CHAPTER 5
CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the public participation opportunities made available through the development of the Draft RMP/EIS. This chapter also describes consultation and collaboration efforts conducted by BLM with various entities. A distribution list identifies agencies, congressional staff, businesses, and organizations that were sent a copy of the Draft RMP/EIS.

The Draft RMP/EIS was prepared by an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists from the Butte Field Office, Montana State Office, and Maxim Technologies (RMP contractor).

Members of the planning team have consulted formally and informally with various agencies, local government representatives, groups, and individuals during the preparation of this document. Consultation, coordination, and public involvement occurred as a result of scoping, briefings, informal meetings, and individual contacts.

SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PRIOR TO THE DRAFT RMP/EIS

A number of opportunities were available to the public to educate themselves about the planning process and participate in development of the plan prior to release of the Draft RMP/EIS for public review and comment.

A press release with regional distribution was issued at each major stage of the planning process including scoping, travel management planning, and issuance of the Proposed Planning Scenario. In addition, three planning updates were mailed to the general mailing list to announce the start of the planning process, again to announce the start of the travel planning effort, and again to describe preliminary draft alternatives and request Draft RMP/EIS document preference.

The web site www.mt.blm.gov/bdo/rmp/index.htm provided information on the resource and travel planning processes.

The Western Montana Resource Advisory Council, a 15 member advisory group appointed by the Secretary of Interior, was briefed at a number of their meetings on the status of the Butte RMP/EIS and given the opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback. The council's role is to provide advice to BLM on a variety of issues associated with public land management.

TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLANNING

Five public meetings were held over a two-week period during November and December 2004 on travel planning. Separate meetings were held specific to five Travel Planning Areas: Upper Big Hole, Boulder/Jefferson City, East Helena (North Hills), Helena (Scratchgravel Hills), and Lewis and Clark NW (Marysville). The overall goals of the meetings were to identify public travel planning issues and concerns for BLM lands, and to identify possible solutions to issues and concerns. Public attendance at these meetings is presented below:

- Upper Big Hole – 4 attendees;
- Boulder/Jefferson City – 7 attendees;
- East Helena (North Hills) – 24 attendees;
- Helena (Scratchgravel Hills) – 101 attendees; and
- Lewis and Clark NW (Marysville) – 16 attendees.

COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

A variety of public involvement strategies have been implemented throughout this planning process to improve communication and develop understanding of the issues and the process in development of the RMP/EIS. In addition to the scoping efforts and public meetings described in Chapter 1, various potential cooperators including Tribes, the Governor's Office, state and federal agencies, and local governments within the Planning Area were solicited to become cooperators in summer 2002. No agencies or governments signed on as cooperators for the development of this plan.

TRAVEL MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUPS

In an effort to help BLM develop site-specific travel management alternatives agreeable to the public as well as the agency, community based collaborative working groups were initiated. Two working groups, representing a wide, "balanced" range of public land users, were recruited and managed under the direct supervision and guidance of the Lewis and Clark County Board of Commissioners. One of the groups was assigned to assist with travel planning for the Helena (Scratchgravel Hills) and East Helena (North Hills) TPAs, and the other for the Lewis and Clark County NW (Marysville) TPA. Membership criteria included: Montana residency, familiarity with the TPAs, and a willingness to work collaboratively with people of differing viewpoints. In order to provide for balanced representation, members were selected from three different interest categories (in accordance with the Western Montana Resource Advisory Council criteria), as described below.

Category 1:
Hold federal grazing permits or leases within the Travel Planning Area;

Represent interests associated with transportation or rights-of-way;

Represent developed outdoor recreation, OHV users, or commercial recreation activities;

Represent the commercial timber industry; or

Represent energy or mineral development.

Category 2:
Nationally or regionally recognized environmental organization;

Dispersed recreational activities;

Archaeological and historical interests; or

Nationally or regionally recognized wild horse and burro interest groups.

Category 3:
Hold state, county, or local elected office;

Are employed by a state agency responsible for the management of natural resources, land, and water;

Represent Indian tribes within or adjacent to the Travel Planning Area;

Are employed as academicians in natural resource management or the natural sciences; or

Represent the public-at-large.

The Working Groups consisted of eight or nine members, representing each of the three interest categories. These individuals included:

Helena-East Helena Working Group

- Cleve Johnson (Category 1)
- R. Allan Payne (Category 1)
- Randy Piearson (Category 1)
- Andy Baur (Category 2)
- Cedron Jones (Category 2)
- Connie Cole (Category 2)
- Rich Moy (Category 3)
- Bonnie Morgan (Category 3)
- Marilyn Pearson (Category 3)

Lewis and Clark County NW Working Group

- Mike Clark (Category 1)
- Eric LeLacheur (Category 1)
- Rudy Strobbe (Category 2)
- Ken Wallace (Category 2)
- Shaheen Siddiqui (Category 2)
- George Marble (Category 3)
- George Bower (Category 3)
- Michael McHugh (Category 3)

Each group held a series of five or six meetings during June and July 2005. The meetings were attended by at least one BLM representative available to answer questions, provide information and feedback from the BLM's interdisciplinary team, and provide written materials and maps as needed. Group recommendations for route-specific management were based on consensus. In the end, the working groups were able to arrive at complete consensus for the Marysville (subset of Lewis and Clark County NW TPA) and North Hills (subset of East Helena TPA) areas, but only partial consensus for the Scratchgravel Hills (subset of Helena TPA) area.

The Working Groups presented their findings to the Lewis and Clark County Commissioners at their regularly scheduled meeting in Helena on September 22, 2005. The Lewis and Clark Commissioners forwarded Working Group recommendations to the BLM soon afterward. BLM incorporated working group recommendations into Alternative B for each of these three Travel Planning Areas.

RELEASE OF THE DRAFT RMP/EIS

The Draft RMP/EIS was mailed to the public in late May/early June 2007. The Notice of Availability was published in the Federal Register by the Environmental Protection Agency on June 8, 2007, beginning the official 90-day comment period. BLM published a concurrent Notice of Availability containing supplemental information. Written comments on the Draft RMP/EIS were initially slated to be due September 6, 2007. The BLM extended this public comment period to October 9, 2007.

In addition to printed copies or CDs mailed to people who requested them, the Draft RMP/EIS was available for review on the Butte RMP website. Approximately 360 printed copies and 130 CDs were distributed.

Over the period of June 26, 2007, to July 16, 2007, the BLM conducted briefings on key RMP contents for each of the eight county commissions in the Planning Area.

The BLM conducted six open house-style public meetings in the Planning Area in July 2007. Dates, locations, and times of public meetings were publicized through multiple press releases to local and regional press. This information was posted on the Butte RMP website as well.

The public meetings were designed to provide information to the public on the content of the Draft RMP/EIS as well as to provide information on how best to provide substantive comments on the document. Each meeting began with an introductory presentation covering key contents of the Draft RMP/EIS, contact information, and

suggestions on how to comment on the plan. Public members were then encouraged to visit with managers and members of the BLM planning team for the Draft RMP/EIS to discuss any specific questions or concerns. At each open house the public was strongly encouraged to provide any input on the Draft RMP/EIS to the BLM in writing during the comment period.

Open House Locations, Dates, and Public Attendance

Helena, Montana	July 17, 2007	12 attendees
Townsend, Montana	July 18, 2007	5 attendees
Butte, Montana	July 19, 2007	12 attendees
Boulder, Montana	July 23, 2007	5 attendees
Divide, Montana	July 24, 2007	11 attendees
Bozeman, Montana	July 25, 2007	5 attendees

FORMAL CONSULTATION

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE CONSULTATION

Federal agencies are required to comply with provisions of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. This includes a requirement to "consult" with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on any action that may affect species listed as threatened and endangered or result in destruction or adverse modification of habitat designated as critical for listed species. In addition, federal agencies must "confer" with USFWS on any action that is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any species proposed to be listed or any action that may result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat proposed to be designated for listed species.

This RMP/EIS is considered to be a major project and this document describes potential impacts to threatened and endangered species as a result of management actions proposed in the RMP. Contacts were made with the USFWS early in the RMP process, and a representative of the USFWS was on the planning team during development of the plan to adequately address and discuss the effects of management actions on listed and proposed species and their critical habitats. The USFWS also provided guidance to the BLM regarding compliance with Executive Order 13186 for the conservation of migratory birds.

Early drafts of alternative provisions were provided to USFWS staff for discussion and review. An initial list of federally listed threatened or endangered plant, animal, or fish species or habitats present in the Butte Field Office Planning Area was requested on March 23, 2006, with an update received March 29, 2006. Four federally listed threatened wildlife species and one threatened plant species potentially occur, or potential habitat is available in the Planning Area. These include: grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilus*), gray wolf (*Canis lupis*), Canada lynx (*Lynx Canadensis*), bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), and Ute ladies' tresses *(Spiranthes diluvialis).*

A biological assessment that evaluates the impacts of the preferred alternative on federal threatened and endangered species was submitted concurrently with public release of the Draft RMP/EIS to the USFWS. The Proposed RMP/Final EIS (**Appendix G** – Wildlife) includes the USFWS biological opinion, received on January 22, 2008.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE CONSULTATION

The BLM cultural resource management program operates in accordance with 36 CFR Part 800, and through the Montana State Protocol, which provide specific procedures for consultation between the BLM and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to meet BLM responsibilities under the National Historic Preservation Act. The SHPO was consulted during the development of the Draft RMP/EIS concerning cultural resources that may be affected by being included on the RMP mailing list throughout scoping and public involvement. The Proposed Planning Scenario and solicitation for feedback were also sent to SHPO in June 2005. Formal comments on the Draft RMP/EIS were received in August, 2007 and are addressed in the Comment and Response section of this chapter.

TRIBAL CONSULTATION

In accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act as well as in recognition of the government-to-government relationship between tribes and the federal government, the Butte Field Office has included the business and preservation offices of 11 tribal governments in the development of the EIS. Letters were sent to the Blackfeet, Shoshone, Salish and Kootenai, and Shoshone-Bannock tribal governments and officials on August 13, 2002 to invite them to be cooperating agencies on the Butte RMP. The letters also requested their input on issues and concerns to be considered during the planning process and initiate efforts to identify areas of traditional cultural concern.

In December 2004 BLM invited the following tribes to an agency update briefing on the Butte RMP that was held in Helena on February 15, 2005: Tribal Council of the Confederated Tribes of the Flathead Reservation, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes Business Council, Shoshone Business Council, and the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council.

BLM solicited feedback when the Proposed Planning Scenario was sent to the following tribal governments in June 2005: Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, Blackfeet Tribal Business Council, Chippewa Cree Business Committee, Tribal Council of the Confederated Salish-Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation, Crow Tribal Council, Fort Peck Tribal Executive Board, Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes Business Council, and the Nez Perce Tribes.

Feedback was further solicited in additional mailings of the Proposed Planning Scenario in Spring 2006 to the Tribal Historic Preservation Offices of these tribes: Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, Chippewa Cree Business Committee, Tribal Council of the confederated Salish-Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation, Fort Belknap Community Council, Fort Peck Tribal Executive Board, Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council, Shoshone Business Council, Arapaho Business Council, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes Business Council, Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee, and Blackfeet Tribal Business Council.

Various levels of interest have been expressed by different tribal offices. Informal coordination as well as two meetings with the Preservation Office and resource specialists have been conducted with the Ft. Hall Shoshone-Bannock Tribes. Informal coordination, Business Council and two Preservation Office meetings have been held with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation. One meeting with the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer and one Business Council meeting was held with the Blackfeet Tribes.

INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS

BLM has conducted less formal coordination and consultation with various entities throughout the development of the Draft RMP/EIS. As directed by the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act and the Clean Water Act, BLM has included the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, and Natural Resource Conservation Service in scoping activities, including the scoping of the Proposed Planning Scenario in June 2005.

Livestock grazing permittees and lessees have been included in public scoping efforts and mailings. Interested permittees were included in the scoping of the Proposed Planning Scenario in June 1005.

PUBLIC COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT RMP/EIS

A total of 172 separate submissions of comments on the Draft RMP/EIS were received during the comment period. Approximately 20 submissions were duplicated through multiple media (fax, email, and U.S. mail). Unique submissions included 68 letters (including BLM-provided comment forms), 76 emails, and 8 faxes. Several additional verbal comments on site-specific travel plan alternatives were also received at public meetings.

ADDRESSING PUBLIC COMMENTS

Upon receipt by the BLM, each comment submission was assigned an identification number and logged into a tracking database. Specific comments from each submission were also entered into a database and coded to appropriate categories based on content of the comment, retaining the link to the original commentor. Comments similar to each other were combined and summarized, and have been responded to once in the Comment and Response section below. Commenters can reference their name (listed alphabetically by last name, or by the name of the organization or government entity represented) to identify the sections that contain responses to their identified concerns. When several submissions identified the same concern, the concern was summarized and may not necessarily appear in this document with wording identical to the commentors' language.

All comments were reviewed and considered, however comments were not counted as "votes". Comments that presented new data or addressed the adequacy of the document, the alternatives, or the analysis are responded to in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. Changes were made to the Preferred Alternative (Alternative B) presented in the Draft RMP/EIS as a result of comments. Major changes or additions in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS are shaded in light gray, and reflect consideration given to public comment, corrections and rewording for clarification. A list of major changes to the document can be found in Chapter 1 of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

Many comments received through the process expressed personal opinions or preferences, had little relevance to the adequacy or accuracy of the Draft RMP/EIS, or represented commentary regarding resource management without real connection to the document being reviewed. These comments did not provide specific information to assist the planning team in making a change to the Preferred Alternative, did not suggest rationale for other alternatives, did not take issue with methods used in the Draft RMP/EIS, and are not addressed further in this document. Examples of these comments include:

- *BLM lands are not just dirt. BLM lands are acreage with resources other than oil, gas, coal, timber. Soils, aquifers, plant communities, and wildlife are resources too. So is silence. Please pay a little more attention to the unpermitted part of your resource management. A place to start is with management plans with extensive biological research as a foundation.*
- *MWF believes the BLM can most responsibly manage the public lands in its charge if it elevates the most protective aspects within the RMP/EIS, hereafter referred to as the Butte RMP, for hunting, fishing, and access to our public lands; the economic importance of outdoor recreation activities that include hunting and fishing to the state of Montana has surpassed agriculture, mining, timber and other extractive activities as per the Montana Department of Commerce.*

- *The needs of all the people are best met by management of public lands and programs for multiple-uses. Motorized roads and trails are a significant source of recreation for all of the public. The public expects decision-makers to adequately protect the existing standards of living and opportunities (human environment) in their decisions. NEPA did not intend for citizens who do not comment on NEPA actions to give up their standard of living to those that do. We ask that public comments not be used as a voting process and that the needs of all citizens be fairly addressed in the document and decision-making.*
- *The Elkhorn Mountains should not be a proposed ACEC site nor a wilderness site or any such thing. Now if the goal of BLM is to work with the FS to eliminate all opportunity to explore and mine in this area, an ACEC process is a great way to go. But if you go this way, then you are discriminating against one segment of taxpaying citizens in favor of other mostly non-taxpaying citizens.*
- *We support the designation of all five potential Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs, Sleeping Giant, Elkhorn Mountains, Spokane Creek, Ringing Rocks, Humbug Spires, page 66), including the expanded all BLM lands in the Elkhorn Mountains for a total ACEC acreage of 87,893 acres, to apply special management to protect such areas from damage or degradation.*
- *I support the BLM's recommendation to designate 3.1 miles of the Missouri River as a Wild and Scenic River.*
- *It is my opinion, given my history of riding and recreating, that ANY closure of existing used trails is unacceptable.*
- *Of all your Travel Plan alternatives it is obvious that the best and most logical choice is Alternative C. Please choose, implement, and enforce Alternative C for all the Travel Plan areas.*
- *Unfortunately rules often times go to the lowest common denominator, i.e. the guy doing the most irrational things. Agencies are encouraged to keep rules as simple as possible and focused on addressing problems that are common and not the exceptions. Motorized recreationists can be called upon to help address the exceptions.*
- *In your Preferred Alternative B and also Alternatives C and D, I feel you are closing and decommissioning way too many roads for no apparent reason, as far as I can see. I feel both BLM and Forest Service should be opening back up roads already closed, especially for game retrieval.*
- *I am writing to advocate Alternative C for the travel plan for the Scratchgravel Hills Draft Resource Management Plan.*
- *Always preserve biological, cultural, scenic and wilderness resources.*

COMMENT CATEGORIES AND COMMENTER NAMES

Two lists are provided on the following pages. The first list is an index of codes assigned to the 38 subject categories within which comments were received. The second list alphabetically lists the agencies, organizations, and persons who submitted comments on the Draft RMP/EIS and the codes associated with their comments. Commenters can find their name (or the name of the agency or organization they represented) and the corresponding comment codes, and look up responses to see how their concerns have been addressed.

INDEX OF COMMENT CODES

Subject	*Comment Codes*	*Page Number*
Air Quality, Climate	A1 through A9	692-695
Alternatives	B1 through B6	695-697
Cultural Resources	C1 through C3	697-698
Economics	D1 through D14	698-702
Fire and Fuels	E1 through E14	702-705
Fish and Wildlife	F1 through F43	705-725
Forest and Woodland Vegetation	G1 through G12	725-729
Grassland and Shrubland Habitat	H1 through H12	729-733
Lands and Realty	I1 through I6	733-735
Livestock Grazing	J1 through J25	735-740
Minerals	K1 through K15	740-743
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Oil and Gas	N1 through N31	753-766
Out of Scope, Staffing, Budget	O1 through O26	766-771
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Soils	T1 through T3	796-796
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Special Designations – National Trails/Wild and Scenic Rivers/ Wilderness Study Areas	V1 through V12	801-805
Special Status Species	W1 through W17	805-811
Travel Management – General	X1 through X34	811-819
Travel Management – Multiple Use/Public Access	Y1 through Y50	819-830
Travel Management – Mitigation, Maintenance, Closure Methods	Z1 through Z13	830-833
Travel Management – Resource Impacts	AA1 through AA38	833-846
Travel Management – Travel Plan Implementation	BB1 through BB11	846-849
Travel Management – Travel Planning Process	CC1 through CC33	849-857
Travel Management – User Conflicts	DD1 through DD13	857-860
Travel Management – User Data	EE1 through EE8	860-862
Travel Management – Winter Use/Snowmobiles	FF1 through FF5	862-864
Travel Planning Areas – Boulder/Jefferson TPA	GG1 through GG12	864-867
Travel Planning Areas – East Helena TPA	HH1 through HH7	867-869
Travel Planning Areas – Helena TPA	II1 through II12	869-872
Travel Planning Areas – Lewis and Clark Co. NW TPA	JJ1 through JJ7	872-874
Travel Planning Areas – Upper Big Hole River TPA	KK1 through KK16	874-877
Water	LL1 through LL12	877-883

LIST OF COMMENTERS/CODES

The following list displays the names of the individuals and organizations who commented on the Draft RMP/EIS and the corresponding comment codes for specific comments made. Organizations and government entities are listed by the organization or government agency rather than by the signatory to the submission. Commentors can use this cross-reference to review responses to their comments by referencing the appropriate comment sections.

Commenter	***Code***
Alvey, Laura and Sam	H11, M1, II10
American Wildlands	B3, F28, J15, J16, L8, N27, Q19, U8, W8, W9, Z11, FF4, GG2, II1, KK1
Antonioli, Ted	O16
Balcerzak, Linda	II12
Barrett, Bob	HH3, Y47
Beardslee, Greg	L9, V10
Beardslee, Russ	Y31, Y32
Bennett, Judith and Daniel	U10, V6
Boles, Glenn and John	II12
Bradshaw, Rose Marie	U10, V6
Burk, Stoney	U10, V6
Cain, Clinton	O16
Capital Trail Vehicle Assn. (CTVA)	B1, C2, D1, D2, D3, D4, D5, D6, D7, D8, D9, F11, F12, F27, I1 L1, L6, M10, M11, O4, O5, O6, O7, O8, O9, O10, O11, O12, O13, O14, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P25, P26, P27, P28, P29, P30, P31, P32, P33, P34, P44, P45, P56, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8, Q24, S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, S14, S15, S16, S17, T2, W6, W7, W11, X7, X8, X9, X10, X11, X12, X13, X14, X15, X16, X17, X18, X19, X20, X21, X22, X23, X24, X25, X26, X27, X33, X34, Y3, Y4, Y5, Y6, Y7,Y8, Y9, Y10, Y11, Y12, Y13, Y14, Y15, Y16, Y17, Y18, Y19, Y20, Y21, Y22, Y23, Y24, Y30, Y32, Y33, Y34, Y35, Y36, Y37, Y38,Y40, Y44, Y45, Y48, Y49, Z1, Z2, Z3, Z4, Z5, Z6, Z7, Z8, Z9, Z12, Z13, AA2, AA3, AA4, AA5, AA6, AA7, AA8, AA10, AA11, AA12, AA13, AA14, AA15, AA16, AA17, AA18, AA19, AA23, AA25, AA26, AA29, AA30, BB1, BB2, BB3, BB4, BB5, BB6, BB7, BB8, BB10, BB11, CC1, CC3, CC5, CC6, CC7, CC8, CC9, CC10, CC11, CC12, CC13, CC14, CC15, CC16, CC17, CC18, CC24, CC25, CC26, CC27, CC28, CC29, CC30, CC31, CC32, DD10, DD11, DD12, DD5, DD6, DD7, DD9, EE1, EE2, EE3, EE4, EE5, EE6, EE7, EE8, FF1, HH1, II3, JJ4
Carparelli, Mary and Peter	U10, V6
Casperson, Barbara	O20
Champion, Robert and Ruth	U10, V6
Chrichton, Jim	O15
Citizens for Balanced Use	CC2, D13, D14, L11, O18, P35, Q13, X1, X2, X3, X8, Y50
Coalition for State Public Land Access	P5, P40
Cole, Connie	HH4

Comer, Helen	U10, V6
Deutsch, Donna	U10, V6
Dolman, Aart	U10, V6
Earth Angel Health Mine	I2
Elkhorn Working Group	F7, F8, F9, G2, G3, H12, H8, J10, J11, J12, J13, J23, J24, J25, J4, J5, J6, J7, J8, J9, M2, M3, M14, M15, M16, O2, O3, R1
Environmental Protection Agency	A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A7, A8, E1, E2, E3, E4, E6, E10, E11, E13, F10, F25, F26, F39, F40, G4, G5, G6, G7, J14, K10, L2, M4, M5, M6, M7, M8, M9, M17, M18, M19, M20, N3, N4, N5, N6, N7, N8, N9, N10, N11, N12, N13, N25, N26, N28, P22, P23, Q18, R3, R4, R5, R6, R8, T3, V5, W1, W2, W3, W4, W10, W16, W17, AA1, AA9, AA27, AA28, AA31, AA32, AA33, AA34, AA35, AA36, AA37, FF2, FF3, JJ2, LL2, LL3, LL4, LL5, LL6, LL7, LL8, LL9, LL10
Epstein, Susan	II8
Erickson, Bonee	U10, V6
Fay, Mary	U10, V6
Fay, Tim	E5, KK2
Fettig, Judy	U10, V6
Fisher, Joanne	U10, V6
Fisher, Richard	U10
Gilda, Alan	G1, K9, K12, N2, P1, P2, P37, U1, Y32, HH2, JJ1
Giop, John	KK3
Grant, John	U10, V6
Graymont Western US, Inc.	D10, D11, I4, K1, K2, K3, K11, K13, K14, K15, P47, U5, U9
Greene, Jim and Martha Vogt	U10, V6
Haverlandt, Carol	U10, V6
Heffern, Roy and Jacquie	U10, V6
Helvey, Angela	DD3
Helvey, Angela	U10, V6
Helvey, Pat	O22, O26
Holton, George and Virginia	U10, V6
Ingalls, Kelly	F29, J17, J18, J19
Jack, Patricia	U10, V6
Jefferson Local Development Corp.	E8, E9, F16, G11, GG1, J20, K4, U2, X4
Jennings, Gerry	U10, V6
Johnson, Cleve	L8, LL11, P19, P19, P36, Z10, CC19, DD13, DD5, DD8, II3, JJ3
Jones, Cedron	B6, E12, H10, HH7, I16, I16, II9, N24, N24, N24, P6, P7, P8, P41, P42, P43, Q17
Jones, Jack	E14, F1, F2, F3, F38, F42, G10, H1, H2, H3, H4, H5, H6, H7, I3, J1, J2, L3, L4, L5, N1, O1, O24, O25, P5, P24, P40, V8, W5, W14, Y1
Kantorowicz, JC	Q22

Kilmer, Tom	Y42
Kilmer, Tom	Q20, U10, V6
Krause (MD), William	U10, V6
Lane, Arlie, Norma Engleson, Helen Manaras, Virginia Ettien	U10, V6
Lydon, Sally	U10, V6
Marks, Bob	G12, K7
Mattfeldt, Jay	V6
McDaniel, Brian	V3
McDaniel, Tom	V4
McKenrick, Tim	GG4, GG5, GG6, GG7
Mehring, Leroy	Y30, Y43
Mercer, Colleen	U10
Miller, Paul and Naomi	U10, V6
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	A9, AA20, AA21, AA22, AA24, AA38, BB9, F13, F17, F18, F19, F20, F21, , F22, F23, F24, F30, F31, F32, F33, F34, F35, F37, G8, GG3, H9, HH5, I5, II7, J21, JJ5, JJ7, K5, K6, KK11, L12, L13, LL12, M13, N31, F37, N30, O23, P50, P51, P52, Q15, Q16, R2, R7, U3, U11, U12, V12, W12, W13, X5, X6
Montana Historical Society	C1
Montana Snowmobile Association	F15, P45, P57, Q9, Q21, V9, X29, X30, X31, Y26, Y27, Y28, Y29, Y35, Y45, Y48, CC4, CC20, CC30, CC32, DD5, FF5
Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Assn.	P21, P48, P49, Q10, Q11, Q12, X32, Y3, CC21, CC22, CC23
Montana Trout Unlimited	N20, N21, N22, N23, N29, N30, N31
Montana Wilderness Association	B6, C3, F14, H10, N15, N16, N17, N18, N19, N24, U10, V1, V6, HH4, HH7, II6, II9, JJ6,
Montana Wildlife Federation	B2, F2, F13, F41, L7, M12, N14, P46, Q23, U6, U7, W15
Moy, Rich	II11
MTARNG	I6
Mullins, Jim and Lynn Hinch	U10
Oler, Terry	II5
Olson, Mary Jo	V6
Oral Comments from Divide Public Meeting	KK12, KK13, KK14, KK15, KK16
Pickett, Will	K8, P53, P54
Pitblado, Nancy	U10, V6
Public Lands/ Water Access Assn.	O17, O19, O25, Q14, X28, Y2, KK5
Pujol, J.P.	II5
Ravndal, Tim	J3, P55
Richards, Paul	U10, V6
Riordan, Donald	U10, V6

Rogers, Dick	B4
Rusoff, David	V7
Russell, Todd	U10, V6
Salois, Larry and Betty	U10, V6
Seeley, Chuck	G9, I12
Shropshire, Spencer	II8
Siderits, Karl	J22, P39, T1
Silliman, Lee and Nancy	U10, V6
Starshine, Dr.	U10, V6
Stevens, Bob and Hopie	U10, V6
Swanson, John	L10, O17, U10
Synness, Curt	U13, V6
Synness, Wes and Carol	E7, V11
Tatz, Janet	U10, V6
Thompson, Gordon	O17, U10
Thweatt, Don	U10, V6
Treasure State Alliance	D12, P20, Y25, Y39, Y41
US Geological Survey	F4, F5, F43, LL1, P4, P38
USDA – Helena National Forest	B5, HH6, O21
Ventres, Dale and Elena	KK4
Wampler, Todd	II4
Wanner, Kathleen	U10, V6
Warehime, HelenH	U10, V6
Western Environmental Law Center	V6
Wikstrom, Katharine	O16
Williams, Earl	GG8, GG9, GG10, GG11, GG12, KK6, KK7, KK8, KK9, KK10
Wilmouth, Stan	C1

COMMENTS AND RESPONSES

Page numbers references in public comments refer to page numbers in the Draft RMP/EIS. BLM responses refer to document sections, rather than page numbers, because page numbers have changed between the Draft RMP/EIS and the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

Air Quality, Climate

A1

Comment: The RMP should meet potential future Regional Haze requirements established by the State, and EPA. We note that the Montana DEQ has returned the clean air visibility program to EPA (see http://deq.mt.gov/AirOuality/Visibility.asp). Please call Ms. Laurel Dygkowski of EPA in Denver for latest information on visibility issues in Montana at 303-312-6144. See also, http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/fera/research/smoke/haze/index.shtml.

Response: As stated in Chapter 2 under Management Concerns, Air Quality, Management Common to All Alternatives, the BLM would comply with local, state, and federal regulatory requirements. This includes all existing and future requirements, including regional haze.

A2

Comment: The last sentence before the section on Air Quality Monitoring and Standards on page 209 refers to fine particulate matter. The sentence reads, “There are

no non-attainment designations for fine particulate matter (PM2.5) because the required monitoring data has not been collected or evaluated." Please correct this sentence; the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and other state agencies have conducted air monitoring for PM2.5 and EPA has designated non-attainment areas. See: www.epa.gov/pmdesignations/.

Response: Content has been changed in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS to read: "Currently, there are no non-attainment designations for fine particulate matter (PM2.5) within the Planning Area. The closet non- attainment designation is Lincoln County in the far North West portion of the state of Montana."

A3

Comment: A footnote to Table 3-1 (page 210) states, "Monitoring data are not available through the EPA AirData Database for nitrogen dioxide ($N0_2$), sulfur dioxide ($S0_2$), and ozone (0_3) since no counties within the Planning Area have monitoring stations for these pollutants."

Although air monitoring stations in the planning area do not currently collect data for these pollutants, data are available from past monitoring at least in the case of $S0_2$ in Lewis & Clark County. We recommend that BLM consult with Montana DEQ regarding data for Table 3-1.

Response: Table 3-1 has been modified in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS to reflect any new or existing information that is available. Sulfur Dioxide was monitored until 2001 by East Helena (Lewis and Clark County). All values were well below Air Quality standards.

A4

Comment: The Air Quality portion of the section about cumulative effects on resources (page 481) refers primarily to cumulative effects of smoke. The reasonably foreseeable development scenario for oil and gas exploration assumes 15 exploratory wells, and this development should be considered a part of cumulative effects on air quality. (The DEIS also discloses that up to 40 wells would be drilled for coal bed natural gas, but assumes that none of these wells would be drilled on federal mineral estate.) Other aspects of management, such as transportation, may contribute to cumulative effects. We suggest that the FEIS include at least a qualitative discussion of these potential contributions to cumulative impacts.

Response: The Air Quality sub-section of the Cumulative Effects section in Chapter 4 has been modified to include additional general discussion about effects from oil and gas development, motorized vehicle emissions, and other activities in the Planning Area.

A5

Comment: It would be appropriate to reference in the air quality discussions in the draft RMP and EIS that Standard #4 in the Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing (Appendix E, page 723) states that "Air Quality meets State Standards." It is not clear to us why this Air Quality Standard is included in the Livestock Grazing guidance. Such an Air Quality Standard should be applied across all BLM lands, and it would appear appropriate to include this Standard also in the RMP section on Air Quality.

Response: The Air Quality section in Chapter 2 of the RMP under Management Common to All Alternatives states: "All resources uses would meet the Land Health Standards for air quality and BLM would comply with local, state, and federal regulatory requirements."

A6

Comment: Also, it would be appropriate to integrate the recent guidance on the PM-2.5 particulate standard into this RMP Standard. Also Appendix E, Standard #4, lists only Montana Ambient Air Quality Standards (MAAQS) and should also address National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) in general. Note that the Montana DEQ's web site has a table showing both MAAQS and NAAQS, www.deq.state.mt.us/AirQuality/Planning/AirStandards/AIR_STANDARDS.pdf.

Montana does not have a PM-2.5 standard other than the NAAQS. Please contact Joe Delwiche in EPA's Denver Regional Office is you have any questions on the PM-2.5 particulate standard (telephone number, 303-312-6448).

Response: Standard #4 does include National Ambient Air Quality Standards. The last sentence under the Air Quality Standards states that "In no case, however, may pollutant concentrations exceed the National or State ambient air quality standards" (**Appendix F** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS). This would include the new PM2.5 National Standard.

A7

Comment: Air quality concerns can result where concentrated snowmobile use occurs in areas of poor air dispersion (e.g., river valleys where frequent inversion conditions may trap air pollutants). Snowmobiles (and ATV) 2-stroke engines mix the lubricating oil with the fuel and both are expelled as part of the exhaust, and allow up to one third of the fuel delivered to the engine to be passed through the engine and into the environment virtually unburned . As stated in the U.S. Department of the Interior document, "Air Quality Concerns Related to Snowmobile Usage in National Parks", Feb. 2000, hydrocarbon emission rates from 2-stroke snowmobile engines are about 80 times greater that those found in a 1995-96 automobile engines. A majority of these hydrocarbons are aromatic hydrocarbons, includ-

ing polyaromatic hydrocarbons, which are considered to be the most toxic component of petroleum products, and aromatic hydrocarbons are also associated with chronic and carcinogenic effects. If concentrated snowmobile use occurs in areas of poor air dispersion some restrictions may need to be considered. There are numerous studies underway to further determine environmental effects of these pollutants. The National Park Service Final EIS for Winter Use in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks contains a good summary of the science regarding impacts from snowmobile use. EPA recommends that the Forests monitor the results of these studies and factor the results into travel management and resource planning. We will also try to pass on information emerging out of these studies. The EPA encourages use of the newer less polluting 4-stroke engine snowmobiles.

In 2003, the National Park Service implemented a commendable "best available technology" (BAT) program at Yellowstone National Park to reduce snowmobile emissions and noise that is critical to improving air quality and public health and recreational experience, and reducing wildlife disturbances due to snowmobile use in the Park. This has resulted in improved air quality and soundscapes as well as reduced wildlife disturbance from snowmobile use. The combination of significantly reduced snowmobile numbers and the use of BAT has decreased the predicted maximum carbon monoxide and particulate matter levels by about eighty-five percent.

We encourage the BLM to consider development of a program to manage snowmobile use, emissions, and noise to improve air quality, public health, and recreational experience while reducing wildlife disturbances.

Response: Most BLM lands are not within areas of poor air dispersion such as river valleys. There are no known areas of concentrated snowmobile use in the planning area on BLM managed public lands. The BLM manages snowmobile use through its site specific travel planning. See Chapter 2under Travel Management and Access of the RMP for proposed open and closed areas for snowmobiles by alternative. BLM land use and travel plan decisions focus on designation of open, limited, and closed areas and/or routes and do not specify or limit types of snowmobile engines for use on public land since concentrated use is not an issue in the planning area.

A8

Comment: It is stated (page 81) under the section on Management Concerns, Air Quality, that, "Air resources would continue to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis as part of project level planning to ensure compliance with local, state, and federal regulatory requirements."

Where proposed projects involve substantial burning, particularly near populated areas or areas with protected visibility, planners should use software to estimate emissions and dispersion of smoke. In addition, please add to this paragraph a statement that project level analyses for oil and gas development projects should also address air quality.

Response: In Chapter 2 of the Butte RMP under Management Concerns, in the Air Quality section, under Management Common to All Alternatives, it states: "Air resources would continue to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis as part of project level planning to ensure compliance with local, state, and federal regulatory requirements. Evaluations would consider the significance of the proposed project and the sensitivity of air resources in the effected area. Mitigation measures would be developed as appropriate to ensure compatibility of the projects with air resource management." That statement would ensure that projects involve substantial burning, particularly near populated areas or areas with protected visibility be considered.

BLM currently operates under the Interagency Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation Procedures Reference Guide which provides for the use of computer modeling. It states that the burn plans need to describe how the project will comply with local community, county, state, tribal and federal air quality regulations and identify smoke sensitive areas including population centers recreation areas, hospitals, airports, transportation corridors, schools, non-attainment areas, Class I airsheds, and restricted areas that may be impacted. If required by state implementation plans and/or state or local regulations, modeling outputs will be included in burn plans as well as mitigation strategies and techniques to reduce the impacts of smoke production.

The Air Quality section of Chapter 2 has been modified to discuss oil and gas development by including the following statement under Management Common to All Alternatives: "Before approval of an application for permit to drill (APD) for oil and gas or a Sundry Notice application that would involve surface disturbance the appropriate level of NEPA analysis, in most cases an EA, is completed. This document would analyze effects on all appropriate resources and resource uses including air quality as identified."

A9

Comment: CHAPTER 3 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT: Climate: More analysis of climate change should have been provided (p. 210). Table 3-2 provides averages for seven climatic measurements over a 110 year period from four different weather stations. The analysis should have looked at five or ten year increments in order to assess trends rather than averages. These climatic features may have had an influence that could be changing over time and thus affecting landscape function such as winter range, functional summer range, species distribution.

Scientifically quantified examples are the seriously diminishing habitat for pika, expansion of suitable habitat for noxious weeds, and implications for population and habitat management.

Response: Climate data displayed in Table 3-2 was provided to show the average temperatures and precipitation over a period of time and was intended to characterize weather patterns within the Butte Field Office. The data was not intended to display trends or changes in climate.

A section on Global Climate Change has been added to Chapter 3 (under the Air Quality heading, Climate subheading) to describe global climate change and its potential effects on resources and resource uses in the Planning Area. A section has also been added to Chapter 4 (after the Cumulative Effects on Social and Economic Conditions section) to discuss potential effects of BLM activities associated with the Butte RMP on global climate change.

Because the assessment of greenhouse gas emissions and climate change is in its formative phase, it is not yet possible to know with confidence the net impacts to climate. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC 2007) recently stated that "warming of the climate system is unequivocal…' and that "most of the observed increase in globally average temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic [man-made] greenhouse gas concentrations."

The lack of scientific tools designed to predict climate change on regional or local scales limits the ability to quantify potential future impacts. If global climate change results in a warmer and drier climate, cool season plant species' ranges could potentially move north and result in a potential loss of habitat. A warmer, drier climate could also result in competition between plant and/or animal species whose ranges shift. It is also possible that populations of many plant and animal species could decline or be at risk of extinction.

Many of the models needed to make effective decisions at the local and regional levels have not been developed. The Department of the Interior is exploring whether global and regional climate modeling can be scaled to the point that it can be used to manage parks and refuges. When further information on the impacts to climate change is known, it would be considered during site-specific analysis and implementation of the RMP.

Alternatives

B1

Comment: There is a serious deficiency and conflict built into the "Travel & Transportation Management, Planning and Conducting Route Inventories, Technical Reference 9113-1" (http://www.blm.gov/nstc/library/pdf/TR9113-1.pdf). There are only two references in the entire manual to single-track trails and in both cases the manual describes single-track as being primarily used for hiking (page 38, route type 6.) and in the second instance not used by motorbikes (page 39, use classification 6, Wilderness Area). The motorized single-track definition bound on figure 2.2 on pages 12 and 14 of Chapter 2 in the 3-State OHV EIS and decision (http://www.mt.blm.gov/ea/chapter2.pdf) is much better and more acceptable to the motorized community. This definition clearly shows that existing single-track trails used by motorcycles are to be considered as motorized trails/routes. We request that the definition of single-track motorized trails in Technical Reference 9113-1 be modified to reasonably address motorcycle trails which are very popular in the project area.

Response: Changing the definition of single-track motorized trails in Technical Reference 9113-1 is outside the scope of the Butte RMP.

B2

Comment: Montana Wildlife Federation strongly supports Alternative C as most fully protecting and enhancing the high wildlife values that sportsmen have labored hard to conserve within the Butte RMP area.

Alternative C is far from being the most extreme management options but represents a realistic, pragmatic choice that will indeed maximize wildlife and hunting/fishing values. Montana Wildlife Federation requests that Alternative C to be chosen as the Preferred Alternative as it represents the highest benefit for resource in regards to hunting and fishing values. The following list of bullets supports our rationale and is quoted directly from the draft Butte RMP Alternative C in various places and paraphrased:

- Alternative C poses the lowest impact to water quality and Wild and Scenic values.
- Alt. C creates the lowest impacts from road construction.
- Alt. C offers the greatest winter range protection
- Alt. C provides the greatest habitat protection
- Alt. C provides for the most protection of all alternatives for fish and other aquatic organisms by only allowing activities within riparian areas that would restore or maintain the riparian zone.
- Alt C provides for the optimum protection while the area sustains a long-term population growth.
- Alt. C contributes the least number of adverse cumulative impacts to fish and wildlife values.

Response: The BLM acknowledges the long-term efforts of multiple entities in conserving wildlife values within the Butte Field Office. While Alternative C may

best meet the needs of wildlife in some respects, the BLM continues to believe that the mix of proposed activity and resource protection measures under Alternative B best meet the BLM's multiple use mission. The BLM notes that Alternative B provides improved protection and reduced impacts to wildlife compared to the current condition under Alternative A. Riparian protection measures under Alternative B would require these areas to be managed for site-specific riparian values, including wildlife. Alternative B would improve wildlife habitat as related to road impacts compared to the current condition. The nature and extent of proposed vegetation treatments under Alternative B would improve wildlife habitat more than either Alternative A or C.

B3

Comment: American Wildlands recommends that the BLM reconsider Alternative B as the preferred alternative. If only one alternative had to be chosen at this time, Alternative C would be best for long term wildlife habitat connectivity. However, American Wildlands does not view Alternative C as the best alternative in all cases, and in some specific instances, recommends other alternatives.

Response: While wildlife habitat connectivity was considered in the development of RMP alternatives, the BLM still considers Alternative B to provide the best balance of resource protection and resource uses to best meet its multiple-use mission. The BLM believes that the level of active vegetation treatments proposed under Alternative B would benefit wildlife habitat more overall than the reduced levels of proposed treatment under Alternative C.

B4

Comment: I have lived in the Silver Creek Subdivision since 1982 and my land is bordering along 6,679 feet of Scratch Gravel BLM land that is adjacent to Helena Travel Plan Route Map 8. This land is being used heavily by off road vehicles, motorcycles, and ATVs which put people that walk or ride horses there at risk due to the speeders which are tearing up the roads, trails and off road areas. They don't care about the damage they cause or the mess they leave behind - garbage, beer cans, drug stuff.

The BLM needs to have additional enforcement to control and catch these bad guys. This is why I feel that the Helena Travel Plan Route Designations under Alternative C would stop some of the damage but not all.

Response: The Preferred Alternative for the Scratchgravel Hills portion of the Helena Travel Planning Area has been changed from the Draft RMP/EIS to the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. The revised Preferred Alternative would close the Scratchgravel Hills to wheeled public motorized use yearlong, 24 hours/day, with the exception of several routes with rights-of-way to homeowners as well as a few other known routes needed by local residents to access their homes. This closure should improve the negative conditions described in the comment.

B5

Comment: Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC): We support the ACEC special designation of the Elkhorns as described in Alternative C. Alternative C designates all of the land as described in the Elkhorns Wildlife Management Unit MOU and as depicted by the BLM portion of the ECMA (approximately 67,665 acres). This alternative would provide the greatest protection for the relevant and important values associated with this ACEC and is most compatible with our Forest Plan goals to manage the Elkhorns as a Wildlife Management Unit.

Response: The BLM has modified the boundaries of the Elkhorns potential ACEC in the Preferred Alternative (Alternative B). This boundary now excludes the Graymont Mine permitted area as well as the currently proposed expansion boundaries. Also, the Montana Army National Guard proposed withdrawal area is now fully excluded. The recently acquired Iron Mask property has been included in the Preferred Alternative.

B6

Comment: York Bridge East: This is the BLM land on the east side of the bridge and north of York Road/Trout Creek. These lands, along with the adjoining FS lands that lie west of the road to Nelson and SE of Soup Creek, comprise a mini-wilderness, with rugged, scenic terrain, historic artifacts (aqueducts, some prospecting), goats, arches, the old peregrine hack site, and a few old tracks to explore and help get around on. It's an area that should be left, and preserved, 'just like it is.' To that end, you should make it an "exclusion" area (towers or utility corridors would be an abomination here), impose NSO stipulations (any leaseholder could drill from the FS ground in the Nelson road corridor), and classify it as semi-primitive non-motorized.

The BLM land south of Trout Creek and north of the old sapphire diggings area, on the flats north of the Ward Ranch (roughly the S2 Sec 13 and N2 Sec 24), is also wild and rugged, and should be managed the same way, i.e., "exclusion" area, NSO stipulations, semi-primitive non-motorized.

Response: The BLM notes that under the Preferred Alternative in the RMP, much of the area in question is proposed for No Surface Occupancy stipulations for oil and gas leasing, and much of it is proposed for Recreation Opportunity Spectrum management of semi-primitive non-motorized. The Preferred Alternative in the Draft RMP/EIS proposed the area on the east side of the Missouri down through Ward Ranch as an "avoidance" area for rights-of-way. The BLM believes this

level of protection is adequate for this area and retains the same proposed management in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

Cultural Resources

C1

Comment: We do not agree with prescribed fire effects characterization found on page 417. It is and has been widely documented that prescribed fire has the potential to adversely affect many different cultural resources and we have met with you regarding those findings in the past. The potential for adverse effects varies with a number of variables embedded in the prescription and resources types. We disagree with the summary characterization made in the RMP that the potential for adverse effects is a "minimal threat." That threat level varies with the above variables and should be assessed on a case by case basis. If that is understood it should be made explicit in the RMP. Montana Historical Society is more than willing to consult on specific applications and proposed findings of effect as they are proposed. If, on the other hand, this characterization in the Butte RMP implies that prescribed fire will not be considered an undertaking with the potential to effect historic properties as some sort of categorical exclusion based on generic prescriptions we believe formal consultation on the issue is warranted.

Response: It is not the BLM's intention to imply that the phenomenon of fire (prescribed or not) is, in itself, a minimal threat. Nor is it the BLM's intention to imply that prescribed fire projects are not undertakings. Prescribed fires are undertakings that require cultural resource inventories and completion of the section 106 process prior to project implementation. Generally, a carefully conducted prescribed fire will avoid most impacts to all known cultural resources. While each project has the potential to escape, the BLM believes that this threat is minimal when prescribed fire burn windows are properly utilized. This section of text has been changed in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS to clarify the BLM's position.

C2

Comment: We are concerned about the preservation of historic mines, cabins, settlements, railroads, access routes, and other features used by pioneers, homesteaders, loggers, settlers, and miners. These are important cultural resources and should not be removed from the landscape. Western culture and heritage has been characterized by opportunities to work with the land and preservation of all remnants of this culture and heritage is important. Current management practices are not adequately protecting western culture and heritage including the opportunity to work with the land. We request that the ties to the land that are part of our local western culture and heritage be protected and that the preferred travel management alternative include opportunities to visit these features as part of motorized interpretative spur destinations and loops.

Response: The BLM has ongoing programs that identify historic structures suitable for restoration and repair. It is BLM policy to avoid impacts to historic structures and other historic property types through project redesign to reduce or eliminate impacts to these properties from a proposed surface disturbing activity. If impacts are not avoidable the BLM will identify measures that will reduce the impact of a proposed activity on that historic structure. The BLM considers impacts to historic period structures and features consistent with regulations found at 36 CFR Part 800, the implementing regulations for the National Historic Preservation Act.

The BLM does interpret some historic period features and properties on a case-by-case basis. For example, at Ward Ranch there are two historic ranch headquarters that are available for walk-in visitation. However, the BLM believes that linking heritage resources to the proposed travel management alternatives would exceed our available resources to prepare those historic features for public visitation.

C3

Comment: Cultural, Historic, Paleontology: The RMP should explain how the agency will work with tribal governments and comply with the National Historic Preservation Act. Areas being considered for oil and gas drilling should be inventoried prior to leasing to determine whether the area is appropriate for oil and gas drilling. If the BLM has not completed an inventory of historic sites, how will the agency determine whether an area is appropriate to lease for oil and gas drilling? The RMP should include information about what areas have been inventoried and how the BLM plans to expand its inventory of cultural, historic, and prehistoric sites. Importantly, it should address how the BLM will protect these sites once they are identified.

Response: The BLM employs a phased approach toward oil and gas leasing, development, and meeting our obligations under section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The first phase begins at the initiation of the Resource Management Plan process. It is at this point where we analyze existing inventory data concerning the distribution and significance of cultural resources. It is also at this point where we consult with tribes to identify areas where the tribes have particular concerns should development occur in those areas. Based on available data and the results of the tribal consultation, the BLM then makes decisions in the RMP on which areas should be open or closed to leasing and what stipulations should be applied at lease issuance.

The second phase of the leasing development process is initiated when individual lease parcels are reviewed by the BLM prior to a lease sale. The agency decides if

enough information is available to lease the parcel and properly protect cultural resources or if more information is needed. The cultural resource specialist reviews the cultural resource records to determine whether cultural resources are present in the proposed lease area and also reviews previous information from consultation with the tribes, existing ethnographic data, and the archaeological and historic literature specific to the area under review. This information is then analyzed comprehensively to determine if sensitive cultural resources may be present. If it is determined that the analysis requires more information, the BLM may conduct sample-based cultural resource surveys and/or seek additional tribal information to augment existing data.

The final phase of the compliance process occurs at the Application for Permit to Drill (APD) stage where the location of the proposed drilling program has been fully defined. It is at that point where the BLM will require site-specific cultural resource inventories, gather additional tribal information through consultation, and implement mitigation measures where necessary.

Economics

D1

Comment: Each route must include a socio-economic analysis that includes the impacts on the public owning OHVs and looking for opportunities to use them and landowners who purchased property with the intent of being able to access and recreate using motor vehicles.

Response: The economic analysis in this RMP is based on a set of anticipated levels of activities and reasonably foreseeable development scenarios for each alternative. Travel management of individual routes may be one of several management actions that influence the level and nature of these activities in one or more of the following resource management areas (recreation, fish and wildlife, grazing, timber, minerals, and other). The economic impacts expressed for each alternative reflect the impacts of the set of management actions, including travel management actions, for each alternative.

D2

Comment: The negative social and economic impact experienced by motorized recreationists when motorized recreational opportunities do not exist in nearby public lands must be adequately evaluated and considered in the decision-making. This is especially significant now that fuel is over $2.00 per gallon. These impacts include the complete loss of recreational opportunities and the cost of having to travel farther and farther in search of fewer and fewer motorized recreational opportunities in times of increasing travel costs. For example, the lack of adequate OHV systems in the Helena National Forest requires us to travel at least 180 miles to adjacent national forests and many more miles to other states including Idaho and Utah. A 180 mile roundtrip costs at least 3 hours and $70 and that cost will increase substantially in the future. This added cost is a waste of time and energy resources and has not been adequately considered by the agency.

Response: The expected level of recreation use for each alternative considered the travel management prescription for each alternative. The level of motorized vehicle travel currently accounts for an estimated 12 percent of total recreation use (in visits). It is predicted to decline by about 7,700 visits (5 percent) with Alternative B, about 15,400 visits (10 percent) with Alternative C, and about 3,100 visits (2 percent) with Alternative D. The economic analysis of recreation management displayed in Chapter 4 is based on expected levels of recreation use for each alternative. These economic impacts are expressed in terms of employment and labor income, including proprietor's income.

D3

Comment: The different management plans being developed by the BLM and Forest Service are using generated, estimated, and inadequate data to forward an agenda of eliminating access and motorized recreation from public lands. The economic impact of these closures will be devastating to small communities throughout the West. Models can be manipulated to predict any result. Economic models such as IMPLAN should not be used when the input data is estimated and not factual or actual. Adequate effort must be exercised by the agencies to gather true on the ground data from businesses and individuals that use our public lands. We request that the economic analysis use actual local data to determine the true economic and social impact of proposed motorized access and closures on the public.

Response: IMPLAN data are drawn from several government sources, the most important of which are the Bureau of Labor Statistics ES202 data, and the Bureau of Economic Analysis REIS and County Business Patterns data. All of these data are "real" and "local" in that they come from censuses of individual firms aggregated to the county level. The IMPLAN Model is the most flexible, detailed, and widely used input-output impact model system in the U.S. Over 1,500 clients across the country use the IMPLAN model. IMPLAN is a professionally accepted, widely used computer model to predict economic impacts of resource management decisions. It is analytical and it provides evidence that the agency used professional integrity, including scientific integrity, concerning economic impact assessments. Resource inputs to the Butte RMP IMPLAN analysis reflect the level of activity anticipated by the local Butte Field Office resource professionals and involved extensive levels of local public participation and consultation.

D4

Comment: A recent study by David Sunding, an associate professor of natural resource economics, David

Zilberman, a UC Berkeley professor of agriculture and resource economics, and graduate student Aaron Swoboda to the California Resource Management Institute found that the economic impacts from designation and preservation of special plant and animal habitat areas continue to cost society hundreds of millions of dollars because of delays, court fees and opportunities forgone. Sunding's report, released Feb. 20, found that agencies had underestimated the actual economic and social impact by seven to 14 times. Certainly, natural resource decisions cannot and should not be made entirely on economic impacts. However, NEPA requires that both economic and environmental facts should be considered in the final land management decisions. The U.C. Berkeley study displays the fact that the full economic and social facts and impacts are not being adequately considered by the federal land management agencies. We request adequate evaluation of the economic and social impacts of this proposed action be considered in the analysis and decision-making. Additionally, we request that the cumulative negative impact resulting from inadequate evaluation of economic and social impacts in past actions are considered in the analysis and decision-making and that an adequate mitigation plan be included as part of this action to compensate for past cumulative negative impacts.

Response: To analyze individual national policies is beyond the scope of this analysis. The economic analysis in this RMP is based on a set of anticipated levels of activities and reasonably foreseeable development scenarios for each alternative. The designation and preservation of special plant and animal habitat may be one of several management actions that influence the level and nature of these activities in one or more of the following resource management areas (recreation, fish and wildlife, grazing, timber, minerals, and other). The economic impacts expressed for each alternative reflect the impacts of the set of management actions for each alternative by alternative, not individual actions or national policies.

D5

Comment: We request that the analysis include an adequate benefit-cost analysis of non-motorized versus motorized trail use. This analysis should include the annual cost of the non-motorized trails per the actual and documented number of non-motorized trail user. The economic analysis should also compare the annual benefit-cost per non-motorized user versus the annual benefit-cost per motorized user if the trails and funding were used as multiple-use/motorized trails. Motorized trail users out-number non-motorized trail users at least 25 to 1 (see summary of local observations). Motorized recreationists need approximately 5 times the miles of trail per day compared to non-motorized recreationists (CBU analysis). Therefore, motorized recreationists need 125 times (25 x 5) the miles of trails as do non-motorized recreationists. However, the current allocation of resources in the forest is significantly weighted towards non-motorized and is no where near this ratio. Additionally, the allocation is moving in the wrong direction towards more non-motorized opportunities with each decision (refer to Table 2 past and current actions). An increased allocation of exclusive non-motorized trails is not a good use of the taxpayer's money. Additionally, non-motorized trails benefit a very limited number of recreationists who already have more than adequate recreational resources when compared to motorized recreationists. It is more reasonable for the decision to focus on multiple-use trail projects and invest our limited financial resources in those types of projects. The benefit-cost analysis should also recognize the significant economic benefit associated with motorized recreation. Motorized economic benefit far exceeds the economic benefit of non-motorized recreation because there are more motorized recreationists and they have a considerable investment in their recreation. Economic benefits to the local economy associated with motorized recreation include sale of OHVs, parts and service; sale of tow vehicles, parts and service; sale of camping units, parts and service; fuel; meals; motels, etc.

Response: There is no requirement under the National Environmental Policy Act to conduct a benefit-cost analysis, nor is it appropriate to conduct a benefit-cost analysis considering the social and economic goals summarized in Table 2-23 under Management Concern: Social and Economic Environment. Benefit-cost analysis is only one of several economic analysis methods that can be used to help make public decisions about the natural environment. Benefit-cost analysis focuses only on benefits and costs and therefore economic efficiency. This may not be the most socially acceptable option or the most environmentally beneficial option.

The economic analysis summarized in Chapter 4 addresses the changes in local employment and income attributable to the various resource management program decisions. These impacts caused by recreation management, including travel management, reflect the anticipated changes in recreation use and related local expenditures. The level of motorized vehicle travel currently accounts for an estimated 12 percent of total recreation use (in visits). It is predicted to decline by about 7,700 visits (5 percent) with Alternative B, about 15,400 visits (10 percent) with Alternative C, and about 3,100 visits (2 percent) with Alternative D. The economic analysis of recreation management displayed in Chapter 4 is based on expected levels of recreation use for each alternative. These economic impacts are expressed in terms of employment and labor income, including proprietors' income.

D6

Comment: The positive economic impact on the economy of the area must be adequately considered in the decision-making. Arizona State Parks has prepared a

good example of an economic analysis of OHV recreation for Coconino County, AZ http://www.gf.state.az.us/pdfs/w_c/OHV%20Report.pdf.

