfire and livestock operations, and because many of the Primitive Roads within the Monument serve these purposes this alternative was eliminated from detailed study.

III. PUBLIC INVOLVMENT

This project has been listed on the Idaho NEPA Database since September 1, 2007. Scoping was initiated for the Travel Plan in October 2007 with the mailing of a newsletter to the interested public mailing list identified through development of the MMP.

In response to scoping efforts hundreds of public comments were received and combined into a “scoping summary” database that identified 55 separate substantive comments. All of the scoping comments were considered using an Interdisciplinary team approach which considered the goals of the Agencies alongside recommendations derived from public comment.

A 30-day public comment period was offered ending September 18, 2009, following the release of the Proposed Action and Draft EA. During this time, approximately 100 responses were received from the public.

The Agencies received a broad spectrum of comment during this period ranging from “leave everything as it is” to “close every non-essential road in the Monument.”

Public comments received during the 30-day comment period were reviewed and considered by the Interdisciplinary team. Some changes were made to the EA in light of these comments. The changes that were made and a summary of public comments are as follows:

Public comment was received requesting the conversion of routes 3417, 785, and 768 from “administrative use only” to designated open to motorized travel. Also, comment was received recommending keeping these routes under “administrative use only”. After further review, route 3417 was removed from “administrative use only” and designated “open” to motorized vehicles because the resources in that area were determined not to be sensitive to motorized travel. In consideration of route 785, deference was given to the sensitive resources in the area, and the route was left as “administrative use only”. Route 768 was identified as a Type 1 trail in the Monument Management Plan and while it was removed from “administrative use only” status in this Travel Plan, it cannot be converted to a motorized Type 2 Trail without an MMP amendment.

Public comment suggested that the term “concentrated livestock” was vague and subject to broad interpretation. The term was removed and the intention of that section was clarified

to identify livestock trailing and sheep bedding specifically.

Public comment suggested that the “no occupancy” restrictions could lead to unavoidable livestock jams in narrow vegetated areas of the Monument, which would in turn leave livestock permittees with no choice but to bed down in a restricted area. Language was added stating, “Where overlapping lek buffers create bottlenecks or impractical impediments to normal livestock trailing, permittees will work with the Agencies to identify appropriate areas to allow bedding or passage.”

Public comment suggested route 817 near Bear Park, and route 825 near the west side of the Wapi flow was needed for motorized recreation. These routes were changed to an “open” to motorized travel designation.

Public comment suggested routes 817 and 797 were overlooked in scoping as necessary for livestock permittee operations and motorized recreation use. These routes were changed to an “open” to motorized travel designation because they were previously identified as unused, unneeded, or redundant.

Public comment suggested that the use of the term “best available data” was too vague to apply to annual updates to seasonal sage-grouse route closures. Language was changed to clarify that the data identifying “active sage-grouse leks” used to update these route closures would come from IDFG.

A comment suggested we impose seasonal Big Game Winter Wildlife Closures proactively, or identify trigger points that would cause these closures to go into effect automatically. Without specific triggers identified, the potential to close these areas remains, but no areas were identified for closure now. The following language was added, “If monitoring identifies a conflict, the Agencies in cooperation with IDFG, will consider implementing Big Game Winter Wildlife Habitat closures as analyzed in this Travel Plan.”

Public comment suggested that the seasonal sage-grouse restrictions for motorized and mechanized travel should be extended through the entire 24 hour day, rather than from 6pm to 9am. Because the “Conservation Plan for Greater Sage-grouse in Idaho” recommended the 6pm-9am closure, no change was made.

Public comment suggested the EA include a provision to close the area to motorized travel during periods of high fire danger. Because the Agencies already have this authority outside of the Travel Plan (43 CFR 9212.2, *Fire Prevention Orders*), no change was made.

Public comment suggested that non-motorized recreation opportunities were not adequately addressed. The EA notes that cross-country travel by horse or on foot is not restricted or affected by this plan. Also, during scoping and the 30-day public comment period, few comments were received recommending development of non-motorized trails. It was decided that the current non-motorized trail system was adequate.

Public comment suggested that route 3416 was needed to provide motorized access to a section of state land. A portion of route 3416 was changed to open to motorized and mechanized use.

Public comment suggested that snowmobile use should be allowed cross-country during times when the snow depth was 30 inches or greater. Because Proclamation 7373 and the MMP closed the Monument to cross-country motorized and mechanized travel, no change was made.

Public comment suggested the 30-day public comment period should be extended. Because it was determined that the 30-day public comment period was sufficient, no extension was granted.

Public comment suggested that nothing in the EA indicated that equestrian and foot travel would be limited to designated routes. The EA states that equestrian and foot travel is not restricted by this EA (p. 5). Therefore, equestrian and foot travel is not restricted to designated routes.

Public comment suggested route 12225 should be removed from “administrative use only” and opened to motorized and mechanized use. Because this route does not connect with any other routes that are open to motorized and mechanized use without passing through “administrative use only” routes, no change was made.

Public comment suggested that route 802 be reopened to motorized and mechanized use because it connects to a number of other routes. Because numerous other routes in the area provide access to these routes, no change was made.