Response: The Butte RMP contains information in Chapter 4 on the economic impacts resulting from each of the alternatives. BLM believes this analysis is adequate to make the decisions covered in the Butte RMP.

D7

Comment: A common theme with the public and local and state governments has been the need for more economic development in the area and they are searching for ways to expand and enhance the local economy. OHV recreation is a significant part of the existing economy. Any reduction in OHV recreational opportunities will hurt the local economy. Additionally, the enhancement of OHV recreational opportunities in the project area will provide a badly needed enhancement of the overall local economy as well.

Response: The expected level of recreation use for each alternative considered the travel management prescription for each alternative. The level of motorized vehicle travel currently accounts for an estimated 12 percent of total recreation use (in visits). It is predicted to decline by about 7,700 visits (5 percent) with Alternative B, about 15,400 visits (10 percent) with Alternative C, and about 3,100 visits (2 percent) with Alternative D. The economic analysis of recreation management displayed in Chapter 4 is based on expected levels of recreation use for each alternative. These economic impacts are expressed in terms of employment and labor income, including proprietor's income.

D8

Comment: Agency staff has told us that they intend to focus on resource management issues. Issues related to the management of natural resources have received most of the attention during the evaluation while socio-economic issues surrounding motorized access and recreation are largely ignored. This lack of adequate recognition has led to the creation of significant socio-economic issues affecting the quality of the human environment for motorized recreationists. Land management agencies must acknowledge that public land has significant meaning and socio-economic value to the public. We request that all significant issues involving the human environment for motorized recreationists be adequately considered during the evaluation and decision-making process.

Response: The expected level of recreation use for each alternative considered the travel management prescription for each alternative. The level of motorized vehicle travel currently accounts for an estimated 12 percent of total recreation use (in visits). It is predicted to decline by about 7,700 visits (5 percent) with Alternative B, about 15,400 visits (10 percent) with Alternative C, and about 3,100 visits (2 percent) with Alternative D. The economic analysis of recreation management displayed in Chapter 4 is based on expected levels of recreation use for each alternative. These economic impacts are expressed in terms of employment and labor income, including proprietor's income.

D9

Comment: The environmental document should be an issue driven document as required under NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality guidelines. The driving issue is the development of a reasonable travel management alternative that addresses the needs of the public. NEPA requires that agencies "Rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives, and for alternatives which were eliminated from detailed study, briefly discuss the reasons for their having been eliminated" [40 CFR 1502.14(a)]. We request that the environmental document adequately addresses the social, economic, and environmental justice issues associated with multiple-use access and motorized recreation. We request that the environmental document include a travel management alternative for the project area that adequately responds to these issues and the needs for multiple-use access and recreation.

Response: The expected level of recreation use for each alternative considered the travel management prescription for each alternative. The level of motorized vehicle travel currently accounts for an estimated 12 percent of total recreation use (in visits). It is predicted to decline by about 7,700 visits (5 percent) with Alternative B, about 15,400 visits (10 percent) with Alternative C, and about 3,100 visits (2 percent) with Alternative D. The economic analysis of recreation management displayed in Chapter 4 is based on expected levels of recreation use for each alternative. These economic impacts are expressed in terms of employment and labor income, including proprietor's income.

The discussion that motorized recreationists should be identified as an environmental justice-covered population is not valid. Order 12898 specifically deals with low-income and minority populations as the subject of this order. The Social Conditions sections of the Butte RMP/EIS address the social issues related to access and recreation uses.

D10

Comment: Page 204 - Under the heading "Mining and Mineral" it does not appear that the economic impact with respect to the implementation of the four alternatives is accurately described. Specifically, under Alternative C it would appear that more than "20 local jobs and $0.73 Million in annual labor income" would be the result of the production numbers shown under that alternative. These numbers should be reevaluated.

Response: The text in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS has been revised to address this comment.

D11

Comment: Page 305 - The statistics utilized on pages 305 and 306 including those contained in Table 3-40, do not appear to correspond with the numbers shown on Table 2-24 at page 204.

Response: The data on page 305 and 306 of the Draft RMP/EIS describe total employment and income from resource uses on all lands within the planning area whereas the data displayed in Table 2-24 summarize the impacts expected to occur from BLM management decisions and land uses on BLM administered lands and resources only.

D12

Comment: Our list of concerns has grown considerably as we review the proposed project such as the reduction in organized group activities, reduction in trail miles available throughout the project and the lack of economic review that these reductions would mean for the surrounding communities.

Response: The expected level of recreation use for each alternative considered the travel management prescription for each alternative. The level of motorized vehicle travel currently accounts for an estimated 12 percent of total recreation use (in visits). It is predicted to decline by about 7,700 visits (5 percent) with Alternative B, about 15,400 visits (10 percent) with Alternative C, and about 3,100 visits (2 percent) with Alternative D. The economic analysis of recreation management displayed in Chapter 4 is based on expected levels of recreation use for each alternative. These economic impacts are expressed in terms of employment and labor income, including proprietor's income.

D13

Comment: The Draft Butte RMP has a mere 12 pages dedicated to the economic and social impact of this plan. Again CBU would raise the requirement of the Presidents Council of Environmental Quality which requires agencies to attempt to engage local residents and businesses in the process of gathering true local economic impacts to communities. We find no attempt through the Butte RMP that would satisfy this requirement. CBU requests that the Butte RMP provide this information.

Response: Efforts by the BLM to identify issues, gather data, and receive input from the public on how BLM lands should be managed are summarized in Chapter 1 and Chapter 5, Consultation and Coordination. These sections describe the public notification, initial scoping, additional scoping specific to travel planning, additional RMP scoping associated with the Proposed Planning Scenario, public meetings, and presentations to county commissioners, congressional delegations, and other entities. Economists associated with this RMP worked closely with other resource specialists, local residents, and businesses to identify economic issues and gather appropriate local data for the economic analysis. Other efforts to meet with local publics and businesses include attending the Economic Outlook Seminar in Butte, holding six public meetings upon release of the Draft RMP/EIS throughout the planning area, and briefing all eight county commissions in the planning area on the contents of the Draft RMP/EIS. Various businesses and organizations have been on the Butte RMP mailing list throughout the planning process. The BLM believes that it has gone to considerable efforts to collect local input and information on the Butte RMP, and that the Effects on Social and Economic Conditions section in Chapter 4 of the RMP is adequate.

D14

Comment: In surveys conducted in 2003 and 2004 by CBU, we found significant expenditures by multiple use visitors. Summer motorized users were on the average spending 100 dollars per visitor day and winter use by motorized reflected an average approaching 300 dollars per visitor day. With these expenditures coupled with the visitor use days that the Butte RMP acknowledges occurs within the planning area, we feel your team has missed the mark on the negative economic impact that the proposed closures will have on the surrounding small communities. CBU requests that the BLM make at least an attempt to gather true economic data from affected communities and take a hard look at the results of this data prior to making any Butte RMP decisions.

Response: The level of motorized vehicle travel currently accounts for an estimated 12 percent of total recreation use (in visits). Compared to current management (Alternative A), it is predicted to decline by about 7,700 visits (5 percent) with Alternative B, about 15,400 visits (10 percent) with Alternative C, and about 3,100 visits (2 percent) with Alternative D. However, these impacts are expected to be offset by increases in other areas such as foot travel, biking, and horseback riding. The net effect is expected to be a 1.3 percent decline in recreation use with Alternative B, a 2.5 percent decline with Alternative C, and a 0.5 percent decline with Alternative D. The economic impacts of each alternative that are presented in Chapter 4 are based on the expected level of recreation use and average daily expenditures per visit. The average daily expenditures per visit are based on Spending Profiles of National Forest Visitors, NVUM Four Year Report, May 2005 by Daniel Stynes and Eric White. Based on input-output analysis of anticipated net changes in recreation use it is estimated that local employment supported by recreation use would, compared to current management, decline by about 5 jobs with Alternative B, 10 jobs with Alternative C, and 2 jobs with Alternative D. Annual local income supported by recreation use would decline by an estimated

$130,000 for Alternative B, $250,000 with Alternative C, and $40,000 with Alternative D.

Fire and Fuels

E1

Comment: As you know, fire suppression over the last 100 years has changed the structure and composition of forest ecosystems, and it is recognized that fire is a necessary disturbance phenomena to keep fuel density in check and to maintain healthy forest ecosystems. The RMP offers opportunities to address the past heavy reliance on fire suppression by restoring more natural fire disturbance regimes to forest ecosystems, and treating unwanted competing vegetation, fuel loads, fire risk, and forest health with prescribed fire.

Although increasing development on private lands interface areas adjacent to public lands may make restoration of natural fire disturbance regimes in private lands interface areas more difficult.

EPA supports the BLM's wildland fire management goals to restore and maintain desired ecological conditions consistent with appropriate fire regimes; and minimize the adverse effects of fire on resources, resource uses and Wildland Urban Interface areas; and control wildland fire safely, efficiently and with minimal impact to resource values while minimizing the risk of catastrophic fire within the BFO lands and adjacent communities, while maintaining and reestablishing the natural influence of fire on vegetation (Table 1-5, page 9).

We especially support the prioritization of fire and fuels management activities in areas within or near the wildland urban interface (WUI) areas and areas of high or severe fire risk, and risk of damage to life and property. The RMP should reflect national fire management strategies and policies such as the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Program Review (USDA and USDI 1995), that directs integration of fire into land management planning, working with landowners and stakeholders, and directing landscape level analysis; and the National Fire Plan directing full range of fire management activities linked to RMPs.

The risks of uncharacteristic disturbances such as catastrophic wildfire should be evaluated versus the effects of fuels management actions designed to reduce those risks (i.e., water quality, fisheries, and wildlife effects). Methods to address competing and unwanted vegetation and fuel loads and fire risk need to be evaluated vs. water quality, fisheries, and wildlife effects from fuel and vegetation treatments. We note that thresholds for acceptable environmental impacts for fuel treatments around WUIs and areas of severe fire risk may be higher.

Response: The SIMPPLLE model was used to: (a) simulate future vegetation changes caused by various disturbance processes at multiple landscape scales, (b) show trends in vegetative communities over the next 50 years as a result of fire suppression, (c) simulate historic vegetative conditions by running the model over 500 years with variables such as fire, insect and disease activity, (d) simulate management treatment alternatives for their impact on disturbance processes and the attainment of desired conditions defined at the landscapes scale, and (e) provide a basis for identifying the probability of disturbance processes and vegetation conditions. Use of the model is described in **Appendix D** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. The effects of the risk of wildfire vs. the effects of fuels treatments on resources are analyzed at the site-specific project level. However, Chapter 4 of the RMP (Effects on Resources, Wildlife Fire Management section) does contain generalized discussion on the effects that management proposed under each alternative would have on the potential for wildland fire.

E2

Comment: Table 2-23 (page 115) under Fire Management Response shows the acreage that BLM would manage in various fire management unit (FMU) designations under the four alternatives. The table shows that alternative A (i.e. current management practice) would have approximately 7,300 acres designated as A FMU, 29,590 acres designated as B FMU, and 258,200 acres designated as C FMU, for a total of 295,090 acres. This is 8,910 acres less than the area shown as total managed land under the other three alternatives (304,000 acres). Please explain the difference in total area.

Response: All acres in the Butte RMP are approximate acres. It does appear that errors in the acres for Alternative A have occurred in the Draft RMP/EIS. Changes have been made in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS to show the appropriate acres for each FMU under each alternative.

E3

Comment: Also, the data shown under the four FMU designations contrasts with maps 2, 3, 4, and 5, which depict fire management. These maps cover the entire planning area with color coding for the FMU designations even though BLM-managed lands are only a fraction of the planning area. For example, current management (alternative A) has no land under D FMU according to the text, but Map 2 shows areas with this designation. Most BLM land would be under C FMU under Alternative C, but Map 4 shows large areas of Gallatin, Park, and Lewis & Clark Counties under A FMU and B FMU. Only 42,000 acres would be under B FMU in Alternative D, but Map 5 shows most of Gallatin County and portions of Lewis & Clark, Jefferson, Deer Lodge, and Silver Bow Counties under B FMU. Perhaps the maps would be more easily understood if only the BLM lands showed color coding. Alternatively, the maps

could distinguish BLM lands by superimposed marks such as cross-hatching.

Response: The BLM acknowledges that errors were made on Map 2 in the Draft RMP/EIS; there is no FMU D designation in the current condition as expressed by the text. The FMU designation and acres only pertain to those acres administered by the BLM. Maps providing a better representation of the BLM administered ground and the FMU designation have been included in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

E4

Comment: It is stated on page 415 and elsewhere in the DEIS that, "no Fire Management Units (FMUs) would have any Category A designated lands" under Alternative B. Accordingly, BLM's preferred alternative would remove 7,300 acres from Category A, which emphasizes fire suppression and non-fire fuels treatments. Map 2 shows that most of the areas currently under A FMU lie in Gallatin and Park Counties (see related comment above), which suggests the 7,300 acres proposed to be removed from A FMU are in this portion of the planning area. Please clarify the location of these parcels and why BLM's preferred alternative would remove them from A FMU.

Response: The 7,300 acres in Category A are BLM administered land within Park and Gallatin counties. Maps providing a better representation of the BLM administered ground and the FMU designation have been included in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. In the Butte RMP in Chapter 4, in the Wildland Fire Management section under Effects of Alternative B, it states that "Fire suppression under this alternative would be similar to Alternative A except it would allow for more flexibility to manage fires with no FMU Category A designations."

E5

Comment: Revise map to include Beaverhead County, and update to B designation in Wise River/Dewey/Hwy 43 area (see attached). Coordinate with Beaverhead County Fire Plan for this area, call Scott Marsh.

Response: The Preferred Alternative in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS has been modified to include these lands in a FMU B designation.

E6

Comment: The EPA supports reintroduction of fire into federal land management programs to allow fire to play its natural role and provide resource benefits, consistent with public health and environmental quality considerations. We agree that judicious use of prescribed fire can be used to control forest fuel accumulation and to influence vegetative composition and structure. We are pleased that the RMP acknowledges BLM's participation in the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group in accordance with the EPA Interim Air Quality Policy on Wildland and Prescribed Fires (page 210). EPA supports management direction consistent with the EPA Interim Air Quality Policy on Wildland and Prescribed Fires, that was developed with the active involvement of stakeholders, including the U.S. Department of Interior, to integrate the public policy goals of allowing fire to function in its natural role in maintaining healthy ecosystems and protecting public health and welfare by mitigating the impacts of air pollutant emissions on air quality and visibility.

We suggest that RMP Air Quality direction advise that project level NEPA documents for prescribed fire treatments discuss the EPA Interim Air Quality Policy on Wildland and Prescribed Fires and disclose involvement in a certified Smoke Management Program (Montana/Idaho Airshed Group). For example, "Project level NEPA documents involving treatments with prescribed fire should discuss the EPA Interim Air Quality Policy on Wildland and Prescribed Fires, and disclose how the BLM is participating in a EPA certified Smoke Management Program (e.g. Montana/Idaho State Airshed Group), and describe how prescribed burns will be conducted in accordance with the State certified Smoke Management Program." Also, it may be of interest to the public to display the website for the Montana/Idaho State Airshed Group, http://www.smokemu.org in the final RMP/EIS. Similarly it may be of interest to display the website for the Interim Air Quality Policy and a fact sheet on this policy in the FEIS, http://www.epa.gov/ttn/oarpg/t1/memoranda/firefnl.pdf, and www.epa.gov/ttn/oarpg/t1/fact_sheets/ firefl.pdf.

Response: In Chapter 2 of the RMP, under Management Concerns, in the Air Quality section it states: "Air resources would continue to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis as part of project level planning to ensure compliance with local, state, and federal regulatory requirements." That statement would ensure that project level NEPA takes into account the EPA Interim Air Quality Policy on Wildland and Prescribed Fire.

E7

Comment: There is a vast difference between the "natural fires" of a hundred years ago and the all-consuming forest fire we witnessed in the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness this summer. Back then forests were in fire equilibrium, that is, periodically natural forest-cleansing ground fires reduced the combustible fuel load on the forest floor, along with excessive numbers of small trees and brush. The fire seldom reached the lower limbs of big trees which would cause them to ignite and in turn create a fire storm that incinerates everything else in the forest.

Since BLM Wilderness Study lands are included in the FMU2 (Flexible Suppression Response Strategy), The Sleeping Giant (a wilderness study area) could suffer the same devastation as the Gates of the Mountains Wilder-

ness. When fires have been suppressed for many years the enormous buildup of fuel creates "burn intensity" such as that of the Meriwether fire. If the Sleeping Giant should ever be exposed to a lightening caused fire - some 6,000 acres will be toast.

Our public comment for the "Sleeping Giant study area", will be; Alternative D (which allows the greatest flexibility in fire management. It treats the most acres for fuels reduction and would do the most of any alternative to reduce fire intensity and behavior, improve wild land fire fighter safety, and move toward historic fire regimes).

Response: BLM guidance mandates Wildland Fire Use will be based on approved Fire Management Plans and will follow specific prescriptions contained in operational plans. This means that if the RMP identifies areas that Wildland Fire Use can be used, a site-specific plan will need to be developed to take into account the specific issues raised in the comment. The BLM notes that the Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands under Wilderness Review limits certain types of fire suppression activities for Wilderness Study Areas, such as Sleeping Giant. In the Butte RMP all BLM administered ground would be put into one of four Fire Management Unit (FMUs) Categories, as discussed in Chapter 2 under Wildland Fire Management in the Management Common to All Alternatives sections. After finalization of the Butte RMP, the Butte Field Office will revise its Fire Management Plan to more specifically address some of these issues.

E8

Comment: The Wildland Fire Management proposal under Alternative B has no lands designated in the Category A. The rapid growth and development in northern Jefferson County tends to support designation of these lands where fire is not desired.

Response: The BLM does not agree that Category A is the best designation for these lands. While Alternative C of the RMP/EIS allocates a portion of northern Jefferson County to Category A, placing these lands in Category B as proposed in the preferred alternative (B) allows for better flexibility for managing fuels in that area.

E9

Comment: The proposed ACEC designation for the Elkhorn Mountains dictates a more liberal fire management plan for naturally ignited fires. The concern for the large number of trees that are dying due to bug kill makes this large area a potential for being a location where a small fire could quickly grow into a major event that could become a public safety concern. This same concern exists for the proposed Elkhorn WSA tack-on that would further impede firefighting capabilities by restricting heavy equipment use and imposing retardant usage restrictions. The requirement to use 1/8th inch screens on hoses when removing water from fish bearing streams should not be a restriction on fire management personnel. It appears the wildland fire strategy should include a detailed analysis, in conjunction with the Forest Service, of the current bug infestation and the fire risks involved with proposed fire mitigation measures for the most threatened areas. This fire assessment and discussions should include the county leadership along with volunteer fire management personnel.

Response: Under Alternative A (current management) the Elkhorn Mountains are in a Fire Management Unit (FMU) Category C (see Chapter 2 Wildland Fire Management), and they would be designated in Category C under Alternatives B and C. Under Alternative D the Elkhorn Mountains would be designated as FMU Category D which provides for the most flexibility in Fire Management. The BLM believes that a good range of fire management options are presented for the Elkhorn Mountains area. BLM guidance mandates Wildland Fire Use will be based on approved Fire Management Plans and will follow specific prescriptions contained in operational plans. This means that if the RMP identifies areas that Wildland Fire Use can be used, a site specific plan will need to be developed to take into account the specific issues raised in the comment. The BLM current standard for hose screen is 1/8th inch, therefore the BLM does not see it as a restriction as discussed in the Wildland Fire Management section in Chapter 2 of the Butte RMP. The Collaborative Efforts including outreach to county commissioners for the Butte RMP DEIS are discussed in Chapter 5.

E10

Comment: We also encourage BLM to conduct improved public education programs to increase public understanding on the need for and value of fire in forest ecosystems. We encourage the BLM to consider issues such as promoting public education and understanding on air quality trade-offs between increased use of prescribed fire vs. wildfire. Increased public understanding of prescribed fire vs. wildfire air quality tradeoffs may promote increased public acceptance of and support for prescribed fire to manage vegetation and fire risk.

Response: The BLM agrees that public education programs to increase public understanding on the need for and value of fire in forest ecosystems is important. The National Fire Plan and 2001 Federal Fire Policy, both referenced in Chapter 1 of the RMP/EIS, place an emphasis on fire mitigation, education, and prevention. Discussions on air quality tradeoffs depending on proposed management in the different alternatives are provided in Chapter 4 of the RMP/EIS.

E11

Comment: BLM management direction should also assure that prescribed fire for fuel management and control or suppression of wildfire be conducted in a

manner that minimizes potential nonpoint source pollution of surface waters. All bladed firelines for prescribed fire and wildfire should be stabilized with water bars and/or other appropriate techniques if needed to control excessive sedimentation or erosion of the fireline.

Response: In Chapter 2 of the RMP, under Management Common to All Alternatives (of the Wildland Fire Management section), it states the BLM would use the BLM's Emergency Fire Rehabilitation Handbook (H-1742-2) for implementing fire rehabilitation projects following wildland fire and wildland fire use. It also states in the same section that: "Fire management activities would be designed and implemented in a manner that meets or moves toward meeting Land Health Standards." This should ensure that excessive sedimentation or erosion of the fireline well be considered in the planning and implementation of wildland fire management activities.

E12

Comment: On page 344 you state the different goals for prescribed burns – 80 percent consumption of aboveground biomass for Alt B, 60 percent for Alt C, 90 percent for Alt D. But so what? - What's the import of those differences, what are the tradeoffs? (The answer may well be buried in there somewhere, but that's part of my point.)

Response: The importance of the difference in percent consumption of above ground biomass is the nature of the mosaic of vegetation that will be left after a prescribed fire treatment, to provide desirable vegetation for colonization into the burned area. The tradeoff would be directly proportional to the size of the treatment area, which will have direct effects on wildlife, vegetation, and soils. See the Wildlife section in Chapter 4 of the RMP, Effects of Alternative B for more detail.

E13

Comment: Programmatic direction should also assure that the effects of burning on the potential stimulation of noxious weeds be evaluated during site-specific project level analysis. Prescribed fire has the potential to stimulate weed growth (e.g., Dalmatian toadflax or leafy spurge), and can destroy insects planted for biological weed control. Burning followed by application of appropriate herbicides can provide effective weed control. We suggest that such considerations be evaluated during development of direction and plans for prescribed burning. Areas should not be prescribed burned for at least 30 days after herbicide treatment.

Response: Treatment of weeds in relation to specific proposed prescribed burning would be determined during project specific analysis. The Wildland Fire Management section in Chapter 2 of the RMP/EIS contains goals that assure that noxious weeds will be evaluated at the site-specific level, while the Noxious Weed Management section outlines the goal to minimize infestations of invasive plants and noxious weeds. Whether burning would occur within 30 days of herbicide treatment would be dependent on site-specific factors and label instructions on herbicides or other known factors. In general, the window for herbicide treatment in the summer and fall and the windows for prescribed burning in the spring and fall would allow for the suggested objective.

E14

Comment: Is Urban Wildland Interface still alive? Destroy the vegetation on public lands to protect adjoining private landowners?

Response: The BLM is operating under laws, regulations and policies, as well as the most current scientific knowledge, in effort to reduce the risk of large-scale, severe wildfires by restoring healthy, viable ecosystems to our public forests and rangelands. These efforts include fuels reduction projects designed to protect communities at risk of wildfire and promote the safety of firefighting personnel. See Chapter 1 of the RMP, Relationship to BLM Policies, Plans and Programs, for reference to the National Fire Plan and 2001 Federal Fire Police.

Fish and Wildlife

F1

Comment: BLM did not even mention wildlife habitat for wild sheep, mule deer, white-tailed deer, pronghorn antelope, very little on elk, nothing about moose, beaver including beaver dams, ruffed grouse, and blue grouse habitat, very little on non game species and nothing on waterfowl/ wetlands habitat. No vegetative maps were shown of plant communities or wildlife habitat by quality and quantity was presented. Where is bighorn sheep habitat on public lands in HD 340 for example?

Response: The Wildlife Section in Chapter 3 of the RMP discusses wildlife habitat for a variety of wildlife species including those species that depend on grassland/shrubland, forest, and wetland/riparian habitats. This section also provides specific discussion on species such as elk, bighorn sheep, mule deer, white-tailed deer, pronghorn antelope, moose, and game birds (including grouse and waterfowl). The role of beaver dams is described in the Wetlands and Riparian Communities Section of Chapter 3.

Although suitable habitat for waterfowl is minimal on BLM lands in the Butte Field Office, the Wildlife Section in Chapter 3 of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS has been modified to include discussion of waterfowl species and their associated habitats that may be present in the Planning Area.

Maps displaying vegetation zones are cited under Vegetation Communities in Chapter 3 of the RMP (AMS

Figures 2-9a, 2-9b, and 2-9c) and are located on the supplemental disc provided in the RMP. The supplemental disc also provides maps that display wildlife habitat for wildlife corridors (AMS Figure 2-15), elk winter range (AMS Figure 2-16), mule deer winter range (AMS Figure 2-17), bighorn sheep winter range (AMS Figure 2-18), grizzly bear recovery and distribution zones (AMS Figure 2-19) and sage grouse distribution (AMS Figure 2-20).

Table 3-4 on the Vegetation Section in Chapter 3 of the RMP displays acres of different vegetation communities for the Planning and Decision Areas. Discussion on the quality and quantity of wildlife habitat is also found in the Wildlife section of Chapter 3.

Bighorn sheep habitat in HD 340 is discussed in the Wildlife Section (Bighorn Sheep) of Chapter 3. Bighorn sheep habitat in HD 340 is identified as habitat within the Soap Gulch and Camp Creek areas.

F2

Comment: MWF agrees strongly that fences can be significant barriers and cause unnecessary wildlife deaths if constructed irresponsibly but believes the statement needs much more clarification and emphasis. Too many area fences do not meet the requirements of the Unlawful Enclosures Act. Ensure that new and existing livestock fences comply with legal parameters as directed in BLM Manual H-1741-1 which ensures they do not inhibit free movement of wildlife. Those standards for domestic fence requirements as quoted, "...3-wire, 38-inch height, with bottom wire 16 inches off the ground..." fences constructed as such comply with the Unlawful Enclosures (sic) of Public Lands Act of 1885 (43. USC. 1061-1064; 23 Stat. L. 321. ch.149). MWF requests that these specifics be stated clearly within the RMP so that BLM' s intentions to provide for wildlife friendly fences are more than just empty promises, it complies with the law.

Response: In Chapter 2 of the Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section (Management Common to All Alternatives) of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS cites BLM's Manual H-1741-1 to clarify what fence specifications will be used. The BLM also works directly with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to design fences that best allow for wildlife movement.

F3

Comment: No wildlife evaluation was done on any exchange lands.

Response: Within the Land Ownership Adjustment Section (Management Common to Action Alternatives) of Chapter 2 in the Draft RMP/EIS, 7,472 acres of BLM lands were identified under the "disposal" category. This figure has been revised to 8,901 acres in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. Parcels identified for disposal are generally small (less than 100 acres), isolated parcels and often are surrounded by private lands. The interdisciplinary team reviewed all BLM parcels in the Butte Field Office and determined which parcels could be available for disposal. During this process, no major wildlife issues were identified for any of the parcels. The "disposal" category only determines which parcels would be available for sale or exchanged in the future. Site-specific analysis, however, of each parcel would be required when specific parcels are proposed for sale or exchange. As identified under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, parcels can only be sold if important recreation, wildlife, watershed, threatened or endangered species habitat, and/or cultural values are not identified during site-specific analysis. **Appendix L** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS provides information on land exchanges and sales.

F4

Comment: The document contains generalized statements regarding the potential impacts on wildlife, aquatic, and special status species for all of the proposed alternatives and affected areas. As a result, the reader is left with a limited understanding of the specific impacts on the various species. For instance, the potential effects of Alternative B for the Helena TPA include the following statements (Volume II, page 503, paragraphs 2 and 3): "The amount of big game security habitat would be low, but still more under Alternatives B and C…compared to Alternatives A and D which have no functional security habitat…Alternative B would allow for more breeding, foraging, and hiding habitat as well as improve more movement corridors for a wide variety of species than Alternatives A and D but less than Alternative C." It would greatly benefit the public if more explicit discussions on the potential impacts of the proposed activities on the various species affected could be provided to the extent that the detailed analytical information is available.

Response: Many of the types of impacts or effects to wildlife would be the same or similar under the different alternatives. All alternatives propose using the same types of treatments or allow similar management across the Field Office with the major differences being acres treated and road density. Because the type of treatments would be the same, the effects to wildlife species would be similar between alternatives but the degree of those effects would differ. For example, security habitat is defined as blocks of forested habitat greater than 250 acres in size that are non-linear and located further than 0.5 mile from a road that is open during the hunting season. Because of their size and location on the landscape, these areas would provide a refuge to big game during the hunting season. Therefore, the difference between alternatives would be the acres of security habitat available to big game, which are displayed by alternative for each TPA in Chapter 4, Volume II. More acres of security habitat would be better for elk than

fewer acres. This would be similar for wildlife corridors, winter range, and riparian habitat.

The general effects of management actions to wildlife and fish are described in the Wildlife and Fish Sections (Management Common to All Alternatives) of Chapter 4 of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS as well as under alternative-specific discussions in Chapter 4.

Some specific discussion on the effects to wildlife from roads is found within the travel plan sections in Chapter 4 (Volume II) of the RMP and additional analysis on the impacts to big game has been added to these sections in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

The Wildlife Section of Chapter 3 (Affected Environment) also provides discussion on the effects of management activities to specific wildlife habitat (such as wildlife corridors) as well as on wildlife species such as elk, black bear, and grizzly bear.

F5

Comment: It would be of great benefit to the public if the final RMP/EIS included references where statements of fact about species are made and on wildland fire management, especially because the number of references in the draft document are limited. For instance, a reference is needed for statements like (Volume II, page 534, 1st full paragraph), "…perennial non-fish bearing streams contribute to fish habitat indirectly by serving as conduits for watershed products (water, sediment, nutrients, contaminants, and in some cases woody material) to fish bearing streams."

Response: The BLM agrees that there was a lack of references in the Draft RMP/EIS. Additional references have been added to the Wildlife and Fish sections of Chapter 4 in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

F6

Comment: There is a big difference in the amount of acres that would be available for oil and gas leasing between alternatives B and C, but it is not clear why B is preferable over C on this point. It would also seem that C would pose far fewer unavoidable adverse impacts due to oil and gas leasing because fewer acres are available, though this is not stated in the plan. For example, an analysis of the impacts identifies benefits to Wildlife for C and to Energy and Minerals for B, while adverse impacts to Energy and Minerals are identified for C. What are the impacts to Wildlife for B? Perhaps the preferred alternative should look more like C when it comes to oil and gas leasing, particularly since the twelve stipulations to lessen the impacts to Special Status Species that are proposed for B (page 400) seem to have been the impetus for identifying much of the additional acres in C as available. At the same time, it is not clear why the same 12 stipulations are necessary for C (page 405), when lands for Special Status Species are specifically unavailable to leasing.

Response: The action alternatives represent a range of effects to fish and wildlife from oil and gas leasing. The type of stipulations and acres of leasing under Alternative B were consistent with the other types of management prescriptions proposed under this alternative. Generally, management prescriptions under Alternative B were more restrictive or beneficial to wildlife than Alternative D but less restrictive or less beneficial to wildlife than Alternative C. The comment is correct with the statement that Alternative C does pose fewer adverse impacts to wildlife due to oil and gas leasing. This is consistent with the more “protective” approach under Alternative C. Alternative C however, also effectively prohibits oil and gas leasing from most of the federal mineral estate acres in the Butte Field Office and this is less consistent with the BLM’s multiple-use mission than Alternative B.

Impacts to wildlife from oil and gas development under Alternative B are described under the Wildlife and Special Status Species sections of Chapter 4 in the RMP. The BLM believes that the stipulations identified under Alternative B, combined with the relative lack of oil and gas activity in the Decision Area forecast in the Reasonable Foreseeable Development scenario would protect resources while providing for oil and gas development.

The 12 wildlife stipulations for oil and gas leasing found in the Special Status Species section of Chapter 4 of the RMP are necessary to identify the type of stipulation for each species under Alternative C. There are differences between the stipulations under Alternative C including; No Lease, No Surface Occupancy and Timing Restrictions.

F7

Comment: In the Elkhorn Mountains analyze and map elk security habitat for all elk within Hunting District 380 (using Hillis et al. and in conjunction with information on elk use patterns from Fish, Wildlife and Parks).

Response: Acres of elk security habitat were generated for the five site-specific travel plan areas to display differences in acres of security habitat between alternatives. Acres of elk security habitat are also discussed at the Field Office scale to display the cumulative differences of security habitat in the five site- specific travel plan areas by alternative in both the Draft and Final EIS. For those areas that already have travel plans, such as the Elkhorn Mountains, the amount elk security habitat was not specifically displayed because elk security habitat was already mapped and discussed in the Elkhorn Mountains Travel Management Plan (completed in 1995).

Although the BLM agrees that updated mapping should be completed for elk security habitat in the Elkhorn Mountains, it is recognized that this mapping should be done in coordination with the Helena National Forest,

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

F8

Comment: In the Elkhorn Mountains thin or reduce conifers in areas where appropriate identified as security habitat in order to reduce risks of catastrophic wildfire, to enhance grasslands, and to maintain security habitat.

Response: Although each alternative differs in how aggressive the BLM would be with vegetation treatments to reduce fuel loads and restore grassland/shrubland habitats, all alternatives do propose treatments to meet these objectives. The emphasis for vegetative treatments are found in Chapter 2 of the RMP in Goals Common to All Alternatives for all BLM Activities, General Approach of Vegetation Management Activities, General Summary of Alternative Emphasis for Vegetation Communities as well as within other discussions in the Vegetation Communities main section.

The Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section (Management Common to All Alternatives) in Chapter 2 of the RMP provides direction to consider important blocks of security habitat during project planning.

F9

Comment: In the Elkhorn Mountains use prescribed fire to reduce or eliminate areas of conifer encroachment. In addition, when prescribed burns are planned to reduce conifer encroachment, the potential of such small patches of hiding cover should be evaluated to determine if some patches might contribute to the landscape pattern of security, and if some, therefore should be retained.

Response: The BLM agrees with the comment and the RMP provides for these types of treatments in the Elkhorn Mountains as well as throughout the Butte Field Office. Site-specific analysis (outside the scope of this RMP) of any project that proposes reducing conifer encroachment, or other types of vegetation manipulation, will address the amount and distribution of vegetation that contributes to hiding and security habitat as well as how the project would affect the amount and distribution of hiding and security habitat.

F10

Comment: We also support management direction that ensures that population strongholds and key refugia for listed or proposed species and narrow endemic populations are protected and restored. More pristine wilderness study areas and less developed areas further from roads often provide the key refuge areas and population strongholds for threatened and endangered and sensitive species. We believe it is important that wilderness study areas and less developed areas further from roads be protected and maintained in order to protect wildlife resources within the BFO area.

Response: The BLM agrees with the comment. The existing six Wilderness Study Areas would continue to be managed under the Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands under Wilderness Review. As stated in the Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section (Management Common to Action Alternatives) in Chapter 2 of the RMP, the BLM would minimize fragmentation in wildlife linkage corridors as well as maintain the function and diversity of habitats within large "patch" sizes. This would be accomplished by protecting areas with low road densities and excluding or minimizing certain types of development in these areas.

The action alternatives also provide additional guidelines to minimize open road densities in important areas such as grizzly bear habitat and big game winter range.

F11

Comment: Hikers disturb nesting birds (Swarthout, Elliott and Steidl, Robert, Journal of the Society of Conservation Biology, February 2003) yet restrictions on hiking and other non-motorized recreationists to reduce impacts on nesting birds are rarely imposed.

Response: The literature referenced by the comment refers to the Mexican spotted owl (Experimental Effects of Hiking on Breeding Mexican Spotted Owls), a species not found in the Butte Field Office.

The BLM, however, is aware that hikers can disturb nesting birds and has taken measures to protect active raptor nests along hiking trails in the past. The BLM will continue to restrict access to areas where hikers or other types of activities could have a substantial negative effect on breeding birds.

F12

Comment: The encroachment of residences into the forest is often the most significant factor contributing to the loss of summer and/or winter wildlife habitat. First, we request that the impact of these permanent encroachments be quantified and compared to the relatively minor impact that mechanized forest visitors have on wildlife habitat. Secondly, public land visitors should not have to pay the price in the form of motorized closures required to offset the impact of permanent encroachments by private residences. Proper assignment of restrictions would rest on those private individuals who permanently encroached on the natural habitat.

Response: The amount of residential development adjacent to BLM lands can not be quantified under this planning effort. However, Chapter 4 of the RMP considers the cumulative effects of residential development and roads in the five travel planning areas (Chapter 4, Wildlife). The Cumulative Effects on Resources sections

(under Vegetation Communities, Wildlife) of the RMP also provide discussion on the effects of residential development adjacent to BLM lands. The amount of residential development adjacent to BLM lands must be analyzed under "Cumulative Effects" because these developments are occurring on private land, not on BLM lands. Roads, however, are located on BLM lands and the effects to wildlife from roads are specifically addressed under all alternatives in the RMP. The alternatives for the five site-specific travel plan areas provide for a range of access into these areas.

The BLM does not have the authorization to assign restrictions to private land owners regarding development of their lands.

F13

Comment: Recreation Management: Executive Order 13443, Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation was enacted on August 17, 2007. The purpose of this order is to "direct Federal agencies that have programs and activities that have a measurable effect on public land management, outdoor recreation, and wildlife management, including the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture, to facilitate the expansion and enhancement of hunting opportunities and the management of game species and their habitat. "

MWF believes E.O. 13443 has not been sufficiently addressed in the Butte RMP/EIS and suggests that the Butte Office amend the RMP to include an analysis of the alternatives and how they affect hunting opportunities, quality of the hunt, and maximizing habitat protection.

MWF also asks how the Travel Plan ensures habitat security so that fish and wildlife remains on the public estate and if displacement of wildlife towards public land is discouraged. We believe these analyses appropriate in light of the new Executive Order 13443.

Response: The BLM acknowledges the importance of meeting the direction of Executive Order 13443. A recent study of Montana's outfitting industry (Nickerson et. al. 2007) indicated that this industry is a viable subcomponent of Montana's travel industry, and that hunting contributes the largest economic portion to outfitting in Montana (Nickerson et al., 2007).

The BLM believes that many management actions proposed under the Wildlife and Travel Management and Access sections in Chapter 2 of the Butte RMP facilitate the implementation of Executive Order 13443 such as providing for wildlife friendly fences; emphasis on security habitat, hiding habitat and winter range; seasonal timing restrictions in big game habitat; minimizing fragmentation of linkage corridors; habitat restoration; identifying big game species as "priority species"; coordination with federal, state, tribal and private landowners to improve wildlife habitat; and cooperating with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to adjust seasonal travel restrictions to meet state harvest goals.

Hunting access and quality of hunting experiences were issues that were considered during the development of alternatives and later analyzed in Chapter 4 under Recreation effects. These issues influenced many travel plan decisions with regard to routes available to motorized uses. The primary considerations were seasons of use, elevational access for hunters, hunter disbursement opportunities, game retention on public lands, conflicts between non-motorized and motorized users and game retrieval.

Although the alternatives differ in their degree of habitat restoration, each alternative emphasizes conserving and/or restoring wildlife habitat including habitat for game species. The Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section (Management Common to All Alternatives) in Chapter 2 of the RMP states that all alternatives would emphasize maintaining and supporting healthy, productive and diverse wildlife populations and communities of native plants and animals including big game species. All action alternatives would maintain or restore habitat for game species or minimize the effects to these species.

The Environmental Consequences of Five Site-Specific Travel Plans section (Wildlife subsections) in Chapter 4 provides analysis on the effect from roads to wildlife and compares the impacts from roads by alternative. The Wildlife sections in Chapter 4 include discussion on security habitat, winter range, travel corridors, as well as general effects to wildlife from roads.

The Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section (Management Common to All Alternatives) in Chapter 2 of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS states that the BLM would facilitate the expansion of hunting opportunities and management of game species and their habitats, as per Executive Order 13443.

F14

Comment: Elkhorn ACEC: The protection of wildlife is a priority so in areas where vehicle use is well established, the routes should be monitored and re-evaluated to ensure that quality habitat is provided for a wide range of wildlife, but especially for elk which require good winter range, safe calving grounds, and a high level of security to keep them on public land. On BLM lands where vehicle use has become well established, routes should be monitored and evaluated, and management decisions should be primarily based on the most recent science.

Response: The Elkhorn Mountains Travel Management Plan Environmental Assessment was completed for Forest Service and BLM lands in the Elkhorn Mountains in 1995. Big game security habitat and winter range

were two driving issues that resulted in road closures (including seasonal closures) in the Elkhorn Mountains.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks conducts annual surveys for big game in the Elkhorn Mountains. The results of these surveys, along with any recommendations for changes in management or restoration opportunities, are provided to both the BLM and the Forest Service. Future amendments to the Elkhorn Mountains Travel Plan could result from these recommendations.

The BLM, Forest Service and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks entered into a cooperative agreement to mange the Elkhorn Mountains consistently across administrative boundaries and to manage public lands for wildlife habitat and recreation in 1992. The agencies currently work together to identify issues in the Elkhorn Mountains as well as with management of wildlife and wildlife habitat.

F15

Comment: Pg.S-2: Habitat: Mt. FWP studies show elk numbers exceed the projected goal in all areas under the RMP. There isn't any data presented to warrant [road] closures for wildlife issues.

Response: The BLM manages habitat for wildlife, including big game species, while Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks regulates harvest of game species. One of the goals of habitat management on BLM lands is to provide habitat for self-sustaining populations of game and non-game species. The number of elk in an area depends on many factors including (but not limited to) weather, forage, predation, disease and hunter success. Although elk populations will fluctuate from year to year, the BLM manages wildlife habitat for the long-term sustainability of many species while providing for recreational activities. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks' Statewide Elk Management Plan identifies management goals and objectives for each Elk Management Unit across the state. The BLM took these goals and objectives into consideration when addressing the impacts of roads on elk and elk habitat in the five site-specific travel plan areas. In addition, while elk numbers may be high in some areas at the current time, these numbers could change substantially over time, further reinforcing the need for BLM to manage habitat appropriately.

The Travel Management and Access section (Management Common to Action Alternatives) in Chapter 2 indicates that the BLM will continue to coordinate travel restrictions with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to provide adequate access to meet the harvest goals that they set.

F16

Comment: Some wildlife considerations appear to impose more restrictions on land use that could impact future decision-making based on sound logic. The recommendation to retain contiguous blocks of dead and dying forests is subjective and may not be in the best interests of healthy forests and public safety. The raptor nest restriction of 0.5 mile noise buffer for active nests and the 0.25 mile noise buffer for five years for unoccupied nests has the potential to negatively impact many other aspects of the proposed RMP since raptor nesting locations could easily be a changing variable.

Response: Butte RMP management direction to retain contiguous blocks of dead and dying forests was intentionally left general in nature so as to allow project-level planning teams to identify what would be appropriate on a site-specific basis and provide management flexibility. There are a host of wildlife species, including a number of BLM sensitive species (such as black-backed and three-toed woodpeckers), that require this type of habitat. So from that standpoint, dead and dying forests are a natural and healthy part of ecosystem diversity.

The management prescription for raptor nest sites would not preclude management in these areas. The noise buffer around active nest sites would only be in effect during the breeding season. Noise disturbance buffers around raptor nests would entail seasonal activity restrictions, but would allow noise-producing management activities outside nesting/rearing seasons. Management activities could occur in these areas as well as around unoccupied nest sites providing suitable habitat is maintained around the nest sites. In the case of unoccupied raptor nests, some raptors have a tendency to re-occupy such nests in the future. There would be no noise disturbance seasonal restrictions applied to unoccupied raptor nests. In many cases throughout the Butte Field Office, thinning dense stands of trees around raptor nests would improve the habitat for these species.

F17

Comment: Related Plans (p.14). It is not clear whether plans and management direction by other agencies are considered. Recently issued plans, agency direction, and Executive Orders as listed below are not addressed in the plan but should be considered:

*Lynx Management Direction, adopted by the Forest Service in July 2007 – the core habitat includes several parcels of BLM lands including Granite Creek (Greenhorn-Skelly Gulch area), Marysville, and Virginia Creek area (Stemple Pass). Additional Core Habitat occurs in the Gallatin and Custer National Forests and virtually all of the remainder of southwest Montana occurs in Secondary Lynx Habitat.

*Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan Supplement: Habitat Based Recovery Criteria for the Yellowstone Ecosystem (March 2007). This plan calls for enhancing linkage connections between Yellowstone and other ecosystems. BLM lands at the headwaters of Little Prickly Pear Creek and Dog Creek on the Continental Divide are essential to the continuity of linkage connectivity north

to the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem and the Yellowstone Ecosystem.

*Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Final Conservation Strategy for the Grizzly Bear in the Greater Yellowstone Area. Federal Register/Vol. 72, No. 48/Tuesday, March 13, 2007/Notices.

*Executive Order 13443, Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation, August 17, 2007. Addresses hunting opportunity and wildlife conservation on all federal lands.

Response: FLPMA emphasizes the need to ensure coordination and consistency with the plans and policies of other relevant jurisdictions. To the extent practicable, BLM will consider these plans and management direction during site-specific planning. All recovery or conservation plans identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would be implemented by the BLM as well as management plans developed by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Park for those species removed from the Endangered Species list (such as the Yellowstone population of the grizzly bear).

The BLM will follow the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy and the BLM has worked closely with the Helena, Beaverhead-Deerlodge, and Gallatin National Forests to provide consistent mapping of lynx habitat between Forest Service and BLM lands. To ensure management consistency in the Butte RMP with other agencies, the BLM worked with adjacent National Forests to integrate lynx habitat on BLM and Forest Service lands into common Lynx Analysis Units. This will improve vegetation management and coordination of projects within lynx habitat between the BLM and adjacent National Forests.

The BLM will continue to use peer reviewed scientific studies along with recommendations from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to manage habitat in occupied grizzly bear habitat.

The BLM believes that many management actions proposed under the Wildlife and Travel Management and Access sections in Chapter 2 of the RMP will facilitate the implementation of Executive Order 13443 such as wildlife friendly fences; emphasis on big game security habitat, hiding habitat and winter range; seasonal timing restrictions in big game habitat; minimizing fragmentation of linkage corridors; habitat restoration; identifying big game species as “priority species”; coordination with federal, state, tribal and private landowners to improve wildlife habitat; and cooperating with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to adjust seasonal travel restrictions to meet state harvest goals.

The Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section (Management Common to All Alternatives) of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS states that the BLM would facilitate the expansion of hunting opportunities and management of game species and their habitats, as per Executive Order 13443.

Appendix B of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS provides a list of laws and executive orders that affect BLM planning and management.

F18

Comment: Big game security cover could be more adequately addressed if both security blocks of 250 to 500 acres and the Elk Management Guidelines were applied (p. 122). Currently only Alternative A calls for use of Elk Management Guidelines while Alternative B calls for 250 acres and Alternative C calls for 500 acres of security cover. However, the context and distribution in which these security block acreages would be applied is not described, does this mean 250 or 500 acres in an area of 1,000 acres or in an area of 10,000 acres?

Response: The Elk Management Guidelines referenced by the commenter found in Alternative A is The Coordinating Elk and Timber Management Study (1985). This study, along with more recent literature and research, was used to identify appropriate activities within elk habitats as well as to address the effects of management actions in the proposed RMP. For example, The Coordinating Elk and Timber Management Study, along with more recent literature, discusses security habitat, road location, road density and closures, vegetative management and winter range. All aspects of this study and other related research are found throughout the Draft and Final EIS.

Site-specific projects will continue to consider The Coordinating Elk and Timber Management Study along with other relevant research and literature during site specific project analysis.

The BLM agrees with the commenter that security habitat identified in the Wildlife Section of the Draft EIS is confusing and may not meet the intent of BLM’s objectives for providing elk security habitat. The management prescription for elk security habitat under each action alternative has been deleted from the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. A new management prescription has been included in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS under the Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section (Management Common to Action Alternatives) of Chapter 2 that states that functional blocks of security habitat for big game species would be maintained across the landscape. Where minimum-size blocks of security habitat (250 acres), as defined by Hillis et al. (1991), are located, they would be retained in a suitable condition during project implementation. Larger blocks of security habitat would be addressed and analyzed during project or watershed level planning to address the protection of security habitat. Where security habitat is limited or fragmented across the landscape, the BLM would emphasize

improving habitat through vegetation treatments and road closures (including seasonal closures) to increase security habitat for big game species.

F19

Comment: Two attached maps submitted from the Helena Area Resource Office entitled "Wildlife Distribution in Northern BLM RMP" and "North BLM RMP Land Ownership & Wildlife Linkage Zones" display linkage zones through the landscape. The primary one, the Continental Divide, as well as a series of local movement linkages (narrow dashed lines) are depicted. These linkages exist and are defined by a combination of suitable topography and vegetative cover, lower human densities, and appropriate habitats render these public lands crucial in the context of wildlife linkages. The most striking feature of the land ownership map is the critical role the BLM lands play in defining these linkages.

In the majority of cases, BLM lands are being utilized by wildlife to move between local areas and between ecosystems. It is a fact that wildlife will do their best to adapt to changes, but as human density spreads throughout all types of wildlife habitats, the simple presence of lands that are not inhabited by people (public lands) provides the security and thoroughfare necessary to accommodate not only local wildlife movements, but also the larger flow of genetic material through the landscape to help minimize isolation of meta-populations. For these reasons whenever BLM lands are being evaluated for disposal the above factors should be analyzed on both the broad and local scales, and wherever possible be retained and managed to provide for wildlife movements.

Response: Parcels identified for disposal are generally small (less than 100 acres), isolated parcels and often are surrounded by private lands. The "disposal" category only determines which parcels would be considered for sale or exchange in the future. Site-specific analysis, including a review for wildlife values such as location of lands relative to linkage corridors, would be required when specific parcels are proposed for sale or exchange.

F20

Comment: The RMP specifically indicates that it would coordinate with MFWP to determine whether habitat conditions exist that would allow for successful reintroduction of locally or regionally absent species and then lists several species. However, mountain goats are notably absent and should be added to the list. The mountain goat population decline began to occur immediately after a joint BLM-MFWP effort to introduce bighorn sheep into the Sleeping Giant.

Response: The BLM agrees and mountain goats have been added to the list of species identified for possible re-introduction in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

F21

Comment: Wolverines are rarely mentioned in the RMP and in Table 3-15 they are listed as occurring in the Planning Area but not in the Decision Area. It is very possible that wolverine do in fact occur within the decision area, particularly in the Great Divide, Mount Thompson, and Sleeping Giant areas that occur at higher elevations and within linkage areas. A dead wolverine was located by MFWP on the Sheep Mountain ridgeline in the Clancy area, and wolverine tracks and cache was observed by MFWP in the Great Divide area. Wolverines have home ranges as large as grizzly bears and both locations were within 2-4 miles of BLM lands.

Response: The BLM appreciates the information provided by the commenters regarding wolverines and has included this information in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. Additional descriptions on wolverine habitats have also been included in the Wildlife Section of Chapter 3 in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

F22

Comment: The Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) convened a Wild Sheep Working Group (WSWG) consisting of wildlife and animal health specialists to develop recommendations for domestic sheep and goat management in Wild Sheep Habitat in 2007. Those recommendations were finalized this year and adopted by the Directors of the Western Agencies on June 21, 2007. Both the BLM and Forest Service had representatives on the Working Group. Some of the recommendations from the WSWG to WAFWA agencies that are pertinent to the discussion of interface between domestics and wild sheep and should be recognized by the BLM in the RMP revision include:

1. Following completion of site-specific risk assessment, wild sheep transplant, augmentation, restoration, and management strategies should be designed to minimize the likelihood of contact between wild sheep and domestic sheep and goats.

2. Wild sheep managers should coordinate with local Weed & Pest Districts or other appropriate agencies/organizations involved with weed management to preclude the use of domestic sheep and goats for noxious weed control, in areas where contact between wild sheep and domestic sheep and goats is likely to occur. Agencies should provide educational information and offer assistance to Weed & Pest Districts regarding the disease risks associated with domestic sheep and goat use. Specific guidelines have been developed implemented in, British Columbia (www.for.gov.bc.ca/hfp/publications/00006/).

Response: The Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat and Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section (Management Common to Action Alternatives) in Chapter 2 of the RMP addresses the re-introduction of bighorn sheep. This section of the RMP states that the

BLM would coordinate with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to determine whether habitat or other conditions exist that would allow successful reintroduction of bighorn sheep. Any reintroduction efforts would be subject to site-specific analysis in which strategies would be identified to minimize the likelihood of contact between wild sheep and domestic sheep and goats.

Management direction described for each action alternative under Livestock Management in Chapter 2 provide guidance on when domestic sheep and goats could be allowed for weed control on BLM lands. Site-specific analysis of weed control projects using domestic sheep and goats would continue to address the effects to wild sheep. The BLM will follow the recommendations from the Wild Sheep Working Group to reduce the risk of disease transmission to wild sheep from domestic sheep and goats.

F23

Comment: The opening sentence in Appendix F states: "Grizzly bears, wolves, bald eagles, and lynx are the listed species that occur incidentally throughout the Butte Field Office. " MFWP firmly believes that these species occur more than just "incidentally" throughout the Butte Field Office. It is our opinion that reports of these and other species of concern such as wolverine should be seriously considered, carefully tracked, and their potential habitat conserved.

Response: The BLM agrees with the comment and understands the confusion the word "incidentally" has created. The word "incidentally" has been removed from this appendix (now **Appendix G** in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS).

F24

Comment: Wildlife Screens (p. 732) Part 2 (table of activities). For Item 6, Silviculture Activities, in addition to the criteria that "Chemicals do not affect cutworm moth or habitat" it is recommended that honeybees be included.

Response: The BLM agrees with the comment and honeybees have been added to these screening criteria.

F25

Comment: Roads and motorized uses also increase wildlife encounters with humans, which can degrade and fragment wildlife habitat; displace wildlife; change behavior and increase stress; reduce reproductive success; and increase wildlife mortality. The proposed management direction did not appear to say much about promoting a road network or transportation system that reduces wildlife fragmentation and displacement, and that is consistent with maintenance and protection of productive and diverse populations of wildlife species; and reducing impacts to sensitive species and contributing to recovery of listed species. To address these concerns we recommend that BLM consider improving such direction. For example, "The BLM will manage the transportation system to minimize fragmentation of wildlife habitat and to maintain and protect productive and diverse populations of wildlife species, reducing impacts to species of concern and contributing to recovery of threatened and endangered species."

Response: The BLM believes that management prescriptions found in the Butte RMP do relate to minimizing road construction and reducing road densities to promote quality habitats for wildlife. Maintaining suitable habitat conditions and minimizing fragmentation in linkage corridors as well as maintaining or emphasizing large block "patches" of habitats across the landscape would not be possible without reducing road densities or by maintaining areas that currently have low road densities. Management actions identified in the Wildlife sections of Chapter 2 in the RMP also identify minimizing road densities and disturbance to wildlife in critical habitats such as big game winter range, calving habitats, security habitat, and in the distribution of grizzly bear. All alternatives would emphasize maintaining and supporting healthy, productive, and diverse populations of animals including threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. Management of the transportation system would be taken into consideration during travel planning to maintain or improve habitats for a wide variety of wildlife species.

Travel planning under the five site-specific travel plans did address the effects of roads on fragmentation of habitats and disturbance as well as the direct and indirect effects of roads on a variety of wildlife and aquatic species.

F26

Comment: We support the proposed fish and wildlife goals in the RMP (page 40) to conserve, enhance, restore, or minimize impacts to important wildlife habitats, and contribute to the recovery of threatened, endangered, or candidate plant or animal species. We encourage restoration of degraded wildlife habitats, and protection and enhancement of travel and migration corridors for wildlife, including threatened species such as the grizzly bear, lynx, and gray wolf. We recommend your consideration of additional more specific language to strengthen protections to fish and wildlife and their habitat. For example, "BLM will ensure that the structure, composition, and function of aquatic ecosystems is maintained and/or restored to support a diversity of aquatic plant and animal species and ensure that hydrologic connectivity within watersheds is maintained and/or restored to provide for habitat and connectivity needs to maintain populations of aquatic dependent species."

"BLM will ensure that native wildlife species are provided habitat of sufficient quantity and quality, including connectivity and wildlife movement corridors, habitat

complexity, forest openings, edges, and ecotones, to enhance biological diversity".

Response: The BLM agrees with the comment and has added the following modified suggested wording under Management Common to Action Alternatives in the Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, and Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section in Chapter 2:

"The BLM would emphasize maintaining and/or restoring the structure, composition, and function of aquatic ecosystems to support a diversity of aquatic plant and animal species and emphasize hydrologic connectivity within watersheds to maintain and/or restore habitat and connectivity needs for populations of aquatic dependent species.

The BLM would emphasize providing habitat of sufficient quantity and quality, including connectivity and wildlife movement corridors, habitat complexity, forest openings, edges, and ecotones, to enhance biological diversity and provide quality, sustainable habitat for native wildlife species."

The BLM notes that the scattered nature of Butte Field Office lands in the planning area may limit the BLM's ability to meet these objectives depending on land ownership patterns.

F27

Comment: If protection of fish and game species is a significant issue, then a reasonable alternative that would produce far more positive results would be a different management scenario for fishing and hunting in the area rather than the closure of trails to OHV use. OHV recreationists have been the only recreationists to pay the price for improvements to fish and game populations. At the same time the improvements to fish and game populations from motorized closures is miniscule and the cumulative impact on motorized recreationists has been significant and negative. Motorized recreationists have been the first to be eliminated for far too long. The human environment is also important but it has been ignored and not adequately quantified. If there is some over-arching mandate to maximize fish and wildlife populations, then fishing and hunting management scenarios must be developed as reasonable alternatives to be considered. It is time for a reasonable approach to the management of fish and wildlife. If maximizing fish and game populations is that significant, then the opportunities for others besides motorized recreationists (who have paid their dues many times over) should be reduced. This concept is entirely reasonable and particularly when fishing and hunting closures or management would be far more effective in producing the desired outcome. We request consideration of fish and game management alternatives and a more balanced consideration of recreation versus fish and wildlife populations in the decision-making.

Response: The BLM is responsible for managing habitat for a variety of fish and wildlife species including game and non-game species. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks has the responsibility for managing the population of game species. The BLM believes that the alternatives in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS provide a range of alternatives that address the issues of recreation (including OHV use) and habitat for fish and wildlife.

F28

Comment: We would encourage the BLM to consider developing a new alternative altogether that would emphasize wildlife population habitat connectivity.

Response: Connectivity of wildlife populations can occur at many different scales depending on species and/or season of use. Movement corridors are described as areas of predicted movement between blocks of suitable habitat. Corridors can allow seasonal movements for a species such as elk migration between summer and winter range or provide for dispersing juveniles such as a subadult cougar who has to leave fully occupied habitat of other adult cougars.

Movement corridors may be small, such as in the case of amphibians or small mammals, or large such as with grizzly bear or big game species. If a patch of habitat is too small to support a population over time, corridors connecting patches of habitats can provide a larger habitat structure, and thus support a larger effective population.

Because of the different scales of habitat connectivity, it is difficult for the BLM to know exactly what the commenter would like the BLM to display in a new alternative. The BLM did take into consideration important wildlife movement corridors at different scales (landscape scale for large carnivores as well as riparian corridors) throughout the Butte RMP. The impacts to these corridors from management activities under the different alternatives are discussed in Chapter 4 of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

F29

Comment: On page 72 I read under Wildlife that "BLM would seek opportunities to convert sheep allotments to cattle allotments to protect Bighorn Sheep populations." This is also for Alternative B, the preferred alternative. I am concerned about the ramifications of this proposal. Can the wording here be altered to reflect that the existing sheep allotments will not be targeted for conversion to cattle allotments without the cooperation and consent of the holder of the sheep allotment?

Response: Where bighorn sheep populations are at risk in the proposed Elkhorns ACEC (the context of this comment), the BLM would seek opportunities to convert sheep allotments to cattle allotments at the time an allotment is vacated, sold or transferred. Existing sheep

allotments would remain in effect unless the permittee is interested in working with the BLM to convert to cattle.

F30

Comment: Mountain goat habitats on BLM lands should receive special attention. Few BLM areas qualify as mountain goat habitat, but where they occur, these lands are crucial to the existence of mountain goats, such as the Sleeping Giant Area. Mountain goat population dynamics are such that every opportunity should be afforded to sustain and enhance their habitat and habitat availability. Mountain goats exist within a narrow range of population tolerances, therefore minimal disturbance or overlap of multiple uses would enhance their well being. The RMP does not address mountain goats except in the No Action Alternative (Alternative A). MFWP requests that seasonal mountain goat habitat requirements be addressed and that timing restrictions be applied in all action alternatives, consistent with the Rocky Mountain Front Interagency Cooperative Guidelines that were adopted in 1987 by the BLM, MFWP, USFS, USFWS, Nature Conservancy, Montana State University, and members of the petroleum industry.

Response: The BLM will follow existing policy. The seasonal timing restrictions, however, have been added to Management Common to the All Alternatives in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. Currently, the Sleeping Giant area represents the only occupied mountain goat habitat on BLM lands in the Field Office. Since the Sleeping Giant area is within a Wilderness Study Area and an Area of Critical Environmental Concern, mountain goats would be provided adequate protection in this area.

The Wildlife section of Chapter 3 provides a description of mountain goat habitat in the Butte Field Office.

F31

Comment: Some recommendations to BLM and USFS (and other land management agencies) from the WSWG report that are pertinent to proposals being made in this RMP revision in relation to bighorn sheep include:

1. Joint federal land management agency guidelines on management of domestic sheep and goats in wild sheep habitat should be developed and included in both broad agency policy documents (e.g., USFS Manuals) and local Forest Plan/Resource Management Plans. Once guidelines have been approved, there should not be an automatic "sunset" provision or expiration date. If there is a specified longevity required by federal policy, and if appropriate and timely review cannot be completed, the existing guidelines should remain in effect, rather than becoming obsolete.

2. Land management agencies responsible for domestic sheep and goat grazing allotments, trailing routes, vegetation management (e.g., weed control, enhancement of conifer regeneration), use as pack stock, or any other uses involving domestic sheep and goats should only authorize such use where mechanisms are in place to achieve effective separation with wild sheep.

3. Land Use/Resource Management Plans, where relevant, should specifically address the issue of potential domestic sheep and goat interaction with wild sheep. Land use plans should evaluate the suitability of permitting activities involving domestic sheep and goats. Plans should address this issue and identify general areas of public land where domestic sheep and goats should not be permitted for weed control, commercial grazing, recreational packing, conifer regeneration vegetation management, and other management activities.

4. Where mandatory buffer zones (frequently cited as a minimum of 9 air miles [13.5 km]) between domestic sheep and goats and wild sheep have been used to ensure effective separation, it should be recognized that buffer zones apply to herds or populations of wild sheep, rather than wandering individuals (e.g., most often sub-adult bighorn rams).

5. In some cases, buffer zones have been a very effective strategy to reduce the opportunity for interaction between wild sheep and domestic sheep and goats. However, in continuous wild sheep habitat, where wild sheep movements may eventually exceed prior expectations, buffer zones may not be the most effective or practical tool (Schommer and Woolever 2007).

6. Land management agencies should clearly define the process, protocols, and timelines for short-term or emergency management actions when intervention is needed to minimize or eliminate the risk of interaction between wild sheep and domestic sheep and goats.

Given these recommendations from WAFWA, we support the management practice expressed in Alternative B regarding no new sheep/goat allotments occurring within a five-mile buffer of occupied bighorn sheep habitat. However, we strongly recommend going with the management practice put forth in Alternative C that sheep and goats could not be used for weed control within four miles of occupied native sheep habitat.

In short, FWP recommends against any action that may increase the likelihood of increasing contact between domestic sheep and goats and bighorn sheep.

Response: The BLM believes that Alternative B provides adequate protection to bighorn sheep. The management proposed under Alternative B meets or exceeds the protection provided by the direction in the current BLM Instruction Memorandum No. 98-140 Revised Guidelines for Management of Domestic Sheep and Goats in Native Wild Sheep Habitats (1998) under which the BLM currently operates. Should this policy be updated, the Butte Field Office would operate under that updated direction. If domestic sheep or goats are used for weed control, the BLM would undergo considerable coordination and effort during implementation to ensure that wild sheep are safeguarded.

F32

Comment: East Helena TPA: "Under Alternative C, soil erosion from roads would be reduced more than under any other alternative because the lowest mileage of roads in the high and moderate erosion categories would be left open (4.6 miles combined), while the greatest mileage in these categories combined would be closed (43.9 miles) and decommissioned (4 miles) of all alternatives.

Weeds: Alternatives B and C would have the same effects and both would result in fewer weeds than Alternatives A and D.

Wildlife: Actual road density in elk winter range would be 0.3 mi/mi^2 min Alternative C, far less than other alternatives. Under Alt. C there would be substantially more acres of functional winter range. The quality and quantity of winter range would improve more than all other alternatives, and the amount of big game security habitat would be greater (p. 531). Fragmentation of habitat would be least under Alternative C (p. 533).

Please consider modifying your preferred alternative to provide for conditions more favorable towards wildlife, similar to what is found in your Alternative C.

Response: The BLM is already proposing to reduce road densities in this area which should improve wildlife habitats. The Preferred Alternative attempts to balance the needs of providing motorized access while providing for resource protection.

F33

Comment: Recreation Opportunity Spectrum: Alternative C is the least roaded option and would be consistent with previous concerns for wildlife and their habitat by providing the most natural acreage; but even in Alternative C, 60 percent of the landscape would be roaded and allow for moderate to heavy motorized recreation. So from a wildlife perspective Alternative C generally provides the best scenario for maintaining wildlife habitats and linkages.

Response: The BLM agrees that Alternative C provides the best opportunities for improving or maintaining wildlife habitats and linkage corridors. However, Alternative B remains the Preferred Alternative that best meets the BLM's mission to provide for a range of resource uses and resource protection.

F34

Comment: The Continental Divide Trail (a Congressional Designation): receives a lesser status than Historic Trails, but because it occurs on the divide and essentially identifies the Continental Divide Wildlife Linkage Zone, it should receive greater consideration for non-motorized use and management (as per Congressional designation) to protect the integrity of its varied habitats. Relatively little BLM lands occur along the Continental Divide, but with notable and important exceptions including: Trout Creek in the northwest Lewis & Clark Area and Marysville. We believe that these areas are at least as important and should receive status equal to or greater than "Historic Trails."

Response: The BLM acknowledges the importance of the Continental Divide Trail for recreation as well as the importance of the Continental Divide for wildlife. BLM's section of the Continental Divide Trail follows a utility corridor access road and private lands. Due to this, the BLM cannot viably propose this section of trail as non-motorized. To allow for a non-motorized recreational experience along the Continental Divide Trail in the future, both the BLM and the U.S. Forest Service may pursue moving this section of trail onto Forest Service lands.

F35

Comment: Finally, FWP would like to propose a possible alternative use for the recently acquired McMaster's property. A possible use for this property may be as an alternative grazing allotment for domestic sheep where the existing allotment may allow for potential contact between bighorn sheep and domestic sheep. This may be a viable option for the permittee and prevent contact between domestic and wild sheep.

Response: The BLM believes that appropriate use of this area is as a forage reserve allotment as described in the RMP. Establishing forage reserves on BLM lands would provide the BLM flexibility in conducting vegetation treatment projects within existing general allotments while providing temporary substitute forage for permittees in forage reserve allotments as vegetation project areas are rested from livestock grazing. The McMasters property is ideal for this because it is newly acquired land and does not have any general allotments established on it at this time. The provisions for grazing forage reserve allotments do not restrict the type of livestock grazed. Criteria have been added to the Proposed RMP/Final EIS to address how BLM would determine priority for applicants applying for temporary grazing on a forage reserve allotment.

F36

New scientific information and analysis has emerged on the status of greater sage-grouse (Centrocercus urophasianus), the affects of energy development and West Nile virus on sage-grouse (Connelly et al. 2004; Naugle et al. 2006a; Naugle et al. 2006b; Holloran 2005). We provide here excerpts from these studies: Energy development for oil and gas influences sagebrush habitats by physical removal of habitat to construct well pads, roads, and pipelines. Indirect effects include habitat fragmentation and soil disturbance along roads, spread of exotic plants, and increased predation from raptors that have access to new perches for nesting and hunting. Noise disturbance from construction activities and vehicles

also can disrupt sage-grouse breeding and nesting. Development of oil and gas resources will continue to be a significant influence on sagebrush habitats and sage grouse because of advanced technological capability to access and develop reserves, high demand for oil and gas resources, and the large number of applications submitted (4,279 in fiscal year 2002) and approved each year….Sage-grouse are a relatively long-lived species of upland game bird with low reproductive rates. Sage-grouse are entirely dependent on sagebrush habitats for successful reproduction and winter survival. Disease and hunting have generally not been major factors in sage-grouse population change but new information suggests West Nile Virus may pose a significant threat…. Approximately 56 percent of the potential pre-settlement distribution of habitat is currently occupied. The area currently occupied by sage-grouse is clearly smaller than was occupied in pre-settlement times. With most of the analysis of sage-grouse numbers, we focused on the 1965-2003 period. Although many states and provinces were collecting data prior to 1965, this 39-year range provided an opportunity to analyze data after a sample of leks had been identified and protocols for data collection had been established and implemented. Eleven of 13 (85 percent) states and provinces showed significant long-term declines in size of active leks. Similarly, eight of 10 states (80 percent) showed population declines over the same time frame…Our analysis of the entire sage-grouse population indicated that sage-grouse declined dramatically from the 1960s to the mid-1980s and then tended to stabilize. This analysis indicated that these changes were often not density-independent. If trends characteristic of the 1960s through the mid-1980s continued, sage-grouse had a relatively high likelihood of being extirpated. However, those trends have not continued. As a result, data suggest sage-grouse populations in most areas have been relatively stable or slightly declining during the last 15-20 years. In many areas numbers increased between 1995 and 2003. Although there are areas that presently could be considered population strongholds, some populations are still declining rather precipitously in various portions of the species range… Annual rates of change suggest a long-term decline for greater sage-grouse in western North America and support the trend information obtained from lek attendance (males/lek) data. Sage-grouse populations declined at an overall rate of 2.0 percent per year from 1965 to 2003. From 1965-85, the population declined at an average rate of 3.5 percent. From 1986 to 2003, the population declined at a lower rate of 0.4 percent and fluctuated around a level that was 5 percent lower than the 2003 population. A total of 50,566 male sage-grouse were counted on leks in 2003 throughout western North America. However, we are not optimistic about the future of sage-grouse because of long-term population declines coupled with continued loss and degradation of habitat and other factors (including West Nile Virus), (Connelly et al. 2004). Knowledge that sage-grouse avoid energy development in breeding (Naugle et al. 2006a) and wintering seasons (Naugle et al. 2006b) shows that conservation strategies to date to protect the species have been largely ineffective. An effective conservation strategy is one that limits the cumulative impact of disturbances across a landscape at all times of the year… Winter habitat is limited for birds along the border of Montana and Wyoming. Movements of radio-marked birds indicate that this non-migratory population remains in small parcels of suitable habitat to breed, raise broods, and spend the winter. The most suitable winter habitat in Montana and northern Wyoming encompasses only 13 percent of total land area and has already been impacted by surface mining activities. Expansion of CBNG development threatens to extirpate birds from otherwise suitable habitats and further isolate remaining populations. Risk of complete loss of this population is high if plans proceed to develop the entire northern study area because their non-migratory status and behavioral avoidance of CBNG will leave these birds with no other options (Naugle et al. 2006b). Comparatively more undeveloped winter habitat exists further south in Wyoming (south and east of the town of Buffalo) than along the border of Montana and Wyoming. Large pieces of undeveloped habitat near Buffalo provide winter habitat for a migratory population that nest up to 28 km to the north where winter habitat is poor. Some of these same good wintering areas also contain resident populations of nesting birds that distribute themselves around active leks with >20 males in attendance. Spatially-explicit planning tools, when coupled with knowledge of bird movements and active lek locations provide a biological basis for decision-makers to formulate an effective conservation strategy for sage grouse have shown that sage-grouse either avoid energy development during the breeding season (Holloran 2005, Naugle et al. 2006) or experience rates of mortality that result in extirpation (Holloran 2005). Avoidance is typically detrimental to populations because individuals are forced into sub-optimal habitats where vital rates decline (i.e. survival and reproduction), which in turn negatively influences population growth rate, size, and persistence, and generally leaves populations with little capacity to respond to new stressors (e.g. West Nile virus). New knowledge that sage-grouse also avoid energy development during winter shows that conservation strategies to date to protect this species have been largely ineffective. Current "Best Management Practices" that place timing stipulations or limit surface occupancy next to leks still result in a human footprint that far exceeds the tolerance limits of sage-grouse. We cannot write a prescription for development for each piece of the landscape because the exact mechanisms for each source of disturbance in a gas field that results in avoidance and/or increased mortality are not known. Rather, effective conservation strategies will be those that limit the cumulative impact of disturbances at all times of the year. Size of a functional conservation area will need to be large because sage-grouse are a landscape species that require contiguous tracts of undis-

turbed habitat that meet all their seasonal life requisites. Holloran et al. (2005) found that nest distributions were spatially related to lek location, and that a 5-km buffer encompassed just 64 percent of nests. This marks a shift in our understanding of the size of area necessary to maintain a viable sage-grouse population. Thus, land managers are encouraged to think in terms of "numerous square miles" of suitable habitat rather than individual parcels of land or even an individual square mile of habitat (Naugle et al. 2006b). Greater sage-grouse in western Wyoming appeared to be excluded from attending leks situated within or near the development boundaries of natural gas fields. Declines in the number of displaying males were positively correlated with decreased distance from leks to gas-field-related sources of disturbance, increased levels of development surrounding leks, increased traffic volumes within 3 km of leks, and increased potential for greater noise intensity at leks. Displacement of adult males and low recruitment of juvenile males contributed to declines in the number of breeding males on impacted leks. Additionally, responses of predatory species to development of gas fields could be responsible for decreased male survival on leks situated near the edges of developing fields and could extend the range-of-influence of gas fields. Generally, nesting females avoided areas with high densities of producing wells, and brooding females avoided producing wells. However, the relationship between selected nesting sites and proximity to gas field infrastructure shifted between 2000 - 2003 and 2004, with females selecting nesting habitat farther from active drilling rigs and producing wells in 2004. This suggests that the long-term response of nesting populations is avoidance of natural gas development. Most of the variability in population growth between populations that were impacted and non-impacted by natural gas development was explained by lower annual survival buffered to some extent by higher productivity in impacted populations. Seasonal survival differences between impacted and non-impacted individuals indicates that a lag period occurs between when an individual is impacted by an anthropogenic disturbance and when survival probabilities are influenced, suggesting negative fitness consequences for females subjected to natural gas development during the breeding or nesting periods. I suggest that currently imposed development stipulations are inadequate to protect greater sage-grouse, and that stipulations need to be modified to maintain populations within natural gas fields. My results support the suggestion that greater sage-grouse leks situated relatively near extractive mineral developments ultimately will become unoccupied. The evidence suggests that natural gas field development within 3-5 km of an active greater sage-grouse lek will lead to dramatic declines in breeding populations. Overall declines in male lek attendance approached 100 percent (i.e., lek inactivity) when distances from leks to drilling rigs, producing wells, and main haul roads decreased, and as the number of quadrants containing wells within 5 km and the total length of main haul road within 3 km of leks increased. Conversely, as distances from leks to disturbance sources increased and the level of development surrounding leks decreased, male lek attendance remained stable. These observations were similar to 3 lek complexes in southern Canada that were disturbed by oil and gas activities occurring within 200 m between 1983-1985; none of these leks has been active since the disturbance (Braun et al. 2002, Aldridge and Brigham 2003). In northern Colorado, the numbers of males counted on 3 of 4 leks within 2 km of coal mine development declined as mining activity increased (Braun 1986, Remington and Braun 1991). Following the increase in activity, 1 lek became inactive in 3 years, 1 lek became inactive in 5 years, and 1 lek declined by approximately 88 percent in 4 years (Braun 1986 Remington and Braun 1991). Further, 2 of the 3 most heavily impacted leks in my study became essentially inactive over a 3-4 year period (Holloran and Anderson In Press). Greater sage-grouse leks appeared to be negatively influenced if situated within 5 km of a drilling rig that was operating during the breeding season. Male lek attendance declines were not associated with drilling rig visibility, suggesting that something other than the potentially negative effects of structure (Braun 1998) were influencing drill-disturbed leks. (Holloran 2005). We report unexpected impacts of West Nile virus (WNv) on radio-marked greater sage-grouse (Centrocercus urophasianus), a species that has declined 45-80 percent and is endangered in Canada and under current consideration for federal listing in the US. We show that WNv reduced late-summer survival an average of 25 percent in four radio-marked populations in the western US and Canada. Serum from 112 sage-grouse collected after the outbreak show that none had antibodies, suggesting that they lack resistance. The spread of WNv represents a significant new stressor on sage-grouse and probably other at-risk species. While managing habitat might lessen its impact on sage-grouse populations, WNv has left wildlife and public health officials scrambling to address surface water and vector control issues in western North America (Naugle 2004). Summaries of significant findings in the-above sage-grouse studies:

Breeding Activities:

Holloran (2005 - western WY)

§ Male lek attendance declined as distance from leks to drilling rigs, producing wells and haul roads decreased and as densities of those infrastructure facilities increased. Effects were detectable out to various distances (3 - 6.2 km) depending on the disturbance variable. These observations were similar to that reported for sage-grouse associated with energy development in Alberta (Aldridge and Brigham 2003) and Colorado (Remington and Braun 1991).

§ Well densities exceeding 1 producing well every 283 ha (1 well/699 acres) appeared to negatively influence male lek attendance.

§ Main haul roads within 3 km of leks negatively influenced male lek attendance largely through increased traffic volume.

§ Male attendance decreased with traffic volume of < 12 vehicles per day and leks became inactive when volume exceeded 75 vehicles per day.

Naugle et al. (2006 - northeast WY)

§ Among leks of known status in 2004-2005, only 34 percent remained active within CBNG fields, compared to 83 percent of leks adjacent to or outside CBNG fields.

§ From 2000-2005, leks in CBNG fields had 11-55 percent fewer males per active lek than leks outside CBNG development. All known remaining leks with ≥25 males occurred outside CBNG fields in 2005.

§ Findings show that CBNG development is having negative effects on sage-grouse populations over and above those of habitat loss caused by wildfire, sagebrush control, or conversion of sagebrush to pasture or cropland. Moreover, the extent of CBNG development explained lek inactivity better than power lines, pre-existing roads, or West Nile virus mortality.

§ Research findings show a lag effect, with leks predicted to disappear, on average, within 4 years of CBNG development. Regardless of other stressors, 22 of 24 lek complexes (92 percent) did not go inactive until after CBNG development came into the landscape.

§ Leks typically remained active when well spacing was ≥ 500 acres (1.3 wells per section), whereas leks typically were lost when spacing exceeded 4.2 wells per section.

Summary Statement: During the breeding season, male sage-grouse are sensitive to disturbance during both the exploratory and production phase of oil and gas development. Levels of sensitivity as measured by the distance at which no change in male attendance was detectable, vary by factor, but are significant at distances of less than 3 km. In the Powder River Basin, impacts to lek activity included an observed 50 percent decrease in the number of active leks within developed gas fields as well as a 50 percent reduction in the average number of males present on remaining leks. There was a discernable time lag between development and observed declines. Changes in numbers were likely an artifact of both distribution shifts in attendance as well as changes in survival and recruitment rates. Existing stipulations that restrict surface occupancy within .4 km (.25 mile) of an active lek are insufficient to maintain populations within developed oil and gas fields. Current well-spacing of 32 - 64 ha (80 - 160 acres) appear to be several times greater than breeding sage grouse populations can tolerate. Supports utilizing a minimum 1.6 km (1mile) buffer of no surface occupancy around existing leks and preferably, utilize a minimum 3 km (1.8 mile) buffer. Recognize that development activities within 3 km will have negative impacts on sage grouse populations.

Nesting and Brood Rearing (Holloran and Anderson 2005), (Holloran 2006):

§ Sage-grouse nest locations are spatially related to lek locations and a 5 km buffer included 64 percent of known nests.

§ The substantial number of females nesting > 5 km from a lek could be important for population viability.

§ Observed lek to nest distances was not related to lek size.

§ Closest known lek to nest distance was greater for successful nests than destroyed nests.

§ Nests located < 1 km from another known nest tended to have lower success probabilities.

§ Nesting females strongly avoided areas with high well densities but adult females can exhibit strong nest site fidelity. Mean annual survival rates for females suggest that 5 to 9 years may be required to realize ultimate nesting population response to development activities.

Lyon and Anderson 2003:

§ Female sage-grouse disturbed by natural gas development during the breeding season had lower nest initiation rates.

Schroeder and Robb 2003:

§ Nest distribution patterns may change as a result of habitat alteration and fragmentation and the 5 km buffer should be considered relevant only for contiguous sagebrush habitats.

Aldridge and Boyce 2007.

§ Sage-grouse chick survival decreased as well densities increased within 1 km of brooding locations. These brood-rearing areas acted as habitat sinks where recruitment was poor.

§ Low nest success (39 percent) and low brood survival (12 percent) characterized sage-grouse vital rates in habitat fragmented by energy development in southern Alberta.

Summary Statement: Female sage-grouse are spatially grouped around a lek or lek complex during the nesting season. Females tend to move away from leks in selecting nest locations and to an extent, those movements appear to improve their rates of nest success. However, females in developed habitat moved twice as far as females in undisturbed habitat and exhibited lower rates of nest initiation. Females also select nest locations that segregate their nests from those of adjacent hens and the probability of successfully hatching those nests increases when that distance is > 1 km. When females have suitable and contiguous nesting habitat to select from, slightly over 60 percent of nests occur within 5 km of the lek. This strategy of mutual avoidance reduces nest densities and therefore reduces probability of detection by nest predators. However, land use practices that fragment sagebrush habitat and reduce the amount of suitable nesting cover may lead to increased densities of nesting birds and lower rates of nest success. Even if 5

km buffers are employed around existing leks, increased development and production activity in the zone beyond that buffer will impact the remaining 40 percent of nesting hens and potentially compromise the success of those birds nesting within that 5 km buffer based on the density dependent factors noted above. Stipulations restricting seasonal surface use within 2 miles of an active lek during the breeding and nesting period (1 March - 15 June) are inadequate to maintain sage-grouse populations within developed habitat.

Supports utilizing a 6.9 km (4 mile) buffer around leks to protect nesting and brood rearing habitat for a minimum of 70 percent of the nesting hens associated with a lek from March 1 through June 30. This protection should apply to both initial development and subsequent annual development and maintenance operations.

Winter Habitat Use (Naugle et al. unpub. report 2006):

§ In NE WY, predictive winter habitat use models based on vegetation and topographic features were strongly correlated with observed sage-grouse locations (R2 = 0.96).

§ Sage-grouse select for large intact and relatively flat expanses of sagebrush as winter habitat and avoid more rugged terrain and conifer habitat. Given that severe winter conditions (deep snow, low temperatures) could force birds into more rugged terrain, topographic variables should be considered in regions outside the PRB.

§ After controlling for vegetation and topography, the addition of a variable quantifying the extent of energy development showed that sage-grouse avoid energy development in otherwise suitable habitat. At 80 acre well-spacing birds were found only in the highest quality winter habitat that may not be available in all wintering locations.

§ Avoidance of CBNG in winter and the high likelihood of lek loss in spring threaten to severely impact populations along the Montana/Wyoming border where models classify only 13 percent of area as high quality winter habitat.

Summary Statement: Sage grouse are sensitive to energy development associated with winter habitat. Recent advances in modeling efficiencies provide a tool to assess important winter habitat and the spatial relationship between known leks and potential winter habitat. Sage grouse in this region can be non-migratory when suitable seasonal habitats occur in reasonable juxtaposition while other population segments must move greater distances (and across jurisdictions) when those habitats are unavailable. In some cases, this dissimilar distribution pattern may involve birds using the same lek complex or a shared winter range. Seasonal restrictions will not be effective at mitigating infrastructure development if the level of development is moderate to intense and overlays important winter habitat.

West Nile Virus (Naugle 2004):

§ West Nile virus (WNV) mortalities in radio-marked sage-grouse each year since 2003 (2-25 percent per yr) show that disease is a new and likely permanent stressor to sage-grouse populations. Mortality from

WNV may have population-level impacts because female survival plays a vital role in population growth. Mortality events from WNV in 8 of 11 states since 2003 support the need to conserve the sage-grouse across their remaining range to reduce the risk of impacts from disease.

§ Research shows that CBNG ponds pose a threat to sage-grouse because they provide habitat for mosquitoes that spread WNV. Landscapes with the highest mosquito densities also harbor the highest infection rates in Cx. tarsalis, the species of mosquito that spreads the disease. Larval Cx. tarsalis were produced at similar rates in CBNG and natural sites, whereas CBNG ponds produced Cx. tarsalis over a longer time period than agricultural irrigation.

Inference: West Nile Virus should be considered endemic across the northern Great Plains portion of the range of greater sage-grouse. The presence of this disease has added another stressor to sage grouse population dynamics. The prevalence of the disease and associated level of mortality in sage-grouse appears to vary considerably from year to year based on environmental conditions. However, CBNG ponds do provide a much more consistent set of conditions favorable to the spread of WNV even in years of low natural precipitation. Conservation actions need to consider the relationship between CBNG and WNV and attempt to mitigate those conditions favorable to WNV. Supports reducing potential of CBNG ponds to produce late summer mosquito populations that vector WNV. The DSEIS fails to consider groundwater reinjection as an alternative which could limit some sources of West Nile virus infection. New Science on Vulnerability of Shrub-Steppe Habitat and Avifauna Degradation, fragmentation, and loss of native sagebrush (Artemisia spp.) landscapes have imperiled these habitats and their associated avifauna. Historically, this vast piece of the Western landscape has been undervalued: even though more than 70 percent of all remaining sagebrush habitat in the United States is publicly owned, only 3 percent of it is protected as federal reserves or national parks. We review the threats facing birds in sagebrush habitats to emphasize the urgency for conservation and research actions, and synthesize existing information that forms the foundation for recommended research directions. This research is essential because we already have seen that sagebrush habitats can be altered by land use, spread of invasive plants, and disrupted disturbance regimes beyond a threshold at which natural recovery is unlikely. Research on these issues should be instituted on lands managed by state or federal agencies because most lands still dominated by sagebrush are owned publicly. In addition to the challenge of understanding shrub steppe bird-habitat dynamics, conservation of sagebrush landscapes depends on our ability to recognize and communicate their intrinsic value and on our resolve to conserve them (Knick, et al. 2003).

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Butte RMP. We hope these comments and new scientific findings and recommendations will be incorporated into final RMP.

Response: The BLM manages very little sage grouse habitat in the Butte Field Office. Approximately 9 percent (2,354,572 acres) of the statewide sage grouse habitat is located within southwestern Montana including lands in the BLM's Butte and Dillon Field Offices. Within the Planning Area boundary of the Butte Field Office, current sage grouse habitat is located on roughly 340,000 acres (including all ownerships). Sage grouse breeding and nesting habitat in the Decision Area is found on approximately 67,000 acres and is predominately in the Big Hole and Yellowstone watersheds. BLM surface acres include approximately 2 percent (1,250 acres) of the breeding and nesting habitat and 6 percent (21,700 acres) of general sage grouse habitats within the Planning Area. While there are several known leks within the Planning Area boundaries, no leks have been documented on BLM lands since 1992.

The BLM has analyzed a range of alternatives that would mitigate impacts to sage grouse in the RMP. Under the Preferred Alternative (Alternative B), the BLM would provide mitigation for sage grouse by applying three different stipulations. Winter/spring range would be protected with a timing limit stipulation which would restrict activity in that range from December 1 through May 15. Leks, if any are ever discovered on BLM land, would be protected with a no surface occupancy stipulation extending ¼-mile out from the lek. Breeding habitat would be protected with a timing limit stipulation extending from March 1 through June 30 with a three mile buffer around leks. Essentially, due to the timing limitation stipulations, activity would be limited within the vicinity of leks from December 1 through June 30, a seven month interval. The most restrictive alternative analyzed in detail in the RMP (Alternative C) would make sage grouse winter/spring range unavailable for lease, and would provide for a ½-mile no lease buffer around leks. A no surface occupancy stipulation would apply to breeding habitat with a three mile buffer zone.

The BLM believes that with the use of the stipulations under consideration in the Butte RMP and best management practices, impacts to sage grouse and their habitat would be minimized. The BLM notes that the reasonably foreseeable development scenario prepared for the Butte RMP forecasts only up to seven producing deep gas wells on federal mineral estate. These wells would be spaced at one well for every 640 acres which is state-wide spacing for gas wells. Development would not be as concentrated as in the study areas described in the scientific studies mentioned in the comment. Any other federal wells would be dry holes that would be reclaimed. The oil production is forecast for state or fee minerals. Because of the small amount of sage grouse habitat present, lack of known leks, small amount of forecasted oil and gas exploration/development activity foreseen, and protection provided by the proposed stipulations, the magnitude of any potential effects on sage grouse associated with oil and gas development from the Butte RMP would likely be comparatively minor.

F37

Comment: FWP believes that no record of decision should be issued until the following concerns have been addressed satisfactorily in any selected alternative.

1) sage grouse strutting grounds (leks) should have a 1 mile NSO or be made unavailable for leasing and should have timing stipulations applied within a 4 mile radius in order to protect nesting areas, all sage grouse wintering areas should have an NSO stipulation attached or be unavailable for leasing;

2) all BLM minerals that occur under or adjacent within 1 mile to FWP land interests including state parks, wildlife management areas, fishing access sites, land owner incentive contract areas, fee title land, easements and or leased and FWP recreationally managed areas should have a NSO stipulation attached or be unavailable for leasing,

3) all conservation easements (FWP and private organization) especially those where Federal funding has been applied to secure the easement should have an NSO stipulation attached or be unavailable for leasing,

4) all flood plains, wetland and riparian areas should have NSO stipulations attached, and

5) any river eligible for WSA should have the entire drainage or river corridor designated as NSO.

Likewise, FWP is currently pursuing the development of crucial fish and wildlife areas and migratory corridors throughout Montana. FWP would appreciate the insertion of language into the final ROD that would allow this new information, when available, to be considered and included in the RMP and that at that time these areas would be considered for augmentation of stipulations as designated under the record of decision, including NSO if necessary.

Finally, all of the above recommendations should be given especially close consideration in the areas identified on the map insert page 884 that have moderate to high potential for development of oil and gas resources. It should be noted that areas 2 and 3 on the reference map contains large blocks of surface conservation easements established using Federal Funding. Likewise the BLM should consider language in the Butte RMP that will incorporate the need to recognize the future ROD from the BLM statewide CBM SEIS as it relates to area 5 along the Bozeman Pass.

Response: The numbered items from the comment are addressed in sequential order below.

1) The BLM manages very little sage grouse habitat in the Butte Field Office. Approximately 9 percent (2,354,572 acres) of the statewide sage grouse habitat is located within southwestern Montana including lands in the BLM's Butte and Dillon Field Offices. Within the Planning Area boundary of the Butte Field Office, current sage grouse habitat is located on roughly 340,000 acres (including all ownerships). Sage grouse breeding and nesting habitat in the Decision Area is found on approximately 67,000 acres and is predominately in the Big Hole and Yellowstone watersheds. BLM surface acres make up approximately 2 percent (1,250 acres) of the breeding and nesting habitat and 6 percent (21,700 acres) of general sage grouse habitats within the Planning Area. While there are several known leks within the Planning Area boundaries, no leks have been documented on BLM lands since 1992.

The BLM has analyzed a range of alternatives that would mitigate impacts to sage grouse in the draft RMP. Under the Preferred Alternative (Alternative B), the BLM would provide mitigation for sage grouse by applying three different stipulations. Winter/spring range would be protected with a timing stipulation which would restrict activity in that range from December 1 through May 15. Leks, if any are ever discovered on federal mineral estate lands, would be protected with a no surface occupancy stipulation extending ¼-mile out from leks. Breeding habitat would be protected with a timing limit stipulation extending from March 1 through June 30 with a three mile buffer around leks. Essentially, due to the timing limitation stipulations, activity would be limited within the vicinity of leks from December 1 through June 30, a seven month interval. The most restrictive alternative analyzed in detail in the RMP (Alternative C) would make sage grouse winter/spring range unavailable for lease with a ½-mile no lease buffer around leks. A no surface occupancy stipulation would apply to breeding habitat with a three mile buffer zone.

The BLM believes that with the use of the stipulations under consideration in the Butte RMP and best management practices, impacts to sage grouse and their habitat would be minimized. The BLM notes that the reasonably foreseeable development scenario prepared for the Butte RMP forecasts only up to seven producing deep gas wells on federal mineral estate lands. These wells would be spaced at one well for every 640 acres. Compared to other areas with more extensive oil and gas resources, this level of development is sparse and widely spaced, and would have fewer impacts on sage grouse overall than operations in more intensively developed areas.

2) The BLM has changed the existing no surface occupancy stipulation (within ¼-mile of developed recreation sites) in Alternative B to make it apply to "all developed recreations sites" with underlying federal minerals. As revised it would also apply to state and local sites and provide the same level of protection that the BLM provides to its own sites. Under the Preferred Alternative, wildlife management areas would be protected with a No Surface Occupancy stipulation. For landowner incentive areas, the BLM approach is to stipulate the values needing protection, rather than the geographic areas covered due to the fact that the areas periodically shift location. Therefore, if incentive areas include wildlife habitat, we would apply the appropriate stipulations for sage grouse, crucial winter range, etc. The BLM has been informed by MFWP that if MFWP holds land in fee, it is most likely subject to some stipulated designation and therefore the BLM believes that existing stipulations should be adequate.

3) For conservation easements we will follow our own BLM guidance on the "Acquisition and Stewardship of Conservation Easements" (H-2100-1), which indicates that the impact of mineral development on conservation values will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. The legal language of each individual conservation easement may have addressed severed mineral estate, if it exists, and set parameters for surface occupancy, extraction and restoration within the extent that mineral laws apply. Additionally, mineral status is typically identified and considered during the easement development and this offers a chance to coordinate for new easements.

4) The Preferred Alternative does apply a no surface occupancy stipulation to floodplains, wetlands, and riparian areas.

5) The comment notes that "any river eligible for WSA should have the entire drainage or river corridor designated as NSO." The BLM believes that the comment was really making a reference to Wild and Scenic River (WSR) designations. The BLM notes that a river segment is identified as eligible based on the river area containing "outstandingly remarkable" values. All values should be clearly river related. That is, they should have the following characteristics:

- Be located in the river or on its immediate shorelands (for the purposes of this study, the preliminary boundary is 0.25 mile on either side of the river);
- Contribute substantially to the functioning of the river ecosystem; or
- Owe their location or existence to the presence of the river.

Under the Preferred Alternative, a corridor ½-mile on either side of the active river channels recommended as suitable (not eligible) river segments for WSR designation are proposed for a No Surface Occupancy stipulation.

After the numbered items, the comment mentioned that FWP is currently developing crucial fish and wildlife areas and migratory corridors throughout Montana, and that FWP would appreciate consideration of this information in the future. The BLM is very interested in this

information and when such information is available, the BLM will assess it and determine whether it necessitates an update to all existing RMPs; given that there would be potential impacts to other allocations, there isn't a way to build that data into the Butte RMP. Of course the stipulations ultimately selected in the Record of Decision for the Butte RMP would be applied to new values (i.e., newly found leks, special status fish populations, etc.).

Concern is expressed in the comment about the areas identified in the RMP as having the highest potential for oil and gas. Management prescriptions identified in the RMP apply to BLM minerals on a Field Office-wide basis and will be given close consideration in all parts of the Field Office. The areas identified on page 884 of the Draft RMP were highlighted to help improve the analysis in the document.

The comment expresses the desire that the Butte RMP recognize any future ROD from the BLM statewide Coal Bed Natural Gas Supplemental EIS as it relates to "Area 5" along the Bozeman Pass. No part of the SEIS planning area lies within the Butte Field Office and as such the BLM will not be carrying out this action. However, the BLM notes that there is no reasonably foreseeable chance for coal bed natural gas from federal leases to be produced in this area because the BLM controls almost no mineral estate in the area, and the Gallatin National Forest would be unable to lease due to the lack of a leasing document.

F38

Comment: I thought it was already well established in the minds of most government employees responsible for managing our public lands, the importance of timber areas adjacent to primary winter-spring foraging areas for elk and mule deer as well as wild sheep. Timber cover is essential to save on energy levels with foraging areas close to cover under extreme temperatures. We also have a 15- year cooperative research project in which BLM participated and final recommendations were published in "Coordinating Elk and Timber Management". This document was signed by the BLM state director as well to be used as a guideline for timber management on public lands in Montana. BLM in Butte considers second growth Douglas fir (COVER) "encroachment" that must be dealt with accordingly. BLM again provided no literature references to support their opinions and wishful thinking. The 15-year cooperative project with recommendations BLM said they would follow is not even mentioned in the 11# document.

Response: The Coordinating Elk and Timber Management Study (1985) referenced by the commenter is cited in Chapter 2 of the Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section under Alternative A. This study, along with more recent literature and research, was used to identify appropriate activities within elk habitats as well as to address the effects of management actions in the Proposed RMP. For example, The Coordinating Elk and Timber Management Study, along with more recent literature, discusses security habitat, road location, road density and closures, vegetative management and winter range. All aspects of this study and other related research are cited and used throughout the RMP.

Site-specific projects will continue to consider The Coordinating Elk and Timber Management Study along with other relevant research and literature during site specific project analysis.

F39

Comment: We support proposed direction in the Draft RMP/EIS regarding retention of adequate snags for wildlife habitat. The RMP states that snag management would be emphasized (page 27) and that there should be "abundant snags and downed logs" with the preferred alternative (page 29), and that impacts to snags and downed woody material will be minimized (page 40), and that the BLM would follow the Forest Service's Northern Region Snag Management Protocol (page 44).

We are also pleased that the direction for timber salvage indicates that when salvage is proposed in dead and dying forests that, "contiguous acres of undisturbed standing and down woody material would be retained in adequate amounts for those wildlife species that depend on this type of habitat" (page 30). This type of direction for retention of undisturbed standing and downed wood material in adequate amounts for wildlife is good, although it appears that such direction should be applicable to general forest and woodland management as well, and not just timber salvage.

Response: Although the management prescription raised by the comment is found under the subheading of "Timber Salvage" it would be applicable to all general forest and woodland management.

F40

Comment: We support protection of old growth habitats that maintain and restore large, native, late-seral overstory trees and forest composition and structure within ranges of historic natural variability (e.g. Ponderosa pine). Old growth tree stands are ecologically diverse and provide good breeding and feeding habitat for many bird and animal species, which have a preference or dependence on old growth (e.g., barred owl, great gray owl, pileated woodpecker). Much old growth habitat has been lost. It is important that management direction prevent continued loss of this habitat and promote long-term sustainability of old growth stands, and restore where possible the geographic extent and connectivity of old growth (e.g., using passive and active management-such as avoiding harvest of large old growth trees, leaving healthy larger and older seral species trees, thinning and underburning to reduce fuel loads and

ladder fuels in old growth while enhancing old growth characteristics). Private lands outside the federal land boundary have often not been managed for the late-seral or old growth component, so federal lands may need to contribute more to the late-seral component to compensate for the loss of this component on other land ownerships within an ecoregion.

The draft RMP states that old forest structures would be managed in a sustainable manner (Table 1-5, page 9), and that old forest structures would be emphasized during forest management, and that old forests would be retained and protected from uncharacteristically severe wildland fires and insect and disease epidemics (page 27). The draft RMP also states that the preferred alternative would provide direction to maintain and promote old forest structure and conditions through active treatments and restoration activities (page 29), and that actions would be designed to develop and maintain stand structures that are relatively complex with highly variable tree densities, healthy and diverse understory composition (page 29).

This language provides a level of protection to old growth habitats, but may be subject to varying interpretations, and does not provide optimally clear direction to protect or restore old growth or late seral stage forest habitats. We encourage the BLM to consider additional direction that would provide clearer direction for protection and/or restoration of old growth or late seral stage habitats within historic ranges of natural variability. For example, "BLM will strive to maintain and/or restore old growth habitat within historic range of variability to maintain and/or enhance habitat for old growth dependent species."

Response: The BLM agrees with the comment and has adopted the following modified wording related to old forest structure in Chapter 2 of the RMP:

"The BLM would strive to maintain and/or restore stands with old forest structure within historic range of variability to maintain and/or enhance habitat for old growth dependent species."

F41

Comment: MWF believes that the BLM should establish a minimum 5-10 mile buffer zone around inventoried bighorn sheep core areas and not issue sheep grazing allotments to afford the greatest protection for bighorn sheep against contracting disease from domestic sheep in whichever alternative BLM chooses.

Response: BLM Instruction Memorandum No. 98-140 provides guidelines for the management of domestic sheep and goats in native wild sheep habitats. The Instruction Memorandum identifies that native wild sheep and domestic sheep or goats should be spatially separated to reduce the potential of interspecies contact. The Instruction Memorandum also states that when reviewing new domestic sheep or goat grazing permit applications or proposed conversions of cattle permits to sheep or goat permits in areas with established native wild sheep populations, buffer strips surrounding native wild sheep habitat should be developed, except where topographic features or other barriers minimize physical contact between native wild sheep and domestic sheep and goats. No minimum buffer strip widths are identified in the Instruction Memorandum but buffer strips could range up to 9 miles.

All alternatives would follow the Instruction Memorandum but the Preferred Alternative would provide guaranteed protection to wild sheep with a mandatory 5 mile buffer between wild sheep habitat and new domestic sheep or goat allotments. The distance could be greater if determined necessary during site specific analysis.

F42

Comment: BLM did not mention rainbow x cutthroat trout and brook trout another important species and habitat. What about the brook trout fisheries in Moose Creek and importance of beaver dams? What about the belt of public land along the Big Hole River in the Maiden Canyon area accessed by the Ponderosa Road? This BLM public land is adjacent to a nationally known blue ribbon trout stream. All fish habitat must be considered not what BLM chooses.

Response: All fish habitat was considered in the RMP. The Fish section of Chapter 3 in the RMP provides a description of fish species and habitats within the Butte Field Office. A table from the Analysis of the Management Situation indicating all fish species found in the Butte Field Office and their distributions has been added to the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. The role of beaver dams is described in Wetlands and Riparian Communities section of Chapter 3.

Reference to "blue ribbon" streams is located in the Recreation section of Chapter 3 in the RMP.

F43

Comment: The final document would be improved by including species-specific impact discussion rather than providing general assumptions, such as (Volume II, page 535, right column, 4th paragraph), "…Natural disturbances are typically followed by periods of stability, during which fish habitats and populations recover. Population recovery in disturbed streams may be facilitated by fish immigration from nearby drainages less affected by the catastrophic event [fires, floods, drought]."

Response: Many of the types of impacts or effects to fish species would be the same or similar under the different alternatives. For example, an activity that increases fine sediment to a fish bearing stream would have the same general effect to the majority of fish species common in the Butte Field Office, such as degradation of spawning habitat. Because of this, those effects

that could have a similar impact on many different fish and other aquatic species are discussed under the Fish section (Effects Common to All Alternatives) of Chapter 4 in the RMP.

Some specific impacts and threats to sensitive fish species, however, are described in Chapter 3 under Special Status Species. Some specific discussions related to fish species are also found in Chapter 4 under Special Status Species (within the Fish subsections of the different alternatives).

Forest and Forest and Woodland Vegetation

G1

Comment: Do the visual change maps also include changes in trees from green evergreens to red and brown evergreens? If change is not allowed or acceptable in some of these areas, then what is BLM doing to implement a program to prevent the changes in tree color that are occurring. Does it mean that BLM will actually start managing the forests in a responsible manner again with timber harvesting, spraying, or some other effective means to prevent the continuing change in tree color, which results in major visual impact?

Response: The visual maps depict the proposed Visual Resource Management Classifications for the action alternatives. These classifications establish varying degrees of modification allowed for classified landscapes. The primary focus of this management pertains to minimizing visual impacts from human rather than natural caused actions. BLM will strive to minimize visual resource impacts regardless of cause where feasible opportunities and budgets allow. Priorities for forest treatments will generally be driven by vegetation and fuel treatment objectives rather than visual resources. In Chapter 2, under Vegetation Communities, Management Common to All Alternatives, in the Forests and Woodlands section, the RMP indicates that vegetative treatments will be managed to reduce the occurrence of unnaturally large and severe wildland fires and insect outbreaks. Stands with characteristics indicating a substantial risk for developing epidemic levels of insect and disease would be high priority for treatment. Reducing these types of occurrences would also reduce the acres of dead and dying (red) trees on the landscape.

G2

Comment: In the Elkhorn Mountains promote elk use in forested stands in the late-summer and fall by promoting palatable foraging habitat, where appropriate, through thinning and prescribed fire.

Response: At least some portion of the Elkhorn Mountains would be managed as an ACEC under all action alternatives in the RMP. Vegetation treatments would be geared toward improving upland and riparian habitat quality and resiliency. In many cases this would likely entail reducing stem densities in forested stands which would promote development of palatable foraging species on the forest floor. It would also entail treating grassland and shrubland habitats to reduce conifer encroachment and promote palatable forage species in these habitats as well.

G3

Comment: In the Elkhorn Mountains thin known areas of dense, thick conifer regeneration stands in order to open areas for use by elk and minimize elk use of private land. Known areas include Warm Springs, Upper Crow Creek, Staubach Creek, Sheep Creek, and other areas of prior fire activity.

Response: The Preferred Alternative of the RMP allows for conducting vegetation treatments such as those described by the comment. Treatment of specific areas in the Elkhorns would be addressed separately in project level NEPA analyses, outside the scope of the RMP.

G4

Comment: EPA supports the draft RMP Forests and Woodlands goal to restore and/or maintain the health and productivity of public forests to provide a balance of forest and woodland resource benefits, as well as wildlife and watershed needs to present and future generations (page 17). We support management that moves vegetative composition, structure, pattern, and function within historic ranges of variability and toward long-term ecological sustainability, and reduced risk of uncharacteristically large and severe wildland fires.

Management should be based on understanding and consideration of natural disturbance processes (e.g. fire, insects, disease), including the intensity, frequency, and magnitude of disturbance regimes: natural succession and disturbance regimes: and ecosystem processes (such as the flows and cycles of nutrients and water) and their dynamics.

Efforts should be made to bring the intensity, frequency, and magnitude of disturbance regimes for all these natural disturbance processes (e.g. fire, insects, disease) within the range of natural or historic disturbance levels. Among the information to consider and analyze are:

1) Normal fire return intervals and mortality levels from disease or insects:

2) Post-treatment landscape vs. desired forest age class, composition, structure (How far outside the natural range of variability and disturbance regimes are areas to be treated? What forest types (e.g. cold, moist, or dry), stand densities, and species composition are to be treated? Do these vary from similar sites that have experienced natural disturbances? Is vegetation management directed at density management, thinning from below, strategically placed treatment units, etc.?);

3) Funding for vegetation management (Are large trees being cut to fund restoration? Are wildlife or restoration funds available to carry out vegetation management to meet desired future conditions?);

4) Trade-offs of adverse water quality, fisheries, wildlife impacts of vegetation management (Will fuels reduction require new road construction or reconstruction of roads? Will riparian areas, wetlands, and other important habitats be treated differently than the rest of the landscape?)

5) Monitoring (Is pre- and post-project monitoring proposed?)

Response: The Purpose and Need for Revising the RMP stated in Chapter 1, explains that the RMP provides goals, objectives, land use allocations and management direction to maintain, improve, or restore resource conditions. The RMP is designed to specify overarching management policies and actions, by providing an overall vision of the future (goals and objectives) which includes measurable steps, management actions, and allowable uses to achieve the vision. The statements and questions posed in the comment are appropriately considered at the project level and beyond the scope of the EIS.

Appendix C of the Draft RMP/EIS (**Appendix D** in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS) discusses the application of the SIMPPLLE model to the current vegetative conditions to determine the extent of variation from historic conditions and the landscape level treatment needs for the watersheds found in the Decision Area. Current forest conditions are described in the Vegetative Communities section of Chapter 3, specifically for various forest zones in the Planning Area and summarized on Tables 3-5 and 3-6 by forest type and watershed in the Decision Area. These tables present how far the current vegetative conditions have departed from historic conditions. The SIMPPLLE model aided in determining the amount of forest and woodland area that could effectively be treated under the guidance for each of the action alternatives discussed in Chapter 2.

The Record of Decision will provide for specific plan monitoring processes to assess progress toward meeting goals or objectives. Project monitoring will be guided by BLM protocols and conducted as part of the forest and woodland health assessment process.

G5

Comment: We also encourage efforts to restore declining tree species such as aspen, Ponderosa pine, whitebark pine, etc, and to address conifer encroachment upon non-forest habitat types. EPA encourages BLM to include management direction that assures that large healthy trees of desired species such as Ponderosa pine and whitebark pine that are decreasing in overall composition be retained during timber harvests and other vegetative treatments.

Response: The dry forest zone includes the stands of ponderosa pine found in the Butte Field Office. The treatments proposed for dry forest stands in Chapter 2 under Alternative B (preferred) would be designed to move these stands to fewer trees per acre with a larger average tree diameter. This emphasizes the retention of the large healthy trees which are often ponderosa pine, in order to meet the desired conditions that are based on historic range of variability and would provide for self-renewal of ponderosa pine in treated stands. Whitebark pine is a species that is found in some areas of the subalpine fir zone which is discussed under the vegetative communities in Chapter 3. This species comprises only a small portion of the subalpine zone that amounts to about 1 percent of the forests and woodlands in the Butte Field Office. The vegetative management guidance discussed for cool, moist forest types in Chapter 2, would also apply to subalpine fir stands, with the treatments focusing on maintaining and protecting healthy and diverse forest systems.

G6

Comment: We also support the proposed direction in the draft RMP/EIS for retention of downed woody material for soil productivity (organic matter-nutrient cycling) as well as wildlife habitat. The draft RMP states in the vegetation section that much of the fine material not utilized would be left scattered on the forest floor to maintain site productivity (page 27), and that levels of downed wood be maintain to contribute to the needs of wildlife, invertebrates, fungi, bryophytes, saprophytes, lichens, other organisms, long term soil productivity, nutrient cycling, carbon cycles and other ecosystem processes (page 44). This evidences good understanding of the need to retain woody debris on the ground, although we encourage identification of particular numerical levels of downed woody material per acre for habitat types to provide greater assurance that adequate downed woody debris would be left on the ground to maintain soil productivity (organic matter, nutrient cycling), wildlife habitat, and other ecosystem processes.

Response: Appropriate numerical target levels of downed woody debris would vary greatly by specific habitat types across the Butte Field Office. Target values such as “tons per acre” of downed woody debris would be developed as necessary at the project level and are beyond the scope of the RMP analysis

G7

Comment: The draft RMP and EIS discuss insects and disease (page 334). We note that bark beetles are natives of the forest ecosystem and local endemic populations of beetles are a normal component of the ecosystem and beetle interaction with weakened trees is a normal ecosystem function. Bark beetles have a role in forest ecosystems of helping to remove older, weakened, less vigorous trees. It is our understanding that even large

populations of bark beetles and resulting tree mortality can be part of normal ecosystem function, although we recognize that much of the public perceives epidemic beetle populations as an unhealthy forest environment. However, beetle populations generally experience "boom and bust cycles, and forests have proven resilient, if not dependent on these cycles. A beetle epidemic may also be part of a natural progression to a new successional sere, thus, beetle attack is a natural disturbance and regeneration agent in the ecosystem. Many forests that have undergone "devastating "infestations are now experiencing regeneration without active management before or prior to the epidemic. While we do not oppose management to address bark beetle outbreaks for silvicultural purposes, we think it is important that the public understand that bark beetle outbreaks are a normal component of a forest ecosystem.

Response: The BLM agrees with the comment. More information regarding the level of insect and disease infestation by watershed has been added in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS in Chapter 3 under Vegetative Communities, Process of Vegetation Change, Forests Insects, and Disease.

G8

Comment: Fish Wildlife and Parks looks forward to working with the BLM on the fuels reduction projects in the Big Hole watershed. Within these projects we believe there is a lot of potential to enhance and restore big game winter range in the vicinity of Divide. We also have some concerns about the size and scope of the projects that were proposed, then ultimately shelved, prior to the initiation of this planning effort. More recently concern over Rocky Mountain Juniper and its perceived lack of value, as wildlife habitat has become a concern.

Response: The BLM agrees that the size and scope of individual projects are important concerns to be analyzed under the appropriate level NEPA documentation. However, the RMP deals with land use planning level decisions rather than individual projects. The action alternatives in the RMP are flexible so that treatment projects can be designed at the size and scale that is most efficient and effective in meeting the desired conditions while complying with the appropriate laws, regulations, and BLM policies and protecting important resources that are discussed in the RMP.