VI. APPEALS

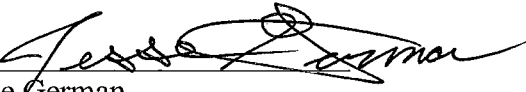
This decision may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA), Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR Part 4. Any appeal must be filed within 30 days of this decision. Any notice of appeal must be filed with the Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve Monument Manager, 400 West F Street, Shoshone, ID, 83352. The appellant shall serve a copy of the notice of appeal and any statement of reasons, written arguments, or briefs on each adverse party named in the decision, not later than 15 days after filing such document (see 43 CFR 4.413(a)). Failure to serve within the time required will subject the appeal to summary dismissal (see 43 CFR 4.413(b)). If a statement of reasons for the appeal is not included with the notice, it must be filed with the IBLA, Office of Hearings and Appeals, U. S. Department of the Interior, 801 North Quincy St., Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22203 within 30 days after the notice of appeal is filed with the Monument Manager.

Notwithstanding the provisions of 43 CFR 4.21(a)(1), filing a notice of appeal under 43 CFR Part 4 does not automatically suspend the effect of the decision. If you wish to file a petition for a stay of the effectiveness of this decision during the time that your appeal is being reviewed by the Board, the petition for a stay must accompany your notice of appeal.

A petition for a stay is required to show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

- (1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied;
- (2) The likelihood of the appellant's success on the merits;
- (3) The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted; and
- (4) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

In the event a request for stay or an appeal is filed, the person/party requesting the stay or filing the appeal must serve a copy of the appeal on the Office of the Field Solicitor, 960 Broadway Ave., Suite 400, Boise ID, 83706.



Jesse German
Monument Manager (Acting)



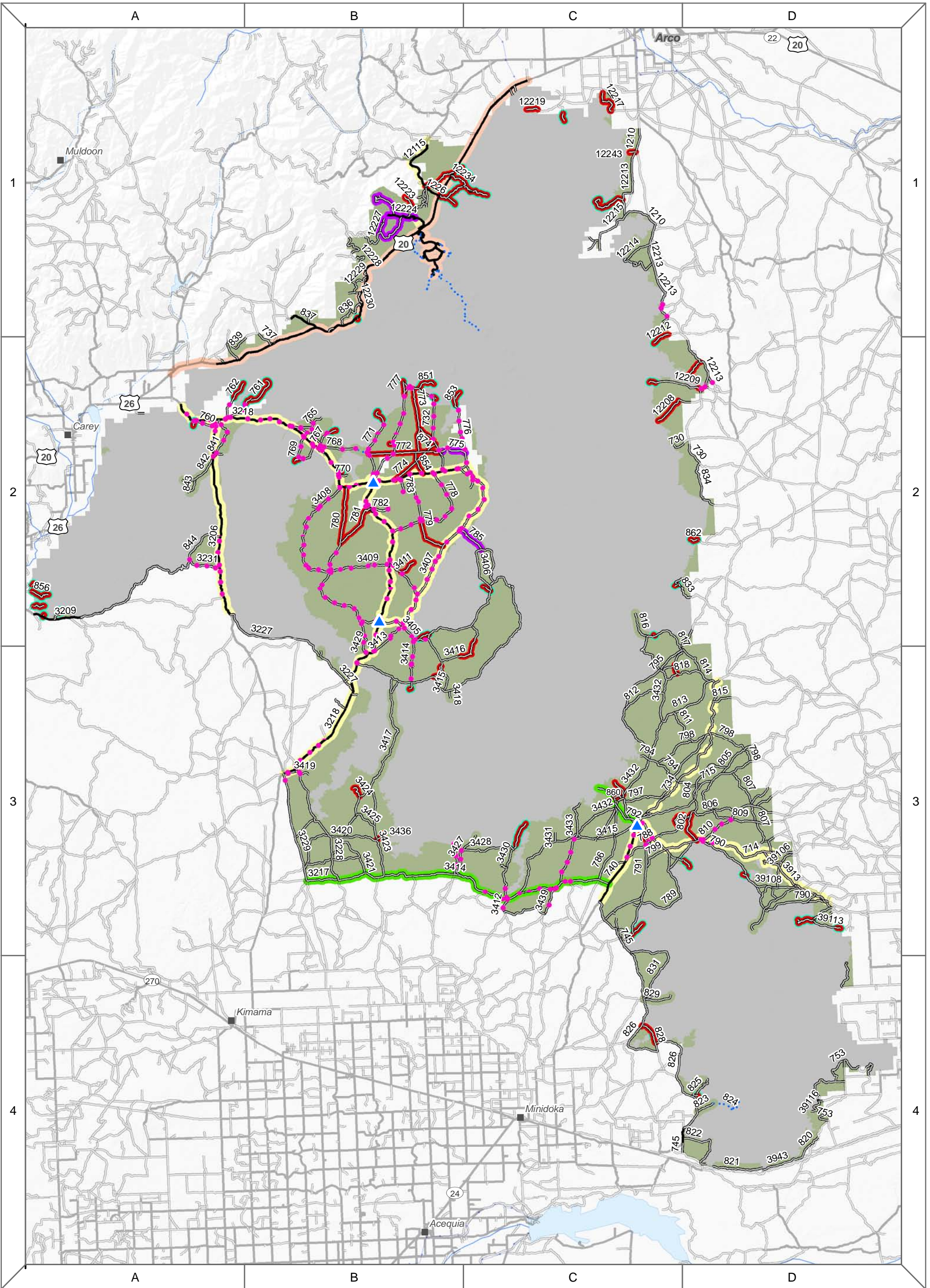
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PROPOSED ACTION



	Primitive Road		Upgrade		MMP Closure - Pristine Zone		Frontcountry Zone		Primitive Zone
	Road		Closed		Sage-grouse Spring Closures (Closed March 15 - May 1, from 6pm to 9am)		Passage Zone		Pristine Zone
	Trail		Admin Use Only						
	Parking Areas								

(Management Zone corridors have been oversized for graphic representation at this scale.)



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