With regards to the rocky mountain juniper, the RMP discusses the species in the Vegetative Communities section of Chapter 3. Juniper is discussed as both a problem species involved in conifer encroachment of grasslands, shrublands and riparian areas, which competes directly with a number of priority plant species named in the RMP; and, a natural component of forest and woodland systems. Juniper is not considered to be a special status species nor a priority species that the BLM has determined to be unique or significant. Project considerations on juniper may vary based on specific vegetation conditions, treatment needs, and site characteristics, therefore concerns are most properly analyzed and handled at the project level.

G9

Comment: Approximately 140,000 acres of the 302,000 acres that the BLM manages from the Butte field office is classified as forest. The highest probable timber harvest sale quantity proposed in any of the BLM's Resource Management Plans alternatives A, B, C, or D is 10 to 30 MMBF per decade. Assuming a harvest of five MBF per acre, 200 to 600 acres will be treated per year or 2000 to 6000 acres per decade. This harvest level is insignificant considering the number of acres that need to be treated. The Butte RMP does not address the problem but exacerbates the problem. Dealing with the problem generates sufficient volumes of timber to Montana's milling infrastructure. It also leads to improved forest ecosystems conditions and a healthy attractive natural environment that is important to western Montanans and to the economy.

I propose another Alternative E to address these issues. My proposal is to conduct an accelerated timber management program during the next 10 to 20 years. A strong focus on restoration and fire hazard treatments addresses wildfire, insect and disease problems by dealing with the underlying forest density problem. To protect watersheds and be effective, timber management must be conducted at the landscape level. To protect communities and homes the wild land interface zone must be realistic. Let terrain be the determining factor, not political, 400 foot, predetermined distances. In drainages with north facing wetter slopes, zones may be much narrower. In drainages containing south facing slopes, wild land interface zones may extend several miles. Also, to be effective, timber harvesting must remove a sufficient number of trees to allow a minimum of 20 feet between crowns and must be followed by broadcast under burning. Research conducted by the University of Montana has shown that a comprehensive thinning program is an economically effective method to reduce fuels and improve forest health. I would also like to suggest that sale purchasers have the ability to sell small diameter and other non-merchantable material as pulp logs. The best way to accomplish this is with split pricing between saw logs and pulp logs. With one bid price fits all, the bidder has to estimate the volume of each product and lower the bid on saw logs to where he covers his expenses on pulp logs.

Response: The estimate of forested acres to be treated that was given in the comment was developed by using an assumed rate of product removal and provided a considerably lower range of area treated than those that would actually occur under all of the RMP alternatives except Alternative C. The amount of forest and woodland area that would be treated under each of the alterna-

tives is listed in the Comparison of Alternatives found in Table 2-23 under Forest Products. The total amount of area that would be treated under Alternative B (preferred) and Alternative D would be 3 to 4 times that of the comment estimate. This is due in part to the variety of treatments that would occur under each of alternative, which included a number of non-commercial or non-timber producing treatments such as broadcast burns, pre-commercial thinning, and mechanical reductions in areas where the products could not be efficiently removed due to access limitations or unacceptable resource damage.

The full range of available treatment tools under all alternatives as discussed in Chapter 2 under Vegetation Management Tools and commercial uses of materials from vegetation management activities would be considered in all cases where appropriate. Current BLM timber sale policy and practice would be followed in the implementation of the forest and woodland treatments under all of the RMP alternatives, as described under 43 CFR 5400 and the 5400 series of BLM timber sale handbooks. These guides encourage utilization of all available commercial products from forest management activities when it is efficient to do so, including the use of low value materials such as pulp and biomass. The BLM will also utilize recently developed stewardship contracting tools that were authorized under the Omnibus Appropriations Bill of 2003 (P.L.108-7, Section 323), which allows for technical evaluation of bidder proposals and award based on best value to the government rather than the highest return in revenue. The Butte Field Office would tend to give higher weight to proposals from bidders that would utilize more of the available forest products in the technical evaluation process.

There is no guidance or policy requiring the BLM to manage public forest specifically for timber production. The BLM would be unable to consider an alternative that promotes the production of timber over the other resources, as that would conflict with the multiple use mandates of FLPMA.

The four alternatives presented in the RMP provide a reasonable range of forest treatment alternatives, including actions needed to protect forest health and values, and to provide timber outputs. None of the alternatives propose exclusive or primary use, specific target output, or individual resource protection except in specific cases mandated by law. The RMP alternatives are designed to be flexible, being that treatments are proposed in acreage ranges that would allow for increased treatment of larger areas of forests and woodlands as natural resource, silvicultural and/or landscape needs and imbalances become apparent. They can be treated up to the high end of the acreage ranges to meet the goals, prescriptions, and benefits of each alternative. Other demands such as complying with the many environmental laws, policy initiatives, and budget constraints also influence the level of BLM activity at the field office level. However, each alternative allows for an acceleration of treatments and an opportunity to increase product outputs, when the increased activity would comply with the resource management objectives of that alternative, while avoiding or mitigating damage to important resource values described in the RMP or protected by law.

G10

Comment: We have diseased trees now on much of our public land. A BLM sage burn could touch off a major uncontrolled fire. It's happened in other states with tort claims under the Tort Claims Act of high proportions. Pipestone now has many dead trees, standing firewood. None of this mentioned in your document. Nothing about BLM allowing these trees to be cut now for firewood.

Response: As stated in Chapter 2 of the RMP (under Vegetation Communities, Management Common to All Alternatives, Wildland Fire Management section), fire management activities would be prioritized by their risk to life and property across the Butte Field Office. More information regarding the level of insect and disease infestation by watershed has been added to the Proposed RMP/Final EIS in Chapter 3 (under Vegetative Communities, Processes of Vegetation Change, Forest Insects and Disease section). Firewood removal activities would be permitted under all alternatives as discussed in Chapter 2 (under Vegetation Communities, Management Common to All Alternatives, Forests and Woodlands section). Timber salvage resulting from forest insects and disease would also be considered under all alternatives.

G11

Comment: Forest products are a renewable resource and objectives should be sustained at levels that ensure healthy forests. The current insect infestations coupled with the prolonged drought have decreased healthy timber stands and should be addressed in more detail. A proactive management plan should be developed and implemented that utilizes this resource and reduces the overall public safety fire hazard. The proposed restriction against cutting dead trees over 24 inches in diameter for firewood doesn't seem like a prudent action considering the large amount of bug killed timber and the many mature timber stands that currently exist.

Response: Additional information has been included in the Vegetative Communities section of Chapter 3 in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS regarding insect infestations in the Butte Field Office. Public safety related to beetle killed trees will be addressed on a site-specific basis and site-specific analysis will determine the appropriate course of action in those areas.

The firewood restriction on trees greater than 24 inches in diameter is intended to protect the largest and highest quality snags for avian species as well as wildlife species

that use this type of habitat. Areas traditionally used by firewood cutters often have a deficiency of large, old snags.

Firewood cutting is not necessarily an adequate tool for preventing the spread of mountain pine or Douglas-fir beetle. Firewood cutters only remove the trees closest to the road, leaving infested trees throughout a stand. It is also important to note that by transporting infested logs, firewood cutters can actually promote the spread of beetles into healthy forested habitats.

Site-specific analysis will determine those areas where forest treatments should be done to prevent or slow the spread of beetles. The removal of large, mature trees could be identified at that time.

G12

Comment: I generally support the Alternative A proposals. Some items need to be considered whichever plan is adopted:

The bug infestation is getting ahead of BLM, and their staff is not fully aware of the intensity of this concern. A very active forestry harvesting activity needs to commence immediately in order to reap some economic benefit from affected timber and to assist in reducing massive fire occurrences. Traditional economic benefits of forestry practices would also be enhanced.

Response: BLM staff is aware of current insect and disease conditions in the Planning Area. Aerial insect and disease surveys are conducted annually across the Planning Area. More information regarding the level of insect and disease infestation by watershed has been added to the Proposed RMP/Final EIS in Chapter 3 (under Vegetative Communities, Processes of Vegetation Change, Forest Insects and Disease section). Vegetation treatments proposed under Alternatives B and D represent increases from the current level of forestry activities on Butte Field Office lands. These levels of activity are summarized in Table 2-23, Comparison of Alternatives, near the end of Chapter 2 in the RMP.

Grassland and Shrubland Habitat

H1

Comment: This proposal for burning of sagebrush will be detrimental to the wildlife resource as well as watershed protection. The importance of sagebrush to various species of wildlife is well documented. BLM presented no literature references on sagebrush in Montana and the importance to wildlife and what species.

Response: The Vegetation Management Tools Section in Chapter 2 of the RMP outlines the types of activities that could be used to manage shrublands (including sagebrush). Although prescribed burning of sagebrush communities could be used as a management tool, if appropriate, the BLM is not specifically proposing the burning of sagebrush habitat. Mechanical treatments are identified as an acceptable method to remove conifers from sagebrush communities and would likely be used in most cases.

The Vegetation Communities section in Chapter 2 of the RMP identifies goals for sagebrush habitat as well as management actions. Sagebrush communities are identified as priority habitats based on the conservation status of sage grouse, pygmy rabbit and other species associated with sagebrush and would be managed to protect habitat for these species as well as for other species that use sagebrush for all or part of their lifecycle.

The Wildlife, Fish and Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section (Management Common to All Alternatives) in Chapter 2 of the RMP identifies that management activities in sagebrush habitat will be consistent with the National and Montana Management Plan and Conservation Strategies as well as current, accepted science for sage grouse. These plans provide direction for sagebrush protection and management. This section of the RMP also identifies the maintenance of sufficient densities and cover of sagebrush for sage grouse. All action alternatives would provide additional protection to sagebrush by maintaining large patches of sagebrush in sage grouse habitat, maintaining connections between sagebrush habitats, and enlarging the size of sagebrush patches within sage grouse habitat.

The Wildlife section in Chapter 3 of the RMP discusses the importance of sagebrush habitat for a variety of wildlife species.

H2

Comment: Page 321, BLM selected Alternative B "Treatment of up to 11,800 acres of grassland habitat up to 3,650 acres of shrubland habitat, up to 14,750 acres of dry forest, up to 3,750 acres of cool, moist forest and up to 700 acres of riparian acres." The grasslands you are referring to are sagebrush/grasslands and some of our most valuable winter range on public land. Are you aware of the memo of understanding with FWP on land treatment projects? Is BLM aware of the "Guidelines for Maintenance of Sage Grouse Habitats" Jour. of Wildlife Mgt and Western States Sage Grouse Committee "Guidelines for Habitat Protection in Sage Grouse Range?" 1. "The state wildlife agency should be notified of each specific vegetal control proposal a minimum of two years in advance of treatment by means of an Environmental Impact Analysis." This is also stated in the MOU with FWP.

Response: The Vegetation Communities section in Chapter 2 of the RMP discusses the goals for vegetation communities. Goals related to vegetation focus on maintaining sustainable vegetation, maintaining or increasing diversity, managing for healthy forest stands and maintaining or moving communities towards proper function-

ing condition. The General Summary of Alternative Emphasis for Vegetation Communities (subsection of the Vegetation Communities section) in Chapter 2 identifies the major emphasis for Alternative B as fuels reduction in the urban interface, reduction of conifer encroachment in grasslands and shrublands (sagebrush) particularly in big game winter range areas (to restore and protect big game winter range), enhancement of bighorn sheep habitat and restoration of dry forest types. In both the Draft and Proposed RMP, the main emphasis of vegetation management outside the urban interface is to protect and restore vegetation communities and wildlife habitats.

The Vegetation Communities section (Management Common to Action Alternatives) under Chapter 2 of the Draft and Final EIS also discusses the objectives for management of grasslands/shrublands, forests/woodlands and riparian habitats. Vegetative treatments will focus on restoring the distribution and vigor of grassland and shrubland habitats by removing invading conifers. Sagebrush habitat is identified as a "priority" species based on concerns over the conservation status of sage grouse, pygmy rabbit and other species associated with sagebrush and grasslands habitats.

Appendix D (Use of the SIMPPLLE Model) of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS provides a discussion on how acres of various vegetation communities were identified for treatments and those considerations that went into identifying vegetation treatments. Some considerations with vegetation treatments included how vegetation has changed over time, fire suppression, past management and wildlife habitats.

Although the BLM acknowledges that there are many good recommendations for the management of sage grouse and sage grouse habitat in the literature, the BLM in Montana follows both the National and Montana Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse (2005). These plans have taken into consideration much of the available literature on sage grouse and incorporated this literature into goals, objectives, and conservation actions for sage grouse habitats. The use of these plans, as well as the use of acceptable science, is outlined in the Wildlife, Fish and Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section in Chapter 2 of both the Draft and Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

Although the BLM is unclear on the specific Memorandum of Understanding referenced by the commenter, it is assumed that the Memorandum of Understanding referenced is the "Mechanical and Chemical Alteration of Vegetation" Memorandum of Understanding of 1971. The BLM is aware of this Memorandum of Understanding and believes that the Memorandum of Understanding, although outdated, is still followed. As outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding, the BLM does coordinate with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks on all projects (not just vegetation projects) that can affect wildlife and wildlife habitats. It is important to point out that the Memorandum of Understanding is an agreement between the BLM and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and not a law.

H3

Comment: Page 332 the BLM plan "Mechanical treatments (no fire) would be used in most cases to remove conifer encroachment in shrubland communities". Conifers provide security cover for big game animals on winter range. "Conifer encroachment" does not exist in ecological nomenclature. Perhaps you mean second growth Douglas fir and plant succession of conifers.

Response: The term "conifer encroachment" is a common term used by public agencies, including the BLM, to describe coniferous trees that are now becoming established in grassland and shrubland habitats. The BLM uses the term "second growth" to refer to forested habitats where trees are becoming re-established after a disturbance such as fire, insect, disease, or logging. There are a number of studies and anecdotal accounts that verify the establishment of conifers in grassland and shrubland communities throughout the west.

Conifer encroachment can provide escape cover for big game but can also significantly reduce the amount of forage available to big game on their winter range. As described in the Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section (Management Common to All Alternatives) of Chapter 2 of both the Draft and Proposed RMP/Final EIS, during site-specific project planning, important blocks of hiding, security and thermal cover for big game will be considered and the effects to these habitat types from site-specific projects will be analyzed.

H4

Comment: This next statement on page 333 as well defies all the published scientific literature on the subject: "Sage grouse management activities involving treatments of sagebrush habitats would create mosaics of sagebrush and grassland communities, regenerate decadent sagebrush, and prevent further decline in the health of sagebrush communities and reduction in distribution of favorable sites (BLM statement)". This statement lacks insight on research in Montana on sage grouse and sage grouse habitat and why it grows on a site not to mention wildlife literature on the subject, all falsehoods not supported with any literature reference. Habitat maintenance and preservation of sagebrush communities on our public land is essential.

Response: The statement in Chapter 4 mentioned by the comment contained editorial mistakes in the Draft RMP/EIS. This statement has been corrected in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS to state: "Treatments within sagebrush communities would emphasize improving or maintaining habitats for sage grouse and other sagebrush

dependant species by removing conifer encroachment, creating a mosaic of grassland and sagebrush habitats, regenerating decadent sagebrush and by preventing a decline in the quality and quantity of sagebrush communities."

As stated in the Wildlife, Fish and Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section (Management Common to All Alternatives) in Chapter 2 of the RMP, sage grouse management activities would be designed and implemented to be consistent with the National and Montana Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse (2005) as well as current, accepted science. This section goes on to explain that sufficient sagebrush densities and cover would be retained in sage grouse habitat. The Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse in Montana (2005) was developed by representatives of the Montana sage grouse work group (SGWG) which was comprised of federal and state agencies, tribal representatives, private organizations, and individuals from the general public, all of whom have an interest in the issue of sage grouse conservation. The plan also considered a large amount of literature and research on sage grouse and sagebrush habitat.

The overall goal of the Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse in Montana is to "Provide for the long-term conservation and enhancement of the sagebrush steppe/mixed-grass prairie complex within Montana in a manner that supports sage grouse and a healthy diversity and abundance of wildlife species and human uses." Objectives include maintaining the distribution and integrity of sagebrush steppe communities and maintaining the distribution of sage grouse populations within the mountain foothills and sagebrush ecotypes.

The Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse in Montana (2005) provides a description of breeding, nesting, brood-rearing and winter habitat for sage grouse. Although sage grouse are obviously sagebrush obligates, their biological needs differ throughout the year based on the season. For example, nesting habitat is often located near lek sites and with sagebrush canopy of 15-31 percent whereas brood rearing habitat tends to be in more open sagebrush stands with canopies 1-25 percent and a broad range of succulent forbs, an important food source for young sage grouse. The plan and other sage grouse literature explains the importance of having diversity of sagebrush habitats to meet the requirement of sage grouse throughout their lifecycle.

The RMP emphasizes restoring or enhancing sagebrush habitat for sage grouse and other sagebrush dependant species. In some cases, it may be appropriate to treat decadent stands of sagebrush or remove conifer encroachment into sagebrush stands to improve breeding, nesting, brood-rearing, or winter habitat for sage grouse. A site-specific analysis will be done to identify the effects to sage grouse and other sagebrush dependant species at the time of a proposed activity.

H5

Comment: Is BLM aware of the fact that Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*) is a key winter forage species for elk and wild sheep? Idaho fescue is also susceptible to burning. In other words BLM burn plans will also destroy this key forage species as well as big sagebrush.

Response: As stated in the Wildlife, Fish and Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section (Management Common to All Alternatives) in Chapter 2 of the RMP, fish and wildlife habitat would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis as part of project level planning. Overall, the RMP spells out more broad-scale goals and objectives that are to be implemented at the project level where objectives are defined much more specifically as related to site-specific conditions during project-level planning and NEPA. Such evaluations would consider the impacts to forage species (including Idaho fescue) and sagebrush. Measures would be taken to reduce the negative impacts to these species, such as early spring burning before green-up or burning when patches of snow are present for a mosaic burn pattern.

The Wildland Fire Management Section in Chapter 2 in the RMP provides a range of different intensity burns allowed under the alternatives to address maintaining a source of unburned vegetation.

H6

Comment: Here are a few references on Big Sagebrush you should consider: "A Sea Fragmented into Lakes, Ponds, and Puddles" by Welsh, Bruce L. USDA, Forest Service, Gen'l Tech Rpt RMRS-GTR-144, March 2005; Montana Sagebrush Bibliography, Montana FWP, Frisina, M.R. John J. McCarthy December 2001; SAGEBRUSH Ecological Implications of Sagebrush Manipulation, FWP by Peterson, Joel G.1995, Montana Sage Grouse, FWP/BLM 1975 by Wallstad, Richard.

Response: Almost all the referenced literature cited by the commenter was considered and used during the development of the National and Montana Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse (2005). The Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse in Montana (2005) was developed by representatives of the Montana sage grouse work group (SGWG) which was comprised of federal and state agencies, tribal representatives, private organizations, and individuals from the general public, all of whom have an interest in the issue of sage grouse conservation.

Although the BLM acknowledges that there are many good recommendations for the management of sage grouse and sage grouse habitat in the literature, the BLM in Montana follows both the National and Montana

Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse.

The use of these plans, as well as the use of acceptable science, is outlined in the Wildlife, Fish and Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section in Chapter 2 of the RMP.

The Draft and Proposed RMP/Final EIS emphasize restoring or enhancing sagebrush habitat for sage grouse and other sagebrush dependant species.

H7

Comment: Is BLM familiar with "Steppe Vegetation of Washington" by Dr. R. Daubenmire? On page 79 he lists 12 good reasons why not to manipulate sagebrush. 1. "There is little to indicate the extent to which the grass increase measured shortly after shrub eradication is maintained." 2. "The protection afforded many grass plants by dense clumps of shrubs is the sole reason why any perennial grass remains on much of the depleted range." He goes on to discuss the importance of big sagebrush in watershed protection and improving soil profile.

Response: The BLM was unable to view a copy of the reference cited by the commenter. However, many studies and peer reviewed journal articles related to sage grouse and sagebrush habitat were considered and used during the development of the National and Montana Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse (2005). Although the BLM acknowledges that there are many good recommendations for the management of sage grouse and sage grouse habitat in the literature, the BLM in Montana follows both the National and Montana Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse. The use of these plans, as well as the use of acceptable science, is outlined in the Wildlife, Fish and Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section in Chapter 2 of the RMP. The reference cited by the commenter was addressed during the response to public comments in the Montana Management Plan and Conservation Strategy for Sage Grouse (2005). The BLM notes that sagebrush has been identified as priority species/habitat in the Butte RMP, and that Goal #6 under Vegetation Communities in Chapter 2 focuses on managing to promote sagebrush and other priority species.

H8

Comment: In the Elkhorn Mountains, continue ongoing encroachment reduction treatments (i.e. Power Gulch, Kimber, and Crow Creek). Pursue treatments in other known areas of encroachment (i.e. McClellan, Crystal, and Jackson Creeks) through mechanical manipulation (e.g. slashing, masticator) or prescribed fire. Pursue additional treatments in areas identified through mapping. Use existing maps of known encroachment and fill in missing data through photo interpretation and other tools.

Response: The BLM agrees with the commenter that the reduction of conifer encroachment should occur in the Elkhorn Mountains as well as throughout the Field Office. The BLM, however, doesn't manage any land in Power Gulch, Crystal Creek, or Jackson Creek and the BLM manages very little land in the Crow Creek and McClellan drainages. The BLM does manage land in Kimber Gulch and future site-specific projects to reduce conifer encroachment may be proposed within the Elkhorn Mountains to improve habitat for wildlife. Site-specific analysis will continue to map conifer encroachment.

H9

Comment: The document states that bitterbrush and mountain mahogany would be protected and restored in Alternatives B and C. It is not clear how this would be accomplished, especially with mountain mahogany. We would not support burning in stands of mountain mahogany as fire kills mountain mahogany and it is very slow to reproduce and it may take many decades before climatic conditions are favorable for its reproduction.

Response: Mountain mahogany and bitterbrush would be protected, when possible, from fire, herbicides and, in the case of bitterbrush, from extensive browsing by livestock. The BLM would also minimize the loss of these species from ground clearing activities such as road construction and mineral activity. To promote these species, the BLM would target projects that focus on the use of mechanical treatments to eliminate conifer encroachment. As described in the Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section of Chapter 2, there would be more proactive efforts to restore these species as described under Alternative B, than would be the case under Alternative C where such efforts would be undertaken on an opportunistic basis.

H10

Comment: Ward Ranch: For now, your Alt B seems a good start, except I don't see any reason to move the trailhead further west from where it is now. The main thing is to not let ORV use get established in the area. There's lots of neat hiking and exploring in the wooded sections (the old BLM holdings). And there's a crying need to restore the grasslands on the old ranch holdings, and to preserve or improve the scenic qualities (as viewed from west of the river.)

Response: All action alternatives in the Butte RMP provide for restoring up to 850 acres of grasslands in the Ward Ranch and McMasters Ranch acquisitions (Chapter 2, Vegetation Communities, Management Common to Action Alternatives, Grasslands and Shrublands section). After further consideration of the location of the

Ward Ranch trailhead, the BLM is proposing to change the Preferred Alternative to keep the trailhead in its current location on the ground as under Alternative A. Because the public has grown accustomed to and regularly uses the existing trailhead, the BLM believes it is more desirable overall and is an appropriate blend of uses to maintain the existing motorized access to this trailhead in a predominantly non-motorized area.

H11

Comment: I strongly believe that only native plant materials (seeds, seedlings, etc.) appropriate to the area should be used for restoration and revegetation projects. Sometimes, non-native materials appear to be cheaper and more abundant in the short term, but in the longer term, the non-native introduction may prove to be noxious and it may take great time, effort, and cost to fix such mistakes.

Response: Using native plant materials was analyzed under Alternative C. Under the Preferred Alternative, revegetation seed mixes would usually consist of site-appropriate native species. In some instances such as after an intense fire or in an area infested with noxious weeds, low-impact, non-invasive species or annual cereal crops may be used to stabilize soils or to compete with noxious weeds. Additionally, seed availability of native species can be an issue when time is of the essence to re-establish vegetative ground cover over large areas. The ability to use non-native species in those rare cases, provides the BLM with more management options.

H12

Comment: We recommend that ecological site descriptions (ESD's) need to be developed for all lands (USFS, BLM, State, DNCR, and private) in the Elkhorns to be used within the State Transition Model.

Response: The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) develops ecological site descriptions which the BLM uses for site specific planning and rangeland health standard evaluation. The NRCS is currently in the process of developing new ecological site descriptions for the entire state of Montana.

Lands and Realty

I1

Comment: The elimination of public access to public lands through private property has also contributed to the loss of motorized access and motorized recreation opportunities. We request that agencies acquire private land and right-of-ways to provide access to public land that is now blocked off to the public. Anytime there is a land exchange between private and public entities, a public access easement or right-of-way should be required. This action is necessary to reverse the prevailing trend of significantly less public access to public land over the past 35 ± years and the cumulative negative impact of that trend on multiple-use recreationists.

Response: The BLM shares the concern about the lack of legal access to certain areas of public lands, and will continue to pursue access easements from willing landowners as funding and staff capabilities allow. The goal statement for Lands and Realty in Chapter 2 indicates that it is our intention to look for opportunities to acquire non-federal land or interest in non-federal land with important resources or resource uses. Under the Management Common to All Alternatives section under the heading of Access, the RMP lists the various means by which the BLM would seek to acquire access, including easement acquisition and several different types of land ownership adjustment. For more specific information please refer to **Appendix L** (Lands and Realty) in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

I2

Comment: I request that my desire to acquire a portion of these lots be included in the new Butte Resource Management Plan. I have attempted to show basis of inclusion from the "Draft" wording. I attach that statement.

I understand that legal description through the Public Land Survey System is required for a property to be listed. The above “Lots 15 and 18, Sec. 16, T.6 N, R.5W, PMM” are specified for that purpose. However, only a small portion of each lot is involved. The boundaries to be specified later. Some 5 to 15 acres of Lot 18 and 2 to 5 acres of lot 15 are desired. Only a portion of the south face of the mountain side is needed. No "island effect" of land boundaries would be created. I would, of course, pay for the cost of the cadastral survey as well as other expenses involved in the sale.

I request this to be a direct sale since the land is so isolated from ease of public access. If any but the adjacent landowner bought it, the right-of-way issue would be very invasive to the surrounding forest. This proposal before you has no more invasion of the BLM land than the transaction itself. And it will open another public access for the surrounding lands.

Response: The BLM is unable to add these parcels to the potential disposal list as they are attached to and contiguous with a large block of federal land administered by the BLM. Parcels identified on the disposal list in **Appendix L** (Lands and Realty) of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS are generally scattered parcels that are difficult and/or uneconomical to manage.

I3

Comment: BLM proposes land sales and land exchanges but where? The BLM land pooling program promoted for years resulted in the loss of valuable wild-

life habitat and public land access in this area. No public lands should be sold and little if any exchanged.

Response: The Butte RMP follows national and state-level planning direction by 1) specifically listing legal descriptions of tracts that could potentially be sold pursuant to Section 203 of the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA) (although land exchange is the preferred means of disposal), and 2) developing land acquisition criteria rather than listing legal descriptions of specific tracts for acquisition.

Land exchange transactions are typically processed under the authority of Section 206 of the FLPMA and involve the discretionary, voluntary exchange of lands or interests in lands between the federal government and a non-federal party. Since most land exchange proposals are initiated by external customers, the Butte Field Office has no way of identifying where land exchanges are likely to occur.

Sales of public lands are authorized under Section 203 of the FLPMA and parcels are offered at not less than fair market value. Public lands determined suitable for sale are offered only on the initiative of the BLM. Approximately 8,901 acres in the Butte FO are potentially suitable for disposal under Section 203 of FLPMA if important recreation, wildlife, watershed, threatened or endangered species habitat, and/or cultural values are not identified during disposal clearance reviews and no viable exchange proposals have been identified.

The Butte FO recently completed the Ward Ranch land exchange and has acquired the McMasters and Iron Mask properties to promote wildlife habitat and increase public access in this area.

Please refer to **Appendix L** (Lands and Realty) in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS to obtain information pertaining to land ownership adjustments, and the list of potential disposal parcels.

I4

Comment: In lieu of such a designation [as ACEC], the Limestone Hills area should be identified as an area available for disposal through sale or exchange into private ownership as suggested in Graymont's 2005 comments. [BLM Note: ACEC boundary will likely exclude Graymont's permitted area.]

Response: Disposal of the Limestone Hills area is outside of the scope of this planning effort as the area is currently being considered for a legislative withdrawal for military training purposes by the Department of Defense.

I5

Appendix K – Lands and Realty - Potential Disposal Parcels (p. 873). Many of these parcels should not be considered for disposal. See table below, describing parcels in Helena-west area that should not be disposed of.

The following table identifies several parcels that the BLM has identified for "disposal" that MFWP does not feel would be in the best interest of the wildlife resource

Potential Disposal Parcels

T/R/Sec	Acres	Location-HD	Rationale for not disposing the parcel
6N 4W 5	38.54	Amazon-318	Elk winter range
9N 3W 32	1.43	Lump Gulch-335	Deer, moose, elk. Contiguous with other accessible BLM lands
10N 1W 6	3 small parcels	Spokane Bay	This may be a surveying issue, but BLM lands are accessible from Missouri River
10N 1W 32	40	Spokane Creek	No BLM land appears on map
10N 5W 3	38.33	Greenhorn	Elk, deer, bear, Wildlife Linkage on Cont. Divide. Contiguous with accessible public land
10N 5W 4	34.93	Greenhorn	Same as above
10N 5W 13	40.41	Stemwinder Hill	Elk winter range
11N 4W 36	77 (4)	Scratchgravels, adjacent to Green Meadow Dr.	Wildlife Linkage Zone, continuous public land, important buffer to Scratchgravels
11N 5W 15	17.73	Threemile Creek	Adjacent to state section. Accessible. Mule deer, elk, Wildlife Linkage Zone.
11N 5W 16	44.09	Threemile Creek	Same as above
11N 5W 27	43.69	Willet Ridge	Important elk winter range. Wildlife Linkage Zone
11N 5W 34	61.53	Willet Ridge	Important elk winter range. Wildlife Linkage Zone

or the public if they were disposed. Section 203 (a) of FLPMA indicates that if important recreation, wildlife, watershed, threatened or endangered species habitat, and/or cultural values are not identified during the disposal clearance reviews then parcels can be considered for disposal. Only parcels that meet one of these criteria are listed in the following table, and therefore should not be removed from BLM (public land) ownership. Several small isolated segments are valuable wildlife habitat, however they are not mentioned here because they are isolated and inaccessible.

Response: The table in **Appendix L** (Lands and Realty) in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS (formerly **Appendix K** in Draft RMP/EIS) depicts the legal descriptions of parcels which are potentially suitable for disposal through sale under section 203(a) of FLPMA if important recreation, wildlife, watershed, threatened or endangered species habitat, and/or cultural values are not identified during disposal clearance reviews and no viable exchange proposals for them can be identified. These lands would also be available for transfer to another agency or to local governments, as needed, to accommodate community expansion and other public purposes. Project level NEPA under which site-specific issues could be identified would be conducted before any such transactions.

The following parcels are generally widely scattered parcels which are difficult and uneconomical to manage due to their size, shape, location, topography, and access constraints. They would remain on the proposed disposal list in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

Township	Range	Section
6 North	5 West	5
10 North	5 West	4 and 13
11 North	5 West	15, 16, 27, and 34

In the Proposed RMP/Final EIS, the parcel located in T. 10 N., R. 1 W., Section 32, is land administered by the BLM and this parcel remains on the list due to the same rationale listed above.

The parcels located in 11 N., R. 4 W., Section 36 and T. 9 N., R. 3 W., Section 32 are very small slivers of public land which are either within the boundaries or very close to proposed subdivision developments. These parcels would stay on the disposal list in order to reduce the chance of future trespass issues.

The parcels located in 10 N., R. 1 W., Section 6 are currently authorized as non-commercial occupancy (2920) leases which were issued to resolve un-willful trespass cases that involve permanent residential structures. These parcels would remain on the disposal list.

The parcel located in 10 N., R. 5 W., Section 3 has been removed from the disposal list upon further review by the BLM.

I6

Comment: On page 479 under "Lands Use Authorizations", the right-of-way agreement between BLM and MTARNG is mentioned. The following sentence is “about 30,000 acres that are currently withdrawn.” It is our opinion that it could cause confusion to the reader. MTARNG has proposed a withdrawal of the Limestone Hills Training Area and a reader might think that the decision has already been reached. We suggest that some addition be made to the paragraph to clarify.

Response: Language in this Land Use Authorizations section in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS has been changed to correct this error.

Livestock Grazing

J1

Comment: In the livestock section of the document, BLM recommended land treatment over management.

Response: Virtually all of the prescriptions for Livestock Grazing described in Chapter 2 for all the alternatives cover various aspects of livestock grazing management. Some prescriptions do address livestock grazing management as it relates to land treatments. The BLM will continue to address livestock management at a site-specific allotment level, outside the scope of this RMP revision.

J2

Comment: BLM will not mention again Rest Rotation Grazing and applying the principles and concepts of August L. Hormay to manage our public lands.

Response: Rest rotation grazing is certainly one of the methodologies employed in grazing management on a number of Butte Field Office allotments; however it will not be the only method applied. The specific method of grazing on an allotment will continue to be determined on a site-specific basis, outside the scope of this RMP.

J3

Comment: We are concerned that there is no proactive planning to enhance grazing on BLM land. We recommend allotment improvements in planning process.

Response: The BLM’s goal is to manage for a sustainable level of livestock grazing while maintaining, restoring, or enhancing BLM rangelands to meet the Land Health Standards. Allotment range improvements are tools to help achieve Land Health Standards and are included in the guidelines for livestock grazing management found in **Appendix F** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. Additionally, new and existing Allotment Management Plans would continue to be implemented with associated allotment improvement projects under all alternatives as staffing and budgets allow. Proposed vegetation treatments also stand to increase the

amount of forage available that would contribute to enhanced livestock grazing. Any range improvements would require site-specific analysis.

J4

Comment: Maintain upland utilization monitoring during cattle grazing season.

Response: The BLM will continue to collect utilization data on allotments as staffing and budgets allow. Livestock grazing prescriptions in Chapter 2 and guidelines in **Appendix F** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS both outline the need for utilization monitoring.

J5

Comment: We recommend that the agencies establish, maintain, and document an annual pre-cattle utilization-monitoring program in all allotments in the Elkhorns.

Response: Although beyond the scope of this RMP, the BLM will continue to collect utilization data on allotments as staffing and budgets allow. Livestock grazing prescriptions in Chapter 2 and guidelines in **Appendix F** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS both outline the need for utilization monitoring. The method and timing of utilization monitoring on each allotment will be determined on an interdisciplinary, site-specific basis, outside the scope of this RMP.

J6

Comment: Elkhorn Working Group recommends: Re-establish all Parker 3-Step transects, even if permanent are gone.

Response: The Butte RMP is a broad-based plan covering the analysis area. The BLM will continue to collect monitoring data on BLM allotments as staffing and budgets allow. The BLM will continue to use BLM approved vegetation monitoring methods which does include the Parker 3-Step method as one of many. However, most of the established Butte Field Office long term trend monitoring studies use Daubenmire or other methodologies. Switching to, or establishing, Parker 3-Step studies would not improve long term trend information and analysis. The method to be used on each allotment will be determined on an interdisciplinary, site-specific basis outside the scope of this RMP.

J7

Comment: Elkhorn Working Group recommends continuing existing riparian utilization standards and monitoring while rethinking monitoring site selections.

Response: Under all alternatives, existing utilization objectives would continue to be implemented under existing Coordinated Resource Management Plans. Lower or higher utilization objectives and changes in monitoring sites may be set through interdisciplinary planning or project level NEPA processes to achieve resource objectives on a site-specific basis.

J8

Comment: Elkhorn Working Group recommends future adoption of the State and Transition Model to help better understand and manage rangeland habitats. Elkhorn Working Group believes that state and transition modeling as a measure of range condition or health, and its relation to succession and ecological processes will enhance management of the Elkhorns.

Response: Although beyond the scope of the RMP, under all alternatives, existing management for all Elkhorn Mountain allotments would continue to be implemented under existing Coordinated Resource Management Plans. Elements of the State and Transition model are currently applied by the Bureau as rangeland health assessments are conducted. Additionally, the SIMPPLLE analysis process basically uses the state and transition theory of vegetation modeling. The SIMPPLLE analysis was used to complete a portion of the vegetation potential and analysis in the RMP (See **Appendix D** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS).

J9

Comment: Elkhorn Working Group recommends that normal precipitation figures be developed and utilized to predict annual production and to plan for reduced forage availability. This precipitation data should be utilized for adaptive monitoring for elk/cattle management purposes.

Response: The BLM regularly examines precipitation and climatic data collected and collated by the various branches of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). This data is used to modify annual operating plans of livestock permittees as needed. Although beyond the scope of this RMP, under all alternatives, existing management for all Elkhorn Mountain allotments would continue to be implemented under existing Coordinated Resource Management Plans. Changes to management and/or monitoring plans to include climate and precipitation data collection may be effected through interdisciplinary planning or project level NEPA processes to achieve resource objectives on a site-specific basis.

J10

Comment: We recommend the US Forest Service and BLM adopt State and Transition Models to manage this species (Kentucky Bluegrass).

Response: Elements of the State and Transition model are currently applied by the BLM as rangeland health assessments are conducted, which would be the avenue where issues with Kentucky Bluegrass are identified.

J11

Comment: In the Elkhorn Mountains management strategies should move away from attempts to resolve cattle vs. wildlife use conflicts and begin to develop long term approaches designed to sustain grassland systems.

Response: The BLM believes the prescriptions outlined for the action alternatives in Chapter 2 of the RMP are designed to sustain grassland ecosystems. The BLM's goal is to manage upland vegetation communities to move toward or remain in proper functioning condition, including a full range of herbaceous and shrub species. Grasslands and shrublands would be treated to remove conifer encroachment and move towards a more desired ecological condition of open areas with a low density of tree species. Grasslands and shrublands would also be assessed to ensure that uplands are in properly functioning condition. If these habitat types are not in properly functioning condition due to management activities, management would be modified to improve conditions. Alternatives B, C, and D as described in Chapter 2 outline varying degrees of aggressiveness towards addressing this issue.

J12

Comment: In the Elkhorn Mountains continue current adaptive allotment systems, rather than strict management plans.

Response: Although beyond the scope of this RMP, under all alternatives, existing management for all Elkhorn Mountain allotments would continue to be implemented under existing Coordinated Resource Management Plans. Changes to management may be effected through interdisciplinary planning or project level NEPA processes to achieve resource objectives on a site-specific basis.

J13

Comment: Elkhorn Working Group recommends maintaining cattle grazing on public land in the Elkhorn Mountains and using cattle as a tool for achieving wildlife management goals.

Response: Cattle grazing would be maintained on public lands in the Elkhorn Mountains under all alternatives with one exception. As shown on Table 2-2 in Chapter 2, under alternative B the Indian Creek allotment (Iron Mask property) would be managed as a forage reserve allotment and under Alternative C, this allotment would not be available for livestock grazing.

The Vegetation Management Tools section (under Vegetation Communities) in Chapter 2 of the RMP indicates that livestock grazing management or prescription grazing would be available as a method to treat habitat to achieve wildlife management goals.

J14

Comment: Clarify if there is adequate monitoring and oversight of implementation of Land Health Standards (Appendix E) and enforcement of grazing permits when State Water Quality Standards are not being met due to grazing. We also recognize that it is important to maintain economically viable ranching/ grazing operations on private lands adjacent to BLM lands to reduce pressure for subdivision and development of such lands.

Response: The BLM believes there is adequate monitoring and oversight of implementation of Land Health Standards. As of the end of fiscal year 2006, 229,000 acres (90 percent) of a possible 253,000 acres of currently permitted allotments had been assessed for Land Health Standards. Of the acres assessed, 113,000 acres were meeting standards (49 percent), 80,000 acres were not meeting standards but appropriate action has been taken to ensure significant progress toward meeting standards and livestock is a significant factor (35 percent), 3,000 acres were not meeting standards and appropriate action had not been taken yet to ensure significant progress toward meeting standards and livestock is a significant factor (1 percent), and 34,000 acres were not meeting standards due to causes other than livestock grazing (15 percent). Furthermore, the Bureau continues to monitor allotments to ensure Land Health Standards are being met, or progress is being made toward meeting Land Health Standards. The BLM regularly monitors allotments on a scheduled basis.

J15

Comment: American Wildlands recognizes that riparian zones are often critical for wildlife movement. Livestock grazing often leads to the degradation of these areas; and therefore AWL recommends the BLM fencing where necessary to prevent unrestricted access to riparian zones.

Response: In Chapter 2 of the RMP, under Vegetation Communities, Management Common to All Alternatives, in the Livestock Grazing section there is a management prescription that indicates: "The health and integrity of riparian areas and wetlands would be protected by and improved by using tools such as livestock fencing, alternate upland water sources or livestock grazing adjustments (timing and stocking rates)."

J16

Comment: American Wildlands recommends that the BLM perform a thorough watershed assessment of all livestock allotments within the BLM's Butte Office lands. AWL was particularly impressed with the series of watershed assessments performed by the BLM's Dillon Field Office (2006-2007) and suggests the Butte Field Office provides a similar assessment. This would give the BLM a strong foundation from which to create and implement changes in allotments, and would pro-

vide the public with technically solid reasoning behind these changes.

Response: Given the scattered and fragmented nature of BLM ownership across the planning area, the Butte Field Office has conducted Rangeland Health Assessments on an allotment-by-allotment basis. The Butte Field Office has used the information from these assessments to develop and implement changes on allotments where livestock grazing is a significant factor in not meeting standards.

J17

Comment: Using domestic sheep to control noxious weeds in Schedule [Alternative] B is interesting. The proposed regulations state that the domestic sheep will be kept 2 miles from the known Bighorn Sheep habitat, with the bed grounds for the domestic sheep being 4 miles from the known Bighorn Sheep habitat. The management provisions that are proposed concerning domestic sheep grazing of noxious weed infestations in areas adjacent to Bighorn Sheep habitat are so restrictive that it is unlikely that any sheep producer will agree to the restrictions. I base this upon my 30 years experience of raising range sheep. Domestic sheep will have a greater impact controlling noxious weeds when they are camped or bedded in the noxious weed infestation. From a livestock producer prospective these proposals effectively preclude the possibility of using domestic sheep to graze noxious weeds in areas adjacent to Bighorn Sheep habitat.

Response: Grazing domestic sheep to control noxious weeds is one of many useful management tools for controlling noxious weeds. However, the transmission of disease from domestic sheep to bighorn sheep is a significant concern. Buffer strips of sufficient distance or topographic barriers to keep domestic sheep and bighorn sheep from interacting are the only currently known methods of preventing disease transmission. The proposed management prescription was included to provide the possibility of management flexibility to address some noxious weed infestations near bighorn sheep habitat. Using domestic sheep as a weed control tool under a contract basis rather than under a permit basis would require the sheep owner to use younger sheep which would graze further from camp; in this case the sheep owner would calculate the costs of using younger animals and trailing further as part of his or her bid proposal.

J18

Comment: On page 33, though, livestock grazing is discussed and it is mentioned that cattle allotments cannot be converted into sheep allotments if they are within 5 miles of known Bighorn Sheep habitat. Is it stated anywhere what will happen if Bighorn Sheep populations shift into an existing domestic sheep allotment? When the Bighorn Sheep were introduced to the Elkhorn Mountains years ago assurances were given that the Bighorn Sheep would be far from existing domestic sheep allotments. Presently the range of the Bighorn Sheep is different from what was originally thought to be.

Response: Current BLM guidance would be followed under all alternatives for the scenario described above. Current BLM guidance outlined in Washington Office Instruction Memorandum 98-140 states that cooperative efforts should be undertaken to notify the permittee and appropriate agency to determine the appropriate action if domestic and wild sheep come in contact. Appropriate action is often removal of stray wild sheep, but could also entail removal of stray domestics if they may contact the wild sheep.

J19

Comment: Who will perform the maintenance of fences and water development projects and provide weed control of the Forage Reserve Allotments if those allotments are used only on a temporary and nonrenewable basis?

Response: The BLM would pursue and establish the infrastructure (i.e. fences, water developments, etc.) and control weeds through the annual work planning for forage reserve allotments. The BLM would assign maintenance to users or perform upkeep as needed to maintain the infrastructure.

J20

Comment: The livestock grazing analysis needs to clearly specify the anticipated impact on grazing allotments when other conditions presented in the plan such as riparian areas, water quality, wilderness areas, and endangered species plans are overlaid. It appears current grazing allotments may be reduced due to these outside impacts and [the RMP] does not address the potential impacts on the agricultural producers through possible mitigation measures by reallocation of grazing allocations from one area to another.

Response: Impacts to livestock grazing are disclosed in Chapter 4 of the RMP under Effects on Resource Uses in the Livestock Grazing section, based on estimates of what could occur with implementation of any given alternative. The impacts described in the Economic and Social sections also estimate impacts to livestock operators and people/groups that value livestock grazing on public lands. Under current regulations and management direction, the BLM is required to manage livestock grazing to meet Rangeland Health Standards for riparian areas, water quality, and endangered species. This will remain the case for all of the alternatives. In most cases when an allotment is not meeting standards, a range improvement project or change in season of use is sufficient to initiate an improving trend. Additionally, the Butte Field Office manages livestock grazing in a num-

ber of Wilderness Study Areas. No significant reduction in the amount of livestock grazing authorized in the BFO is anticipated with adopting any of the alternatives.

J21

Comment: Range monitoring: "self-monitoring is encouraged" (p.724) Agency monitoring is a must.

Response: Under current regulations and management direction, the BLM is required to manage livestock grazing to meet Rangeland Health Standards described in **Appendix F** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. This will remain the case under all of the RMP alternatives. As is stated in the appendix, "Self-monitoring by permittee should be encouraged, but with these sideboards:

- permittee's data and BLM's data should be comparable;
- BLM must perform some level of compliance monitoring for each self monitored allotment to ensure the permittee's monitoring is being done and it is valid;
- there should be regular reporting of self-monitoring data; and
- when appropriate, monitoring should include the use of reference sites (such as exclosures)."

The BLM will continue to monitor rangeland and vegetation on a regular basis as time and funding allow.

J22

Comment: I agree with the grazing level of Alternative B although rotational grazing through quality range review is very important. We need to insure our range conservationists are out in the field reviewing the need for rest rotation of the pastures. Soil and riparian impacts will be decreased with a quality level of on-the-ground management.

Response: The BLM agrees that range inspections and monitoring of resources are important. The BLM will continue to inspect allotments and collect data on allotments as staffing and budgets allow. Livestock grazing prescriptions in Chapter 2 and guidelines in **Appendix F** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS both outline the need for regular range inspections and periodic monitoring.

J23

Comment: Recommendations for the Elkhorn Mountains, Page 31 and 32 concerning forage reserve allotments:

1. An appropriate infrastructure including boundary and interior fences, water development and weed treatment, will occur before livestock grazing use begins on the forage reserve allotments.
2. The BFO will determine who is responsible for building and maintaining boundary and interior fences and water developments.
3. The Elkhorn coordinator shall track interested applicants for livestock grazing on the forage reserve allotments.
4. Preference shall be given to forest service permittees, BLM permittees or private land owners who are otherwise qualified applicants and involved in or affected by a project, emergency or resource use occurring in the Wildlife Management Area or the lands managed by the BFO in the Elkhorns.
5. The Elkhorn Coordinator shall collaborate with the BLM range specialist, Forest Service Range Specialist, and FWP on a yearly basis as to the rangeland health on the forage reserve allotments.

RATIONALE: One of the primary reasons for the acquisition of the lands proposed for the forage reserve allotments was to help resolve wildlife/livestock grazing issues on federal lands under the particular managements as a Wildlife Management Area and a MOU among the Forest Service, Fish Wildlife and Parks, BLM and other state and federal agencies. The success of management practices concerning wildlife within the managed lands is inherently tied to private ranches surrounding the federal lands and the maintenance of that open space landscape. It is therefore important to give preference to those ranches around the Elkhorns who affect and are affected by this unique management situation. As the Ecosystem Research Group noted in its recent study, "The benefit of coordinated public/private land management in the Elkhorns is the leverage it offers our public land resources to produce a far larger accessible wildlife ecosystem than would otherwise be available from public land only." By giving a preference to those Elkhorn connected ranches that are involved in or affected by projects, emergencies, or wildlife resource use, the BLM will be furthering their goals shared with other agencies in this cooperative management plan. Whether the BLM Elkhorn lands are managed pursuant to an MOU or by an ACEC designation, the preference will facilitate and help achieve those management goals and policies of the federal and state agencies regarding wildlife and the other resources involved.

Response: The BLM would pursue and establish the infrastructure (i.e. fences, water developments, etc.) where necessary for forage reserve allotments through the annual work planning process. The Butte Field Office would assign maintenance to users or perform upkeep as needed to maintain the infrastructure. The BLM will determine the amount and timing of use and rest on forage reserve allotments to ensure they are meeting rangeland health standards. The BLM will keep track of interested applicants. As modified in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS for Alternative B in Chapter 2, preference will be given to qualified applicants within the Elkhorn Cooperative Management Area for the Indian Creek forage reserve allotment (Iron Mask acquisition). The Proposed RMP/Final EIS also provides addi-

tional criteria as to how the BFO would select applicants if multiple applications were received.

J24

Comment: Rework upland use standards for areas in the Elkhorn Mountains that have transitioned to non-native grass communities.

Response: Under all RMP alternatives, existing utilization objectives would continue to be implemented under existing Coordinated Resource Management Plans. Lower or higher utilization objectives may be set through interdisciplinary planning or NEPA processes to achieve resource objectives on a site specific basis.

J25

Comment: Repeat rangeland data collection on the Elkhorn Vegetative Study area using methods similar to those used during the Elkhorn Vegetation Study.

Response: Though this comment is outside the scope of the Butte RMP, the BLM will continue to collect monitoring data on BLM allotments within the Elkhorn Vegetative Study area as staffing and budgets allow. The BLM will continue to use BLM approved vegetation monitoring methods which are similar to those used during the Elkhorn Vegetation Study.

Minerals

K1

Comment: Page 463 - This page contains Table 4-39. Under the heading "Limestone" the data on that table indicates a consistent output both currently and through all alternatives at a level of 365,000 short tons. Page 466 - Tables 4-41 and 4-42 appear to contain conflicting information when compared to the content of Table 4-39. In Table 4-41 under the heading "Minerals" it is currently stated that there are "16" full and part-time jobs in the minerals industry. Under Alternatives A, B and D the number of full and part-time jobs would be 105 while under Alternative C the number would again be 16. Given the employment at the Graymont facility and the content of Table 4-39 it would appear that these numbers are simply not correct.

Response: The Proposed RMP/Final EIS has been adjusted to address this comment. Text revisions address economic impacts related to minerals management in Table 2-24, Chapter 3, and Chapter 4 of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. Please note that the minerals resources referred to in Tables 4-41 and 4-42 of the RMP include anticipated natural gas activities as well as locatable minerals.

K2

Comment: On Table 4-42, it is currently estimated in 2006 Dollars that the "average annual labor income" from the minerals" industry is $730,000. Under Alternatives A, B and D this average annual income would increase to $1,087,000 while under Alternative C it would remain at $730,000. Obviously, these numbers do not reflect Graymont's operations and apparently were based upon the erroneous "Analysis Assumptions and Guidelines" instead of the reality of Graymont's existing operations. Also, Graymont could not find anything in its analysis of the various alternatives that would support the numbers utilized in Alternative C which would appear to indicate that somehow Graymont's operations would cease under Alternative C. If the Draft Plan alternative intends to terminate Graymont's operations it should be more clearly stated.

Response: Text revisions that address economic impacts related to minerals management have been made in Table 2-24, Chapter 3, and Chapter 4 of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. Please note that the minerals resources referred to in Tables 4-41 and 4-42 of the RMP include anticipated natural gas activities as well as locatable minerals.

K3

Comment: Page 478 - In Table 4-44, the "anticipated operation timeframe" for Graymont's operations run through 2030. As indicated in the Mine Plan Modification submitted to the Butte Field Office in early 2006, Graymont anticipates that its mining operations in the Limestone Hills will run at least 50 additional years. Graymont believes the table should reflect this anticipated life.

Response: Text in this table has been corrected in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS to address this comment.

K4

Comment: The RMP analyzes the impacts on mineral exploration as it relates to wilderness area expansion, Areas of Critical Environmental Concerns (ACEC) and Visual Resource Management (VRM). When all these other proposed conditions are overlaid on the available land there is a significant increase in restricted area available to potential future mining operations in Alternative B. This limitation on possible mineral production has the potential to decrease tax revenues to Jefferson County due to the increased requirements that will be placed on future mineral development. The proposed Muskrat Creek and Elkhorn Tack-on Wilderness Study Area would preclude mineral development in areas of high proven mineral deposits and be a foregone opportunity for future generations. These permanent closures would also generate standard county PILT payments that wouldn’t be equitable to the permanent lost potential that mineral development could produce.

Response: The RMP provides for mineral development opportunities in both ACECs and areas with high VRM ratings. These areas would likely require additional

measures to mitigate visual impacts or prevent unnecessary or undue degradation, but they are available for mineral development. The Muskrat Creek withdrawal has been dropped from the Preferred Alternative of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS because the BLM believes that aquatic resources there could be protected using the 43 CFR § 3809 regulations. The Elkhorns Tack-On WSA existed before this RMP revision so this RMP revision would not apply any additional restrictions than what already exist for this area. The Preferred Alternative for the Butte RMP does provide for this tack-on WSA being dropped in the event that adjacent Forest Service lands are removed from wilderness consideration.

K5

Comment: "Map 46: Lands Proposed for Withdrawal from Locatable Mineral Entry under Alternatives B & C" includes several recreation areas and the proposed Muskrat Creek Wilderness Area, but does not include the proposed Wilderness of the Sleeping Giant – it should.

Response: One complexity with respect to proposing a withdrawal from locatable mineral entry in the Sleeping Giant Wilderness is that the area does include privately held mineral rights that would not be affected by any withdrawal. The area has low potential for mineral resources other than slate so the likelihood of claims being filed is low. However, on lands for which the BLM holds mineral rights in Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs), locatable mineral entry would be managed in accordance with the Interim Management Plan for Lands under Wilderness Review. If Congress designates WSAs as wilderness, they would then be withdrawn from mineral entry where the BLM holds mineral rights.

K6

Comment: On page 13 under planning criteria and regulatory requirements BLM indicates that FLPMA and all other applicable laws will be met. Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks believes that some of the issues we have related to mineral and energy issues ultimately stems from the vision and management mission statement in Table 1-5. This statement fails to capture the spirit of the Federal Land and Policy Management Act of 1976 that directs the BLM to conduct land use planning, and that management on the basis of multiple use and sustained yield unless otherwise specified by law. The overarching mission and goal statement for minerals and energy that will help frame the selection of an alternative for the record should include a statement to address fish, wildlife, and recreational resources. Specifically, this mission should state that not only geologic features be preserved but that in mineral leasing and development should occur in a manner that protects fish, wildlife and recreational resources, including crucial fish and wildlife habitat and migratory corridors through appropriate stipulations including No Surface Occupancy where required.

Response: The plan does protect fish, wildlife, and recreational resources using appropriate stipulations, including the use of No Surface Occupancy stipulations for oil and gas exploration.

K7

Comment: The Boulder Batholith has traditionally offered mining opportunities and tremendous local and statewide economic and employment benefits from extractive industries. These opportunities should continue to be made available without undue restrictions.

Response: The RMP notes the Boulder Batholith is an area of high mineral potential that has hosted many of Montana's most historic mining districts. The plan continues to make lands available for mineral development. Any measures required to prevent unnecessary or undue degradation related to mineral development are the result of the BLM's responsibility to protect a variety of resources as noted in FLPMA.

K8

Comment: Page 601 Minerals, Effects Common to All Alternatives; Travel management provisions that "could result in reducing access to mining claims or interfere with the ability to conduct exploration work for some operators", is inconsistent with Locatable Minerals, Management Common to all Alternatives on Page 94 that states, "BLM provide opportunities for mineral exploration an development", and "BLM will ensure accessibility to mineralized areas for exploration and development". Any travel provisions in any of the options contrary to those statements on Page 94 need to be removed.

Response: The access for mineral development through the travel management plans will restrict access only to those operators who may not be willing to take the time to follow the travel plan variance requirements. Operators following the available provisions for obtaining a travel plan variance will have access to mineralized areas for the purpose of mineral exploration and development. Operators interested in obtaining a travel variance should be aware of additional lead time and potential expense that a travel variance request may involve.

K9

Comment: It is obvious (clear) that our concern was well founded that BLM is very serious about closing off as much mineralized areas from public access as possible. This is reflected in the pursuit of closing off 20-70 percent of the mineralized areas to public use/prospecting and claim staking. If you say I have it all wrong and BLM is not intentionally locking up minerals by closing and decommissioning key roads, let look at

their conclusions in the EIS/RMP. Helena TPA – BLM wants to lock up 49-72 percent of all known high-mineral potential areas by closing and decommission key roads. East Helena TPA – BLM wants to lock up 9-22 percent of all known high-mineral potential areas by closing and decommission key roads. NW L&C TPA - BLM wants to lock up 32-36 percent of all known high-mineral potential areas by closing and decommission key roads. Boulder/Jefferson City TPS - BLM wants to lock up 38-61 percent of all known high-mineral potential areas by closing and decommission key roads. Upper Big Hole TPA - BLM wants to lock up 8-19 percent of all known high-mineral potential areas by closing and decommission key roads.

Response: The areas identified for road closure or decommissioning are not withdrawn from operation of the Mining Law and remain open to the location of mining claims and development of minerals. The travel restrictions would impact the exploration and development by requiring the permitting, either through a travel variance or a Plan of Operations for activities that might otherwise have been Casual Use or Notice level activity under the Bureau's Surface Management Regulations (43 CFR 3809). These requirements may restrict exploration and development activities to those unwilling to pursue the required permits, but these lands do remain open to the Mining Law and are not "locked up".

K10

Comment: The final RMP/EIS should evaluate and discuss the potential for acid mine drainage and/or metal or nutrient transport or pollution to occur during mineral exploration and development on BLM lands. Impacts to water quality from active and inactive mining on BLM lands within the BFO area should be identified and disclosed. It would also be helpful to identify where active and inactive (abandoned) mines are located on a map, and to identify mine sites where reclamation work is needed for environmental restoration, and the proposed implementation schedule for mine reclamation. There is a need to protect the taxpayer from the potential expense of reclamation and remediation following hard rock mine financial failures or abandonment.

We note that pollutant discharges from mine adits, and mine site surface runoff and ground water seepage are regulated by EPA and/or the States National or Montana Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES or MPDES) permits under Section 402 of the Clean Water Act.

Response: The potential for acid mine drainage (now more commonly referred to as acid rock drainage) and/or metal or nutrient transport or pollution is much too site-specific to be discussed in the RMP, and would be addressed at a project-specific scale. Impacts to water quality from Abandoned Mine Land (AML) sites are also highly site-specific. AML sites proposed for reclamation work are discussed only briefly in the RMP. For a more detailed discussion of BLM AML sites please visit: http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/more/Abandoned_Mine_Lands/abandoned_mine_site.html. Potential impacts associated with these sites are addressed in project level NEPA analyses.

K11

Comment: Under the heading Resource Assumptions and the subheading "Minerals and Geology" there is a further subheading titled "Locatable" on pages 314 and 315. As we have reviewed this material, while it makes reference to "three currently operating large scale metal mines" and "three currently operating limestone mines located on private land within the initial Planning Area..." we do not find any reference to Graymont's activities on the public lands nor to the significant impacts Graymont's operation has on the economy of Broadwater County. To the extent the text accurately reflects the "analysis assumptions and guidelines actually used in preparing the alternative management actions," it would appear to Graymont that the failure to even consider Graymont's operations as a part of the analysis of the alternative management actions constitutes a significant defect in the preparation of the Draft Plan as it relates to locatable minerals.

Response: The text has been changed in the RMP to reflect the fact that the limestone mines are on both private and public lands.

K12

Comment: Why is White Sandy, Spokane Bay (or Bar?), Muskrat Creek, and French Bar being proposed for mineral withdrawal? This is the first I heard about it, I haven't seen any public notices or anything in the Federal Register that you are planning to withdrawal those areas from mineral entry. Isn't this a major process and shouldn't it be done in a separate process, not sneaked in through the backdoor in a RMP? It is fine to note that these areas "may be" considered for withdraw, but I thought there is an actual proper and formal route to take to withdraw minerals from public domain?

Response: The proposal to withdraw these areas is initiated through the planning process and the RMP, but the RMP does not actually withdraw these lands. The comment is correct that the "withdrawal" process for withdrawing areas from the operation of the Mining Law is a formal process involving both internal and public review. The areas proposed for withdrawals remain open to the Mining Law until the withdrawal process is formally started. The RMP recommendations are only the first step in this process.

K13

Comment: Page 87 - The Draft Plan acknowledges the fact that the LEIS is being prepared and that if, and when, legislation is passed by Congress, the legislation

would "subsequently amend the Butte RMP." This text does not appear to reflect the actual circumstance in the Limestone Hills, particularly with regard to the existing emergency closure and the recently published "segregation" for purposes of the proposed withdrawal. The Draft Plan needs to be amended to reflect actual circumstances as they exist on the ground.

Response: Text has been added to reference the Federal Register notice which segregated the lands.

K14

Comment: Table 2-23 on page 141 under the heading "Management Common to All Alternatives" appears to indicate at the third bullet point that the LEIS itself would cause a revision to the Draft Plan. It was our understanding that only the actual legislation would cause the change in the plan. If the mere preparation of the LEIS will change the Draft Plan, then since the draft of the LEIS has already been published, this text should be clarified.

Response: The text under the heading Management Common to All Alternatives has been modified to address this comment.

K15

Comment: Page 263 - On this page in the right hand column under the heading Limestone, the second sentence in the second paragraph should be reconsidered. While this sentence appears to reflect the proposed action as contained in the draft LEIS, it does not refer to the preferred alternative identified in the LEIS. Also, it would appear to indicate the "Army National Guard" is evaluating the withdrawal while in fact it is Congress that is ultimately going to consider the withdrawal on behalf of the Department of the Army, Corps of Engineers.

Response: The text has been modified in this location in the RMP to reflect this comment.

Monitoring, Implementation

L1

Comment: Monitoring and evaluation must be made consistent with and pursuant to the best available scientific information, techniques, and methods, and any conclusions based on these evaluations must be statistically significant.

Response: **Appendix N** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS describes the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation process that will be used for the Butte RMP. The Approved Plan accompanying the Record of Decision will identify monitoring processes by goal and program area.

L2

Comment: Monitoring and adaptive management programs are necessary and crucial elements in identifying and understanding the impacts of management actions, and should be an integral part of ongoing resource management and RMP implementation. There should be a continuing process of planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating effects of management, and adjusting management where effects are not as predicted. It is only through monitoring of actual effects that occur that the BLM will be able to determine whether:

1) goals and objectives are being met;

2) assumptions/indicators used in developing and implementing the plan are valid; and

3) effects are as predicted (i.e. addressing uncertainties); and

4) if mitigation is effective or should be increased or decreased or otherwise adjusted to be meet project goals and objectives. A properly designed monitoring plan will quantify how well the preferred alternative resolves the issues and concerns identified during scoping, and provides the flexible program for monitoring and feedback of monitoring results to improve predictive methodology and modify mitigation. Balancing of recreational uses and resource development with ecosystem and environmental protection needs will require careful monitoring of impacts associated with uses and resource development and feedback of monitoring information to BLM management within an adaptive management framework.

We did not see much discussion of the BLM's proposed monitoring and adaptive management program for the BFO area. Additional information on the BFO's monitoring and adaptive management program should be provided in the final RMP/EIS. Programmatic documents provide an ideal mechanism to develop monitoring programs ultimately used through tiered documents to gather data and answer questions raised in scoping. EPA supports linking the approval of projects tiered to the RMP to availability of funding for conducting necessary monitoring and evaluation. We are concerned that monitoring is often under funded in land management agencies. We believe the RMP/EIS should include a strong, explicit commitment to monitoring, especially watershed/water quality monitoring, such as that in the Forest Service Pacific Northwest Region's Forest Monitoring and Evaluation Guide in which the Regional Forester stated, “All programs and projects should contain appropriate levels of monitoring funds in their costs- or they should not be undertaken.” (USDA FS 1993)

We recommend that an Appendix be devoted to describing the monitoring and adaptive management program that will be used within the BFO to assure that goals and objectives are met. The final RMP/EIS should demonstrate how future decisions will affect monitoring and

evaluation if financial commitments to these programs or the operating budget are reduced.

Response: **Appendix N** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS describes the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation process that will be used for the Butte RMP. The Approved Plan described in the Record of Decision will identify monitoring processes by goal and program area.

L3

Comment: Does BLM consider the second growth Douglas fir growing on the winter range in Sawmill Gulch a weed, a nuisance species as well as big sagebrush and Idaho fescue? This winter range needs more timber cover not less.

Is BLM again going to try to burn sagebrush on elk/mule deer winter-spring range in the Pole Creek, Whiskey Gulch, and winter range south of Divide using this seriously flawed document?

Response: Vegetative conditions and associated potential treatments of specific localities within the Butte Field Office, such as the areas mentioned in the comment, are implementation decisions that will be considered site-specifically outside of the RMP. After finalization of the RMP priority project areas and habitats for vegetative treatments will be tiered to the priorities identified in the RMP.

L4

Comment: BLM also has a memo of understanding with FWP on land treatment projects and it should be in this document. Each land treatment is subject to an EA/EIS with full public involvement as well including field trips. Refer to BLM manual on Environmental Assessments H-1790-1 and National Environmental Policy Act. This document will not give BLM a license to go out and destroy our public land wildlife habitat.

Response: The BLM agrees with the commenter that specific treatment projects are subject to site-specific NEPA analysis on a project-level basis outside the context of the Butte RMP. The BLM regularly coordinates these projects and activities to involve Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The BLM has no plans to go out and destroy wildlife habitat.

L5

Comment: We request public meetings on any sagebrush control project and the process followed including Fish Wildlife and Parks involvement.

Response: The BLM proposes to promote and enhance sagebrush habitats in the Butte RMP. Specific projects geared toward promoting sagebrush will follow a site-specific NEPA process that may involve public meetings, and will involve coordination with Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. Such project level site-specific NEPA occurs outside the RMP process. Upon finalization of the RMP, such projects will employ and tier to management direction described in the RMP.

L6

Comment: The most common maintenance requirement for 4x4 and OHV routes is the construction and maintenance of water bars/dips/mounds to divert runoff from the route. This maintenance could easily be provided by running a SWECO trail machine with a trained operator over each route once every 5 years. OHV trail maintenance and gas tax monies are available to fund this maintenance. AmeriCorps type labor could also be used. The SWECO could not be used on motorcycle single-track trails but they typically require less maintenance and water bars/dips/mounds can usually be constructed on these trails by hand work.

Response: As part of travel plan implementation and road/trail maintenance, the BLM routinely physically maintains motorized routes with a SWECO and other machinery.

L7

Comment: Sheep Mountain area outside Clancy near Lump Gulch has been used as a motorized playground in recent history. Other areas would get increased use if the motorized public were aware of them. Montana Wildlife Federation encourages the BLM to concentrate motorized activities to roads in and near Sheep Mountain and offer the most protective measures elsewhere in the Helena TPA.

Response: Travel planning for the Sheep Mountain area was completed several years ago in the Clancy-Unionville travel plan. This area is outside the Helena Travel Planning Area (TPA) and is therefore not being re-addressed in this RMP revision. The BLM is addressing travel management in the Helena TPA with the range of alternatives presented in the Butte RMP. The Preferred Alternative (Alternative B) for the Helena TPA would reduce availability of motorized routes overall in that area.

L8

Comment: If criminal or illegal activity in the Scratchgravel Hills is a big concern, the BLM and local authorities need to provide more effective enforcement regardless of the alternative selected. A dusk to dawn curfew could provide this security only if more effective enforcement is provided.

Response: Law enforcement issues are outside the scope of the RMP. However, the Preferred Alternative for the Helena Travel Planning Area has been modified in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS so that all interior roads in the Scratchgravel Hills would be closed to public wheeled motorized travel yearlong at the five proposed trailheads, with the exception of a few perimeter right-of-way routes and routes to private residents. This mod-

ification of the Preferred Alternative is due to the high degree of user conflicts and illegal activity taking place in this area. The BLM believes that this closure may reduce criminal/illegal activity in this area but we also acknowledge that this closure will need to be enforced.

L9

Comment: Northeast of the Wheat Montana Store and west of Three Forks are several BLM sections and a state section (Copper City). This area is becoming important for mountain bikers from the Gallatin Valley in recent years. This area is only used during the shoulder season months of the spring and fall. Bicyclists have expressed a desire to have a couple of loop trail options there. I would like this area identified in the resource management plan as a potential non-motorized recreation area.

Response: Decisions suggested by the comment are implementation decisions that will be considered during site-specific travel planning for this area after finalization of the RMP.

L10

Comment: Recover and restore Cottonwood Creek [in the Sleeping Giant area].

Response: After reviewing the location of the Cottonwood Creek in question, the BLM believes the comment is related to Cottonwood Creek on state-owned lands east of Sleeping Giant. There are no BLM lands in the watershed for this creek. Therefore, restoration of this creek is beyond the BLM's control.

L11

Comment: CBU has been proactive in preventing cross country travel in the B-D National Forest by offering a 250 dollar reward for individuals reporting violators that are convicted. CBU is willing to engage with your agency in a similar program. This type of cooperative effort between user groups and agencies creates an atmosphere of a vested interest in the resource by the public. Responsible use of the resource should be the primary goal of your agency and CBU is willing to assist the BLM in accomplishing this. Closure of trails and roads to multiple use should be a last resort.

Response: The BLM appreciates willingness to assist with enforcement of travel plans. While this implementation issue is beyond the scope of the RMP, the BLM will consider this suggestion for implementation of both existing travel plans, as well as those that will be developed and finalized in the future.

L12

Comment: Fish, Wildlife, and Parks looks forward to working with the BLM on the fuels reduction projects in the Big Hole watershed. Within these projects we believe there is a lot of potential to enhance and restore big game winter range in the vicinity of Divide. We also have some concerns about the size and scope of the projects that were proposed, then ultimately shelved, prior to the initiation of this planning effort.

Response: Implementation of projects is outside the scope of the Butte RMP. However, the BLM looks forward to working with Fish, Wildlife, and Parks on the fuels reduction project in the Big Hole watershed as well as other future projects.

L13

Comment: Regardless of what Travel Plans get chosen, we are concerned for the successful implementation and enforcement of any travel plan changes that are proposed. Without strong commitment to the financial and personnel resources necessary to affect and maintain on-the-ground change, even the most thoughtfully devised travel management plan will not work.

Response: Travel plan implementation is outside the scope of the Butte RMP. However, the BLM agrees that there are considerable financial and personnel investments that need to be made with implementation of site-specific travel plans. The BLM will continue to request funding for workforce and facilities necessary to implement and enforce travel plans upon finalization of travel plan decisions being made with this RMP.

Noxious Weeds

M1

Comment: I would prefer to see the greatest effort possible to reduce noxious weeds on BLM lands. Noxious weeds reduce habitat for game animals and other wildlife, crowd out native vegetation, and are an eyesore. Alternative B appears to be acceptable, especially when paired with fewer travel routes. I would like to see weed control activities taking place at trailheads, along travel routes, and in areas where sensitive or "threatened" plant species are threatened by weeds. Also, BLM may consider posting signs with pictures of noxious weeds at trailheads to educate BLM users about the identification of these plants. BLM should encourage recreators to notify BLM of small (more controllable) infestations in otherwise weed-free areas, so that BLM can manage these areas before the infestation spreads. BLM may also consider partnering with researchers, high schools, and groups like the Native Plant Society to conduct weed pulls and other vegetation management activities, especially at areas close to towns.

Response: The Noxious Weed section in Chapter 2 of the RMP outlines priority areas for treatment including trailheads and travel routes.

Presently BLM does provide noxious weed education in terms of posting noxious weed signs and conducting direct user communications at recreation sites including

trailheads. Chapter 2 of the RMP under Vegetation Communities, Alternative B – Preferred Alternative, Noxious Weeds section indicates that weed education would be offered to the public at campgrounds and trailheads. The BLM believes that early detection and rapid response is one of the most effective methods of invasive species management, and uses an integrated approach to use all tools to curb the spread of weeds.

The Butte Field Office has several weed partnerships using biological and herbicide weed control. Some of these partnerships include the following: with Montana State University biological weed researchers, the Elkhorn Mountains Implementation Group, the Big Hole Watershed Weed Committee, the Lewis & Clark County Weed District, the Silver Bow County Weed District, the Jefferson County Weed District, the Broadwater County Weed District, the Beaverhead County Weed District, the Gallatin County Weed District, Whitehall High School and the Park County Weed District. Spray treatment days and weed pulls have been completed with many of these groups, often in cooperation with local watershed groups and/or county representatives.

M2

Comment: Page 33 Noxious Weed Management: The BLM needs more aggressive weed management on all BLM land, particularly on McMasters and Iron Mask properties. BLM is responsible for the weeds on their properties and should demand more accountability from contracted services regarding weed control.

RATIONALE: Recommendations from the Elkhorn Working Group to the Elkhorn Steering Committee, on July 14, 2007, include monitoring weed treatment effectiveness and mapping weed infestation.

Response: The BLM is treating and monitoring noxious weeds and non-native invasive species as aggressively as time and budget allow. Both the Iron Mask and McMasters areas are priority weed treatment areas and received treatment in 2007 by herbicide and biological means. Both monitoring for weed treatment effectiveness and mapping weed infestations are tools used by the BLM in weed management on public lands including lands in the Elkhorn Mountains.

M3

Comment: In the Elkhorn Mountains, conduct a complete weed-mapping program, spray and pull weeds, monitor effectiveness of treatments, prioritize treatment areas. Treat trailheads, roads and other disturbed areas first.

Response: The weed-mapping suggestion in the comment is outside the scope of the RMP. The BLM acknowledges that a complete weed mapping program has not been finished in the Elkhorn Mountains. However, many of the public lands in the Elkhorn Mountains managed by the BLM have been inventoried for noxious weed infestations in Broadwater and Jefferson Counties. Achievement of a complete weed-mapping effort will depend upon future budgets and workforce availability. Herbicide and biological control methods have been used on weed project areas in the Elkhorns. Many areas of public lands in the Elkhorn Mountains are monitored annually for weed treatment effectiveness. All weed infested areas in the Elkhorns aren't treated annually, but treatment is centered around trailheads, travel routes, and recently disturbed sites where weeds exist.

M4

Comment: Plant seeds can be carried from a source area by the wind, wildlife, or pack animals, on equipment tires and tracks, by water, and on the boots of workers, so care should be taken to implement control procedures in all source areas to avoid spread to unaffected areas. For your information, measures we often recommend at the project level for preventing spread from source areas to uninfested areas include:

Ensure that equipment tracks and tires are cleaned prior to transportation to an uninfested site.

Focus control efforts at trail heads and transportation corridors to prevent tracking of seed into uninfested areas.

Attempt to control the spread from one watershed to another to reduce water as a transport vector.

If a localized infestation exists and control is not a viable option, consider rerouting trails or roads around the infestation to reduce available vectors for spread.

Establish an education program for industrial and recreational users and encourage voluntary assistance in weed prevention and control activities.

Reseed disturbed sites as soon as possible following disturbance.

Response: Many of these measures are regularly utilized on public lands within the Butte Field Office to help prevent the further spread of weed seed and noxious weed plant parts. The BLM includes requirements to clean mechanical equipment that are authorized to work on public lands. Other public land users including many recreationists clean their vehicles to rid them of as many weed seeds and weed plant parts as possible, but are not regulated to do so.

M5

Comment: Also, if sufficient vegetation is killed during ground disturbing activities (e.g. by prescribed burning) it may warrant revegetation efforts. Revegetation (reseeding with native grass mix) should be expanded to seed any site within the control area where the vegetation density is low enough to allow reinfestation or introduction of other noxious weeds, or erosion. The goal of the seeding program should be to establish the sustai-

nability of the area. Where no native, rapid cover seed source exists, we recommend using a grass mixture that does not include aggressive grasses such as smooth brome, thereby allowing native species to eventually prevail. Mr. Phil Johnson, Botanist, Montana Dept. of Transportation, in Helena at 406-444-7657, may be able to provide guidance on revegetation with native grasses.

Response: It is BLM policy to reseed disturbed areas of ground. Proposed management in the Preferred Alternative of the Butte RMP (Chapter 2, Vegetation Communities, Alternative B – Preferred Alternative, Grasslands and Shrublands section) states that, "native or low impact, non-invasive seed mixtures would be used when restoring vegetation on disturbed ground." Mr. Phil Johnson may be contacted if guidance is needed on specific projects.

M6

Comment: Programmatic direction should also assure that the effects of burning on the potential stimulation of noxious weeds be evaluated during site-specific project level analysis. Prescribed fire has the potential to stimulate weed growth (e.g., Dalmatian toadflax or leafy spurge), and can destroy insects planted for biological weed control. Burning followed by application of appropriate herbicides can provide effective weed control.

We suggest that such considerations be evaluated during development of direction and plans for prescribed burning. Areas should not be prescribed burned for at least 30 days after herbicide treatment.

Response: Weed presence and weed control is evaluated in every fuels reduction proposal. As a standard operating procedure, if weeds are present in a proposed prescribed burn area, the weeds are generally treated at a minimum one year before and one year following the burn. Weed infestations are treated in following years if needed. Label instructions and manufacturer's recommendations will be adhered to for any prescribed burning that would occur on an area following herbicide treatment.

M7

Comment: As a general practice, EPA suggests prioritizing perimeter weed infestations such as around trailheads and roadsides before treating interior weed infestations. Also, in order to prevent the establishment and spread of noxious weeds in recreation areas (trailheads, toilet areas, etc.), it may be helpful to consider the use of mulch where foot traffic is high and revegetation is difficult or impossible. Additionally, we encourage use of aesthetic barriers and posted signs to discourage foot traffic in sensitive areas.

Response: The Butte Field Office uses an Integrated Weed Management (IWM) approach in the treatment and control of weeds. This includes a wide range of strategies to prevent and control the spread of noxious weeds on public lands including those mentioned in the comment. The BLM uses the IWM approach under all alternatives of the Butte Draft RMP/EIS including the "No Action" alternative.

M8

Comment: Please be aware that certain pest control activities described in the RMP may fall under EPA's Worker Protection Standard (WPS) if, (1) the BLM is the "employer" in control of the "operation" and the operation involves or is related to commercial production of timber or timber products, (2) the BLM is using WPS-labeled pesticides, and (3) the pesticide applications in question are related to the production of timber/timber products and they are not covered by one of the applicable exceptions or exemptions. If you have any questions regarding the WPS or its applicability please contact Jaslyn Dobrahner in the Denver EPA office at (303) 312-6252.

Response: The Butte Field Office applies all herbicides and pesticides, in accordance with product labels, Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) instructions, and agency policy. Use of Personal Protective Equipment by all personnel applying herbicides or pesticides will continue to be required in accordance with product labels and agency policy. In our contacts with Ms. Dobrahner, it was determined that few of our pesticide applications fall under the EPA's Worker Protection Standard (WPS). All herbicide and pesticide applications under the RMP will comply with the guidance provided under the EPA publication titled "How to Comply with the Worker Protection Standard for Agricultural Pesticides" No. EPA 735-B-05-002. The herbicide and pesticide application Risk Assessment, for the Butte Field Office, shall also include WPS considerations for personnel involved in these pesticide activities and personnel shall be appropriately trained and equipped for their application tasks.

M9

Comment: We also fully support the proposed conduct of monitoring to determine effectiveness of weed treatment strategies at project level and Planning Area and Decision-wide level (page 24). We recommend that all weed treatment methods be tracked to provide a comparison of the effectiveness of control measures, and that all weed infestations and control actions be tracked in a BFO level weed database.

Response: All weed treatments are tracked through the BLM's application record process and the hard copies are kept for a minimum of 10 years. Annual summaries are compiled from these records and submitted to the BLM State Office. Some weed treatments receive more on the ground monitoring than other treatments, depending on the size of the infestation. A large majority of all weed treatments are evaluated for treatment effectiveness, however not every weed infestation acre or pre-

viously treated acre is visited each year due to budget and personal constraints.

M10

Comment: The transport mechanism for noxious weeds includes all visitors and uses of public lands including hikers, equestrians, and cattle grazing in addition to motorized recreationists. Many events including fire, floods, and the importation of invasive species also contribute to noxious weed problems. For the most part, vehicles do not have a surface texture that will pick up and hold noxious weeds seeds. Transport mechanisms based on hair, fur, manure, shoes, and fabrics are more effective than the smooth metal and plastic surfaces found on vehicles. Additionally, motorized recreationists practice the "Wash your Steeds" policy. However, closures due to noxious weed concerns are only placed on motorized recreationists. We have observed an equal amount of noxious weeds in non-motorized areas as there are in motorized areas. We request that the document make a fair evaluation of all sources and uses that contribute to the noxious weed problem including hikers, mountain bikers, equestrians (non-use of weed-free hay), etc. The document should also fairly evaluate how natural processes and wildlife spread noxious weeds. The document should include a balanced discussion of the noxious weed problem. The discussions, decisions, and measures used to mitigate noxious weeds should be applied impartially to all visitors and with a realistic representation of noxious weeds natural ability to spread versus a relative magnitude for every activity's contribution.

Response: The BLM realizes that all of these mentioned uses transport noxious weed seeds and invasive species plant parts. Weed spread is described in Chapter 3 of the RMP in the Noxious Weeds subsection of the Vegetative Communities section. There are studies that have documented that vehicle travel routes promote a high degree of weed infestation spread. It is true that smooth metal and plastic surfaces on motor vehicles don't hold weed seeds well, however other portions of vehicles do hold them as well, such as the undercarriage and tires, and especially then they are adhered with mud. The Proposed RMP/Final EIS, Chapter 3 has been modified to more deliberately point out that direct human contact, wildlife use, and livestock use contribute to weed spread.

M11

Comment: OHV owners in Montana, as part of their vehicle registration, contribute $1.50 to a noxious weed abatement program. Non-motorized visitors do not contribute to a weed abatement program. We request that the analysis be based on a balanced discussion of the noxious weed problem. The discussions, decisions, and measures used to mitigate noxious weeds should recognize the relatively minor impact that OHVs have on the noxious weed problem and credit OHV visitors for contributing to a program to control noxious weeds. Additionally, this is another example of predisposition because motorized recreationists have not been given credit for the positive action that they have taken and we have only been penalized for our past cooperation and the initiative taken to control noxious weeds.

Response: All vehicle owners when registering their vehicles pay the $1.50 for the noxious weed program. This includes non-motorized visitors' vehicles they use to access public lands. There are studies that have documented that vehicle travel routes promote a high degree of weed infestation spread.

M12

Comment: Noxious weeds become more widely distributed each year. Many factors influence the establishment and spread of invasive plant species. The following points should be incorporated into the RMP:

- Give high priority to noxious weed control by aggressively seeking funds to achieve this goal. Use biological controls whenever possible, chemical control when needed to restore natural environments, techniques that fit the "integrated pest management" guidelines. USDA- CSREES (Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service) defines Integrated Pest Management (IPM) as "a sustainable approach to managing pest species by combining biological, cultural, physical, and chemical tools in a way that minimizes economic, health, and environmental risks". Incorporate some or all of the following techniques.
- Biological controls such as differing various insects are known to control Leafy Spurge, Knapweed, Canada Thistle and Hounds tongue. Leafy spurge flea beetles have proven high success in the Lewistown area as bio-vector of leafy spurge. (Conversation with Craig Roberts, MT DNRC)
- Study the suitability of domestic goats as a bio-agent to control Russian and Spotted knapweed and domestic sheep for leafy spurge. Grazing contracts could concentrate these species, if suitable, in areas of infestation using small enclosures to minimize grazing on desirable species.
- Disturbed ground as will be created if BLM pursues fuel reduction projects is prime substrata for noxious weeds to become established. Plans must emphasize reclamation begin very quickly in those activities that produce this condition: tree and brush removal projects should be reclaimed within 90 days of work completed; Avoid overgrazing by domestic livestock to reduce a disturbed ground situation.

- Minimize use of herbicides in big-sage habitat types to minimize negative impacts to potential sage grouse expansion.

Response: The BLM currently uses an Integrated Weed Management approach. The BLM has strategic plans that are being implemented such as Partners against Weeds (PAWS) that parallel this comment. The PAWS plan is referenced in the RMP. These types of weed treatment prescriptions are also discussed in Chapter 2 of the RMP.

Biological controls on noxious weeds have been used in the Butte Field Office since 1992. Various biological control agents have been used in this time on a number of different noxious weeds. The leafy spurge flea beetles (*Apthona species*) and the knapweed root weevil (*Cyphocleonus achates*) have proven the most effective and are readily available.

The Butte Field Office along with the other cooperators including The Sheep Institute and Montana State University are involved in a sheep and goat study to control noxious weeds at present. Noxious weed control using domestic sheep and/or goats in occupied bighorn sheep habitat would be prohibited to prevent any possible disease transmission (from domestic sheep/goats to wild sheep) under the revised RMP.

During implementation of fuels reduction projects, noxious weed infestations are usually treated in those areas before and following completion of each project. BLM would reseed disturbed areas where needed (RMP Chapter 2, Soil Resources, Management Common to Action Alternatives section). Most reclamation is completed sooner than 90 days following any activity that disturbs the ground but this timing would be determined on a case-by-case basis during project implementation. Further reclamation may be completed if monitoring of the site shows it is needed.

Under the Preferred Alternative in the RMP (Chapter 2, Vegetation Communities, Alternative B – Preferred Alternative, Noxious Weed Management section), no herbicide or pesticide which would negatively affect sagebrush would be used aerially in sensitive sagebrush habitats.

M13

Comment: A general comment that applies to alternatives where prescribed burning occurs is the need to ensure adequate noxious weed control prior to and post burning. A viable monitoring and control program needs to be in place to make sure adequate follow up on control of infestations is accomplished.

Response: It is a standard practice for the BLM to conduct pre and post weed treatment of fuels reduction treatment areas. Necessary weed treatments are completed a minimum of one year before and one year after the fuels treatments. These areas are monitored both prior to and following any fuel treatment activity e.g. mechanical or burning. Following the fuels treatment, further weed treatment is completed if needed.

M14

Comment: The remaining or additional recommendations are prioritized and modified by EWG as follows:

1. Fall annual updates on the 'state of the weeds' will be provided to the Working Group by all parties engaged in weed management in the Elkhorns.
2. Actively seek funding to pursue weed treatments in areas already identified. Funding would be used to assist agencies and counties in weed treatments.
3. Actively pursue weed control in known locations concentrating efforts along roads and at trailheads (e.g. spray and pull).
4. Mapping of unmapped weed locations can occur simultaneous to treatments.
5. Monitor weed treatment effectiveness. Utilize results to determine need for follow-up treatments and ensure that funding is available for the follow-up treatments.
6. Explore opportunities to develop a permanent fund for long-term weed treatments.
7. Map weed infestations in the Elkhorns. This is a multi-step effort and could utilize ongoing services such as those provided by the Townsend school:

    a. Elkhorns Coordinator will pull together existing weed maps (B-D, County, Helena, BLM, state, private) and work with Interagency Weed Committee where mapping efforts are already underway;

    b. Elkhorns Coordinator will work with other agencies, private landowners, and county weed coordinators to develop a collaborative, comprehensive map of Hunting District 380 with the following information: size, location, type of weeds, type of treatment, when treated, and any follow-up treatments. This map will be updated annually;

    c. Identify where mapping efforts are already planned (e.g. northeast side Elkhorns);

    d. Prioritize mapping in accessible areas then move towards the interior of the mountain range.

Response: BLM responses are indicated by numbered item corresponding to numbered items in the comment.

1. Specific decisions on public outreach to particular groups are beyond the scope of decisions made in the Butte RMP. BLM's role in working with the Elkhorn Working Group and providing annual weed updates would be determined in the context of the partnership for management of the Elkhorn Mountains.

2. The Butte RMP does not provide direction as to how to use funding. However, the Butte Field Office (BFO) has an active program in weed management as budgets and staffing allow, and will continue to look for funding and grant opportunities to leverage appropriated funds as well as other mechanisms to control and prevent weeds.

3. The RMP outlines priorities for treatment and control efforts across the field office, which would include the BLM portions of the Elkhorn Mountain range, in the Noxious Weed Management section of Chapter 2. Under all alternatives, BLM would focus prevention of weed spread along roads, trails, waterways, and recreations sites, as well as in areas disturbed by project implementation activities. Additional measures would include requiring outfitters to use weed-free hay and to report weed infestations when encountered. The integrated weed management program currently in place and expected to continue after approval of the Butte RMP uses a combination of different methods (e.g. herbicide, pull, biological, etc.).

4. While specifying specific mapping protocols or sequencing of work is beyond the scope of the RMP, the BLM will continue to document weed locations when encountered during treatment activities. The BLM monitors treatment areas at present and requires the counties to do this also, simultaneous to treatment projects on public land. There is Global Positioning System (GPS) mapping and human observation mapping done.

5. The BLM monitors treatment areas at present and requires the counties to do this also, simultaneous to treatment projects on public land. Planning of follow-up treatments is based on results of this monitoring as well as reports of new infestations. This monitoring is used in planning for the method of treatment (e.g. mechanical or herbicide), and the level of intensity of treatment needed for future years. While funding cannot be guaranteed from year to year given the Congressional budget appropriation system, the Butte Field Office actively pursues funding to address identified weed concerns.

6. Specific decisions on developing a permanent fund for work in the Elkhorns are beyond the scope of decisions made in the Butte RMP. The BLM's role in assisting with establishing a permanent fund would be determined in the context of the partnership for management of the Elkhorn Mountains. Currently, the Butte Field Office places priority on the Elkhorn Mountains landscape when asking for funding for weed prevention and control.

7. Specific decisions on mapping weed infestations in the Elkhorns and the role of the Elkhorn Coordinator are outside the scope of decisions made in the Butte RMP. The BLM's role in cooperating with mapping efforts and prioritizing areas would be determined in the context of the partnership for management of the Elkhorn Mountain. In the past, BLM has been active in the Elkhorns Weed Committee and has used resources from Townsend High School to inventory and map weeds on public lands in the Elkhorns.

M15

Comment: In the Elkhorn Mountains utilize adaptive weed management strategies for ALL areas treated through prescribed burning.

- Inventory - Map the prescribed burn unit and an appropriate buffer around the burn unit to get an accurate inventory of weeds in the area.
- Weed Control Pre Burn - Begin active weed control at a minimum of one year before the unit is burned.
- Revegetation - The unit should be inspected to determine if seeding following the burn will increase competition with weed species, decrease re-invasion of weeds, or establish desired plants that help meet the land use objectives.
- Weed Control - Post Burn Monitoring - Following the prescribed burn and associated restoration, sites should be visited yearly for two to three years to monitor and treat weed infestations. The original inventory and treatments, if any, should be used as a baseline to monitor weed activity for increased infestations, control successes, and to map new invaders. This information can then be assessed and used to improve or adapt the current weed management goals and objects to better address the weeds associated with prescribed burns.
- Apply the above strategies to mechanical treatments where applicable.

Response: Weed management strategies for areas targeted for prescribed burning or mechanical treatment would be addressed on a case-by-case basis during project level analysis and planning. In general, BLM agrees with the outlined prescriptions suggested by the EWG. BLM continues to inventory, monitor and treat weed infestations both inside and outside of the Elkhorn Mountain range.

M16

Comment: In the Elkhorn Mountains assure elk security levels are adequate. Prescribed burning should be used to reduce or eliminate the areas of encroachment identified in the Elkhorn Vegetation Study. Begin active weed control at a minimum of one year before the unit is burned.

Response: Elk security cover is addressed in all fuel reduction projects on public lands in the Elkhorns. Weeds are generally treated prior to burning and following prescribed burning for fuel reduction projects which have been completed to date on BLM managed lands in the Elkhorn Mountains. Weed treatment is continuing on

burned and unburned weed infested areas in the Elkhorns. Weed management strategies for areas targeted for prescribed burning or mechanical treatment would be addressed on a case-by-case basis during project level analysis and planning. Fuel treatments and weed control are discussed in Chapter 2 of the RMP under each alternative.

M17

Comment: Among the greatest threats to biodiversity is the spread of noxious weeds and invasive (non-indigenous) plants. Many noxious weeds can outcompete native plants and produce a monoculture that has little or no plant species diversity or benefit to wildlife. Noxious weeds tend to gain a foothold where there is disturbance in the ecosystem. We appreciate the discussion of noxious and invasive plants in the draft RMP/EIS, and support integrated weed management (e.g., effective mix of cultural, education and prevention, biological, mechanical, chemical management, page 23). EPA supports BLM's goal to minimize infestations of invasive plant and noxious weeds (Table 1-5, page 9, and page 17). We are pleased that weed seed-free forage would be used on BLM lands, and that weed management prescriptions would be included in all new treatment projects and incorporated where possible in all existing contracts, agreements, and land-use authorizations that would result in ground disturbing activities (page 24), and that all contractor and BLM equipment would be power washed to remove weed seed before entering areas with ground disturbance (page 28). Another option for preventing the introduction of noxious weeds is to require cattle and horses, especially those coming from areas with noxious weeds, to be penned and fed weed free hay for several days prior to being released on public lands.

Response: The BLM agrees that requiring weed free hay to be fed to livestock prior to their use of public land could assist in prevention of weed spread onto public land. However, to be effective, this type of requirement would have to be made at the national level. The Butte RMP has not been altered to require this provision.

M18

Comment: While EPA supports integrated weed management, including use of herbicides where needed, EPA also encourages prioritization of management techniques that focus on non-chemical treatments first, with reliance on chemicals being the last resort, since weed control chemicals can be toxic and have the potential to be transported to surface or ground water following application.

Management direction should assure that public health and water contamination concerns of herbicide usage are fully evaluated and mitigated. Herbicide drift into streams and wetlands could adversely affect aquatic life and wetland functions such as food chain support and habitat for wetland species. All efforts should be made to avoid movement or transport of herbicides into surface waters that could adversely affect public health, fisheries, or other water uses. Early recognition and control of new infestations is encouraged to stop the spread of the infestation and avoid wider future use of herbicides, which could correspondingly have more adverse impacts on biodiversity, water quality, and fisheries. Herbicides should be applied at the lowest rate effective in meeting project objectives and according to guidelines for protecting public health and the environment. We recommend that the BLM include an objective stating that, "Herbicides, pesticides, and other toxicants and chemicals be used in a safe manner in accordance with Federal label instructions and restrictions that allow protection and maintenance of water quality standards and ecological integrity, and avoid public health and safety problems."

Response: The Butte Field Office uses EPA approved herbicides and pesticides in a safe manner in accordance with label and material safety data sheet instructions. Under an integrated approach, the BLM also uses several other means of weed treatment including: cultural, physical control, and biological controls. These methods are used in combination with strategies for weed prevention, education, monitoring, mapping, and coordination. Herbicide use is only one method of treatment used. It is the primary method used and will continue to be as long as it is the most effective method available. The BLM has many standard operating procedures for applying herbicides including, but not limited to the following:

- Selecting herbicide that is least damaging to the environment while providing the desired results.
- Applying the least amount of herbicide needed to achieve the desired result.

The BLM follows product label and material safety data sheet instructions when treating weeds to protect and maintain ecological integrity, including but not limited to water and air quality resources, livestock, wildlife and human health and safety issues.

M19

Comment: Aerial application of herbicides in some circumstances can provide the most cost effective means of addressing widespread weed infestations. We note, however, that it is very important that adequate mitigation measures are incorporated into aerial applications to reduce risks of adverse health and environmental effects. We are pleased that the RMP indicates that when winds are greater than 6 miles per hour or within a 300 foot RMZ aerial application of herbicides or pesticides would not occur (page 33). Suggested mitigation measures to avoid herbicide drift to streams and wetlands during ground and aerial applications of herbicide that should be considered as RMP guidelines, include:

- Use adequate streamside buffers {-300 feet for aerial applications and 50 feet for ground applications);

- Flag aquatic areas on the ground;

- Use GPS systems in spray helicopters in association with flagging or field marking of treatment areas to ensure accuracy of aerial treatments (i.e., to better assure that only areas marked for treatment are treated);

-Use drift reduction agents and nozzles that create large droplets to reduce drift to nontarget areas during aerial herbicide applications.

- Use photodegradable dyes in herbicides to facilitate identification of sprayed areas;

- Use spray detection cards;

- Monitor wind speeds;

- Maintain close communications between the helicopter pilot and the ground field observers who monitor herbicide drift, deposition and wind speeds during aerial applications of herbicide;

- Release herbicides at lower altitudes to reduce drift.

- Monitor for herbicides in selected waters near herbicide application areas.

- Notify people living within one-fourth mile of an area to be treated aerially during project planning and shortly before weed treatment.

- Do not locate herbicide mixing, loading, or cleaning areas within 200 feet of private land, open water, or wells, or other sensitive areas; etc.

- Ground field observers, who will be present during aerial applications, should be trained and equipped with the appropriate personal protective equipment according to the label.

- Assure that certified pesticide applicators supervise each BLM application crew and trains crew members in personal safety, proper handling and application of herbicides, and proper disposal of empty containers.

- Consider use of a more selective herbicide (such as clopyralid) in aerial spraying, since a more selective herbicide would kill fewer non-target plants.

- In the unlikely event of a spill, the spill is quickly contained and cleaned up, and appropriate agencies and persons should be promptly notified.

- Conduct surveys for sensitive plants by qualified surveyors prior to aerial applications and at all previously unsprayed sites so that sensitive and/or rare plant species may be protected where such plants are found in areas with weed infestations.

Response: While there are no BLM requirements to do so, all of this comment's guidelines are incorporated into the aerial treatment program in place in the Butte Field Office at present, with the exception of monitoring for herbicides in selected waters near herbicide application areas. The BLM has received guidance for aerial treatment included in the recently completed BLM Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides EIS (finalized after release of the Butte Draft RMP/EIS) and it will be included in the Preferred Alternative of RMP. Many of the guidelines mentioned in the comment are included in this new guidance.

The BLM does not typically test selected waters near herbicide application areas. The existing mitigation measures and standard operating procedures, used by the BLM, for maintaining buffer areas between treatment areas and water bodies should protect water resources from any impact by aerially applied herbicides. Potable water at developed BLM recreation sites is tested on a regular basis, not only for any herbicide impact but for pollutants that could be a public health concern.

The BLM follows product label and material safety data sheet instructions when treating weeds to protect and maintain ecological integrity, including but not limited to water and air quality resources, livestock, wildlife and human health and safety issues.

M20

Comment: We also recommend mechanical weed removal or hand-pulling of weeds adjacent to streams, for weeds that do not contain extensive root systems near surface waters. It may be helpful to add a list of those weed species which can be effectively hand-pulled (i.e. those without large tap roots and spreading rhizomatous root systems). The herbicide application technique of hand or manual wipe-on (especially applicable for contact systemic herbicides such as glyphosate) is not mentioned as an option to control individual weed plants up to the existing water level adjacent to streams or sensitive aquatic sites. As you know, picloram is toxic, mobile, and persistent, and we would be concerned about use of picloram near streams or in areas of high groundwater. For your information, Dow AgroSciences, the manufacturer of Tordon 22K, has recently developed supplemental labeling for Tordon 22K for areas west of the Mississippi River. They have directions for wick or carpet roller applications. Tordon 22K herbicide can be applied using wick or carpet roller equipment where drift presents a hazard to susceptible plants, surface waters, and other sensitive areas.

One part Tordon 22K is mixed with 2 parts water to prepare a 33 percent solution. The wick method of application is more labor intensive but very effective at targeting particular noxious weeds adjacent to surface waters, wetlands, or protected plants.)

Response: Wipe on or wick type weed treatment is considered a tool by BLM in its Integrated Weed Management approach. Biological and hand pulling are two important weed treatment techniques used in riparian areas by the Butte Field Office. Insect releases are the

primary biological technique used. Biocontrol insect releases have proven to be very effective in some areas. Their success is probably dependent upon particular environmental factors of each area. The Butte Field Office utilizes an IWM reference of weed management control methods for State of Montana categorized noxious weeds. This reference discusses the effectiveness of many control methods, including hand pulling, on these particular weed species.

The BLM follows product label and material safety data sheet instructions for each herbicide used, including Picloram, when treating weeds to protect and maintain ecological integrity, including but not limited to water and air quality resources, livestock, wildlife and human health and safety issues.

Oil and Gas

N1

Comment: Energy and Minerals, page 430, BLM forgot to mention that these activities are subject to individual environmental analysis and must involve the public for public input as well as FWP. Recent leasing in Dillon violated the National Environmental Policy Act and a separate EIS draft was not prepared by BLM. That conforms with the federal judges decision for the East Front Leasing. BLM ignored the federal judge's decision that a separate draft EIS must be prepared beyond a land use plan. That is a federal action requiring a comprehensive approach. Is your office following in the same tracks as Dillon and ignoring a federal judge's decision?

Response: The Record of Decision for the Butte RMP will make the decisions required for leasing, as was done for the Dillon RMP, based on the analysis found in this EIS. These required decisions are identified in the BLM Handbook, H-1601-1, Land Use Planning Handbook, beginning on page 23 of Appendix C. These requirements were developed in large part due to the decision that the BLM believes is being referenced in the comment (Connor v. Burford, 848 F. 2nd 1441, 9th Cir., 1988). Further guidance is found in BLM Handbook, H-1624-1, Planning for Fluid Mineral Resources. The purpose of this Handbook is to help ensure compliance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the National Environmental Policy Act. A separate EIS beyond the land use plan is not required for oil and gas leasing.

N2

Comment: This does not seem like the appropriate place/process to determine where to ban oil and gas exploration and production, especially with the uncertainty in the world market and oil pushing $70/barrel. Until the US becomes independent upon foreign oil, we should keep all the options open here in Montana. Don't close off any areas until that time occurs. I haven't heard that this is an issue and so I am unsure why you have to propose banning oil and gas exploration in this area. Again, there doesn't seem to be any "real" data to support your wish to close off all of these areas. It seems more like a lot of "office work" and effort to kiss up to various enviro groups. Actual field work is needed in order to support such premature push to close all these areas with (with no real data provided to support the notion).

Response: The BLM is required by law (the Federal Land Policy and Management Act) to manage lands for multiple use. This means the public lands are managed so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the present and future needs of the American people. The BLM attempts to make the best use of the land for some or all resources or related services over areas large enough to provide for periodic adjustments in use to conform to changing needs and conditions. In some cases the BLM makes use of some land for less than all of the resources. In other cases the BLM manages a combination of balanced and diverse resource uses that takes into account the long-term needs of future generations for renewable and non-renewable resources, including, but not limited to, recreation, range, timber, minerals, watershed, wildlife and fish, and natural scenic, scientific and historical values. The final goal is the harmonious and coordinated management of the various resources without permanent damage to the productivity of the land and the quality of the environment with consideration being given to the relative values of the resources and not necessarily to the combination of uses that will give the greatest economic return.

N3

Comment: Table 2-20 indicates that the preferred alternative, Alternative B, makes the most acres available for oil and gas leasing of any alternative (i.e. 96 percent of the BFO mineral estate lands or 649,367 acres), even more than Alternative D which generally provides for greatest levels of resource development and least environmental protection of the action alternatives. In general, Alternative B provides for moderate levels of resource development in an apparent effort to balance resource development with environmental protection. It is not clear to us why this perspective of moderation and balancing of resource development with environmental protection appears to change when it comes to oil and gas leasing.

Response: The BLM would respond to this comment by first pointing out that Alternative B only makes 43 more acres available for leasing than Alternative D. Of the available acreage 45 percent is available subject to major constraints (No Surface Occupancy stipulations). Fifty two percent is available subject to moderate constraints (Controlled Surface Use or Timing Limitation stipulations). The remainder is available under standard lease terms. In comparison, Alternative D makes 16 percent of the available acreage subject to major con-

straints and 72 percent subject to moderate constraints. While Alternative B makes slightly more land available than Alternative D, it is much more restrictive than Alternative D based on the mix of lease stipulations proposed in the RMP. It is also slightly more restrictive in terms of the mix of stipulations proposed in the RMP than Alternative A.

N4

Comment: We also recommend a stipulation for Alternative B of a 500 foot no surface disturbance buffer distance for protection of wetlands, natural springs and seeps, reservoirs, lakes, ponds, intermittent or small perennial streams, riparian/wetland areas, natural springs and seeps, and within 1,000 feet of perennial streams and rivers. We believe it is important to avoid placement of roads near streams within riparian areas and wetland areas, and that drilling activities should be sited to avoid activities near such sensitive areas. Exceptions to this buffer distance may be considered for pipelines and short segments of roads.

It is also important that wetlands and riparian areas be avoided as much as possible during pipeline routing, and any pipelines unavoidably placed through wetland areas should avoid dewatering of wetlands during trench construction. Trench drainage plugs can be used to minimize this drainage effect. Pipelines through wetlands and other sensitive areas should also use a minimal narrow width for pipeline right-of-ways.

Response: The actions proposed in the comment are in line with BLM policy and regulations. Alternative B contains a No Surface Occupancy stipulation for the protection of wetlands, floodplains, and riparian areas. There is no need for a stipulation in Alternative B for a 500 foot no surface disturbance buffer for protection of wetlands, natural springs and seeps, reservoirs, lakes, ponds, intermittent or perennial streams, and riparian/wetland areas. Regulations at 43 CFR § 3101.1-2 allow the BLM to move a location up to 200 meters (656.16 feet) to mitigate impacts to features proposed for no surface occupancy by the comment. The stipulation listed above would protect and mitigate impacts to perennial streams and rivers. We would also use our authority to move locations up to 200 meters to add additional protection on a case-by-case basis. Alternative B also proposes to stipulate municipal watersheds in the Butte Field Office with a No Surface Occupancy stipulation. Other stipulations for fisheries will indirectly help to mitigate impacts in wetlands, riparian areas, around streams, and other areas.

On BLM-administered lands, pipelines on a lease (or within a unitized area), which are constructed and managed by the lease holder or operator are authorized under an application for permit to drill or sundry notice and lease stipulations applied. On or off lease/unit pipelines constructed and managed by someone other than the leaseholder/operator require a BLM right-of-way and are governed by restrictions found in the applicable right-of-way. On BLM-administered lands pipelines located off the lease or the unitized area require a right-of-way with its own stipulations.

N5

Comment: We also recommend that the BLM require that oil and gas operators make maximum use of directional drilling to increase protection of sensitive resources (i.e. require use of directional drilling to reduce risks to sensitive resources such as water quality and important aquatic or terrestrial habitats). New roads should be restricted, and maximum use made of directional drilling and cluster development, with wide spacing of well pads, and few exceptions, modifications or waivers of environmentally protective stipulations.

Response: Existing BLM policy, Washington Office Instruction Memorandum (IM) No. 2007-021, emphasizes the use of environmental Best Management Practices (BMPs). This IM directs all field offices to incorporate environmental BMPs into proposed Applications for Permits to Drill (APDs), sundry notices, and associated on- and off-lease Rights-of Way approvals after appropriate environmental review. Environmental BMPs to be considered in nearly all circumstances include the following:

- Interim reclamation of well locations and access roads soon after the well is put into production;
- Painting of all new facilities a color that best allows the facility to blend with the background, typically a vegetated background;
- Design and construction of all new roads to a safe and appropriate standard, “no higher than necessary” (see BLM 9113 Roads Manual) to accommodate their intended use; and
- Final reclamation recontouring of all disturbed areas, including access roads, to the original contour or a contour that blends with the surrounding topography.

Other environmental BMPs are more suitable for Field Office consideration on a case-by-case basis, 1) depending on their effectiveness, 2) the balancing of increased operating costs vs. the benefit to the public and resource values, 3) the availability of less restrictive mitigation alternatives that accomplish the same objective, and 4) other site specific factors. Examples of typical, case-by-case BMPs include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Burying of distribution power lines and/or flow lines in or adjacent to access roads;
- Centralizing production facilities;
- Installing submersible pumps;
- Placing wellheads below ground; and

- Drilling multiple wells from a single pad.

What the comment recommends is already BLM policy applied in Montana.

N6

Comment: We also note that mitigation plans that use enhancement or creation of off-site wildlife habitat to offset loss or destruction of natural habitats often results in development of habitat of lesser quality than natural habitat. We believe caution should be exercised in allowing adverse impacts to natural habitat and using human-created habitats of uncertain quality to offset loss of natural habitats. This often results in loss of natural ecological functions. Avoidance of impacts to natural habitats should be prioritized over efforts to use human created habitats as compensation for loss of natural habitats.

Response: **Appendix M** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS provides the stipulations that would be required for a range of species during oil and gas exploration. These stipulations range from timing restrictions to no lease and would be required for all oil and gas exploration activities. Off-site mitigation could be authorized, in some cases, but all measures would be taken to protect natural habitats before off-site mitigation would be allowed.

N7

Comment: We are also concerned that BLM exceptions, modifications, or waivers may be granted that allowed increased surface disturbance and activity timing that may reduce protection of environmentally sensitive areas if operators submit plans that demonstrate that impacts to resources are "acceptable" or can be "adequately mitigated" (per Appendix L). We are particularly concerned if exceptions are granted to the no surface occupancy buffers for important wildlife and fisheries habitats and municipal watersheds.

We believe that the practice and process for removing environmentally protective restrictions on oil and gas development and for demonstrating "acceptable" levels of impacts or "adequate" mitigation should be more fully described in the Final EIS. There should be very careful review of, proposed exceptions, modifications and waivers to protective restrictions, since exceptions, modifications and waivers to protective stipulations may reduce the level of environmental protection.

Response: We have added language to RMP at that point in Appendix L, Fluid Minerals, where the leasing process is explained to address these concerns. However, we have also addressed portions of this comment in our response here.

The Great Falls Oil and Gas Field Station is the BLM office with approval authority for oil and gas activities for the Butte Field Office. During the last two fiscal years, our Great Falls office has not granted any requests for waivers, exception, or modifications for lease stipulations as none have been requested. However, they have granted a total of 51 waivers, exceptions, or modifications to existing conditions of approval attached to APDs. These approvals affected eagle, big game, and sage grouse timing limitation conditions and conditions of approval imposed due to the Migratory Bird Treating Act (MBTA). The MBTA conditions of approval only affected very small areas in and around well sites or other sites disturbed for oil and gas operations. In all of these cases the areas were physically inventoried before approval of any request for a waiver, exception, or modification. In the case of the wildlife conditions of approval the average time granted for an exception was normally less than two weeks long and just involved one well site. Time frames granted for big game conditions of approval were also for very short periods of time.

In regards to the concerns expressed in the comment over public involvement in the process of granting proposed waivers, exceptions, or modifications the BLM will follow requirements found at 43 CFR § 3101.1-4:

"A stipulation included in an oil and gas lease shall be subject to modification or waiver only if the authorized officer determines that the factors leading to its inclusion in the lease have changed sufficiently to make the protection provided by the stipulation no longer justified or if proposed operations would not cause unacceptable impacts. If the authorized officer has determined, prior to lease issuance, that a stipulation involves an issue of major concern to the public, modification or waiver of the stipulation shall be subject to public review for at least a 30-day period. In such cases, the stipulation shall indicate that public review is required before modification or waiver. If subsequent to lease issuance the authorized officer determines that a modification or waiver of a lease term or stipulation is substantial, the modification or waiver shall be subject to public review for at least a 30-day period."

These provisions provide for appropriate public involvement.

N8

Comment: Thank you for directing the RMP/EIS reader to the websites for Best Management Practices (BMPs) for oil and gas operations in Appendix D (page 717). It is our understanding that site-specific BMPs may be negotiated with the operator, and it is not clear if site-specific BMPs will be negotiated with operators above and beyond the standard BMPs identified on the BLM websites. The final RMP/EIS should discuss the potential for development of any site-specific BMPs with oil and gas operators.

Response: The BLM has changed the RMP in **Appendix M** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS (formerly **Ap-**

pendix L in the Draft RMP/EIS) at the subsection labeled "Conditions of Approval" to better explain the use of BMPs and other conditions of approval (COAs). The commenter is correct about the BLM's use of BMPs in the oil and gas program. The BLM does negotiate site-specific BMPs as appropriate/needed with operators.

N9

Comment: We did not see much discussion in the draft RMP/EIS of potential for spills or leaks of petroleum products during oil and gas drilling or production activities, or during pipeline transport. We are concerned about the risk and potential for a spill of petroleum product into the environment, and the serious environmental impacts that may accompany such a spill. We note that small leaks to pipelines or other petroleum transport or storage facilities are often difficult to detect and can allow many thousands of barrels of petroleum product to discharge into the environment before a leak is detected. We believe the potential for spills or leaks of petroleum products to the environment should be evaluated and discussed, and management direction and oil and gas leasing plans should provide for use of state-of-the-art leak detection and monitoring equipment, remote control shut off valves, check valves, etc.

We also suggest that RMP management direction should provide for periodic on the ground inspection of facilities that have potential for petroleum product leakages using hydrocarbon monitoring equipment be considered. All possible actions to reduce the probability of a spill/leak occurring, the magnitude of a spill/leak, and to reduce or mitigate the adverse consequences of a spill/leak should be taken. The CEQ regulations require disclosure of the adverse environmental impacts that cannot be avoided should the proposal be implemented and that appropriate mitigation measures be included (40 CFR 1502.16 and 1502.14).

Response: The reasonably foreseeable development (RFD) scenario developed for the Butte RMP does not forecast any oil production on federal lands. It forecasts only gas production on federal lands.

Revisions have been made in **Appendix M** in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS (formerly **Appendix L** in Draft RMP/EIS) to include information on how potential spills or leaks of petroleum products during oil and gas drilling or production activities would be addressed. The determination to require state-of-the-art leak detection and monitoring equipment, remote control shut off valves, and check valves is a site-specific decision and would be made if and when an application for permit to is filed for a well in the Butte Field Office.

N10

Comment: Are Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasure (SPCC) Plans with information on spill response procedures and containment and other countermeasures to prevent and mitigate oil spills within the Monument [Field Office]? A SPCC identifies specific procedures to control and mitigate potential spills and impacts to surface or ground water, including discussion of the location of equipment and expertise available to respond to environmental cleanup, (see EPA website, http://www .epa.gov/oilspill/spcc.htm). Special conditions such as weather impaired and cold weather response procedures should be addressed in SPCC Plans. The final RMP/EIS should clarify that adequate SPCC Plans will be prepared for oil and gas activities within the BFO Planning Area.

Response: Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasure (SPCC) Plans are a requirement of the Environmental Protection Agency. However, by regulation at 43 CFR § 3162.5-1(d) when reasonably required by the authorized officer (AO) of the BLM a contingency plan shall be submitted describing procedures to be implemented to protect life, property, and the environment. Our Notice to Lessees (NTL-MSO-1-92) governs the reporting of undesirable events with Part IV dealing with contingency plans. That section states that "upon request of the AO, a copy of any Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasure Plan required by the Environmental Protection Agency, pursuant to Title 40 CFR 112 or other acceptable contingency plans, must be submitted. All plans shall provide the names, addresses, and telephone numbers (both business and private) of at least two technically competent company or contract personnel authorized to order equipment or supplies and to expend funds necessary to control emergencies." The BLM will enforce this requirement as appropriate. The RMP has been changed to acknowledge this.

N11

Comment: It is important that BLM inspect and monitor oil and gas activities to assure that activities are in compliance with stipulations and BMPs. We note that BLM could also write stipulations for oil and gas development that requires operators to monitor for water quality impacts and for impacts to fish and wildlife. We are also enclosing an article entitled "Federal Wildlife Monitors Oversee a Boom in Drilling" from the February 22, 2006 Washington Post. This article describes concerns in BLM's ability to monitor wildlife effects of oil and gas drilling. The article appears to support concerns that BLM resources for monitoring and mitigating effects of oil and gas development on wildlife, and perhaps other resources, may be inadequate. How can the effects of oil and gas development activities, particularly cumulative effects, be identified and then mitigated if BLM monitoring resources are so limited?

Response: The article cited in the comment provides no information supporting the assumption that BLM monitoring resources in Montana and the Dakotas are limited. The BLM carries out an active inspection and enforcement/monitoring program in Montana and the Dakotas

and will ensure that it would be carried over into the Butte Field Office if oil and gas production is ever established on the public lands or on split estate minerals administered by the BLM. Recently, with the passage of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 additional emphasis has been placed at a national and state level on monitoring and mitigating effects of oil and gas on wildlife and other resources. Beginning with this fiscal year (October 2008), the BLM now uses a workload measure/program element to track oil and gas surface and environmental monitoring including conducting baseline and follow-up inventory and monitoring activities. Oil and gas surface and environmental monitoring is performed to ensure:

- oil and gas lease stipulations and application for permit to drill conditions of approval are achieving the desired outcome;
- environmental impacts of fluid mineral development are identified;
- interim and final reclamation trend and success;
- BLM and operator follow-up actions are identified;
- Adaptive changes are implemented; and
- Desired outcome measures are appropriate.

Finally the BLM has also adopted policy directing that all Field Offices incorporate environmental best management practices (BMPs) into proposed applications to drill, sundry notices for surface disturbing activities, and associated on- and off-lease rights-of-way approvals after appropriate environmental reviews. Some, but not all, of the BMPs that can be considered include the following items:

- installing raptor perch avoidance;
- burying of distribution power lines and/or flow lines in or adjacent to access roads;
- monitoring wildlife by the operator;
- placing seasonal restrictions on public vehicular access; and
- using common utility or Right-of-Way corridors.

These BMPs are meant to minimize impacts to wildlife.

N12

Comment: We appreciate the inclusion of a section in the draft RMP/EIS regarding anticipated cumulative effects of all resource development activities (pages 480-489), and cumulative effects of travel plans (pages 636-656). We are particularly concerned about the cumulative effects associated with oil and gas drilling and production activities. Appendix L indicates that ancillary facilities would be needed to support oil and gas activities, including well sites, access roads, compressors, and pipelines (Table 2, page 887). We anticipate that in addition to these activities production facilities and equipment, pump stations, sheds, water disposal pits, ground based communication sites, and powerlines feeding pump stations may be needed. There is not much discussion and disclosure of the cumulative effects of oil and gas wells and the ancillary facilities on wildlife and other ecological resources within the BFO Planning Area. The potential cumulative impacts from these wells and ancillary facilities may be significant and should be more fully discussed and disclosed in the final RMP/EIS. We recommend that Table 2 in Appendix L be reviewed to see that it provides full and comprehensive disclosure of all the ancillary facilities and disturbances associated with the drilling of the estimated 15 exploratory oil and gas wildcat wells, with four well having oil and gas discoveries, two of which would become producers, and the 40 coal bed natural gas wells.

Response: The BLM has reviewed the material in **Appendix M** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS (formerly **Appendix L** in Draft RMP/EIS) on the reasonably foreseeable development (RFD) scenario developed for oil and gas for the RMP and also on the forecasted effects for oil and gas. The RFD scenario has been changed to reflect recent drilling activity by the Bill Barrett Corporation in northern Park County in the Butte RMP Planning Area (but not on federal mineral estate lands). The company recently reached total depth in a deep gas well and has announced that they will be testing the well this fall (2007). A second well has been spud in and is drilling. There are two other permitted locations in the same area. In addition after review, we have revised the information in **Appendix M** dealing with the cumulative impacts of oil and gas development to better portray the potential impacts from a RFD scenario showing 29 total wildcat wells, 12 of which would be discovery wells, and 36 step-out wells. As noted in **Appendix M**, 40 of the total wells are forecast to be coal bed methane. The RFD forecasts seven producing federal wells, all of them deep gas wells.

N13

Comment: An important aspect of mitigating cumulative impacts is the ability to monitor and detect impacts that are occurring, and then to take actions to mitigate impacts (mitigation means avoid and minimize impacts and then rectify or compensate for unavoidable impacts), such as maximizing distance between well pads, phasing development, minimizing new roads and other ancillary facilities, assuring that well sites for non-producing wells are adequately reclaimed and abandoned wells are properly sealed, adequate oversight and follow-up monitoring of exploration and development activities . What procedures are being used to ensure that leases on producing or non-producing sites are properly monitored? How can the public and other agencies review monitoring information for leases within the BFO area?

Response: Producing leases or non-producing leases with drilled and abandoned wells will be monitored and compliance with lease stipulations and any conditions of

approval applied to an Application for Permit to Drill ensured in the same way as the BLM does in parts of Montana and the Dakotas where there is existing oil and gas activity. Beginning with this fiscal year (October 2008), the BLM now uses a workload measure/program element to track of oil and gas surface and environmental monitoring including conducting baseline and follow-up inventory and monitoring activities. We also carry out periodic program reviews of all phases to our oil and gas program to identify strengths and potential weaknesses for improvement. In addition, a monitoring plan, similar to the one developed for the Dillon Field Office, for oil and gas leasing and exploration and development in the Butte Field Office will be included in the Record of Decision for this RMP. That information, excluding proprietary or confidential information, would be available for public review upon request.

N14

Comment: Montana Wildlife Federation was dismayed to find the Sleeping Giant and Canyon Ferry recognized for high Oil and Gas drilling potential. MWF does not believe the O&G values of these areas surpass their wildland value and requests that leases are not given a high priority.

Response: The BLM believes that the commenter is referring to the map in **Appendix M**, Fluid Minerals, of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS (formerly **Appendix L** in Draft RMP/EIS) depicting oil and gas occurrence and development potential in the Butte Field Office. That map identified five areas where conventional oil and gas activity was considered most likely in the Field Office and one area of coal bed natural gas. These areas were described in the appendix and in Chapter 3 under the subheading Leasable Fluid Minerals. Sleeping Giant and Canyon Ferry are in two of the areas identified for conventional oil and gas. In no way is the BLM prioritizing these areas for oil and gas leasing. In the case of the Sleeping Giant area we would point out that a major portion of the general area is in within the Sheep Creek and Sleeping Giant Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) and as such by regulation cannot be leased for oil and gas as long as these areas retain that classification. If the Sleeping Giant area is ever released from WSA status that portion that is included in the Area of Critical Environmental Concern would be managed under the management plan developed when it gained that status. As such it would be managed for its recreational, scenic, and fish and wildlife values. The existing management plan use constraints for oil and gas would apply which do not allow surface occupancy on BLM lands. In the case of Canyon Ferry lake the Bureau of Reclamation manages approximately 1,800 acres of Federal lands surrounding the reservoir. Leasing decisions (applicable constraints) for these lands are being made with this RMP. However, the BLM would still request the Bureau of Reclamation to review any proposed leases.

It is also noteworthy that none of these areas have "high" potential for oil and gas leasing. They are a mix of "low" and "moderate" potential.

N15

Comment: With this vast amount of public land being leased out for oil and gas exploration and drilling, it is essential that the leasing process be open and that the public be fully informed before any leases are issued. The RMP is unclear about how the public will be adequately informed about new leases.

Response: The BLM notifies the public of lands that will be available for leasing and under what terms during the planning process when we make the required site-specific leasing decisions in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS and then the Record of Decision. During that process the public has the right to comment on our proposed decisions found in the Draft RMP/EIS and offer suggested changes to our proposed alternatives and mitigation measures.

The BLM notifies the public of competitive oil and gas lease sales through several different avenues. First, as required by regulations at 43 CFR § 3120.4, a notice of competitive sale containing the a list of the lands available at that sale and a map depicting those lands is posted in a public place in the Montana State Office, BLM Field Offices in Montana and the Dakotas, and offices of other affected surface management agencies at least 45 days prior to the sale date. Second, the BLM Montana State also posts the sale list on the internet site (www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/prog/energy/oil_ and_gas. html) at least 45 days before the sale date. Finally, any member of the public may request that the BLM mail them a copy of the sale notice on either an individual sale or by establishing an account with us having all sale notices mailed to them.

In addition to general public outreach described above, it is BLM policy to carry out the following after a land use plan is finalized to better contact surface owners over federal mineral estate when that mineral estate is being offered for lease:

The BLM will use widely available media, such as newspaper, radio, and television, to inform the public of the BLM websites that host lease sale information.

The BLM will work through local forums to maintain a dialogue on local leasing activity. Where practical, the BLM will identify areas of leasing interest.

Oil and Gas Competitive Sale Notices should include links, where available, to sites that offer information regarding surface ownership and leasing information.

N16

Comment: Sufficient information about proposed energy leases and development must be provided to the pub-

lic and sufficient time for public comment should be allowed based on the complexity of the proposal.

Response: The Butte RMP is making those decisions required by the BLM planning handbook, H-1601-1, for oil and gas. These decisions are found in Appendix C of the Handbook beginning at page 23 of the Appendix. The following specific decisions required by this handbook were made for the BLM administered oil and gas estate. The RMP identifies:

1. Areas open to leasing, subject to existing laws, regulations, and formal orders; and the terms and conditions of the standard lease form.

2. Areas open to leasing, subject to moderate constraints such as seasonal and Controlled Surface Use restrictions.

3. Areas open to leasing, subject to major constraints such as No Surface Occupancy stipulations.

4. Areas closed to leasing. Identify whether such closures are discretionary or nondiscretionary; and if discretionary, the rationale.

5. Resource condition objectives and specific lease stipulations and general/typical conditions of approval and best management practices to be employed to accomplish these objectives in areas open to leasing.

6. For each lease stipulation, circumstances for granting an exception, waiver, or modification are identified. The RMP also identifies the general documentation requirements and any public notification associated with granting exceptions, waivers, or modifications.

7. The RMP identifies whether leasing and development decisions also apply to geophysical exploration.

8. Whether constraints identified in the land use plan for new leases also apply to areas currently under lease.

9. Long-term resource condition objectives for areas currently under development to guide reclamation activities prior to abandonment.

The decisions in the Butte RMP to open the lands to leasing represents the BLM's determination, based on the information available that it is appropriate to allow development of the specific BLM lands in the planning area consistent with the terms of the lease, specific stipulations, laws, regulations, and orders, and subject to reasonable conditions of approval.

The Butte RMP meets BLM guidance for oil and gas leasing and development and includes a reasonably foreseeable development scenario for oil and gas, identification of oil and gas potential within the planning area, and the site-specific identification of lease stipulations to be used. It also identified a range of alternatives with varying levels of constraints. Further, the document also identifies a range of conditions of approval to be used to mitigate impacts from oil and gas leasing and development. It also reflects consideration of public, other agency, and interdisciplinary team input.

Opportunity for public input has been ongoing throughout the development process for the Butte RMP beginning with initial scoping for the RMP. Other opportunities for public comment occurred during development of the travel plans described in the RMP. Finally, the Draft RMP/EIS was released to the public for a 90 day public comment period on June 8, 2007, which was extended to 120 days ending on October 9, 2007. During that period the BLM accepted written comments and also held public meeting in six communities within the boundaries of the Field Office.

N17

Comment: An evaluation of impacts from energy development and a specific "conservation strategy" should be completed for each energy field or project before leases are issued which identifies the wildlife, vegetative, historic, geologic and recreational resources. The conservation strategy should provide specific recommendations for actions to minimize impacts on fish and wildlife, while establishing plans for mitigation and detailed monitoring. Only with a thorough analysis will the right stipulations be attached to the leases which genuinely protect wildlife and other resources and values.

Response: The BLM is unsure what the commenter means by the phrase "conservation strategy." However, we believe that the Butte RMP has evaluated the impacts from reasonably foreseeable oil and gas development in the Butte Field Office. The RMP identifies and describes all resources and resource uses in the Butte Field Office including, but not limited to, wildlife, vegetative, historic, geologic, and recreational resources. In the four alternatives the RMP provides specific recommendations for actions to minimize impacts to fish and wildlife through the development of a range of oil and gas lease stipulations. Oil and gas lease stipulations were developed to mitigate impacts to a total of 23 different classes of fish and wildlife habitat. Other stipulations were developed to help mitigate impact to vegetation wetlands, riparian areas, and water quality. In addition to these stipulations a wide range of other stipulations have also been developed to mitigate impacts to other resources in the Butte Field Office. The RMP also identifies potential conditions of approval that may be used on a site-specific basis to mitigate impacts for approved wells or other surface disturbing activities. The BLM has also included information our use of best management practices in the oil and gas program. Information in the Draft RMP has been expanded in **Appendix M** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS to note that it is the BLM's policy to use best management practices and that we will develop local best management practices as needed.

N18

Comment: According the map displaying areas of "reasonably foreseeable development" and drilling activity, it appears that the Sleeping Giant ACEC is included

as an area with some potential for exploration and drilling activities. In keeping with the plan for managing ACECs, oil and gas exploration and drilling activities would seem to be incompatible with the values for they are supposed to be managed. Therefore we ask that no new oil and gas leases be issued for exploration and drilling activities, or if they are, that they only be issued with a “no surface” and “no surface disturbance” stipulation.

Response: The commenter is correct in noting that the Sleeping Giant ACEC is located in an area of reasonably foreseeable development and drilling activity. This is based on a review of the geology of the area. It is not a determination that drilling and other development will occur in the ACEC. Most of the Sleeping Giant ACEC is located within the boundaries of the Sheep Creek and Sleeping Giant Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). By regulation any lands within the boundaries of a Wilderness Study Area cannot be leased as long as they are subject to that designation. The small area outside of the two Wilderness Study Areas will be managed under the existing ACEC management plan which would require a No Surface Occupancy stipulation for oil and gas leasing. If Congress removes these two WSAs from wilderness consideration, management of the total area encompassed by the WSAs would revert to the existing management plan for the ACEC. As noted earlier this would mean that any new leases issued for lands within the boundaries of the ACEC would carry a No Surface Occupancy stipulation.

N19

Comment: Mineral development and utility corridors would be inappropriate 'nuisances' here; so we support making the Scratchgravels a 'no-lease' area and an 'exclusion' area respectively. (The oil & gas potential in the batholith probably insignificant; and with all the surrounding roads, and existing towers in the north hills, Spokane Hills, Boulder Hill, MacDonald Pass, etc., there's no need to trash the Scratchgravels.

Response: This comment is stating an opinion and provides no justification for placing the area in a no-lease status. In order to close lands for leasing the BLM has to determine that other land uses or resource values cannot be adequately protected with even the most restrictive lease stipulations; appropriate protection can be ensured only by closing the lands to leasing.

Finally the comment is correct in stating the Scratchgravel Hills are within the boundaries of the Boulder Batholith which is an area of very low potential for oil and gas occurrence. Due to this the BLM forecasts a very low potential for oil and gas development, if any, in the future in this specific area.

N20

Comment: The No Surface Occupancy (NSO) stipulations in the Final RMP need to specify that NSO in this case means not only that surface occupancy is prohibited, but ground disturbances including road building, stream crossings, and pipeline placement are likewise prohibited through no surface occupancy/no ground disturbance (NSO/NGD) stipulations.

Response: A brief description of lease stipulations is given in Chapter 2 of the RMP at the section Leasable Fluid Minerals – Management Common to All Alternatives. That explanation contains a reference to **Appendix M** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS (formerly **Appendix L** in Draft RMP/EIS) where there is a section titled Lease Stipulations. That section contains further description and definition of No Surface Occupancy stipulations that may be required on leases. As noted in **Appendix M** a No Surface Occupancy (NSO) stipulation means “use or occupancy of the land surface for fluid mineral exploration or development is prohibited to protect identified resource values.”

On BLM-administered lands pipelines, access roads, and utilities located on a lease (or within a unitized area), which are constructed and managed by the lease holder/operator can be authorized under an application for permit to drill or sundry notice. In this case any NSO stipulation part of lease would be applied. On or off lease/unit pipelines, roads and utilities constructed and managed by someone other than the leaseholder/operator require a BLM right-of-way and are governed by other restrictions found in the right-of-way. On BLM-administered lands pipelines, access roads, and utilities located off the lease or the unitized area require a right-of-way with its own stipulations.

N21

Comment: In the Draft EIS, lands known as split estate - where BLM manages the mineral estate while the surface is under separate ownership – are not identified. A map of these lands needs to be provided in the Final RMP EIS and stipulations developed that would accompany any of these split estate lands should the BLM lease them for oil and gas development. While it is true that the BLM does not have the authority to manage the surface of these lands, as the mineral estate manager, BLM should include as part of any lease contract sold, applicable stipulations identical to those that BLM managed lands are subject to that, if violated, would nullify the contract with the lease holder, voiding the lease. Whereas, a lease for split estate lands is nothing more than a contract between BLM and a lease holder, the BLM has the authority to impose such a provision in split estate leases and Montana Trout Unlimited feels very strongly that it is the BLM’s responsibility to manage all mineral estates that BLM controls uniformly for the protection of our public fish, wildlife, and streams.

Response: The RMP addresses split estate minerals when talking about oil and gas leasing and development. Within the Decision Area (refer to Decision Area definition in glossary), BLM will make decisions for fluid minerals, oil and gas, and geothermal energy where the surface and minerals are administered by the BLM as well as for federal minerals where the surface owner is a separate entity. This includes lands where the surface is privately owned and approximately 65,000 acres of surface lands administered by the State of Montana. These lands are identified on Maps 42 through 45 in the Draft RMP/EIS.

The lease stipulations developed in the RMP are applicable to both public domain lands and split estate lands as the BLM has legal responsibilities for oil and gas leasing and operations on split estate lands. The BLM has responsibilities under the Federal Land Policy and Management (FLPMA). In the case of FLPMA, the BLM is required to indicate in RMPs how the federal mineral estate would be managed, including identification of lease stipulations. In order to meet the consistency requirements of FLPMA the BLM has applied the same standard of environmental protection to split estate lands as to federal surface. Second, the BLM also has responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act because the issuance of a lease and potential approval of applications for permit to drill are federal actions. Third, the BLM has responsibilities under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) on split estate lands. The BLM's responsibilities commence with a proposed action that requires BLM's approval. If activities to be conducted on split estate lands under the terms and conditions of a federal oil and gas lease would result in adverse effects to historic properties, the BLM has the authority to impose appropriate avoidance or mitigation measures. Finally, oil and gas leasing and operations on split estate lands constitute federal actions under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). As such, the requirements and procedures of the ESA apply to split estate lands just as they do to federal lands including, as appropriate, preparation of biological assessments and conduct of consultations.

N22

Comment: The Reasonably Foreseeable Development (RFD) analysis only looks at certain areas (Areas 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5) in which the BLM expects there to be development potential within the planning area. Should leases be nominated by the industry outside of Areas 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, BLM needs to conduct a Supplemental NEPA Analysis to determine if the variables used to determine the RFD have changed, why these parcels have been nominated, and if the RFD - and environmental consequences derived from it in the Final EIS – are still accurate, and if additional stipulations need to accompany the proposed parcels. This should be conducted before proposed parcels outside of the RFD areas are sold to prevent a NEPA violation.

Response: The commenter is mistaken in believing that the reasonably foreseeable development RFD scenario only applies to the five numbered areas described in both Chapter 3 and **Appendix M** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS (formerly Appendix L in Draft RMP/EIS). In Chapter 3, the RMP under "Leasable Fluid Minerals" in a section referred to as "Reasonably Foreseeable Development", the following passage can be found:

"The Reasonably Foreseeable Development (RFD) scenario is an estimate of oil and gas activity expected because of resumed oil and gas leasing in the PA [Planning Area]. The scenario is hypothetical in that drilling may occur anywhere in the PA where an oil and gas lease allowing surface occupancy is issued. Actual drilling proposals that result from leasing, if any, will likely differ in location from those anticipated by this RFD scenario. It is also possible that leasing could result in either more or fewer drilling proposals than presented in the scenario."

The passage above is very specific in noting that the RFD scenario acknowledges that drilling may occur anywhere in the planning area (PA) which consists of the Butte Field Office where surface occupancy is allowed. The RMP also makes it clear that actual drilling proposals, if any, will likely differ from the scenario in the document. The five numbered areas identified in the RMP are strictly the areas that the BLM believes have the highest reasonably foreseeable chance for development in the planning area. They are not the only areas that might see development in the future.

Appendix M in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS has a more detailed description of the RFD scenario than that found in Chapter 3. It notes that the RFD scenario is an attempt to portray the most reasonable and likely number of wells expected from a leasing decision on the Butte Field Office Planning Area. It also points out that development potential is not a prediction of precise future drilling locations and should not be used as a gauge of future interest or lack of interest in leasing. **Appendix M** has been clarified to explain that the five numbered areas are those with the highest potential for development. They are not the only areas that may see development.

N23

Comment: In the RFD, BLM believes that coal bed methane (CBM) development may occur in the Livingston and Trail Creek coal fields. The impacts relative to CBM development need to be analyzed and specific stipulations developed to protect fish, wildlife, and hunting and angling opportunities in these areas with potential for CBM exploration and development. Because an EIS is required to disclose for the public baseline conditions and potential impacts of a proposed action, the BLM needs to fully evaluate the potential harm CBM development could impose through a complete, professional, and enumerated inventory of the aquatic com-

munities and wildlife that could be affected by CBM development in the planning area. CBNG development is currently occurring throughout the West, thereby providing BLM plenty of opportunities to study how this development is affecting fish and wildlife and provide a rigorous evaluation of development impacts and potential stipulations and mitigation measures relative to CBM development.

Response: In Chapter 3 of the RMP, in the discussion of leasable fluid minerals in the section titled Coal Bed Natural Gas, the RMP notes that the coal fields in question are not located on BLM administered public lands and that there are only isolated tracts of BLM split estate minerals in the area. The narrative further notes that all of the coal bed natural gas wells drilled in the area would likely not be BLM wells based on the small percentage of BLM administered split estate mineral ownership in the area (most of the federal lands in the area are administered by the Gallatin National Forest which cannot lease at this time). The same comments are made in **Appendix M** in the section titled Drilling Activity Forecast. The BLM does not believe that there is a reasonably foreseeable chance at this time that coal bed natural gas development will occur on federal lands in the Bozeman Pass area due to the small amount of split-estate lands and due to the fact that the Gallatin National Forest is not able to authorize oil and gas leases at this time. However, the oil and gas lease stipulations and other mitigation measures developed in the RMP would apply if development did occur in the future on the very small acreage of split estate lands on Bozeman Pass. We have analyzed an extremely low level of development on federal lands in the area.

N24

Comment: McMaster Hills: It's a small area, surrounded by ever increasing residential development, with some really unique natural features, like Spokane Creek bay and the little drainage in the eastern portion. You should pursue acquisition of as much of the remaining private lands in Sec. 6 as possible, to facilitate hiking in the area and to permit public access to the neat draws in the center of that section. This area should be developed for walking and nature/wildlife appreciation. It's really too small to appeal to mountain bike or stock use. And there's a crying need for restoration - especially around Spokane Creek bay. Like with the Ward Ranch, your Alt. B is a good start. It's very important to keep ORV use, especially by neighborhood kids, from getting started there. And this should be a "no-lease" area - as with the Scratchgravels, any kind of oil & gas exploration or development would be untenable - a gigantic "nuisance" - in such a suburban setting. I'd like to see more in-depth planning done, with a focus on the Bay and on community/neighborhood involvement. For example, should all signs of the old campground be removed or not? Should access to the west side bluffs (i.e., a bridge across the creek) be provided or not?

Response: In terms of priorities for future land acquisitions for Butte Field Office lands, under all action alternatives the BLM would place a high priority on areas with special designations such as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern or Wild and Scenic Rivers, or areas with habitat for special status and priority species. However, future acquisition of lands in Section 6 would be dependent on interest on the part of any willing landowners as well as other acquisition priorities within the BFO.

The McMasters Hills property was acquired primarily with Land and Water Conservation Funds. To provide management in keeping with the intent of LWCF acquisitions, in the Preferred Alternative the BLM is proposing that McMasters Hills be a “no lease” area for oil and gas. Additional issues mentioned in the comment relate to site-specific implementation decisions that would be made outside the scope of the RMP. Future implementation decisions would be consistent with the finalized Butte RMP.

N25

Comment: Table 1-5 in the draft RMP/EIS (page 11) includes a minerals and energy goal stating that exploration and development of mineral resources will be conducted in an “environmentally sound” manner. We note that the mineral and energy resources goal does not mention “environmentally sound” exploration and development of energy resources. It is important that oil and gas exploration and development, as well as mineral exploration and development, occur in a manner that protects the environment. The final RMP/EIS should clarify that oil and gas are included in the mineral resources for which environmentally sound exploration and development would occur. We recommend that BLM make it clear that oil and gas exploration in the BFO Planning Area will be done in an environmentally sound manner that avoids and minimizes adverse environmental impacts. For example, “The BLM’s goal is that oil and gas exploration and development will occur in a manner that avoids and minimizes adverse environmental impacts.”

Response: The BLM believes the goal statement adequately addresses the concerns raised by the comment. As written, the management direction for minerals and energy at “2)” applies to the development of federal minerals for both energy and non-energy uses.

N26

Comment: We also recommend that BLM write stipulations for oil and gas development that requires operators to monitor for impacts to water quality and fish and wildlife habitat.

Response: The BLM normally does not write stipulations that require oil and gas lessees/operators to monitor for impacts to resources or resource uses. Normally, the

BLM conducts all required monitoring for lease activities. However, on a case-by-case basis we have the authority under terms of the lease form at Section 6 to require lessees or operators to complete inventories or special surveys to monitor impacts from their lease operation. These requirements would be incorporated as best management practices/conditions of approval applied to either applications for permit to drill or surface disturbing sundry notices.

N27

Comment: Minerals (Oil and Gas): Alternative B as shown on Map 43 would be improved with the following amendments. 1. Land in the Boulder Mountains and Elkhorns be rated "No Surface Occupancy". While AWL prefers no minerals activities be conducted in this area, no surface occupancy restrictions, seasonal closures during fall and spring, and an adaptive management plan are recommended as lease requirements for these areas. 2. AWL suggests removing the term "Standard Lease" from the area Northwest of Helena and restricting the area to sub-surface mining with no additional surface occupancy. While AWL prefers no minerals activities be conducted in this area, no surface occupancy restrictions, seasonal closures during fall and spring, and an adaptive management plan are recommended as lease requirements for these areas. 3. Mining in the area southwest of Butte should be removed, reduced or should at the very least include timing restrictions as this area is an important movement area for wildlife. While AWL would prefer no minerals activities be conducted in this area, no surface occupancy restrictions, seasonal closures during fall and spring, and an adaptive management plan are recommended as lease requirements for these areas.

Response: The BLM response is itemized by numbered items corresponding to those in the comment.

1. Under Alternative C, the majority of the Boulder Mountains and Elkhorns administered by the BLM are designated as not available for oil and gas leasing and impacts of making those and other extensive discretionary no lease decisions in the Planning Area were fully analyzed in the RMP. In addition to Alternative C there were three other alternatives analyzed in detail in the RMP for impacts to all resources and resource uses. After review of the impacts it was determined to adopt Alternative B, which uses a combination of controlled surface use and timing limitations with some areas being under no surface occupancy stipulations in the referenced area, as the preferred alternative as it provided the least restrictive mix of constraints that meet resource protection objectives. The Elkhorn Tack-on Wilderness Study Area is not available for lease under any alternative. Only very small areas in the Boulder Mountains and Elkhorns would be leased under standard terms.

2. Under Alternative C, the majority of the BLM administered lands northwest of Helena, except for the Scratchgravel Hills, are designated as not available for oil and gas leasing and impacts of making those and other extensive discretionary no lease decisions in the Planning Area were fully analyzed in the RMP. The Scratchgravel Hills would be leased with no surface occupancy stipulations. The small area directly northwest of Helena shown in the Draft RMP/EIS as being available for lease under Standard Lease Terms under Alternative C is Fort Harrison. (Between release of the Draft RMP and the Proposed RMP/Final EIS the BLM has determined that this area has been withdrawn and the BLM therefore has no mineral estate there. These lands are not shown as federal mineral estate in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.) In addition to Alternative C there were three other alternatives analyzed in detail in the RMP for impacts to all resources and resource uses. After review of the impacts it was determined to adopt Alternative B, which uses a combination of controlled surface use and timing limitations with some areas being under no surface occupancy stipulations in the referenced area, as the preferred alternative as it provided the least restrictive mix of constraints that meet resource protection objectives. The lands under withdrawal for Fort Harrison have been deleted from Maps 42 through 44 in the RMP because the RMP does not make leasing decisions for the Department of the Army.

3. Under Alternative C, almost all BLM administered lands southwest of Butte are designated as not available for oil and gas leasing and impacts of making those and other extensive discretionary no lease decisions in the Planning Area were fully analyzed in the RMP. The Humbug Spires Wilderness Study Area is not available for lease under all alternatives in the RMP. In addition to Alternative C there were three other alternatives analyzed in detail in the RMP for impacts to all resources and resource uses. After review of the impacts it was determined to adopt Alternative B, which uses a combination of controlled surface use and timing limitations with some areas being under no surface occupancy stipulations in the referenced area and one area that is closed to lease as the preferred alternative as it provided the least restrictive mix of constraints that meet resource protection objectives while providing for oil and leasing.

N28

Comment: While it appears that the potential for oil and gas development in the BFO area is somewhat limited, (i.e. the Reasonably Foreseeable Development Scenario (RFD) estimates that 15 exploratory oil and gas wildcat wells will be drilled in the BFO Planning Area in the next 15-20 years, with four wells having oil and gas discoveries, two of which would become producers, and 40 coal bed natural gas wells, Appendix L, page 884), we believe there are additional areas that should be considered for withdrawal from availability for oil and gas leasing in order to protect environmentally sensitive areas (e.g. sage grouse winter/spring range, lands within 0.5 mile of sage grouse leks, municipal watersheds and

source water protection areas, lands within 1 mile of bull trout, Yellowstone cutthroat trout and artic grayling habitat, and habitat of genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout habitat). We recommend that areas with fragile or environmentally sensitive resources be stipulated as No Lease (NL), or at a minimum at least have "No Surface Occupancy" (NSO) stipulations. Table 2.21 (beginning on page 93) identifies lease stipulations by alternative, and Appendix L (beginning on page 903) describes lease stipulations. As noted above, we recommend that a no lease or at a minimum no surface occupancy stipulation be applied to environmentally sensitive areas such as sage grouse winter/spring range, lands within 0.5 mile of sage grouse leks, bull trout habitat, Yellowstone cutthroat trout habitat, 99-100 percent pure westslope cutthroat trout habitat, Class I fisheries, and municipal watersheds and source water protection areas.

Response: The BLM believes that the measures proposed in the Butte RMP will provide adequate protection for the resources listed in the comment without applying a blanket no lease decision or blanket no surface occupancy stipulations to the resources you refer to. Components of the Preferred Alternative in this RMP recognize that with few exceptions, mineral exploration and development (including oil and gas exploration) can occur concurrently or sequentially with other resource uses. The policy of the BLM is to use the least restrictive oil and gas stipulations that effectively accomplish the resource objectives established in the plan.

The BLM believes that we have analyzed a broad array of stipulations and other related mitigation measures in the RMP that would provide the appropriate mitigation to the listed resources. Impacts to winter/spring sage grouse habitat were analyzed with timing limitation stipulations in the Preferred Alternative, and in the most restrictive alternative (Alternative C) there would be a no lease decision. Impacts to leks were analyzed with a range of no surface occupancy stipulations in Alternatives A, B, and D, and in the case of Alternative C a no lease decision was considered within a ½-mile buffer around leks. Municipal watersheds were examined for impacts with standard lease terms, a controlled surface use stipulation, no lease, and no surface occupancy in the Preferred Alternative analyzed as proposed mitigation measures. In the case of bull trout, Yellowstone cutthroat trout, and Arctic grayling the BLM also analyzed mitigation for the three species ranging from a controlled surface use stipulation for bull trout under Alternative A, to a no surface occupancy within a one mile buffer zone under Alternative C, with the Preferred Alternative featuring a no surface occupancy within a ½-mile buffer zone for all three of these species. For genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout habitat, the BLM analyzed stipulations ranging from no surface occupancy within a ¼-mile buffer, to no lease within ½-mile of habitat in the most restrictive alternative, with the Preferred Alternative featuring no surface occupancy within ½-mile. For class one fisheries the Preferred Alternative entails no surface occupancy within a ½-mile buffer zone. However, in Alternative C the BLM did analyze no surface occupancy within a one mile buffer.

In addition to the lease stipulations analyzed by alternative in the RMP, the BLM has identified in the RMP that environmental best management practices (BMPs) and other site-specific conditions-of-approval (COAs) will be used on a site-specific basis to mitigate potential impacts. **Appendix E** and **Appendix M** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS provide further information on the BLM's use of BMPs and COAs. Conditions-of-approval and BMPs are mitigation measures that provide for restrictions in light of site-specific conditions. General guidance for conditions of approval and surface operating standards can be found in the fourth addition of "Surface Operating Standards and Guidelines for Oil and Gas Exploration and Development" published by the BLM in 2007.

N29

Comment: Global Climate Change: The BLM needs to conduct an assessment of vulnerable aquatic game species and natural systems that will be adversely impacted by global climate change. The BLM should manage vulnerable systems and their tributaries to prevent them from experiencing regime shifts brought on by the impacts of climate change and remove other stressors from those systems by thoroughly analyzing cumulative impacts that the RMP may authorize, including leasing for – and in turn development of – oil and gas resources . The impacts of closures to angling, and relationships between land use decisions such as oil and gas leasing by the BLM and the impaired nature of coldwater fisheries leading to closures in the planning area needs to be analyzed. This analysis should culminate in appropriate stipulations, lease terms, and/or decisions not to lease in these vulnerable habitats.

Response: This comment raises generalized concerns about climate change and the potential cumulative impacts of oil and gas development on vulnerable aquatic species. While the conditions the comment observes are likely related to the long term drought conditions experienced by the intermountain west, the analysis of direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to climate change from oil and gas leasing and development in the Butte Field Office would likely be very low based on the low level of activity forecast in the reasonably foreseeable development scenario.

The assessment of greenhouse gas emissions and climate change is in its formative phase; therefore, it is not yet possible to know with confidence the net impacts to climate. However, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC 2007) recently stated that "warming of the climate system is unequivocal…" and that "most of the observed increase in globally average temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the

observed increase in anthropogenic [man-made] greenhouse gas concentrations."

The lack of scientific tools designed to predict climate change on regional or local scales limits the ability to quantify potential future impacts. For example, potential impacts to air quality resulting from climate change are likely to be varied. If global climate change results in a warmer and drier climate, increased particulate matter could occur as a result of increased windblown dust from drier and less stable soils. Cool season plant species' ranges could potentially move north and due to the potential loss of habitat, or from competition from other species whose ranges shift northward, the population of some animal species could change.

Many of the models needed to make effective decisions at the local and regional levels have not been developed. The Department of the Interior is exploring whether global and regional climate modeling can be scaled to the point that it can be used to manage parks and refuges. When further information on the impacts to climate change is known, such information would be considered in the implementation of this plan as appropriate.

N30

Comment: All known and future identified drainages containing pure (90-99 percent pure) populations of westslope or Yellowstone cutthroat trout, arctic grayling populations and crucial habitat for bull trout are identified as class 1 fisheries by Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. Under the Preferred Alternative (B), streams harboring conservation populations of westslope cutthroat trout have a ½-mile NSO buffer. Whereas, poor land use management quite literally flows downhill, this NSO stipulation needs to be increased to the entire watershed in order to meet the intent of the Memorandum of Understanding and Conservation Agreement for Westslope Cutthroat Trout and Yellowstone Cutthroat trout in Montana (April, 2007) – (Montana Cutthroat Trout MOU) to which Montana BLM is a party – and lists as Objective 1: "Maintain, secure and/or enhance all cutthroat trout populations designated as conservation populations, especially the genetically pure components."

For Yellowstone cutthroat trout, streams with genetically pure populations of these native trout are proposed in the Preferred Alternative to receive a ½-mile NSO buffer; as with westslope cutthroat trout, this buffer needs to be extended to the entire watershed and specify that all ground disturbance and occupancy is prohibited through NSO/NGD stipulations. Additionally, it is important to note that all conservation populations (>90 percent pure) need to be granted this stipulation, not just genetically pure populations.

As with Yellowstone and westslope cutthroat trout, oil and gas leasing stipulations meant to protect bull trout and fluvial and adfluvial arctic grayling habitats need to be expanded to include watershed wide NSO/NGD stipulations.

Response: The Preferred Alternative (Alternative B) would only establish a ½-mile no surface occupancy buffer zone along streams for protection of conservation populations of westslope cutthroat trout, Yellowstone cutthroat, fluvial Arctic grayling, and bull trout. The BLM has modified the Yellowstone cutthroat trout stipulation in the Preferred Alternative to include all populations with 90 percent or greater genetic purity. For genetically pure populations of westslope cutthroat trout, and for Yellowstone cutthroat trout, the BLM proposed a no lease zone one-half mile in width from their habitats in the most restrictive alternative (Alternative C) of the RMP. A no surface occupancy stipulation of one mile within bull trout habitat was proposed in this same alternative.

The BLM believes that the no surface occupancy (NSO) stipulations in the Preferred Alternative will provide adequate mitigation for impacts from reasonably foreseeable oil and gas exploration on BLM lands in the Butte Field Office in any area with occupied habitat by any of these species. The NSO stipulations for these species, combined with additional NSO fisheries stipulations for blue ribbon fisheries streams will protect the areas within one-half mile on either side of the center line of important streams in the Decision Area. Additionally, the no surface occupancy stipulations for wetlands, floodplains, and riparian areas; municipal watersheds; and rivers suitable for wild and scenic designation will provide additional protection of all aquatic habitats. Finally, the controlled surface use stipulation for erosive soils will help mitigate potential for sedimentation in important fish habitat. Approximately 181,943 acres (28 percent) of the Decision Area in the Butte Field Office is protected by the overlapping no surface occupancy stipulations mentioned above. The controlled surface use stipulation for steep slopes provides protection from erosion for an additional 195,984 acres (30 percent) of the Decision Area.

In addition to lease stipulations, the BLM will use environmental best management practices on a site-specific basis to mitigate impacts from oil and gas development that might affect important fish habitat. If an application for permit to drill was filed, during processing the BLM would consider BMPs to reduce unnecessary disturbance. Some, but not all, of these BMPs include:

- Avoiding locating well pads, roads, and pipelines on or adjacent to steep slopes;
- Constructing the minimum sized road required;
- Completing interim reclamation;
- Minimizing topsoil removal during operations;
- Using the minimum sized well pad needed;
- Using oak mats for pads and roads; and

- Co-locating wells on one pad.

Environmental BMPs will also be considered for producing locations, if any are developed, on federal lands. Some but not all of theses include:

- The use of secondary containment, such as dikes, around locations;
- Good housekeeping on locations; and
- Proper erosion control.

N31

Comment: While stipulations meant to protect existing populations of native trout are included in the Draft RMP EIS, an important issue overlooked is that of streams with restoration potential. Under the guidance of Objective 3 of the Montana Cutthroat Trout MOU "Seek collaborative opportunities to restore and/or expand populations of each cutthroat trout subspecies into selected habitats within their respective historical ranges." BLM should include in the Final Butte RMP EIS a list of streams with suitable habitats for potential restoration efforts and protect these watersheds with NSO/NGD stipulations.

All areas identified as potential sites for westslope cutthroat trout replication (as indicated in the westslope cutthroat management plan) should have an NSO stipulation attached for the entire drainage (not just ½ mile) or be unavailable for leasing,

Response: The BLM agrees with the comment. While there are no streams where additional native trout restoration is currently being planned in the Butte Field Office, an additional stipulation (no surface occupancy within ½-mile) has been added to the Preferred Alternative that calls for protection of streams with restoration potential for all special status fish species as they are identified in the future. Because Butte Field Office lands are highly fragmented, native fish restoration efforts by the BLM are most often done in conjunction with Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MFWP) based on MFWP priorities. As a result, the BLM has not identified any additional streams with restoration potential at this time, but may do so in the future in conjunction with MFWP.

Out of Scope, Staffing, Budget

O1

Comment: BLM presented no information on the need for accurate affordable public land recreation maps and proposals for updated the maps we have. BLM must emphasize the importance of accurate recreation maps available to the public.

Response: Development of recreation maps is beyond the scope of the Butte RMP. The Record of Decision for the Butte RMP will indicate decisions that will need to be incorporated into public maps in the future.

O2

Comment: We recommend that the West side of Elkhorns be further investigated, as it has high rates of tree encroachment, forest in-filling, and wildlife affects on private property.

Response: Site-specific data collection is an implementation level decision that is beyond the scope of the Butte RMP. The BLM's potential role in such data collection in the Elkhorn Mountains would be determined within the context of the partnership for management of the Elkhorn Mountains.

O3

Comment: It is recommended a biological study be done to determine if there are reproductive diseases affecting the Elkhorn herd units.

Response: The BLM's role in a potential biological study of elk herds in the Elkhorn Mountains is beyond the scope of the Butte RMP. The BLM's potential role in such a study would be determined through interactions within the context of the partnership for management of the Elkhorn Mountains.

O4

Comment: Every planning action "re-invents" the line weights, color, and line styles for the different motorized and non-motorized road and trail designations. This is very confusing to the public and, once again, puts motorized recreationists at a disadvantage. A national mapping standard for travel planning actions must be developed starting with proposed action in order to address this inadequacy and the environmental justice issue associated with it.

Response: It is beyond the scope of the Butte RMP to establish national mapping standards. The BLM has done its best to provide readable, understandable travel planning alternative maps for the public during the Butte RMP revision process. Both a hard copy option, as well as a more detailed electronic PDF map option were provided to give the public two different means of viewing travel plan alternatives.

O5

Comment: If the loss of motorized routes cannot be mitigated within the project area, then a Motorized Access and Recreation Mitigation Bank must be established. This mitigation bank would keep an overall accounting of the miles and acres of motorized access and recreational opportunities closed and the new motorized access and recreational opportunities created to offset that loss. It would be the responsibility of a cooperative group of public land management agencies to monitor

the balance sheet and work towards no net loss/closure of motorized access and motorized recreation. Similar to other mitigation banks, motorized access and routes closed to motorized use would be replaced with equivalent routes on a one to one basis.

Response: Establishment of such a bank is outside the scope of the Butte RMP and would require commitments within the BLM and other agencies at the national level.

O6

Comment: We request that an adequate number of agency staff be licensed and safety trained to operate OHVs, have an adequate number of OHVs for their use, and spend an adequate amount of time riding OHVs along with OHV recreationists so that they can adequately understand the needs associated with motorized access and motorized recreationists.

Response: Many BLM personnel are licensed and safety trained to operate OHVs and do so on a regular basis as part of their jobs. It is not the policy of the BLM to require its employees to spend a specified amount of time riding along with OHV recreationists as part of their jobs.

O7

Comment: A quantification of the level of public understanding and participation in the NEPA process has never been undertaken. Additionally, a quantification of the level of public acceptance of the NEPA process has never been undertaken. We request that the significant negative impact on the majority of the public resulting from the lack of information, education, training, understanding, and acceptance of the NEPA process be evaluated and that the cumulative negative impacts which have become significant on the public be adequately mitigated.

Response: All members of the public have the same access to information on the NEPA process. For the Butte RMP, guidance has been provided to the public via press releases, newspaper articles, the website, presentations at public meetings, and personal communication with BLM staff on how to participate in the NEPA process.

O8

Comment: We request the significant impact that national foundation funding to environmental groups has on motorized recreationists be adequately evaluated and considered including:

(1) the impact that foundation funding has on the NEPA process,

(2) the impact that foundation funding has on the decision-making, and

(3) the impact that foundation funding has on the NEPA process through significant use of legal challenges to nearly every decision involving multiple-use proposals for public lands. In addition, the document and decision-makers should evaluate the cumulative negative impact national foundation funding has had on all past NEPA actions involving multiple-use and motorized recreation.

Response: There is no requirement for the BLM to evaluate the issue identified. Furthermore, the BLM would have no way of acquiring information on funding sources of commenters on the Butte RMP.

O9

Comment: Note that an OHV Trust Fund should be set up to collect and hold OHV gas tax monies paid by OHV recreationists in the past but not returned to them. This trust fund could also be used in the event of delays in the start-up of OHV Programs and to accommodate the scheduling of NEPA actions for on-the-ground OHV projects.

Response: Setting up an OHV Trust Fund is beyond the scope of the Butte RMP

O10

Comment: Our vision for motorized recreation includes opportunities such as the Great Western Trail and Oregon Back Country Discovery Route, and other regional opportunities that include connections between forests and adjoining states. A system of OHV back country discovery routes and OHV byways could provide loops and interconnecting trails to points of interest including lakes, streams, rivers, ghosts towns, and scenic overlooks. This system of OHV routes could also include connections to small towns for access to motels and restaurants and could be a significant source of economic revitalization for the project area. OHV recreation and tourism could be a significant boost to many local economies. This potential has yet to be recognized and tapped. Examples of OHV tourism can be found at:

www.visitid.org/Outdoor /ATV.html
www.marysvale.org,
www.trailscout.com,
www.transamtrail.com/main.htm,
www.motorcycleexplorer.com, and
www.visitnorthidaho.com/wallace.html.

We request that the positive benefits of OHV recreation and tourism be considered as part of the evaluation and implemented for this action.

Response: While BLM routes could be incorporated into expansive trail routes described in this comment, such routes are beyond the scope of the Butte RMP itself and would entail cooperative planning between the BLM and many other entities.

O11

Comment: OHV recreation and tourism has not been promoted or supported by Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MDFWP) as aggressively as recreation and tourism associated with fish and wildlife programs. We request that MDFWP actively promote OHV recreation and OHV tourism. We also request that MDFWP increase the level of OHV management to a level that addresses the needs of motorized recreationists, enthusiastically promote OHV recreation opportunities, and enthusiastically develop OHV tourism.

Response: This issue is outside the scope of the Butte RMP. The BLM has no authority over Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks priorities.

O12

Comment: Motorized recreationists are very concerned that a reasonable alternative will not be adequately addressed in the environmental document and decision-making and that the process is predisposed. To prevent this from happening again, we request a Multiple-Use Review Board be established to assure that the decision-making reflects the multiple-use management goals and the needs of the public. We request that a Multiple-Use Review Board look into all past travel management decisions within public lands to determine whether all decisions have adequately considered the needs of multiple-use and motorized recreationists. Where decisions have not adequately considered the needs of multiple-use and motorized recreationists, we request that the reasons be identified and that corrective actions be taken.

Response: Development of a Multiple-Use Review Board is beyond the scope of the Butte RMP. The BLM considers the range of multiple uses, including the needs of motorized recreationists as well as the needs of non-motorized recreationists and resource protection, in its decisions.

O13

Comment: Ruts caused by ATVs in corners are often due to the solid drive axles which do not allow the wheels to turn at different speeds due to the difference in between outside and inside curve radiuses. These ruts could be significantly reduced by encouraging all manufacturers to develop machines with differential axles that allow the outside and inside tires to turn at different speeds.

Response: It is outside the scope of the Butte RMP for the BLM to recommend vehicle specifications to manufacturers.

O14

Comment: Agencies are encouraged to publish all Travel Plan maps in the same format and in an easy to read format. The Travel Plan map and Visitors map should be the same. All visitors need to clearly understand what areas, roads or trails are open for motorized travel and what areas, trails, or roads are closed to motorized travel. Current maps lead to misunderstandings by both non-motorized and motorized visitors.

Agencies are encouraged to make Travel Plan maps more readily available. Vending machines could be placed in areas that are accessible at any time of the day or week at BLM and FS offices.

Response: The format and availability of travel plan maps would be decided upon during the actual implementation of site-specific travel plan decisions described in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. This issue is outside the scope of the RMP itself.

O15

Comment: I agree with the proposed designation of "Closed" for the Iron Mask property. My understanding is that this will mean that no motorized use will be allowed.

Response: In the Proposed RMP/Final EIS, the Travel Management and Access section of Chapter 2, under Management Common to Action Alternatives, wording has been adjusted to reflect that the newly acquired Iron Mask property is proposed for a “Limited” area designation for travel planning. After finalization of the Butte RMP, site-specific travel planning will be done in this area (as an amendment to the Elkhorns travel plan) to determine route-specific management.

O16

Comment: The Jimmy Gulch area has very high potential for hosting an economic deposit. Pegasus Gold and FMC had a joint venture in this area about 15-20 years ago, during a period of time when considerable exploration was taking place in Montana. They used the Jimmy Gulch road to access the patented claims sometimes known as the "Satellite" group. I also know that this road is the only practicable access to that property of around 75 acres, owned by a certain individual. Therefore I would urge the BLM and USFS to make access through the Jimmy Gulch road available at least to owner of said property and her designees. I oppose the closure of the Jimmy Gulch Road.

Response: This comment is outside the scope of the Butte RMP revision. The area in question is outside the five travel planning areas being addressed within the RMP revision. Site-specific travel planning within the area in question will be addressed in the future after finalization of the Butte RMP. Until that time, the landowner could seek a right-of-way with the BLM for road access to the property in question.

O17

Comment: I urge the following: Add the Sleeping Giant/Sheep Creek Wilderness Area to the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness Area to include the 3.1 miles of river and lake (Holter) below Hauser.

Add 16,572 acres to the FS 11,009 Gates of the Mountains Wilderness. Designate the Sleeping Giant wilderness - BLM of 36,204 acres.

Response: The BLM has no authority to designate wilderness. Only Congress has the authority to designate wilderness areas. The BLM is obligated to manage its Wilderness Study Areas for wilderness values until Congress decides to either designate them as wilderness, or remove them from wilderness consideration. Management direction described in the Butte RMP meets that obligation.

O18

Comment: The Butte RMP does not adequately address the cumulative effect that the proposed [road] closures will have when added to past closures. The following list clearly shows that over the past few years multiple users are the user group that is continually being locked off of federally managed public land.

List of Current and Immediate Past Actions Affecting Multiple-Use Recreation

United States Court Of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, No. 01-35690 D.C. No, CV-96-00 152-DWM

Every Resource Management Plans and Planning Actions

(Interagency) Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan

(Interagency) ICBEMP

(Interagency) Northern Rockies Lynx Amendment

(Interagency) 3-States OHV Strategy

B-DNF Continental Divide Trail near Jackson. MT

B-DNF Whitetail Pipestone Travel Plan

B-DNF 200 3 Forest Plan Update

B-DNF Analysis of the Management Situation

B-DNF Continental Divide trail near Feely

B-DNF Continental Divide trail near Whitetail-Pipestone

B-DNF Social Assessment

B-DNF Mussigbrod Post Fire Roads Management

B-DNF & BLM Flint Creek Watershed Project

BLM Blackleaf Project EIS

BLM Dillon Resource Management Plan

BLM Headwater Resource Management Plan

BLM Arizona Strip Travel Plan

BLM Bruneau Resource Area Travel Plan

BLM Escalante Grand Staircase Monument

BLM Missouri Breaks Monument

BLM Moab Resource Management Plans

BLM National OHV Strategy

BLM National Mountain Biking Strategic Action Plan

BLM San Rafael Travel Plan

BLM Sleeping Giant Travel Plan

BLM Whitetail/Pipestone Rec. Management Strategy

BLM Lake Havasu RMP

BLM Sustaining Working Landscapes Initiative

BLM Rocky Mountain Front Scenery Evaluation Project

BLM Kanab Resource Management Plan

Bitterroot NF Fire Salvage EIS

Bitterroot NF Post-fire Weed Mitigation EIS

Bitterroot NF Sapphire Divide Trail

Bitterroot NF Forest Plan Revision

Caribou NF Travel Plan

Custer National Forest Travel Plan

EPA Tenmile Creek Watershed Plan

Flathead NF Robert Wedge Post Fire Project

Flathead NF West Side Reservoir Post Fire Project

Flathead NF Forest Plan Revisions

Flathead NF Moose Post Fire Road Closures

Flathead NF Spotted Bear Road Closures

Gallatin NF 2002 Travel Plan Update

Helena NF Blackfoot Travel Plan

Helena NF Blackfoot Water Quality Plan

Helena NF Cave Gulch Fire Salvage Sale

Helena NF Clancy-Unionville Plan

Helena NF North Belts Travel Plan

Helena NF North Divide Travel Plan

Helen a NF Noxious Weed Plan

Helena NF South Belts Travel Plan

Helena NF South Divide Travel Plan

Helena NF Continental Divide National Scenic Trail

Humboldt Toiyabe NF Charleston-Jarbidge Road

Humboldt Toiyabe NF Spring Mountains NRA

Kootenai NF Bristow Restoration Project

Kootenai NF McSwede Restoration Project

Kootenai NF Forest Plan Revisions

Lolo NF Forest Plan Revision

L&CNF Judith Restoration Plan

L&CNF Rocky Mountain Front Travel Plan

L&CNF Snowy Mountain Travel Plan

L&CNF Travel Plan update

Montana State Wolf Plan

Montana State Trail Grant Program PElS

Montana State Trail Plan PElS

Montana FWP Statewide Outdoor Recreation Plan

Nez Perce NF Travel Plan Revisions

NPS Salt Creek Road Closure

NPS Yellowstone Winter Plan (SI1O\\IDobi le closure)

Payette NF Travel Plan Revisions

Sawtooth NF Travel Plan Revisions

USFS National OHV Policy and Implementation

USFS Forest Plan Amendments for Grizzly Bear Habit at Conservation

USFS National Strategic Plan 2003 Update

USFS Roadless

USFS Road less Rule II

USFS Roads Policy

USFS National Land Management Plan Revisions

USFWS Bull Trout Recovery Plan

USFWS Westslope Cutthroat Trout ESA

USFWS CMR National Wildlife Refuge Road Closures

USFWS Sage Grouse Plan

The reduction in available multiple use access will have an adverse effect on the remaining resource as more use is concentrated into smaller areas , CBU requests that the BLM take a hard look at the previously listed actions when evaluating cumulative effects on multiple use recreation in the Butte RMP.

Response: While there is no requirement for the BLM to consider decisions from all of the management plans and actions listed in the comment, the BLM believes it has adequately considered cumulative effects of local management decisions from various agencies within and adjacent to the Butte RMP planning area as related to travel planning. These effects are described in Chapter 4, Volume II, in the Travel Management and Access subsection of the Cumulative Effects of Travel Plans at the Planning Area Scale section.

O19

Comment: We need more communication and cooperation as far as this draft RMP goes. More accountability on money spent for range improvements, money spent to increase and expand recreational values, wildlife habitats, and fisheries. Also, show where cooperative agreements with FWP, state agencies, DNRC, and the Forest Service are concerned.

Response: The BLM has provided multiple opportunities and avenues for communication and cooperation with the public in the context of the Draft RMP/EIS. Accountability on money spent is beyond the scope of the RMP. The RMP does provide for a wide range of recreational values and improvements to wildlife habitats (primarily through vegetation treatments) and fish habitat as described in Chapter 2. Cooperative and coordination efforts with Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, the Forest Service, and other agencies is described in many different locations particularly in Chapter 2 sections on: Noxious Weeds within the Vegetation Communities section; Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species; Travel Management and Access; and Recreation Management.

O20

Comment: I realize money is always a huge factor, but would it be possible to require schooling at the time an off-road vehicle is licensed, similar to hunting? I think a lot of the problem is ignorance.

Response: It is beyond the scope of the Butte RMP and beyond the jurisdiction of the BLM to require schooling at the time of off-road vehicle licensing. Such a requirement would be the responsibility of the State of Montana.

O21

Comment: Terminology: We have identified inconsistencies in some of the definitions included in the Butte RMP glossary relative to those defined in the Helena National Forest Plan glossary. We would like the opportunity to work with the Butte Field Office staff between the draft EIS and the final EIS to develop a terminology set that facilitates consistent management between both agencies.

Response: The BLM will gladly meet with the Helena National Forest to resolve issues of consistency and common terminology. However, given the scheduled timeframes for completion of the Butte RMP, the BLM is unable to do so before release of the Proposed RMP/EIS, but may be able to do so before finalization of the Butte RMP in the Record of Decision.

O22

Comment: I hope this management assessment reveals the need for more emphasis on the botanical sciences,

wildlife sciences, and environmental studies in the preparation of Bureau of Land Management employees whose job requirements put them in the field.

Response: BLM personnel have appropriate formal educational backgrounds and training for the specific positions and job duties for which they are responsible. Upon issuance of the Record of Decision for the Butte RMP, BLM personnel will be required to become familiar with the provisions of the approved RMP as it pertains to how they do their particular jobs.

O23

Comment: Regardless of what Travel Plans get chosen, we are concerned for the successful implementation and enforcement of any travel plan changes that are proposed. Without strong commitment to the financial and personnel resources necessary to affect and maintain on-the-ground change, even the most thoughtfully devised travel management plan will not work.

Response: The BLM agrees that travel plan implementation requires considerable budget and labor expenditures to ensure proper implementation and enforcement. While this issue is beyond the scope of the Butte RMP, the BLM will do its best to receive appropriate funding to properly implement travel plans.

O24

Comment: What about the fishing access sites developed under the BLM wildlife challenge cost share program with local TU, Skyline Sportsmen, and Anaconda Sportsmen's Club? Not even mentioned by BLM as well as the Wildlife Challenge Cost Share access road in Sawmill Gulch with the Anaconda Job Corps. Boat ramps on the Bighole River were also funded with this program such as by Divide and Jerry Creek ands above Dickie Bridge. Does BLM have the Challenge Cost Share program anymore?

Response: Site-specific projects such as those mentioned in the comment are implementation level decisions, not RMP decisions, and thus beyond the scope of this land use planning document. The Challenge Cost Share program does still exist and the BLM uses it where possible to implement projects on the ground.

O25

Comment: We are especially concerned about the lack of accountability for the wildlife and recreation funding that you receive in your annual budgets - we don't feel that this money is being spent to benefit public access and recreational opportunities. BLM has been engaged in pooling these funds and using these funds to support the land exchange program and other programs such as realty. That is not the purpose of earmarked wildlife and recreation money to BLM. We need to have an accounting of all monies received for wildlife and recreation and how you plan to improve wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities in the final EIS.

Response: Specific programs are held accountable for meeting budget-based accomplishment targets within each program annually. The Vegetation Communities and Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species sections of Chapter 2 of the Butte RMP describe activities that would be accomplished to benefit wildlife. The Recreation Management section of Chapter 2 describes activities and management that would benefit recreational opportunities. An accounting of monies for any specific program is outside the scope of the RMP.

O26

Comment: I hope you will make a strong argument on behalf of BLM staff to increase your budget for additional personnel. To monitor and maintain the acreage under your responsibility, you MUST HAVE THE RESOURCES AND PEOPLE.

Response: While this issue is outside the scope of the Butte RMP revision, the BLM continuously works to receive appropriate levels of funding and staffing to ensure quality land use plan implementation. These efforts will continue after finalization of the approved Butte RMP.

Process, Public Involvement, and Editorial Issues

P1

Comment: I do not support most of the alternatives and question why BLM did not consider hardly any the suggestions offered by the public during the group meetings? Also, why does BLM continue to insist on an "All or Nothing" approach and not a combination of the best of all ideas?

Response: The BLM believes it has fairly considered public comments received during the scoping process for the Butte RMP by incorporating public comments into RMP or travel plan alternatives where feasible. The BLM believes it has developed alternatives that provide varying degrees of balance between resources and resource uses.

P2

Comment: For a process that was purported to be for recreational planning, there are sure a lot of non-recreational issues included.

Response: The Butte RMP revision has been portrayed by the BLM as an all-encompassing land use planning process since the beginning of the process. Recreation is one of many different resource uses addressed during the RMP revision.

P3

Comment: NEPA requires adequate disclosure of the potential impacts of a proposed action as stated in CEQ Sec. 1500 .1. "It shall provide full and fair discussion of significant environmental impacts and shall inform decision makers and the public of the reasonable alternatives which would avoid or minimize adverse impacts or enhance the quality of the human environment."

Response: The BLM acknowledges this requirement of NEPA and believes it has conscientiously met the intent of this regulation in development of the Butte RMP.

P4

Comment: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is commended for using the SIMPPLLE model (state of the art landscape-level planning tool) to aid in their planning efforts to predict change and vegetation dynamics over time. However, the document mainly provides relative comparisons of the alternatives rather than detailed analytical information that would allow the public to make more informed comparisons.

Response: One inherent difficulty in being quantitatively specific in describing environmental consequences associated with RMP alternatives is that most proposed activities necessarily lack absolute quantities or site-specificity at the scale of the RMP. These features would be determined at the project level during implementation of projects under the RMP. However, Chapter 4 of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS provides a combination of data comparisons (where feasible) and relative comparisons of alternatives.

P5

Comment: BLM makes it appear that they are not responsible to the very law BLM must comply with and an accurate description of each. We want to see these laws all listed in the Plan and explained in such a way the OMB will be happy and so that the public can see all the pieces before any 20-year plan is reached. BLM must operate under numerous federal land laws as well as the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Federal Data Quality Act (DQA). BLM is also subject to Title 18, The False Statements Act. BLM must comply completely with the Federal Data Quality Act (FDQA) and Criminal Code title 18, Chapter 47-1001 which is listed even on grazing leases.

Response: The Proposed RMP/Final EIS includes an appendix (**Appendix B**) that synopsizes key attributes of pertinent laws.

P6

Comment: BLM lands typically occur as somewhat discrete blocks of land with isolated parcels of varying sizes, and varying access constraints, around them. It seems to me that an important and legitimate planning concern relates to the size and access of the individual parcel. For example, should there be any active management of small parcels or of parcels with no public access; and if so, what kinds of management and why?

Response: Specific management activities on site-specific parcels are determined in implementation decisions outside the RMP process. Such decisions regularly consider issues such as those raised by the comment in the context of any proposed management for a particular area. After finalization of the RMP, the RMP will be used as guidance on prioritizing types of work and geographic areas for such project level planning.

P7

Comment: Many of the differences between the current alternatives rest with how much of what kind of management activity is planned to occur. Presumably your budget requests then seek to fund the adopted levels of activity. But if and more likely when your appropriations are too low to completely fund the plan, what then? Where I'm going with this is the idea that your alternatives should talk about priorities - when faced with limited funding, which activities and which specific areas should be funded.

Response: RMP decisions will be implemented based on budget and workforce availability in the future. Future BLM budget requests will be based on decisions made with the RMP. For some resource areas, such as vegetation management, Chapter 2 of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS discusses priority vegetation types, geographic locations, and acreages for treatments (Table 2-23). The Travel Management and Access section of Chapter 2 describes priorities for implementing travel plans. Special Recreation Management Areas in the Recreation section of Chapter 2 identify priority areas where recreation funding would be applied.

P8

Comment: Ward Ranch: This property needs its own in-depth management plan. What's going to happen with the residence? What values & uses should be emphasized? (Historic, recreation, scenic, ecological restoration) I'm not sure myself; but I am sure it needs and deserves more attention than it can get in this RMP.

Response: Management issues raised by this comment are implementation decisions that will need to be made in activity plans after finalization of the RMP.

P9

Comment: The process used puts the average working class citizen at a great disadvantage. The process is inordinately confusing, cumbersome, and intimidating to the members of the public who are not organized or experienced which is the majority of the public. A 300+ page draft environmental document is too much for the general public to understand and participate in. Coupled

with the current number of other ongoing actions the situation is overwhelming. The size of the environmental document is being used as a mechanism to overwhelm the public and allow the agency to effectively ignore the needs of the public for motorized access and motorized recreation. Council on Environmental Quality regulations for the proper implementation of NEPA can be found at ceq.eh.doe.gov/nepa/regs/ceq/toc_ceq.htm. Sec. 1502.7 Page limits. The text of final environmental impact statements (e.g., paragraphs (d) through (g) of Sec. 1502.10) shall normally be less than 150 pages and for proposals of unusual scope or complexity shall normally be less than 300 pages. The agency is ignoring the page limit guidance and the documents produced are way beyond what the public can process.

Response: The rigors of producing credible and defensible NEPA documents has increased in recent years such that document lengths have increased to adequately address all issues. For the Butte RMP, efforts to make the process as user-friendly as possible for the public have included RMP and travel plan-specific public scoping meetings with comment forms available to provide written comments; a website for the Butte RMP; readily available contact information for the BLM project manager to allow the public to have personal contact if desired; six public meetings during the comment period for the Draft RMP/EIS; a 30-day extension of the original 90-day public comment period on the Draft RMP/EIS; and opportunities for the public to comment via email, hard copy letters, or fax. The length of the Proposed RMP/EIS is longer than 300 pages due to the fact that in addition to the RMP/EIS for the Butte Field Office, the document also includes the equivalent contents of five separate Environmental Assessments to address site-specific travel planning for five areas.

P10

Comment: Positive impacts to the environment in areas such as fisheries, wildlife habitat, sediment reduction, and noxious weeds are largely based on personal judgment or predictive models. These models are not calibrated or based on data from the study area. All models are wrong, so honest modelers first report the expected uncertainty of the model and then the predictions. There are no case histories and very little data to back up any of the predictions.

Response: Other than the SIMPPLLE (Simulative Landscape Patterns and Processes at Landscape Scales) model used to provide general guidance on vegetation management proposals, no predictive models were used in the development or prediction of environmental consequences associated with the Butte RMP.

P11

Comment: Impacts should be evaluated in a fair and unbiased manner and with a relative sense of magnitude. Natural conditions should be used as the benchmark for the test of impacts on natural resources. For example, if natural events including floods, wildfires, and their associated impacts are natural and acceptable as stated by some agency personnel and environmental groups, then (in order to be consistent and equitable) impacts from OHV recreation should be compared in relative magnitude to the impacts associated with floods, wildfire, and other natural events.

Response: The locations, severities, and magnitudes of impacts from natural events such as floods or wildland fires are not highly predictable and therefore often cannot be accurately depicted. This makes it impossible to credibly describe site-specific impacts from OHV recreation in the context of natural events. Generalized effects of natural events are discussed in the Cumulative Effects sections for each resource in the Environmental Consequences of Five Site-Specific Travel Plans section of Chapter 4 (Volume II of the RMP). In addition, the BLM cannot control effects of natural events. BLM can control effects of human activities and indeed assessing the effects of human activities is the essence of analyzing effects of the BLM's proposed management activities. Relative contributions of human activities to resource impacts can be more credibly described. Introductory information included at the beginning of Chapter 4 in the RMP provides the framework and describes the approach and assumptions used in this planning process to disclose impacts.

P12

Comment: Presently, very few agency staff members are OHV enthusiasts and can represent OHV recreation interests in day-to-day operations and long-term management decisions. OHV enthusiasts understand how to educate, manage, and meet the needs of OHV recreationists. Agency personnel are not able to relate to the needs and challenges of OHV recreationists because they are not familiar with OHVs nor are they typically OHV recreationists. There is an inherent bias on management teams that do not include OHV enthusiasts. We request that the staff on each project team include an adequate number of OHV enthusiasts in order to adequately represent and address the needs of OHV recreationists. The test for an adequate number of OHV enthusiasts on a team should be based on the percentages of visitors. Information from NVUM, USDA, and CTVA cited earlier document that OHV recreationists represent from 25 to 60 percent of the visitors and the management team should also reflect these percentages.

Response: There are no requirements for BLM planning teams to be made up of certain percentages of enthusiasts of any particular interest. Planning teams include a wide range of professionals with training and experience to address their appropriately assigned areas of specialty, including OHV recreation.

P13

Comment: In the past many of the impacts associated with motorized recreation were based on opinions about the impacts on wildlife. The courts have clearly established the prevailing standard for evaluating scientific evidence in Daubert vs. Merrell Dow Pharmaceuticals Inc. (DAUBERT v. MERRELL DOW PHARMACEUTICALS, INC., 509 U.S. 579 (1993)) (http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/printer_friendly.pl?page=us/509/579.html), in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that expert testimony must be based on a testable theory or method that has passed peer review, has a known error rate and has reliable results. Peer reviewed reports and recommendations are mandatory in order to protect the public from personal opinion. We request that an adequate peer review plan and process be used for all impact analyses.

Response: Many impacts on wildlife described in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS are based on cited, peer-reviewed scientific literature. After being drafted by the interdisciplinary team, the document (including its impact analyses) has been reviewed by BLM specialists in the Montana State Office as well as the Washington Office prior to finalization.

P14

Comment: Scientists may come from within federal or state agencies, or the general public, and may hold a variety of important and influential positions. The study team should:

1) Require minimum standards and criteria for qualifications which must be met before a scientist can be deemed an "expert";

2) Provide minimum standards and criteria for determining when a scientist may be deemed "independent"; and

3) Provide a minimum amount of public notice and opportunity to object whenever any such scientist is considered for such participation, whether such position is permanent or temporary, full time, or part time, voluntary or compensated. Such notice should include the qualifications of the individual, the role which the individual will have in such participation, and the type and duration of the position. Review and participation by independent scientists is a good thing, provided the process require standards which assure that such scientists are in fact qualified and independent, and provide the public the opportunity to review such factors.

Independent scientists should review and participate in all aspects of planning, broad-based assessments, local analysis, and monitoring.

Response: Chapter 5 of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS includes the list of preparers along with their educational qualifications and areas of responsibility for the Butte RMP. While the planning process includes several opportunities for public involvement (scoping, alternative development, and comments on a draft document) it does not provide for public notice and review of hiring staff positions within the agency. Although the BLM used an independent contractor to assist with preparation of the Butte RMP, there is no requirement for independent scientists to participate in the RMP revision process.

P15

Comment: Decisions should be based on:

(1) accurate and unbiased information,

(2) fairness to all members of the public and their needs,

(3) the principles of sharing and tolerance, and

(4) an equitable distribution of benefits to all interests.

Response: The BLM considers these factors in the context of its multiple-use mission to provide for the needs of people to use resources, in concert with the need to provide for and protect resources.

P16

Comment: Collaborative sessions or other types of negotiations often result in undue benefits for environmental groups because they have manipulated the process. The decision-making process should be solidly founded on the principles of unbiased information and public need.

Response: Due to the often inherent conflict between public members with differing viewpoints related to resource management, the BLM does value consensus-based recommendations from collaborative working groups made up of a balanced mix of resource user types. The BLM does not believe that consensus-based recommendations derived from such collaborative working groups favor one interest over another, or that environmental groups have manipulated the process associated with the Butte RMP.

P17

Comment: The current precedent is that legal actions and appeals are the most effective way to influence decisions on how public land is to be managed. Unfortunately, the true public need for management of public lands for multiple-uses is not adequately defended because agencies are so focused on countering the massive legal attack by environmental groups.

Response: Legal actions and appeals associated with BLM NEPA documents arise from a wide range of sources. The BLM does its best to stay focused on its multiple-use mission as these processes proceed.

P18

Comment: Agencies are encouraged to seek outside review and input by OHV recreationists on all proposed management decisions affecting motorized recreation opportunities including closures. Agencies are encouraged to establish greater credibility with motorized recreationists by having motorized recreation planners on the interdisciplinary team and a board of motorized recreationists.

Response: OHV recreationists have the same opportunities as everyone else in the general public to participate in and provide input on any proposed management decisions made by the BLM. The BLM does include recreation planners to address motorized recreation on its interdisciplinary teams. While the BLM has sought the assistance of county-sponsored community-based working groups (which included motorized recreation advocates) to provide input on travel plan alternatives for the Butte RMP, the BLM cannot include a board of motorized recreationists on interdisciplinary teams because this would be a violation of the Federal Advisory Committee Act.

P19

Comment: I do not believe that the preferred alternative identified (B) is in keeping with the concept of multiple use and does not address the need to provide dispersed use of the "Public Lands" which should ultimately help reduce the environmental impact on any one location. If the BLM finds it absolutely necessary to reduce the number of roads in these travel plan areas, implementing Alternative D in each area would provide a realistic gauge as to whether or not more restrictive measures are actually necessary. This approach combined with increased educational programs could actually provide desired results without significantly reducing access to the areas in question.

Response: The BLM does believe that Alternative B provides for multiple use of the wide range of resources in the Butte Field Office. Maximizing dispersion of human activity does not necessarily reduce environmental impacts for all resources. For example, maximizing dispersion of human activity would tend to maximize impacts to wildlife species that are prone to abandoning their habitats when disturbed by human activity. Alternative B has been modified in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS for some travel planning areas to increase motorized access based on specific comments provided by the public.

P20

Comment: A major concern with your proposed alternatives is the lack of an alternative that maintains or increases recreational opportunities for motorized and/or mechanized recreationists. In one breath you recognize the increased use of motorized recreation but in your alternatives you only show a "major" reduction in recreational opportunities for the majority of recreationists. The alternatives brought forward in this RMP lack any fairness or provide proof that your agency is actually devising a plan that meets the needs of the public that actually use this public land.

Response: Alternative A maintains current motorized use for all travel planning areas considered in the RMP. The BLM believes the alternatives presented meet the needs of the public in the context of multiple use management. It is not the BLM's mission to solely meet the needs of any particular interest or land use preference in the public. Multiple use entails balancing the needs of resource uses along with the needs for resource protection.

P21

Comment: Many motorized recreationists, who traditionally recreate on public land, may not participate in a formal NEPA process. The process is both time consuming and confusing. Multiple-use interests often times struggle to provide active participants due to many other time commitments. At the same time, non-motorized groups, well funded by foundations, have organized, trained, and experienced paid staffers that are readily available to participate in the NEPA process and collaborative sessions. These groups are able to participate on a wide front of actions from travel management to timber sales to non-motorized designations.

The magnitude of foundation funding available to non-motorized groups tends to amplify their limited-use interests in comparison to the needs of the public. This setting often results in non-motorized interests getting undue benefits by creating and manipulating the process. This setting is not based on the principles of addressing public need and technical merit. We ask that the effectiveness and impact of foundation-funded organizations versus the needs of all citizens be evaluated and factored into the planning process.

Response: The BLM provided the same opportunities to everyone in the public to participate and comment during the Butte RMP revision process. The BLM considered all comments received regardless of their source. An evaluation of the source of comments is not required by the NEPA or BLM planning regulations and guidance.

P22

Comment: We also recommend that direction regarding reduction of road/ transportation system effects on water quality/fisheries/wildlife be included in and/or repeated in the Travel Management section on the RMP, since we are concerned that the BLM staff responsible for managing and maintaining roads may not know, understand and/or follow the management direction in other resource sections of the RMP. Some redundancy in

the RMP may promote improved understanding and implementation of management direction.

Response: Final decisions will be described in the Record of Decision which will be accompanied by an Approved Plan. This document will be release following publication of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS and will be the one that BLM employees will regularly use as the RMP. Specific considerations on how to structure the approved RMP will be made in the future.

P23

Comment: Management direction in the draft Butte RMP in general appears to be less prescriptive than many land management plans we review. Management alternatives include general management goals and desired future conditions and guidance for managing land use, travel, recreation, vegetation, grazing, oil and gas leases, etc. However, there appear to be only a few Standards with more binding limitations on land management. The only more binding Standards that we saw were in the Standards for Rangeland Health in Appendix E, along with the oil and gas lease stipulations (Appendix L).

We believe management direction would be more protective of the environment and ecosystems within the BFO Planning and Decision Areas if additional more binding and protective direction were included. We recommend that the BLM consider development of additional limitations on land uses and activities and more protective management direction to provide increased levels of protection, restoration, and enhancement of the environment (see specific comments and recommendations in our subsequent comments).

Response: In some cases the BLM has modified proposed management to make it more specific in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. Overall the BLM believes the level of specificity of proposed management provided in the RMP is appropriate to provide for appropriate levels of resource protection and site-specific project level flexibility to address the wide range of conditions that exist on Butte Field Office lands.

P24

Comment: Nowhere in any of the documents did BLM mention coordination/cooperation with sportsmen's organizations, FWP biologists, youth organizations, and better involvement of BLM with the public including field trips to examine our public land.

Response: Chapter 1 describes public scoping efforts including six public scoping meetings, six additional public scoping meetings specifically for site-specific travel planning, two additional public scoping meetings associated with the extended scoping for the Proposed Planning Scenario, and ten briefings provided to organizations and county commissions after solicitation by the BLM. Chapter 5 describes solicitation of various state and federal agencies, tribal governments, local governments, and the governor's office as cooperating agencies for the Butte RMP. The BLM attempted to specifically engage biologists from Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MFWP) by specifically soliciting that agency to become a cooperating agency on the Butte RMP. MFWP never chose to become a cooperating agency but informal contact and coordination between the BLM planning team and MFWP biologists occurred throughout the process of preparing the Draft RMP/EIS. With the release of the Draft RMP/EIS, BLM advertised and provided six public open houses that featured presentations on key contents of the RMP and information on how the public could provide input. Also upon release of the Draft RMP/EIS, organized groups were invited via newspaper articles from press releases to have the BLM provide them specific briefings on the Draft RMP/EIS. No organizations responded to the BLM's invitation during the public comment period for the Draft RMP/EIS.

P25

Comment: The environmental document should evaluate how the number of policy proposals over the past several years has overwhelmed the public. There is no way that the public could evaluate and comment on each proposed action. The cumulative negative impact of the overwhelming number of proposals has been decision-making that does not provide for the needs of the public and a significant reduction in multiple-use and motorized access and recreation opportunities. We request that this cumulative negative impact be adequately evaluated and factored into the decision-making for this action. Additionally, we request that an adequate mitigation plan be included as part of this action to compensate for past cumulative negative impacts on the public associated with the overwhelming number of NEPA actions.

Response: Evaluation of the impact that the number of policies established over the past several years or the number of different management proposals has had on the ability of the public to respond is beyond the scope of the Butte RMP. There is no requirement for the BLM to evaluate this. However, the public comment period for the Butte RMP was extended from 90 to 120 days, providing the public more time than usual to comment on the management proposed in the Draft RMP/EIS. The BLM believes this is adequate time for the public to comment.

P26

Comment: We are very concerned that motorized recreationists must identify and inventory specific routes that we want to remain open. These resources are there now and they are being used by the public and in almost all cases, it is entirely reasonable type and level of use. Motorized recreationists should not have to identify and inventory motorized routes as part of the process. This is

the work of the agency. No other visitor group is saddled with this requirement. Our concern is that the agency is using public involvement in a discriminatory way to establish which motorized routes will remain open.

Response: In developing travel plan alternatives for the Butte RMP, BLM personnel did inventory motorized routes and develop the baseline for each of the five travel plan areas analyzed (as depicted on travel plan area maps in the RMP). The BLM did not ask nor request the motorized recreation community to conduct a road and trail inventory for the project area. The BLM conducted this work on its own, using a combination of professional knowledge, GPS data, and aerial and digital photography interpretation. Prior to the Butte RMP revision, there was no inventory of motorized routes in these areas. Throughout the scoping process and public comment period on the Draft RMP/EIS, the public was welcome to provide input on specific routes not included in BLM's inventory presented, or to provide input on travel route-specific management of routes in the BLM inventory. As a result of public feedback, the BLM was able to correct several minor errors and provide better maps.

P27

Comment: We have also observed from past NEPA travel management processes that the lack of participation by motorized recreationists has been due to the cumulative effect of confusing and poor documentation of the proposals, which included maps that did not have clearly defined characteristics, landmarks, trails, roads, routes and historical sites that would be removed from communal use by the proposed closure action. We are concerned that this lack of understanding will lead to resentment and poor support of motorized closures by the community. We request that the travel management process seek out and document the needs of all motorized visitors including those who traditionally use the primitive roads and trails, plus the handicapped, elderly, and physically impaired as required under 40 CFR 1506.6.

Response: For the Draft RMP/EIS, travel plan alternative maps were provided in two contexts within the Butte RMP in effort to address concerns associated with potentially confusing maps. Hard copy maps were provided to give the opportunity to look at a physical map of the travel plan alternatives. The supplementary CD contained PDF files of more detailed maps with landmarks and route numbers to provide the public opportunities for more detailed viewing and comment on travel plan alternatives. The BLM believes it has conscientiously followed 40 CFR 1506.6 in providing public outreach and soliciting public input on the Butte RMP through various means including public scoping meetings for the RMP, scoping meetings specifically for travel planning, extended public scoping for the Proposed Planning Scenario, and an extended public comment period on the Draft RMP/EIS. In addition, the Butte RMP website provided opportunities for the public to stay informed and to contact the BLM to provide input.

P28

Comment: We request that the process adequately meet public involvement requirements with respect to motorized visitors. The process should include methods of public involvement that effectively reach motorized visitors and methods to account for the needs of citizens who may not participate for diverse reasons. Some public involvement methods that would be effective include; (1) the use of trail rangers (who are motorized enthusiasts) to count and interview visitors using the travelways and distribute Travel Management materials to them, (2) publication in the newsletters of motorized association, (3) attendance at motorized club meetings, (4) posting of information packets at motorized trail head areas, and (5) mailing to OHV enthusiasts and owners.

Response: All members of the public were provided the same opportunities to participate in the Butte RMP revision through scoping efforts described in Chapters 1 and 5.

P29

Comment: Clearly, comments under NEPA were intended to bring issues and concerns to the attention of the team preparing the environmental document and the decision-makers. NEPA did not suggest that comments were to be used as a voting process to indicate support of alternatives. Nor did NEPA anticipate that the scoping and citizen input would be dominated by well-funded special interest groups. NEPA did not intend citizens to comment on every possible NEPA as a requirement to protect their interests, needs, and quality of life. This misuse of the comment process has resulted in agencies overlooking the needs of all citizens and decisions have been made that do not adequately address the needs of the public.

NEPA requires decision-making that adequately addresses the needs of all members of the public. This direction was stated in Title 1, Sec. 101 of NEPA Policy Act of 1969 as "achieve a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities…" Under NEPA, decision-makers have a responsibility to seek out, determine, and make decisions that address the needs of all citizens and not just those that submit comments.

Response: The BLM agrees that comments are intended to bring up substantive issues and concerns (regardless of the source and its funding levels) and that the comment process is not a "voting" process. The BLM does not misuse the comment process as a "voting" process. Inherent in the NEPA process however is the

reality that in order to address specific concerns in specific areas, citizens need to comment on proposed activities there. The BLM believes it has met the cited direction from Title 1, Sec. 101 of NEPA. The BLM notes that this section also includes direction other than that cited by the commenter and the BLM believes that its responsibility is to meet all aspects of this section, and that no one item within this section is intended to take precedence over any other.

P30

Comment: The NEPA process is complicated and unapproachable to most of the public yet there has never been a program to inform, educate, and increase the public's awareness and ability to work with the NEPA process. The lack of widespread information, education, awareness, and NEPA skills has contributed to extremely low participation in the NEPA process by some sectors of the public. Public participation for even the most controversial proposed action (roadless rule) has involved less than 1 percent of the affected public. Additionally, the general lack of understanding of the NEPA process has resulted in poor acceptance and opinions of the process by the public.

Response: Throughout the Butte RMP revision process, the BLM has attempted to guide the public on how to provide meaningful input to the NEPA process. Chapter 1 of the RMP describes public scoping efforts including six public scoping meetings, six additional public scoping meetings specifically for site-specific travel planning, two additional public scoping meetings associated with the extended scoping for the Proposed Planning Scenario, and ten briefings provided to organizations and county commissions after solicitation by the BLM. With the release of the Draft RMP/EIS, BLM advertised and provided six public open houses that featured presentations on key contents of the RMP and information on the public could provide input. In each case of these public involvement opportunities, BLM personnel provided information on how to provide substantive input on the RMP.

P31

Comment: We have been told that motorized recreationists must participate in the travel management process and/or collaborative sessions in order to realize future motorized recreational opportunities. While we agree that motorized recreationists have the opportunity to participate in the NEPA process, the level and effectiveness of participation should not be the deciding factor when making decisions about who gets what recreational opportunities within public lands. NEPA does not identify the quality and quantity of individual and group participation as a decision-making criterion. The network of influence groups has a significant advantage over common citizens in areas including funding, staffing, training, and advertising through radio, television, web sites, and newspapers. This setting allows environmental groups to get undue benefits by manipulating the NEPA process. This setting does not address the principles of meeting public need. NEPA and other laws do not intend for independent individuals who are less organized to give up their life's amenities to better-organized and funded groups.

Response: The BLM cannot require or control the participation of any group or individual in its planning processes. The BLM agrees that the level and effectiveness of advocacy group participation is not the deciding factor when making decisions about resource management on BLM land. Any group or individual can participate in the process and consideration given to any input is based on the substantiality of the input regardless of the entity and its resources for getting its particular viewpoint heard. The BLM considers public comments based on the extent to which they are substantive and relate to inadequacies or inaccuracies in the analysis or methodologies used; identify new impacts or recommend reasonable new alternatives or mitigation measures; or involve substantive disagreements on interpretations of significance (BLM NEPA Handbook H-1790-1 (USDI-BLM 2008)). However, it should be noted that without participation, any group or organization’s concerns or issues may simply not be identified and therefore not considered when making management decisions. Conversely, the redundant raising of issues or preferences does not ensure a particular RMP outcome or land use decision.

P32

Comment: The establishment of recreational opportunities on public lands should be based on public need. Other government entities are directed to address and meet the needs of the public. For example, cities provide water and sewer systems based on public need. Highways are constructed based on public need. The need for these facilities is not based on the level of citizen involvement. The need for these facilities is based on an assessment of need developed by water and sewer usage, traffic counts, etc. The public has a basic expectation that agencies will look out for all of their interests and the best interests of the public are met when agencies respond to the needs of the public in this manner. If members of the public did not comment on the upgrade of a water treatment plant or the construction of a highway does not mean that their water is shut off or that they can't drive to Bozeman. We request that the use of public participation in decision-making for this proposed action be monitored to assure that it does not obscure the needs of all citizens who rely on the project area for their recreation and livelihoods.

Response: Chapter 5 of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS documents the consultation and coordination processes used for public participation. The BLM believes it has conscientiously considered public input received on the

Butte RMP. Due to the inherent nature of conflicting input from different members of the public, RMP decisions cannot possibly reflect all management suggestions received from all members of the public.

P33

Comment: Both sides would be further down the trail towards measurable protection of the human and natural environment if multiple-use, motorized access and motorized recreation were accepted at a reasonable level and we all focused our energy on visitor education, site-specific problems and site specific mitigation measures. Consensus and collaborative processes cannot by nature produce reasonable results and motorized recreationists should not be forced into these processes where they are guaranteed to lose.

Response: The BLM believes that the Butte RMP contains alternatives that provide reasonable levels of motorized access. Educational activities and mitigation projects are implemented at the site scale after RMP and travel plan decisions are made. The BLM does not force any entity into participating in any collaborative processes. However, the BLM does value consensus-based recommendations from collaborative working groups made up of public members that represent a balanced mix of perspectives on resource management issues.

P34

Comment: While collaborative agreement on a travel management plan between two opposing interests is a desirable solution from an Agency's perspective, the reality of the current setting is that collaborative sessions have failed because a reasonable allocation of recreational opportunities that would meet the needs of all citizens never stays on the table. The lack of a reasonable multiple-use alternative combined with the significant cumulative negative effects that motorized recreationists have experienced (loss of over 50 percent of motorized recreational opportunities during the past 35 ± years) precludes motorized recreationists from accepting any additional unbalanced proposals coming out of collaborative sessions. The collaborative approach must produce reasonable multiple-use alternatives for all (100 percent) of the remaining lands intended for multiple-use.

Response: The intent of establishing collaborative working groups, such as those used to assist in development of travel plan alternatives for the Butte RMP, is to identify solutions that best strike a balance for the wide range of perspectives that exist throughout the public on how best to manage multiple-use lands. The makeup of the working groups used for site-specific travel planning addressed with the Butte RMP was intentionally set to prevent one particular interest, such as motorized enthusiasts or non-motorized enthusiasts, from dominating the process and biasing working group recommendations with their own agendas.

P35

Comment: CBU did not find that your agency engaged the local government in developing the Butte RMP. Federal law does require the BLM to coordinate and cooperate with state and local governments.

Response: Chapter 5 of the Butte RMP describes coordination efforts undertaken by the BLM. For the Butte RMP the BLM offered and provided multiple briefings to county commissions within the Planning Area. For the extended scoping associated with the Proposed Planning Scenario, five of the eight county commissions received briefings on initial management proposals (the other three county commissions did not respond to solicitations for briefings). During the public comment period for the Draft RMP/EIS, all eight county commissions received briefings by the BLM. State agencies as well as local governments were solicited for interest in becoming cooperating agencies for the Butte RMP. None of these entities signed on as cooperators.

P36

Comment: The cover letter for the RMP invites readers to review and comment on the Draft RMP/EIS. It goes on to say that comments will be most helpful if they are specific and address one or more of four criteria. I can see where this is helpful but in my quick review of the travel plans I could not find where the Draft RMP/EIS gives the same specific reason or information for each of the roads that are slated for closure.

Response: The direction provided in the cover letter to the Draft RMP/EIS on how best to provide public comments applied to any and all public comments anyone may have wanted to provide on proposed management in the RMP or the site-specific travel plans. The direction was not intended for a particular interest within the public on a particular issue.

P37

Comment: Maps 26-30 are too large of scale to allow for any meaningful comments.

Response: The BLM apologizes for any difficulty encountered while reviewing maps. The dispersed distribution of BLM lands addressed by the Butte RMP made it difficult to select a more user friendly map scale without driving up document printing costs to prohibitive levels. However, all maps were made available in PDF format at BLM's Butte RMP website where reviewers could zoom in on areas of interest.

P38

Comment: It also would benefit the reader if detailed analytical information could be presented in tables sup-

plemented by a more limited discussion of that information.

Response: The Butte RMP employs a combination of tabular display of analytical data as related to various resources and resource uses, in concert with discussion of data presented. Efforts were made to limit discussion of data presented to the extent practicable. The complex nature of proposed RMP management and associated environmental effects require extensive discussion of effects in some cases.

P39

Comment: It would be very helpful if you provided a "table of comparisons" of the amount of Dry Forest treatment per decade of the four alternatives. These forest management activities are major to the health of the forest and a visual presentation of these data would be very helpful.

Response: Table 2-23 in Chapter 2 lists ranges of proposed treatment acres by alternative for all major vegetation types, by major watershed, by RMP alternative.

P40

Comment: Who wrote the plan and what are their qualifications?

Response: Chapter 5 lists the preparers, their educational backgrounds, years of professional experience, and areas of responsibility in working on the Butte RMP.

P41

Comment: The really meaningful stuff, which I call the 'science', mostly ends up so buried that it's inaccessible to the public (and to decision makers??) So I'd suggest the following: have the section on 'environmental consequences' explain the science behind the various possible and proposed management activities, with no reference to the various alternatives, and organized by management activity rather than by impacted resource. (This seems to me to be the critical decision framework - whether or not to do something proactive, and if so, what & how. That requires comparing the effects, across all resources, of your options (e.g., to burn, to cut, or to leave alone); so organize the discussion by those options.) Then have sections devoted to each planning area that explore the impacts of the various alternatives on them.

Response: While the BLM generally followed the format for the environmental consequences section (Chapter 4) outlined in Appendix C of the BLM Land Use Planning Handbook (H-1610-1), careful consideration was given on how Chapter 4 was structured as related to addressing effects of proposed RMP management versus effects of site-specific travel plan alternatives. In effect, this structure led to the portion of Chapter 4 contained in Volume I of the RMP describing effects of RMP level decisions. The portion of Chapter 4 in Volume II describes effects associated with site-specific travel planning alternatives, organized by each of the five travel planning areas. This structure was followed so as to allow interested members of the public who might be solely interested in one (or more) specific travel planning area to turn to the section for that travel planning area and see all the environmental consequences described in one location for that area.

P42

Comment: It would be very useful to include a map in the document that shows the location of the various planning areas and sub areas, and the names you use for them. (E.g., it's not obvious to me that "Lewis & Clark County NW" means the Marysville area, nor that McMaster Ranch North means the ground east of Spokane Bay.)

Response: Within the Travel Management and Access section of Chapter 2, under the subheading Activity Level Planning for Five High Priority Travel Planning Areas, there is a further subheading for each travel planning area (Helena TPA, East Helena TPA, Lewis and Clark County NW TPA, Boulder/Jefferson City TPA, and Upper Big Hole River TPA). Introductory text for each of these travel planning areas describes which hard copy maps in the document correspond to which sub-areas (by sub-area name) on the electronic maps for each travel planning area.

P43

Comment: First, a couple of 'typos': p. 271, the bird list is riddled with repetition, and p. 295, Table 3-30, the data on acres recommended for Wilderness are wrong.

Response: In the Proposed RMP/Final EIS, text has been modified to address repetition of bird species names in the areas in question. The acreages reported as being recommended for wilderness vary slightly from acreages used in past documents because during the RMP process GIS calculations were used to characterize these acreages. The BLM believes that the GIS-calculated acreages are more accurate than the original acreages identified for the Wilderness Study Areas being recommended for wilderness designation.

P44

Comment: Site-specific analysis should be provided for every road and trail so that the benefits of keeping each motorized travel way is adequately addressed and accounted for in the decision. Site-specific questions will need to be discussed during the process. We request that the mapping be sufficient to allow site-specific analysis.

Response: The process described in **Appendix A** was followed on a route-specific basis to develop travel plan alternatives for each of the five travel planning areas

analyzed in the RMP. Records of how specific routes rated out for various resources and resource uses are part of the administrative record for the Butte RMP. Electronic maps provided in PDF format on the supplementary CD in the RMP provide route numbers and landmarks to allow for site-specific analysis.

P45

Comment: The Draft EIS and the maps are not user friendly. None of the proposed route changes have any route designation applied to them. They need better identification in order to comment on specific routes and areas. It is very difficult for the public to orient themselves and to interpret the proposed action for each specific road and trail. Therefore, the public cannot adequately evaluate the proposal and cannot develop comments with reference to specific roads and trails.

Response: Maps for travel plan alternatives are provided in two formats in the RMP. Hard copy maps are designed to provide the reader with a “big picture” view of each travel plan alternative. These maps lack route numbers out of necessity because they would be virtually unreadable if route numbers were applied. Travel plan maps in PDF files on the supplementary CD provide a finer scale look for each travel plan area, including more site-specific landmarks than are found on the hard copy maps, as well as route numbers used by the BLM during travel planning efforts. The BLM received a number of route-specific comments from the public during the public comment period.

P46

Comment: The draft has some serious shortcomings and some blatant misprints, for example, what is a “peregrine hawk”?

Response: Text has been modified in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS to address this editorial mistake.

P47

Comment: Page 146 - Table 2-23 under the heading "Management Concerns: Minerals - Locatable Minerals" and the sub-heading "Management Common to All Alternatives" the last bullet point contains the statement "the Elkhorn Mountains ACEC would not be proposed as a withdrawal under any alternative." This statement appears to be inconsistent with the text that immediately follows regarding the same subject but with the additional heading "withdrawals."

Response: While the statement in question in Table 2-23 was intended to express that the Elkhorns ACEC on the whole would not be proposed for a mineral withdrawal under any alternative, this statement is confusing because approximately 180 acres within the Elkhorns ACEC (Muskrat Creek) was proposed for withdrawal under Alternatives B and C in the Draft RMP/EIS. In the Proposed RMP/Final EIS, this proposed 180-acre withdrawal has been eliminated from the Preferred Alternative. Appropriate adjustment to RMP text and Table 2-23 have been made to reflect this change and eliminate confusion about the point made by the comment.

P48

Comment: Areas that have historically provided OHV opportunities are now proposed for non motorized use. The Scratch Gravel Hills offers opportunities in close proximity to Helena. The map of Alternative B shows the trails closed yearlong while page 62 text states the "entire Scratchgravel Hills area would be closed to motorized vehicle use after dark year long". We recognize the maps state "intended for display purposes" but the general public will obtain most of their information from the maps provided.

Page 52, table 2-9 shows wheeled motorized routes open: 13.6 miles, with 38.6 miles of non-motorized trails. The conflict between the statements and the map should be addressed.

Response: The Preferred Alternative for the Scratchgravel Hills portion of the Helena Travel Planning Area has been changed from the Draft RMP/EIS to the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. The revised Preferred Alternative would close the Scratchgravel Hills to wheeled public motorized use yearlong, 24 hours/day, with the exception of several routes with rights-of-way to homeowners as well as a few other known routes needed by local residents to access their homes. This closure would negate the need for a nighttime closure and should eliminate the confusion expressed by the comment.

P49

Comment: The areas with current travel plans are described as "limited" (page 268) is misleading. With the exception of the Whitetail-Pipestone that actually provides trail opportunities for the OHV community, the other limited areas would be described as extremely limited.

Response: In the context used, the term “limited” means designated areas or trails where the use of off-road vehicles is subject to restrictions, such as limiting the number or types of vehicles allowed, dates and times of use (seasonal restrictions), limiting use to existing roads and trails, or limiting use to designated roads and trails.

P50

Comment: Omission: Description of Issue 2 in Table 1-5 as well as language about how Issue 2 will be addressed. Earlier text indicates that Issue 2 addresses Wildlife, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species. This heading should have been written down in Table 1-5.

Response: This was a printing error that occurred after the BLM sent the document out for printing. The BLM

has attempted to ensure this error was not repeated in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

P51

Comment: Maps did not have adequate reference such as corner section numbers, which made it difficult to analyze information.

Response: The BLM acknowledges the lack of features on RMP maps. Maps were intended to convey various specific information and in their development the BLM was concerned about packing too much information on any given map. In the case of site-specific travel plan maps, more detailed mapping of travel plan alternatives is provided in PDF format on the CD enclosed with Proposed RMP/Final EIS. Township and Range lines have been provided on maps in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

P52

Comment: Recreation Opportunity Spectrum: All the tables in this section (p. 63) indicate that there are 302,000 acres being considered within the RMP. However, Appendix H indicates that 311,000 acres exist within the planning area with respect to surface lands (and 656,000 acres of federal mineral estate). This leaves 9,000 acres unaccounted and will likely lead to misunderstanding. This is an area equal to 14 square miles and should be properly allocated within all tables in the RMP.

Response: Due to land ownership changes between the Draft RMP/EIS and Proposed RMP/Final EIS, the surface acreage managed by the Butte Field Office is now approximately 308,000 acres while total area of federal mineral estate is approximately 654,000. These corrections have been made where needed throughout the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

P53

Comment: Page ii. TOC is incorrect in designating Appendices H and I.

Response: This has been corrected in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

P54

Comment: Page S-11 and supporting locations in document; the management of the Elkhorn Tack-on as an ACEC if it is released from further review by congress as a wilderness area is inconsistent with Appendix H that does not included the Tack-on as an ACEC (See Figure 3 App H), only the original Elkhorn WSA. The continued management as an ACEC statements needs to be removed.

Maps 33 and 34 (p 69 & 73) have ACEC boundaries in the Elkhorns (specifically the Elk Horn Tack-on in Golconda Gulch) inconsistent with Appendix H. The Maps need to be revised to be consistent with the Figure 3 in 2006 study in Appendix H.

Page 79 Management Common to Action Alternatives (B, C and D); The management of the Elkhorn Tack-on as an ACEC if it is released from further review by congress as a wilderness area is inconsistent with Appendix H that does not include the Tack-on as an ACEC, only the original Elkhorn WSA. The continued management as an ACEC statements need to be removed.

Response: The Elkhorns Tack-on Wilderness Study Area (WSA) would be managed as ACEC as indicated on Figure 3 of **Appendix H** of the Draft RMP/EIS (now **Appendix I** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS). In Figure 3 the potential Elkhorns ACEC is indicated by a cross-hatch pattern on lands potentially included. This figure does indicate inclusion of the Elkhorns Tack-on WSA in that cross-hatch pattern (and did so in the Draft RMP/EIS). Related maps and text referenced in the comment regarding this issue were all correct in the Draft RMP/EIS and have been carried forward into the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

P55

Comment: We are concerned about ACEC designations. Manage all non-wilderness land as multiple use.

Response: FLPMA requires the BLM to examine its lands for consideration as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) during the land use planning process. Specific management of ACEC lands is described in the Proposed RMP/EIS and varies by ACEC to include a range of multiple uses with limitations applied in some cases.

P56

Comment: First, and very important, was the mandate to manage lands under the principles of Multiple Use. Second was the preservation of valid existing rights, including grazing rights, mining claims, oil and gas leases, water rights and rights of access. The third element was specific instructions to the Secretary of the Interior to formulate land use plans that are consistent with State and local plans. The fourth element of FLPMA consists of very specific instructions regarding Wilderness. We simply ask that all of the instructions and requirements of the law as agreed to under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act be honored and applied to this project.

Response: The BLM believes it is meeting the requirements of FLPMA in the development of the Butte RMP. Throughout the Butte RMP process the BLM has coordinated with state agencies, tribal governments, and local governments to get their input on proposed management. While there is no wilderness within Butte Field Office lands, the BLM is following appropriate procedures in maintaining current management of Wilderness Study Areas until congress makes decisions about them.

The RMP includes proposed "fall back" management of each Wilderness Study Area to be implemented in the event that congress releases them from wilderness consideration.

P57

Comment: Social issues: There are already huge blocks of the RMP area that are non-motorized, the plan does not have to take away all of the motorized trails. This goes against the objective of multiple use, on public lands.

Response: Of the approximately 308,000 acres of BLM lands in the Butte RMP Decision Area, approximately 31,500 acres would be closed to motorized use (10.2 percent), 283 acres (0.1 percent) would be open to on and off-road use, and approximately 276,217 acres (89.7 percent) would be open to motorized use on designated routes under all action alternatives in the Proposed RMP/EIS. None of the alternatives in the Proposed RMP/EIS propose closing all of the motorized routes.

Recreation

Q1

Comment: Under Recreation Management Common to All Alternatives (page 60) it is stated that the BLM would solicit, train and support volunteers. Without analysis of the effectiveness of such activities in the plan, the reader is left to assume that volunteers and employees are interchangeable. Yet, organizations, including most, if not all, companies, typically do not rely on unpaid workers to provide service. Thus it is logical to presume that quality would suffer if the public were served by an unpaid BLM workforce, which runs contrary to Recreation Management Goal 2 (page 60). Either this is a discrepancy in information, or this plan should analyze why there is a need for volunteers and whether or not they would be as good as, or better than, BLM employees in enhancing Recreation.

Response: The BLM has a long standing volunteer program and encourages field offices to utilize volunteers to carry out numerous supportive tasks where appropriate. The intent of the volunteer program is to supplement the work of the existing professional staff not replace them. The primary use of volunteers in the Butte Field Office is for campground hosts. These volunteers are used to assist with visitor information, light maintenance, and use compliance. They are generally retired, experienced campers that enjoy interacting with visitors. Other uses for volunteers whether groups or individuals have been for small maintenance projects such as fencing, painting, picnic table assembly, trail maintenance, resource inventories and field monitoring.

Q2

Comment: Allowing travel up to 300 feet off of a designated route, both roads and trails, is an absolutely necessary opportunity for reasonable use of the area by the public. This access is needed for retrieval, woodcutting, and to reach dispersed campsites and the public's use of the area would be unreasonably compromised without this access. The use of this access can be qualified to restrict it in situations where it results in unreasonable resource damage.

Response: The Butte Field Office followed the Record of Decision in the 2003 Statewide Off-Highway EIS/Plan Amendment for addressing motorized uses off existing routes. The decision of Statewide Amendment and this Proposed RMP is to only allow motorized wheeled travel up to 300 feet for the purpose of establishing dispersed campsites. Exceptions for firewood retrieval can be established by creating temporary area designations. Game retrieval can be accomplished with wheeled hand carts or by foot.

Q3

Comment: Dispersed campsites are very desirable camp sites. Closure of these sorts of dispersed campsites would have a very significant impact on the public and we request that they remain open. If water quality concerns are the basis for these closures, then there are reasonable alternatives to mitigate these concerns, such as allowing only self-contained camping units to use them. Additionally, a sense of magnitude needs to be applied when assessing the water quality impacts from camping. For example, it appears that cattle grazing along the stream have a much greater impact than any camp site that we observed. Now don't get us wrong, we support all reasonable multiple-uses of the forest including cattle grazing. We are concerned that the incremental impacts on the public of closing dispersed camp sites are relatively significant while the real improvement to the environment will be relatively insignificant. Again, we request that all reasonable camp sites located along water courses remain open.

Response: The 300-foot rule provides numerous opportunities for establishing motorized accessible campsites off existing routes. The BLM strongly endorses the Leave No Trace principle of establishing dispersed campsites al least 200-feet from existing streams. However, except for within developed recreation sites and designated closed areas, all BLM land is open to dispersed camping.

Q4

Comment: If dispersed camp sites are to be closed based on water quality concerns, then we request that the decision include a water quality monitoring program to establish the baseline water quality prior to the closure of dispersed camp sites and continue that program after

the closure to establish whether any significant water quality improvement was realized. The decision should also include a provision to re-open closed camp sites when no significant improvement in water quality was realized by the closure.

Response: The BLM does not have funding or workforce available to monitor water quality changes associated specifically with closing dispersed campsites. The BLM notes that many variables contribute to water quality conditions within any particular water body and that in most cases the existing water quality is often a cumulative result of the effects from land uses and management in a watershed. Water quality monitoring in most cases would be providing information on water quality condition and trends in the context of these cumulative effects, rather than the effects of one particular action.

Q5

Comment: In general there is a very high demand for camp sites and especially dispersed camp sites. If a dispersed camp site is closed, then we request that the closure be mitigated by creation of new camp sites on at least a 1:1 basis in order to avoid a significant cumulative effect on the public of too few camp sites.

Response: This concern is compensated by the 300-foot provision that allows users the opportunity to drive off routes in order to establish suitable dispersed campsites.

Q6

Comment: Hiking, cross-country hiking and wilderness uses also cause trail impacts yet these impacts are seldom acknowledged. For example, the USDA FS Intermountain Research Station Research Paper INT-450 "Changes on Trails in the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness, Montana, 1978-89" and dated 1991 found that many trail segments changed markedly, depending on site and use.

Response: The BLM agrees that non-motorized user trails do create impacts to other resource values. However, the magnitude of impacts is generally lower than motorized trails given the reduced width of the trail bed, amount of soil displaced or channeled, higher life expectancy of water bars, reduced gradients, and the lower overall maintenance costs. In addition, noise-related impacts from non-motorized users are generally lower.

Q7

Comment: Why are there so many double-standards in the impact analyses and decision-making? If the issues surrounding motorized travel are significant enough to justify closures, then, in order to avoid introducing a bias to the evaluation and process the same issues and restrictions should also be applied to hiking, mountain climbing, cross-country hiking, wilderness users, etc.

Response: A primary goal of resource management is to allocate uses that are compatible with landscape settings, public demands, management capabilities and other important resource values and objectives. In some cases impacts associated with motorized travel pose greater resource concerns than non-motorized uses due to resource sensitivity levels such as vegetation, soil stability, water quality, wildlife security areas, riparian areas, route maintenance costs, and public safety.

Q8

Comment: The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) for motorized recreationists should consist of an equivalent number, type and quality of opportunities as compared to non-motorized recreationists including access to backcountry recreation areas, long distance back country discovery routes, back country airstrips and destinations including historic areas, lakes, vistas, streams and rivers.

Response: Under the Preferred Alternative, 88 percent of the BLM land within the Butte Field Office is proposed for varying motorized opportunities that range from Semi-Primitive to Rural type settings. This is described in Chapter 2 of the RMP in the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum section for Alternative B.

Q9

Comment: Issue 4: The vision is to provide a range of quality recreation opportunities. Closures of access to several routes and areas, is not providing a good mixture of quality opportunities.

Response: With this RMP revision, intensive trail riding opportunities would be retained for the three primary OHV areas in the Butte Field Office and motorized access is provided to major attraction areas. In some areas route closures (seasonal and yearlong) are proposed to protect resource values; enhance non-motorized opportunities; provide habitat security so big-game populations are more likely to remain on public lands during the hunting season; reduce maintenance costs and improve safety considerations. Given the varying proposed designations/allocations in Recreation Opportunity Spectrum settings, Visual Resource Management classes, Special Recreation Management Areas, developed vs. undeveloped recreation sites, OHV travel areas, route availability and Special Designations, the BLM believes that a broad range of quality opportunities would be provided under the Butte RMP revision.

Q10

Comment: The directives separating different visitor use referring to "user conflict" is out of touch with reality. Education and a directive to set expectations for multiple uses on the trail systems should a goal. Fair, diverse, and equitable solutions should be a goal. Rather than perpetuate the "user conflict' that the organized quiet trails community has advertised for the past 15 years. Rather than dispel the "conflict" scenario with

workable solutions, the current land management mind set seems to adopt the concept of separating uses, in essence, using area closure as a management technique.

The statement made on page 469; the "overall effect of reducing opportunities available for motorized recreation" would be "The quality of the experience may increase because separating uses would reduce conflicts between user groups" is unacceptable. The documentation showing any increase in quality is totally lacking. Report FHWA-PD-94-031, Conflicts on Multiple-Use Trails, 1994 has many management suggestions. The focus of the document is "how to improve trail sharing by avoiding and resolving conflicts. Quoted from the Executive Summary: "Conflict in outdoor recreation settings (such as trails) can best be defined as "goal interference attributed to another's behavior" (Jacob and Schreyer 1980, 369). As such, trail conflicts can and do occur among different user groups, among different users within the same user group, and as a result of factors not related to users ' trail activities at all. In fact, no actual contact among users need occur for conflict to be felt. Conflict has been found to be related to activity style (mode of travel, level of technology, environmental dominance, etc.), focus of trip, expectations, attitudes toward and perceptions of the environment, level of tolerance for others, and different norms held by different users. Conflict is often asymmetrical (i.e., one group resents another, but the reverse is not true)."

Response: Conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users have been identified as a major issue of concern by the public via both oral and written comments on the Butte RMP. Conflict concerns raised include noise intrusions, speed of travel, dust, safety, wildlife displacement, etc. These concerns are typically expressed more often by non-motorized users because their sensitivity to noise and higher speed uses is much greater. Multiple use trails do maximize opportunities for all users however; they do not ensure quality recreation experiences for those who seek quiet, natural settings.

In this planning effort, the Butte Field Office is committed to providing a diverse array of both opportunities and quality user experiences. In order to achieve this, allocations with regard to travel management, recreation settings (Recreation Opportunity Spectrum), special recreation management areas (SRMAs) and Visual Resource Management have been made so that visitors can identify areas that will meet their experience expectations.

Q11

Comment: The "displaced" motorized community is facing a situation of few or no places to go. If every land management plan simply "manages" motorized recreation by closure and displacement, the consequence will be catastrophic. A recently released Forest Service Study states that motorized recreation is in creasing, with 29.1% of Montana's general population describing themselves as OHV enthusiasts and use OHVs for recreation. This is a significant portion of the population whose desires for access to public lands are not being addressed. (See "Off-Highway Vehicle Recreation in the United States, Regions and States: A National Report from the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE), June 2005.

Response: Under the Butte RMP, intensive trail riding opportunities are retained for the three primary OHV areas in the Butte Field Office and an extensive network of primitive roads is available in the Limestone Hills area. The BLM recognizes the public demand for motorized travel opportunities and considered additional opportunities in this planning process.

Q12

Comment:

• Elimination of organized, motorized events (page 444) will not correct management problems (existing or perceived). 'Organized' group events have rules and influence over participants.

• Each event, motorized or non-motorized should be evaluated on its own merits with consideration for the location requested and the group/sponsor accountability. Again, multiple use rather than exclusive use.

• Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Association has held the annual State Ride in the Pipestone vicinity on 3 separate occasions. Members attending worked on trail projects, visited, rode, and enjoyed the opportunity. The event in 2006 was held under a USFS permit at $50. An event request for BLM permit was quoted at $4.00 per day per rider.

• In the summer of 1985, a National trials event was held in the Whitetail-Pipestone area. The event was a rare chance for Montana people to watch National riders compete. The area lends itself to a trials type of activity, whether on motorcycles or bicycles. Competitive events come in many sizes and types. This type of activity should not be severely limited.

Response: The Alternative B (Preferred Alternative) language regarding organized competitive motorized events has been changed in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. Existing management for the Whitetail-Pipestone travel planning area does allow for consideration (subject to case by case evaluation) for competitive and non-competitive uses in the Pipestone OHV recreation area. In addition to making this correction, the BLM has been modified Alternative B to allow for additional consideration of organized motorized competitive event opportunities outside Pipestone, subject to management restraints.

The BLM notes that BLM's Special Recreation Permit Administration policy and guidelines, including the fee schedule, vary from USFS management.

Q13

Comment: The Presidents Council on Environmental Quality just issued a statement that hunting opportunities must be increased on federally managed public land. CBU believes that the Butte RMP severely reduces hunting opportunities with the closure of multiple use trails. The closure of trails prevents direct game retrieval of harvested animals and a study conducted in 2004 by CBU showed limits on game retrieval negatively affected 85% of the respondents to the survey. CBU finds this information important when developing travel plans.

Responses: Hunting access and the quality of hunting experiences were issues that were considered during the development of alternatives and later analyzed in Chapter 4 under Recreation effects. These issues influenced many travel plan alternatives with regard to routes available to motorized uses. The primary considerations were route availability, seasons of use, elevational access, hunter disbursement opportunities, game retention on public lands, conflicts between non-motorized and motorized users and game retrieval.

Q14

Comment: One concern that was not expressed was the extended camping requests on a case by case basis in semi developed camping areas on the BLM public lands. Unfortunately, there seems to be no set criteria for issuing these permits and the decision is left up to the area manager.

Responses: In Chapter 2, under Recreation Management, Alternative B (Preferred Alternative) has been modified in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS to allow for variance consideration to the 14-day camping rule under stipulated conditions for appropriate uses in low impact locations throughout the Butte Field Office. The 14-day limit also corresponds to what is allowable for commercial outfitters without additional analysis. Preference will be given to developed recreation sites after the high use season (Memorial Day weekend to Labor Day weekend) that provide hardened camping units, toilet facilities and good access for non-commercial, extended hunting camps during the hunting season.

Q15

Comment: Recreation Management: Executive Order 13443, Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation, was enacted on August 17, 2007. The purpose of this order is to "direct Federal agencies that have programs and activities that have a measurable effect on public land management, outdoor recreation, and wildlife management, including the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture, to facilitate the expansion and enhancement of hunting opportunities and the management of game species and their habitat." It is our hope that this Order, together with recommendations called for in the Hunter Behavior Advisory Council Final Recommendations will be addressed within the RMP.

Responses: Hunting access and the quality of hunting experiences are issues that were considered during the development of alternatives and later analyzed in Chapter 4 under Recreation effects. These issues influenced many travel plan decisions with regard to routes available to motorized uses. The primary considerations were route availability, seasons of use, elevational access, hunter disbursement opportunities, game retention on public lands, conflicts between non-motorized and motorized users and game retrieval.

Q16

Comment: Under the discussion of the preferred alternative for Recreation Management you state your intent to issue an Annual Recreation Permit in order to receive a fair economic return from commercial fishing and floating outfitters/guides. Your discussion should mention the possibility of collaborative special recreation permitting as we have initiated on the Madison River with the Dillon Field Office. I would suggest that a collaborative approach would result in benefits that include less duplication of agency effort and one stop shopping for the commercial users. I would further recommend that this section be amended to recognize the value of partnering with FWP on permitting commercial uses, especially on the portion of the Big Hole River that falls within the Butte Resource Area.

Responses: The BLM fully agrees with this comment and will coordinate with FWP on all appropriate waterways where public river access sites are located. This management action is described in Chapter 2 of the RMP, in the Recreation Management section under Management Common to Action Alternatives. In addition, the Preferred Alternative has been modified in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS to include the following statement, "BLM would continue to coordinate with MFWP to enhance river/corridor land management and to develop a multi-agency fee system for the commercial uses of river access sites wherever feasible."

Q17

Comment: Scratchgravel Hills - The key concerns are public health & safety, limiting public nuisances and maximizing recreational opportunities. Regarding public health & safety, fire is the over-riding concern, followed by shooting (still a problem, but minor compared to what it used to be.) The major 'nuisances' now are ORV use and late night 'parties.' So I strongly urge you to 'close' the entire area to use after dark.

Response: The Preferred Alternative for the Helena Travel Planning Area has been modified in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS so that all interior roads in the Scratchgravel Hills would be closed to public motorized travel yearlong at the five proposed trailheads, with the excep-

tion of a few perimeter right-of-way routes and routes to private residents. This change will negate the need for the dusk to dawn closure since the use of motorized vehicles will not be allowed during any time of the day.

Q18

Comment: We suggest that management direction for recreation include specification that campground facilities and concentrated public recreational uses should be located away from ecologically sensitive areas, such as riparian areas and wetlands or areas with erosive soils as much as possible. We encourage restricting motorized access to camping sites in ecologically sensitive areas, and identifying and designating camping sites to avoid sensitive areas and/or to encourage camping or concentrated public use in areas that are more resilient and can more easily recover from impacts and/or accommodate public use with less impact. We believe recreational uses should be directed and encouraged toward more resilient areas where they would cause the least environmental harm. For example, including management direction language such as, "BLM will avoid locating campground facilities and concentrated public recreational use areas near ecologically sensitive areas, and will strive to locate such facilities in areas that are more resilient and can more easily recover from impacts and/or accommodate public use with less impacts."

Response: The BLM believes that the last two paragraphs in Chapter 2 of the RMP, Recreation Management, under Management Common to Action Alternatives (B, C, and D) addresses these concerns. Some limited flexibility was included so that existing and future fishing access sites (typically located in riparian areas) could continue or be considered, provided a high public need could be demonstrated. Prior to establishing any new site, BLM is required to complete a NEPA document for public review that analyzes all resource impacts including riparian and wetland areas.

Q19

Comment: AWL recommends the amendments to Alternative C:

- Change roads designated as "natural roads" to "semi-primitive modified" in the Elkhorns.
- Change roads designated as "roaded natural" to "semi-primitive modified" in the area west of Helena.
- Change roads designated as "roaded natural" to "semi-primitive modified" in the Highlands.

Designating these roads "semi-primitive modified" should enhance security and population connectivity.

Response: The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) system has established criteria for each setting that must be followed in order to maintain national integrity. This system assesses areas, not roads, and there are size guidelines that must be followed. The BLM believes that the preferred ROS settings are appropriate based on the characteristics of these areas within the Elkhorns.

Q20

Comment: I am thrilled that you are considering Wild and Scenic River status for the Missouri River 3.1 miles below Holter Dam. This is a very scenic, free flowing stretch of the Missouri and it deserves protection. And please designate it as non-motorized to provide a Quiet Trail on the river.

Response: The BLM corridor lands are designated Semi-primitive under the ROS system. No designations have been for the river or the adjacent Forest Service lands at this point for it is beyond the legal scope or decision making authority of this document. The Forest Service will classify its lands when it completes its pending study in their next Land Use Plan. River use issues such as motorized vs. non-motorized travel could be decided by Congress as part of its designation decision or more likely through a specific WSR management plan should the area be designated.

Q21

Comment: BLM needs to revisit and show valid reasons for the proposed reduction of boat-in camping opportunities. This will create more demand on the few camping areas you are designating. In turn this will create more user conflicts. The plan does not address this subject in detail as it should.

Response: The proposed decision is to designate specific sites that may be used for dispersed camping along the Sleeping Giant shoreline of Holter Lake/Missouri River and to evaluate the need to do likewise on Hauser Lake. Established recreation sites on these lakes would not be affected. The Butte Field Office recognizes that there is a high demand for dispersed boat-in camping sites on Holter Lake and that the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area is closed to camping. In addition the Forest Service is considering limiting camping to Coulter Campground only. BLM believes closure of some sites on Butte Field Office lands is necessary in order to protect important wildlife use areas (nesting sites, natural big-game watering sites, etc) cultural resources, riparian areas, etc. Chapter 4 of the RMP does address impacts related to implementing this action.

Q22

Comment: You do have a recreation plan that includes aircraft don't you? Since we lost the Ming Bar and Ox Bow landing strips along Holter Lake, a suitable replacement should be made available. Such a replacement area is available in Section 23, Township 14 N, Range 3 W. I challenge you to provide the pilots of Montana with the opportunity to create a new airstrip along Holter

Lake in Section 23. It is not wilderness and is surrounded on three sides with recreational activities.

Responses: Establishment of aircraft landing strips is beyond the scope of this planning document. Applications for these types of uses are handled through the Lands program. The land identified by the comment in Section 23 is not suitable for such a use since it is within the Sleeping Giant Wilderness Study Area and subject to the non-impairment criteria.

Q23

Comment: MWF supports nighttime travel closures in the Scratchgravel Hills trail system to discourage parties and vandalism. MWF requests some latitude for hunters who may still be afield after dark taking care of downed game or early entry into BLM lands to be afield before the sun rises. Take note that normal hunting hours are ½ hour before sunrise to ½ hour after sunrise and plan closed periods accordingly. Rather than a sunrise opening and sunset closure, perhaps adjust it to 1 hour previous to sunrise and 1 hour after sunset as deadlines which will have the exact same effect at controlling destructive activities.

Response: The Preferred Alternative for the Helena Travel Planning Area has been modified in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS so that all interior roads in the Scratchgravel Hills would be closed to public motorized travel yearlong at the five proposed trailheads, with the exception of a few perimeter right-of-way routes and routes to private residents. This modification is due to the high degree of user conflicts and illegal activity taking place in this area. This change will negate the need for the dusk to dawn closure since the use of motorized vehicles will not be allowed during any time of the day.

Q24

Comment: Visual and other impacts associated with motorized trails have been cited as significant negative impacts. Many non-motorized trails have environmental impacts similar to motorized trails. Existing wilderness and non-motorized areas include many trails that are visually and functionally similar to primitive motorized roads and motorized trails. For example, the Mount Helena trails, and the main trails into the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wilderness at Benchmark, Holland Lake, and Indian Meadows and the main trails into the Anaconda Pintler Wilderness are similar visually and functionally to many primitive motorized roads and motorized trails. Additionally, trails resulting from activities including wild animals and Native Americans have always been a part of the natural environment. We request that the existence of trails be considered part of the natural landscape and that the visual appearance of motorized trails and non-motorized trails be recognized as equal in most cases and that the environmental impacts of motorized and non-motorized trails be addressed fairly and equally.

Response: Visual impacts associated with motorized and non-motorized trails did not influence route restrictions or closures in the Butte RMP alternatives. All human created trails are considered unnatural intrusions on the landscape and the degree of their visual impact depends on the noticeable contrast a specific trail has on the affected landscape.

Riparian Habitat

R1

Comment: In the Elkhorn Mountains, re-establish proper riparian function through the use of various management techniques including but not limited to prescribed fire, mechanical treatment, and restoration of riparian areas (e.g. re-establish historic stream flow, encourage willow and aspen development, reduce head-cutting, and increase the area of wetland). All prescriptions should be based on an analysis of existing condition in order to ensure that site-specific techniques are used to achieve the desired effect of improving riparian function.

Response: The BLM agrees that riparian function should be maintained or improved throughout the Butte Field Office using a variety of management activities. The Vegetation Communities section (Management Common to All Alternatives - Riparian) in Chapter 2 of the RMP provides direction for riparian areas. Additional discussion on management of riparian habitats is found under Management Common to Action Alternatives in Chapter 2 (Vegetation Communities – Riparian) as well as under the different alternatives.

Site-specific riparian restoration projects will address the existing condition, the type and extent of management practices appropriate for that area, and effects from management actions.

R2

Comment: FWP has identified riparian and wetland areas as Tier I communities in our Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CFWCS). We also understand that BLM policy requires consideration of the habitats and species identified by the CFWCS that were approved by the USFWS in 2005. As such we strongly urge the BLM to consider the treatment of riparian areas with the greatest measure of protection that can be afforded. For example, protection from new roads due to mineral development as outlined in Alternative C, page 144, should be strongly considered. Similar such protections should be incorporated into any alternative selected in the ROD.

Response: The Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section of Chapter 2 (Management Common to Action Alternatives) states that all Tier I and Tier II species and ecotypes from Montana's Comprehensive Fish and Wildlife

Conservation Strategy would be considered "priority species and habitats" in the RMP. Priority species and ecotypes would be given additional consideration during site-specific project planning and/or project development. All riparian habitats in the Butte Field Office would be considered "priority habitats" including those identified in the Conservation Strategy (Big Hole and Jefferson Rivers) and, under Alternative B, would be given a substantial increase in protection and emphasis compared to the existing condition.

R3

Comment: Wetlands and riparian areas increase landscape and species diversity, support many species of western wildlife, and are critical to the protection of water quality and designated beneficial water uses. EPA considers the protection, improvement, and restoration of riparian areas and wetlands to be a high priority. Potential impacts on riparian areas and wetlands include: water quality, habitat for aquatic and terrestrial life, flood storage, ground water recharge, and discharge, sources of primary production, and recreation and aesthetics. The draft RMP/EIS says that 42 condition of riparian areas in the Decision Area (or 147 miles) are functioning-at-risk (FAR), and 12 percent (or 40 miles) are non-functioning (NF, page 224, 324), with only 43 percent of the riparian areas (or 150 miles) in proper functioning condition (PFC). This high percentage of BFO riparian areas that are not in proper functioning condition (56 percent of riparian areas), evidences the need to improve BLM BFO management to restore riparian areas and promote healthy aquatic ecosystems.

We support the RMP's stated goal of managing wetland and riparian area to move toward or remain in PFC, and support healthy, diverse, and abundant populations of fish and associated aquatic and riparian dependent species, (page 17), and the emphasis for protection and restoration of riparian areas (page 18), and the statement that, "authorized activities in riparian areas would strive to maintain and restore riparian structure and function , benefit fish and riparian-dependant species, enhance conservation of organisms that depend on the transition zone between upslope and the stream, and maintain or improve the connectivity of travel and dispersal corridors for terrestrial animals and plants" (page 20).

Response: As acknowledged in the Butte RMP, riparian conditions could be improved on BLM lands in some cases. In the Preferred Alternative, the BLM has proposed establishment of riparian management zones where the focus of management would be on improving riparian ecological conditions. The BLM believes this should increase the percentage of riparian areas in the Butte Field Office that would meet proper functioning condition (PFC). The BLM notes that in many cases where riparian areas do not meet PFC, the causes for this are beyond the BLM's control (such as county roads in valley bottoms, management activities on private lands, etc.).

R4

Comment: Since portions of the BFO jurisdictional area are located west of the continental divide (i.e. within the Clark Fork River drainage, and thus, Interior Columbia Basin), it is relevant to note that EPA evaluates land management activities proposed within the Interior Columbia Basin for consistency with the provisions of the Interagency Memorandum of Understanding between the Forest Service, BLM, EPA, USFWS, and NMFS for Forest Service implementation of the Interior Columbia Basin Strategy on National Forest lands (referred to as the ICB Strategy, http://www.icbemp.gov/html/icbstrat.pdf; and "A Framework for Incorporating the Aquatic and Riparian Habitat Component of the ICB Strategy into BLM and Forest Service Plan Revisions, " http://www.icbemp.gov/html/agripfrm7804.pdf).

Riparian Conservation Areas are an important management element in the ICB Strategy to maintain and restore the health of watersheds, riparian, and aquatic resources to sustain aquatic and terrestrial species and provide water of sufficient quality and quantity to support beneficial uses. It is important that proposed harvest be consistent with the riparian management objectives described in the ICB Strategy, which include:

- Achieve physical integrity of aquatic ecosystems;
- Provide an amount and distribution of woody debris sufficient to sustain physical and biological complexity;
- Provide adequate summer and winter thermal regulation;
- Provide appropriate amount s and distributions of source habitats for riparian- or wetland-dependent species; and
- Restore or maintain water quality and hydrologic processes.
- Restore or maintain naturally functioning riparian vegetation communities.

This gives further support for the need for riparian protections to be consistent with the ICB Strategy at least for BLM lands within the Interior Columbia Basin (west of the continental divide).

Response: Management proposed for the Butte Field Office in Chapter 2 is consistent with the ICB strategy. The Missoula Field Office manages 932 acres (0.75 percent) of Butte Field Office land within the Blackfoot watershed under an MOU with the BFO. These lands with their associated riparian areas and forests are managed under conservation plans to implement recovery of special status species including bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. The management and conservation plan for bull trout incorporates the principles of the Inland Native Fish Strategy and the riparian man-

agement objectives of the ICB strategy. The riparian reaches in this area are currently in Proper Functioning Condition (PFC).

The Butte Field Office manages 649 acres (0.12 percent of Butte Field Office total) in the American Gulch area within the Upper Clark Fork watershed. Approximately 232 of these acres are classified as forest types. Adjacent to the forested areas are two small riparian reaches totaling less than 1 mile with approximately 5 acres of associated riparian/wetland habitat. These areas are primarily grass/sedge/shrub communities with limited forest influence. In the Preferred Alternative for the Butte RMP, these riparian areas would be managed under the direction outlined for Riparian Management Zones in Chapter 2. The RMZs would meet the direction outlined in the ICB strategy. The two reaches in this area are currently in Functioning-At-Risk (FAR) condition with upward trends.

R5

Comment: Wetlands in particular have experienced severe cumulative losses nationally. Potential impacts on wetlands include: water quality, habitat for aquatic and terrestrial life, flood storage, ground water recharge and discharge, sources of primary production, and recreation and aesthetics. Executive Order 11990 requires that Federal Agencies "take action to minimize the destruction, loss, or degradation of wetlands, and to preserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of wetlands in carrying out the agency's responsibilities..." and agencies are further directed to "avoid undertaking or providing assistance for new construction located in wetlands unless the head of the agency finds

(1) that there is no practicable alternative to such construction, and

(2) that the proposed action includes all practicable measures to minimize harm to wetlands which may result from such use..."

In addition national wetlands policy has established an interim goal of No Overall Net Loss of the Nation's remaining wetlands, and a long-term goal of increasing quantity and quality of the Nation's wetlands resource base. The EIS should describe how the alternatives will meet the wetland protection goals in E.O. 11990.

We believe the RMP should also include direction to assure that project s tiered from the management plan adequately assess potential impacts on wetland functions; avoid or minimize wetlands impacts wherever possible; and compensate for unavoidable impacts through wetland restoration, creation, or enhancement. We encourage the BLM to assure that projects tiered to the RMP delineate and mark perennial seeps and springs and wetlands on maps and on the ground before disturbance so that disturbance to such areas can be avoided. Also, as noted in the discussion below on Travel Management and OHV Use, we recommend that management direction restrict OHV use on ecologically sensitive riparian areas and wetlands.

Response: The RMP recognizes that wetlands are ecologically important areas and takes several steps to ensure they are adequately considered when the RMP and subsequent project level planning are implemented. These areas are included in Riparian Management Zones (RMZ) where maintaining and/or restoring riparian and wetland functions is the primary emphasis. The RMP also implements a Riparian and Wetland Land Health Standard, which requires that these areas are either at Proper Functioning Condition (PFC) or making progress towards PFC. The special management area designation and standard would ensure that wetland areas are adequately considered when planning any action that could potentially impact these resources. This includes travel management and any ground disturbing activity. If wetlands (including seeps and springs) are found during implementation they will be protected under the wetland standard.

Chapter 2 of the RMP, under Vegetation Communities, Management Common to All Alternatives, Riparian subheading (Page 21 paragraph 1 right column in Draft RMP/EIS) clearly states the BLM's position with regard to existing regulations: "Riparian and wetland management would be consistent with all state and federal laws and regulations. Actions would be taken to cooperatively conserve riparian/wetland habitat, minimize the impacts, loss or degradation of wetlands, and preserve values served by floodplains where occurring on public land while reducing hazards to human safety." All state and federal laws and regulations include Executive Order 11990.

R6

Comment: We support the proposed goal for Livestock Grazing to manage for sustainable levels of grazing while meeting or progressing toward Land Health Standards, and to maintain, restore or enhance rangeland to meet Land Health Standards is good (page 17). We note that while the Land Health Standards (Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management Butte District Appendix E) are generally good and address stream channel hydrology, erosion/deposition, and stream bank vegetation, they do not appear to address aquatic habitat fragmentation and connectivity issues, nor do they fully address structure, composition, and functions of aquatic ecosystems. We recommend that additional management direction be considered to maintain and restore habitat connectivity for fisheries and other aquatic life (fish passage through culverts, etc.), and to maintain and restore structure, composition and functions of aquatic ecosystems within historic ranges of variability. For example we suggest adding goals and objectives as follows, "BLM will maintain and restore hydrologic connectivity within and

between watersheds to provide for aquatic habitat needs and connectivity of aquatic habitats."

"BLM will maintain and restore structure, composition, and functions of aquatic ecosystems within historic ranges of variability."

We also note the need to assure that the Land Health Standards are adequately monitored and enforced by BLM. It is not clear to us if there is adequate monitoring and oversight of implementation of these grazing Standards, and enforcement of grazing permits when Rangeland Health Standards and State Water Quality Standards are not being met. It would help if this were clarified in the final RMP/EIS.

Response: The distribution of Butte Field Office lands is highly fragmented such that it is not practical or implementable for the Butte RMP to include management direction associated with ensuring hydrologic and aquatic habitat connectivity. Management direction for Riparian Management Zones (Chapter 2, Vegetation Communities section, Alternative B – Preferred Alternative subsections, Riparian Management Zones) provides management direction that focuses on riparian values in the Butte Field Office. In addition to the requirement to meet or move toward meeting the Land Health Standards (Appendix F in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS), and the management direction for riparian vegetation in Chapter 2, specifically there are management prescriptions in the Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section which address aquatic habitat and ecosystem function.

The Bureau believes there is adequate monitoring and oversight of implementation of Land Health Standards. As of the end of fiscal year 2006, approximately 229,000 acres (90 percent) of a possible 253,000 acres of currently permitted allotments had been assessed for Land Health Standards. Of the acres assessed, 113,000 acres were meeting standards (49 percent), 80,000 acres were not meeting standards but appropriate action has been taken to ensure significant progress toward meeting standards and livestock is a significant factor (35 percent), 3,000 acres were not meeting standards and appropriate action had not been taken yet to ensure significant progress toward meeting standards and livestock is a significant factor (1 percent), and 34,000 acres were not meeting standards due to causes other than livestock grazing (15 percent). Furthermore, the Bureau regularly monitors allotments on a scheduled basis; i.e. higher priority allotments are monitored annually whereas lower priority allotments are monitored every 3 to 5 years.

R7

Comment: We support the greater distances for riparian protection as afforded in Alternative C than any other action alternative.

Response: The Butte Field Office believes the distances for riparian management afforded by the RMZs outlined under Alternative B in Chapter 2 are adequate to enhance and, where necessary, to protect riparian resources.

R8

Comment: Include commitments in the RMP to achieve proper functioning condition (PFC) or a strong upward trend in riparian conditions during the planning period. For example, to increase PFC riparian areas from 43 percent to 80 percent; decrease FAR from 42 percent to 20 percent; and NF from 12 percent to 0 percent. We also recommend establishing interim objectives to move currently functioning-at risk and non-functioning riparian areas to PFC during each 5 years of the planning period (this is important since 56 percent of the BFO riparian areas are not in PFC).

Response: Chapter 2 of the Butte RMP/EIS outlines BLM's goal to manage riparian and wetlands communities to move toward or remain in proper functioning condition to the extent practicable. Additionally, the Land Health Standards included in **Appendix F** in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS reiterate that all uses on public land should achieve or make significant progress toward having riparian and wetland areas in proper functioning condition. However, a review of Butte Field Office riparian reaches reveals that at least 40 percent of reaches in functional-at-risk (FAR) or non-functioning (NF) conditions are subject to factors beyond BLM's management control such as upstream dewatering, the location of highway and county roads, and historic or active mining operations. Furthermore, the fragmented ownership pattern of Bureau lands in the Butte Field Office also affects the ability to effect any significant management change on many of these reaches. Given these limitations, we have not established numerical thresholds over time for riparian improvement. The BLM, however, does work with other parties where feasible to resolve impacts or issues beyond our inherent control. BLM will also continue to monitor riparian and wetland conditions as part of land health assessment work and/or project implementation to ensure actions that BLM has and can take are resulting in moving toward or attaining proper functioning condition.

Social Conditions

S1

Comment: Dr. Martin E.P. Seligman has identified that learned helplessness or the belief that your actions will be futile is an epidemic affecting the nation (page 70, ISBN 0-671-01911-2). The evaluation of social issues must also include an evaluation of conditions contributing to learned helplessness including the lack of recognition and attention to the needs of motorized recreation-

ists and the significant social problems that result from these conditions.

Response: Potential effects to motorized users are discussed for each alternative in the travel management, recreation, social, and cumulative sections of Chapter 4. Many of these effects are social in nature. The effects for each of the individual travel planning areas are discussed in Environmental Consequences of Five Site-Specific Travel Plans in the latter part of Chapter 4. In addition, this plan incorporates by reference the Off-Highway Vehicle EIS and Plan Amendment for Montana, North Dakota and portions of South Dakota, which discusses off highway travel in great detail. The Preferred Alternative of this plan attempts to balance the needs of users with different goals.

S2

Comment: We are concerned about the protection of our western culture. This culture is characterized by access to the land for multiple-uses, friendliness, good neighborliness, tolerance, and sharing. Motorized access to the land provides opportunities for sightseeing, exploring, weekend drives and picnics, hiking, rock climbing, skiing, mountain biking, riding horses, camping, hunting, target shooting, fishing, viewing wildlife, OHV recreation, snowmobiling, accessing patented mining claims, gathering of firewood, rocks, natural foods, etc. and physically challenged visitors who must use wheeled vehicles to visit public lands. Both our observations and the Social Assessment for Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest found that these multiple-use visitors represent over 97% of the total visitors and that these visitors rely on motorized access. We are fortunate to have extensive public lands to support the western culture. While mechanized and multiple-use recreationists are tolerant of others as noted by the District Ranger, this does not mean that non-motorized interests should be allowed to dominate resource allocation decisions. We request that multiple-use management principles be used to protect western culture and values including access to the land for multiple-uses, friendliness, good neighborliness, tolerance and sharing.

Response: The activities described in this plan would not affect the western culture of the area as the BLM manages only 4.2 percent of the surface acres and access in the RMP Planning Area. The Preferred Alternative attempts to balance the needs of users with different goals.

S3

Comment: Motorized visitors have had to devote the majority of their available energy and time addressing local and national level travel management actions. The combination of these actions has created a significant cumulative negative effect on motorized visitors by consuming their free time and money, and significantly impacting their quality of life. Additionally, this cumulative negative effect has lead to the loss of opportunity for motorized recreationists to further the awareness and education of other motorized visitors in areas such as proper riding ethics, safety, and environmental protection. This cumulative negative effect has also reduced the opportunity for motorized recreationists to improve and maintain existing motorized opportunities. This cumulative negative impact includes reduced maintenance of trailheads and trails and reduced ability to undertake mitigation projects to protect the environment and public safety. We request that these cumulative negative effects be addressed in the analysis, preferred alternative, and decision-making.

Response: The BLM believes that the Chapter 4 sections Cumulative Effects on Social and Economic Conditions and Cumulative Effects of Travel Plans at the Planning Area Scale adequately address the cumulative effects associated with land management decisions related to motorized uses. All publics interested in the plan have the same opportunities to participate during the planning process.

S4

Comment: On page 480, volume 1, Social Conditions: “Other federal land management agencies in the Planning area are following a trend of reducing motorized access.” This statement is especially disconcerting. First, just because another agency is following the motorized closure trend does not make it right! Secondly, the cumulative effects of the motorized closure trend are being ignored by all agencies and this is very wrong and out of compliance with NEPA guidelines.

Response: The statement cited that other federal land management agencies are following a trend of reducing motorized access, is simply stating a trend. It is not endorsing the trend. The BLM believes that the Chapter 4 sections Cumulative Effects on Social and Economic Conditions and Cumulative Effects of Travel Plans at the Planning Area Scale adequately address the cumulative effects associated with land management decisions related to motorized uses.

S5

Comment: The evaluation must adequately consider the growing popularity of motorized recreation, the aging population, and their needs for motorized access, and the increased recreation time that the aging population has and looked forward to enjoying public lands in their motor vehicles.

Response: The available research suggests that participation in outdoor activities changes as people age. However, we have little understanding of how the leisure sequence will unfold at the "baby boomer" population ages. We do not know if former backpackers and/or hikers will become OHV users? Therefore it is unclear how the analysis should be adjusted to take the aging

population into consideration and no adjustments have been made.

S6

Comment: The negative social and economic impact experienced by motorized recreationists when motorized recreational opportunities do not exist in nearby public lands must be adequately evaluated and considered in the decision-making. This is especially significant now that fuel is over $2.00 per gallon. These impacts include the complete loss of recreational opportunities and the cost of having to travel farther and farther in search of fewer and fewer motorized recreational opportunities in times of increasing travel costs. For example, the lack of adequate OHV systems in the Helena National Forest requires us to travel at least 180 miles to adjacent national forests and many more miles to other states including Idaho and Utah. A 180 mile roundtrip costs at least 3 hours and $70 and that cost will increase substantially in the future. This added cost is a waste of time and energy resources and has not been adequately considered by the agency. Additionally, OHV routes in adjacent forests are being reduced at an alarming rate and are compounding the cost in time and energy even further. We request the evaluation of the economic cost of fewer motorized recreation opportunities on motorized recreationists and the significant cumulative negative effect of all travel management decisions that contribute to these social and economic impacts on motorized recreationists.

Response: Potential effects to motorized users are discussed for each alternative in the Travel Management, Recreation, Social, and Cumulative Effects sections of Chapter 4. Many of these effects are social in nature. In addition, effects for each of the individual travel planning areas are discussed in the Environmental Consequences of Five Site-Specific Travel Plans section in the latter part of Chapter 4. Since BLM manages only 4.2 percent of the surface acres and access in the Butte Planning Area, the extent of effects to motorized access is not great.

S7

Comment: Identification of "high social, cultural, or economic value" and "desired" levels are subjective and requires an assessment and balancing of public values. For example, a particular species may have a high social value to a particular segment of the population, but a low social value to another. Similarly, a species may have significant economic value for a particular use (trees cut for timber), but have high social value in the context of an entirely different use (trees observed by hikers). Furthermore, these conflicting values may require entirely different "desired" levels. Despite these extremely complex and subjective determinations, the proposed alternative provide virtually no explanation or guidance regarding how these levels and values were established. This extreme discretion is not allowed by the Organic Act, MUSYA, and NFMA, which require that forests be managed for a variety of uses.

Response: It is true that a particular species may have a high social and/or economic value to one segment of the population and little social and/or economic value to another segment. However, it is unclear what specific parts of the document the comment is referring to. The Organic Act, MUSYA and NFMA are Forest Service management requirements and do not apply to BLM, although we may have similar requirements. The social analysis contained in the Butte RMP/EIS identified impacts to groups that place value on certain resources or uses and how a general emphasis on one type of management or another would affect that group.

S8

Comment: Evaluations and decisions have been limited to natural resource management issues. Issues associated with motorized access and motorized recreation must be adequately addressed during the evaluation and decision-making including social, economic, and environmental justice issues. We are concerned that issues cannot be restricted to just those associated with natural resources. Access and recreation on public lands are essential needs of the public in Montana and we respectfully request that issues associated with the human environment be adequately addressed.

Response: Potential effects to the human environment are discussed for each alternative in the Travel Management, Economic, Recreation, Social, Environmental Justice and Cumulative Effects sections of Chapter 4. These sections comply with the guidance in BLM's Planning Handbook.

S9

Comment: Montana ranks very low for social conditions (44th state per Fordham Institute for Innovation in Social Policy,) and social issues are relevant to this action. Motorized recreation is a healthy social activity. These types of issues are associated with motorized access and recreation in the project area and these issues must be adequately addressed. Social issues must be adequately evaluated per the SOCIAL IMPACT ANALYSIS (SIA): PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES TRAINING COURSE (1900-03) (http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/nepa/includes/sia.html) and Environmental Justice issues per Departmental Regulation 5600-2. The evaluation and resulting decision must adequately consider and address all of the social and economic impacts associated with the significant motorized access and motorized recreational closures.

Response: The training course referred to in this comment is a Forest Service course. The social analysis contained in the Butte RMP/EIS complies with all BLM guidance for social assessment. The Environmental

Justice regulations are Department of Agriculture regulations and BLM is a part of the Department of Interior. The social analysis complies with Department of Interior guidance regarding Environmental Justice.

S10

Comment: In the past 30 years, the prevalence of overweight and obesity has increased sharply for both adults and children. Between 1976– 1980 and 2003–2004, the prevalence of obesity among adults aged 20–74 years increased from 15.0 percent to 32.9 percent. This increase is not limited to adults. Among young people, the prevalence of overweight increased from 5.0 percent to 13.9 percent for those aged 2–5 years, 6.5 percent to 18.8 percent for those aged 6–11 years, and 5.0 percent to 17.4 percent for those aged 12–19 years. (Reference: http://www.cdc.gov/ nccdphp/dnpa/obesity). This disturbing trend has prompted the President to promote a health and fitness initiative (http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/fitness/toc.html) and OHV recreation is an activity that meets the physical requirements of the President's fitness program. Recent research by the Ontario Federation of Trail Riders studied 12 off-road motorcycle enthusiasts and found that the physical exertion was on the order of 60 percent of VO2max, or 80 percent HRmax, or 9.3 METS which is slightly greater than jogging (Characterizing the Physical Demands of Off-Road Motorcycling, Executive Summary, Jamie Burr, Norman Gledhill, Veronica Jamnik, Ontario Federation of Trail Riders, February 2007, http://www.oftr.org/OFTR_Fitness_Study.pdf). While jogging is considered a very healthy activity it is not that appealing to everyone and OHVs are very popular form of recreation and physical workout. We request that the evaluation include adequate recognition of the serious physical fitness problem affecting all age groups of our population. We also ask that the tremendous value of OHV recreation for both mental and physical health benefits (equivalent to jogging) be recognized in the evaluation and used to justify an increase in motorized recreational opportunities.

Response: Addressing the obesity problem in the US population is outside the scope of the Butte RMP.

S11

Comment: We believe that federal environmental justice compliance requirements as initiated by Executive Order 12898 should be applied immediately to correct the disproportionately significant and adverse impacts that motorized recreationists have been subjected to. In order to accomplish this we request that this proposed action comply with U.S. Forest Service Departmental Regulation 5600-2 (http://www.usda.gov/ da/5600-2.pdf) including the DEFINITION of environmental justice provided therein. While some of the guidance published on environmental justice refers to specific minority and low income populations, the intent of the guidance must be taken in a broader sense as recommended by the EPA in order to avoid discrimination or unfair treatment of any significantly impacted sector of the public. For example, motorized recreationists working full-time plus jobs and simply looking to get away and recreate in the forest on the weekends are pitted against full-time paid representatives for non-motorized interests that are visiting agency staff on a regular basis during the week.

Response: The discussion that motorized recreationists should be identified as an environmental justice-covered population is not valid. Executive Order 12898 specifically deals with low-income and minority populations as the subject of this order. Other groups that would be affected are discussed in the Social Conditions sections of this document.

S12

Comment: We request that the proposed action comply with the Council on Environmental Quality (http://ceq.eh.doe.gov/nepa/regs/ej/justice.pdf) recommendations in order to correct the disproportionately significant and adverse impacts that motorized recreationists have been subjected to.

Response: The discussion that motorized recreationists should be identified as an environmental justice-covered population is not valid. Executive Order 12898 specifically deals with low-income and minority populations as the subject of this order. Other groups that would be affected are discussed in the Social Conditions sections of this document.

S13

Comment: The process should not allow well-organized and funded groups to take opportunities away from less-organized and funded individuals. This certainly is an environmental injustice. Moreover, the development of measures as required by environmental justice regulations to mitigate the disproportionately high and adverse impacts that have affected motorized recreationists have not happened. We request a corrective action and over-arching mitigation plan that will undo the significant impact that all cumulative motorized access and motorized recreational closures has had on motorized recreationists over the past 35 years. We also request a monitoring program be provided by an unbiased third-party to assure that this correction occurs within our lifetime.

Response: The BLM sees no indication that "well-organized and funded groups" are taking away opportunities from anyone with the Butte RMP revision. The point that motorized recreationists should be identified as an environmental justice-covered population is not valid. Executive Order 12898 specifically deals with low-income and minority populations as the subject of this order. The BLM does not agree that disproportio-

nately high adverse impacts would occur to motorized recreationists due to the Butte RMP revision. The BLM notes that there are three intensive OHV riding areas in the Butte Field Office that would be carried forward, and motorized uses will continue to be available in the site-specific travel planning areas being addressed with this RMP revision.

S14

Comment: Motorized recreationists cannot hold full-time jobs and, at the same time, be able to compete with the paid staff of non-motorized for recreational resources. Unfortunately, the agency has adopted the expectation that motorized recreationists must demonstrate a level of involvement equivalent to the involvement of paid staff from non-motorized groups in order to get a reasonable allocation of recreational resources. We have been told that we are politically insignificant by forest supervisors, district rangers, and BLM managers. There are many socio-economic and environmental justice issues associated with this setting if it is not adequately addressed by this action ranging from the allocation of near-term motorized recreational opportunities and the level of human health that it promotes to the ultimate elimination of motorized recreation from public land in the long-term.

Response: In association with the Butte RMP revision, the BLM has not told anyone in the public that they are politically insignificant. While the BLM is unclear about the meaning of some aspects of the comment, the suggestion that motorized recreationists should be identified as an environmental justice-covered population is not valid. Executive Order 12898 specifically deals with low-income and minority populations as the subject of this order. The BLM has not proposed to eliminate motorized recreation under any alternative with the Butte RMP.

S15

Comment: Any significant closing of motorized routes in the project area does not meet the basic requirement of the NEPA act of 1969 as stated in "Sec. 101 (b) (5) achieve a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities". High standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities should include recognizing and meeting the need for motorized access and recreation opportunities in the project area. All visitors should be expected to share the project area with others and to tolerate the presence of others. We have met very few hikers on the multiple-use roads and trails that we use. We have not perceived any problems with the non-motorized visitors that we have met. We ask that the analysis and decision-making be based on sharing and tolerance and to avoid unreasonable accommodation of visitors to public lands that are not reasonably tolerant and sharing.

Response: Potential effects to motorized users are discussed for each alternative in the Travel Management, Recreation, Social, and Cumulative Effects sections of Chapter 4. Many of these effects are social in nature. The Preferred Alternative does attempt to balance the needs of users with different goals.

S16

Comment: The environmental document should be an issue driven document as required under NEPA and the Council on Environmental Quality guidelines. The driving issue is the development of a reasonable travel management alternative that addresses the needs of the public. NEPA requires that agencies "Rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives, and for alternatives which were eliminated from detailed study, briefly discuss the reasons for their having been eliminated" [40 CFR 1502.14(a)]. We request that the environmental document adequately addresses the social, economic, and environmental justice issues associated with multiple-use access and motorized recreation. We request that the environmental document include a travel management alternative for the project area that adequately responds to these issues and the needs for multiple-use access and recreation.

Response: Potential effects to motorized users are discussed for each alternative in the Travel Management, Recreation, Social, and Cumulative Effects sections of Chapter 4. Many of these effects are social in nature. The Preferred Alternative does attempt to balance the needs of users with different goals.

S17

Comment: The use of the existing network of motorized roads and trails is part of local culture, pioneer spirit, heritage, and traditions. All of these values have ties to the land. Visitors to public lands benefit from all of the motorized roads and trails that exist today. The quality of life for the multiple-use public is being impacted by the cumulative negative effects of all motorized and access closures. The significant closing of motorized routes in the project area does not meet the basic requirement of the NEPA act of 1969 as stated in "Sec. 101 (b) (5) achieve a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities". We request that the criteria for high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities include the preservation of motorized roads and trails based on the recognition of the values (ties to the land) that they provide to local culture, pioneer spirit, heritage, traditions, and recreation.

Response: The activities described in this plan would not affect the western culture of the area as the BLM manages only 4.2 percent of the surface acres and access in the Butte RMP Planning Area. The Preferred Alterna-

tive attempts to balance the needs of users with different goals.

Soils

T1

Comment: Concerning soil erosion in burned areas, I am concerned with your statement on page 322 of the "draft" that Alternative B would have more soil impacts than Alternative C. I would suggest that you use BAER (Burned Area Emergency Restoration) funds, requested at the time of the wildfire, to provide for rehabilitation of the soils and vegetation. If erosion occurs later, rehabilitation funds should be requested through normal funding channels using wildlife, fisheries, and vegetation budget codes.

Response: Alternative B would require erosion control practices in burned areas where sedimentation had been documented to be definitively impacting streams; however, erosion control practices could be employed at other locations within a burned area. Erosion control practices applied to promote soil stability where needed is allowed under all alternatives as stated in Chapter 4, Soil Resources section under Effects Common to Action Alternatives. The intent of Alternative B would be to direct erosion control practices to sites that would produce the most benefit, first. That would be particularly important when large fires make broad-scale erosion control impracticable.

T2

Comment: The report "Erosional Impact of Hikers, Horses, Motorcycles, and Off-Road Bicycles on Mountain Trails in Montana", Mountain Research and Development, Volume 14, No, 1, and published in 1994 found that multiple comparison test results showed that horses and hikers made more sediment available than wheels, and this effect was most pronounced on pre-wetted trails.

The report "Keeping Visitors on the Right Track - Sign and Barrier Research at Mount Rainer", Park Science 14(4) published in 1994 found that off-trail hiking is a major source of impact that creates trails and erosion throughout the several thousand acres of sub-alpine meadows.

Response: The purpose of the RMP is to provide basic program direction, as described in Chapter 1, Purpose and Need. Assessing sedimentation resulting from specific activities would occur at the activity level, or when preparing project specific plans. Site-specific Best Management Practices (BMPs) would be implemented for surface disturbing activities to minimize sedimentation, to the extent possible. Site-specific soil impact assessments and BMPs would reflect local site characteristics, such as soil texture, slope, climate, natural disturbances, and other attributes. This land management ethic is in keeping with the findings of the authors of the study who note that their results are complicated and difficult to decipher. Although the authors note that it would be challenging to extrapolate their small sample plot studies to other locations and larger areas, their finding that wet soil is more susceptible to erosion does reflect the BLM's concern about soil erosion. This concern played a role in recommending some routes have seasonal travel restrictions.

T3

Comment: We support a stipulation [for oil and gas leasing] to control surface use on steep slopes (>30%) and unstable land areas with active mass soil movement.

We recommend that the proposed Alternative B stipulation (page 911) for controlled surface use on steep slopes and Boulder Batholith soils also include unstable land areas and areas with active mass soil movement in the stipulation.

Response: This stipulation has been revised in the Preferred Alternative to now read: "Prior to surface disturbance on areas of active mass wasting, unstable land areas, or slopes of greater than 20 percent on Boulder Batholith soils, or 30 percent on non-Boulder Batholith soils, an engineering/reclamation plan must be approved by the authorized officer."

Special Designations – Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

U1

Comment: Doesn't the ACEC process require more specific effort and documentation than what is offered here? The data or lack of data here does not seem to support the desire to further restrict these areas. There is some obvious "in office" work done, but there didn't appear to be much field/on the ground real data. The ACEC designation and such should be determined through a separate process and more appropriate process than this one.

Response: Section 202(c) (3) of FLPMA mandates the BLM to give priority to the designation and protection of ACECs in the development and revision of resource management plans. Evaluation of potential ACECs for the Butte RMP is documented in A**ppendix I** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS (formerly **Appendix H** in Draft RMP/EIS). For areas that meet relevance and importance criteria in 43 CFR 1610.7-2(a), BLM policy is to develop management direction to protect the relevant and important values in the resource management planning process. The BLM believes it has done so adequately for the Butte RMP as required under FLPMA and as per BLM policy.

U2

Comment: The Ringing Rocks proposed Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) is fully supported and will enhance economic development opportunities. Signage near the I-90 Pipestone interchange should be included as part of the plan.

Response: The BLM has included the Ringing Rocks potential ACEC in its Preferred Alternative for the Butte RMP. Decisions about signage are implementation decisions that would be considered after the final RMP decision on whether or not to designate this area as an ACEC.

U3

Comment: High Ore Creek ACEC: The High Ore BLM lands provide an important connection between the Continental Divide and both the Whitetail-Pipestone and the Bull Mountains and thus to connecting mountain ranges beyond such as the Tobacco Root Mountains and the Highland Mountains. This constitutes part of an important linkage route between the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem and the Yellowstone ecosystem; routes that are called for in the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan Supplement (March 2007). The Habitat Based Recovery Criteria for the Yellowstone Ecosystem calls for enhancing linkage connections between Yellowstone and other ecosystems. BLM lands throughout the Resource Management Area are essential to the continuity of linkage connectivity north to the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem and the Yellowstone Ecosystem.

Although the RMP does not call for ACEC designation for High Ore, MFWP believes that such designation would encourage management of the High Ore area to facilitate wildlife movement. Currently this area is severely impaired because it is lacking adequate travel management. Even Alternative C, the most restrictive travel management alternative still allows a major loop road through the area, and its implementation would require consistent, diligent management and enforcement to regain some of the linkage values that this area is capable of providing for wildlife. One of the Relevance Criteria listed in Appendix H with respect to ACEC designations states:

"Special management is typically needed when one of the following conditions is met:

Current management or management activities proposed in the alternative are not sufficient to protect the relevant and important resource values;

The needed management action is considered unusual or outside of the normal range of management practices typically used; or

The change in management is difficult to implement without ACEC designation." It appears all of the above criteria are being met, and particularly the first one.

Additionally, the Importance Criteria list 5 items, and at least the first 3 have merit with respect to High Ore and its value for wildlife movement through the landscape and linkage of ecosystems for threatened (grizzly bear, Canada lynx), endangered, or sensitive (wolverine) wildlife. All of these species occur within the planning area.

Response: The BLM is required to consider designation of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) as part of its land use planning process. This is done either during the development of the Draft RMP/EIS or as a plan amendment. In so doing, the BLM is required under 43 CFR 1610.7-2 to publish a notice in the Federal Register listing each proposed ACEC and specifying the resource use limitations, if any, which would occur if it were formally designated. Such a notice must provide a 60-day public comment period on each proposed ACEC designation.

During scoping for the Butte RMP, the Butte Field Office solicited ACEC nominations from the public so that review and consideration could take place during the preparation of the Draft RMP/EIS. The ACEC proposal in the comment identifying the particular relevant and important values was not submitted prior to the release of the Butte Draft RMP/EIS. Therefore, consideration of this ACEC at this time would require an additional Federal Register notice along with an additional 60-day public comment period, as well as a supplemental Draft RMP/EIS for public review. Due to the additional costs and timeframe extension for the Butte RMP associated with this requirement, this ACEC proposal will not be considered in the current Butte RMP revision. However, the BLM would encourage the commenter to resubmit this ACEC proposal for consideration after finalization of the Butte RMP. If designation of this potential ACEC is found to be warranted, it could be done with a RMP amendment.

U4

Comment: It is not clear why all potential ACECs would not be designated under Alternative D. If the relevant and important values for designating these areas currently exist, then management direction for Alternative D should protect them.

Response: Not all potential Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) would be designated under Alternative D because this alternative was developed with the intention of providing for fewer resource use restrictions than other alternatives.

U5

Comment: The Draft Plan is woefully inadequate in connection with its analysis of what is described as the Elkhorn Mountains nominated "Area of Critical Environmental Concern" (hereinafter "ACEC") particularly as it applies to the Limestone Hills area utilized by

Graymont and the Guard. Without any analysis of the practical realities in the Limestone Hills, Alternatives B and C include the entire area of the Limestone Hills in a proposed ACEC. The evaluation of the "relevance criteria" and the "importance criteria" contained in Appendix H appears to be focused on other areas of the Elkhorn Mountains and do not relate to the characteristics of the Limestone Hills. There is no evidence contained in the Draft Plan to support a designation of the Limestone Hills as an area where special management attention is required to prevent irreparable damage to fish and wildlife resources.

Response: Inclusion of the Limestone Hills area within the potential Elkhorn Mountains ACEC boundary was an inadvertent oversight in the Draft RMP/EIS. Under the Preferred Alternative (Alternative B) in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS, the potential ACEC boundary has been modified to exclude the Limestone Hills area.

U6

Comment: The BLM was a working partner in the Sage Grouse Strategy (MSGS), yet the protection and enhancements in the Butte RMP is no more developed or more proactive than the Dillon Office RMP was, and as such falls short of the proactive promises given in the MSGS. Given the tentative nature of Sage grouse existence within this management area, MWF advocates a reevaluation and consider protection afforded by an ACEC designation for remaining Sage grouse supporting habitat. They meet the ACEC requirement of being relevant, important, and in need of management especially in the Butte FO managed lands since opportunities to salvage a declining population are few in number and as such increase their intrinsic value.

Response: ACEC nominations were solicited during public scoping conducted for the Butte RMP. The BLM is required to consider designation of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) in draft RMPs or plan amendments. In so doing, the BLM is required under 43 CFR 1610.7-2 to publish such consideration in a notice in the Federal Register listing each proposed ACEC and specifying the resource use limitations, if any, which would occur if it were formally designated. Such a notice must provide a 60-day public comment period on each proposed ACEC designation. The ACEC proposal in the comment was not submitted prior to the release of the Butte Draft RMP/EIS. Therefore, consideration of this ACEC at this time would require an additional Federal Register notice along with an additional 60-day public comment period, as well as a supplemental Draft RMP/EIS for public review. Due to the additional costs and timeframe extension for the Butte RMP associated with this requirement, this ACEC proposal will not be considered in the current Butte RMP revision. However, the BLM would encourage the commenter to resubmit this ACEC proposal for consideration after finalization of the Butte RMP. If designation of this potential ACEC is found to be warranted, it could be done with a RMP amendment.

U7

Comment: BLM manages several parcels near Mullan Pass in Greenhorn and Skelly Creeks as well as other parcels near the Continental Divide near Marysville. These areas are within Canadian Lynx core areas identified in the Northern Rockies Lynx Planning Area map developed by the US Forest Service. Mullan Pass itself is located at the north end of a narrow pinch-point in a wildlife linkage area recognized by the US Forest Service (2007) as highly important for Canada lynx dispersal. Models completed by Craighead and Walker (2002) indicated that this area is one of the last, best linkage areas between the Northern Continental Divide ecosystem and the Elkhorn Mountain Range which has the potential to reconnect otherwise isolated populations of Canadian Lynx and other Special status species such as Grizzly Bears, and Wolverines to the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem. Recent winter tracking studies confirmed the usage of the general area within 2 miles of these named parcels. As development of nearby private lands increases, available land for wildlife purposes will accordingly be reduced. ACEC designation for these pieces categorically fit the stipulations of relevance, importance and need for management for the increased wildlife security in conjunction with Forest Service lands.

Response: ACEC nominations were solicited during public scoping conducted for the Butte RMP. The BLM is required to consider designation of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) in draft RMPs or plan amendments. In so doing, the BLM is required under 43 CFR 1610.7-2 to publish such consideration in a notice in the Federal Register listing each proposed ACEC and specifying the resource use limitations, if any, which would occur if it were formally designated. Such a notice must provide a 60-day public comment period on each proposed ACEC designation. The ACEC proposal in the comment was not submitted prior to the release of the Butte Draft RMP/EIS. Therefore, consideration of this ACEC at this time would require an additional Federal Register notice along with an additional 60-day public comment period, as well as a supplemental Draft RMP/EIS for public review. Due to the additional costs and timeframe extension for the Butte RMP associated with this requirement, this ACEC proposal will not be considered in the current Butte RMP revision. However, the BLM would encourage the commenter to resubmit this ACEC proposal for consideration after finalization of the Butte RMP. If designation of this potential ACEC is found to be warranted, it could be done with a RMP amendment.

U8

Comment: AWL suggests designating additional BLM lands adjacent to United States Forest Service lands as ACECs, especially those near the Mount Haggin Wildlife Management Area and Mullan Pass northwest of Helena, Montana. Inclusion of these areas as ACECs would prove highly advantageous to wildlife. Designating lands as ACEC near the Mount Haggin Wildlife Management Area provides special management for wildlife within a greater block of land. With continued residential expansion of Butte, the I-90 corridor to the north, and an already prolific off-road motorized system in place on nearby forest lands, it is important to create large, secure blocks of wildlife habitat. Recent work performed by AWL indicated that this area was key to future connectivity between the Northern Continental Divide and the Greater Yellowstone grizzly bear populations. This area was also identified as important for the dispersal of wolverines. Mullan Pass is at the north end of a narrow pinch-point in a wildlife linkage area recognized by the US Forest Service (2007) as important for Canada lynx dispersal. Models completed by Craighead and Walker (2002) indicated that this area is one of the last best linkage areas between the Northern Continental Divide ecosystem and the Elkhorns which ultimately could reconnect wildlife populations to the Greater Yellowstone ecosystem. Recent winter tracking studies in an area roughly two miles to the south further confirm that the area is used by ungulates along with both rare and common forest carnivores (Wild Things Unlimited, 2007). While the BLM land may not be along the Continental Divide, evidence from telemetry done on elk by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks indicates a seasonal movement up and downslope from the Continental Divide, and that this general area is important for wintering elk. Development of private lands around this area is increasing thus reducing overall available land for wildlife. Special designation of any land in and around this area as an ACEC would further increase wildlife security and preserve wildlife habitat is encouraged.

Response: ACEC nominations were solicited during public scoping conducted for the Butte RMP. The BLM is required to consider designation of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) in draft RMPs or plan amendments. In so doing, the BLM is required under 43 CFR 1610.7-2 to publish such consideration in a notice in the Federal Register listing each proposed ACEC and specifying the resource use limitations, if any, which would occur if it were formally designated. Such a notice must provide a 60-day public comment period on each proposed ACEC designation. The ACEC proposal in the comment was not submitted prior to the release of the Butte Draft RMP/EIS. Therefore, consideration of this ACEC at this time would require an additional Federal Register notice along with an additional 60-day public comment period, as well as a supplemental Draft RMP/EIS for public review. Due to the additional costs and timeframe extension for the Butte RMP associated with this requirement, this ACEC proposal will not be considered in the current Butte RMP revision. However, the BLM would encourage the commenter to resubmit this ACEC proposal for consideration after finalization of the Butte RMP. If designation of this potential ACEC is found to be warranted, it could be done with a RMP amendment.

U9

Comment: Referring specifically to Alternative B, the preferred alternative, the Elkhorn's potential ACEC is identified as containing 53,439 acres. In this alternative, the proposed ACEC would extend East to what appears to be Old Woman's Grave Road within the area of the proposed Guard withdrawal and would contain the entire extent of Graymont's mining area. Graymont submits that there is nothing within the "area" of the Limestone Hills that meets the definition of area of critical environmental concern. The analysis of both the relevance criteria and the importance criteria as contained in Appendix H and as utilized throughout the Draft Plan is inadequate because the unique characteristics and present uses of the Limestone Hills are not isolated and adequately examined. The Draft Plan must be modified prior to adoption by the BLM in order to eliminate any consideration of the Limestone Hills for ACEC designation.

With regard to Alternative B and the text beginning at page 70 regarding the Elkhorn's potential ACEC, the inconsistencies between the Guard's proposed withdrawal, Graymont's operations, and the proposed ACEC become apparent. None of the items mentioned under the heading "Recreation Opportunity Spectrum" appear to apply to the Limestone Hills. Under "Motorized Travel Management" none of the headings appear to apply to the Limestone Hills. Similarly, under the heading "Landownership/ Adjustment" the bullet points would appear to be inconsistent with both Graymont's operations and the content of the recently published LEIS. Again, none of the "major management categories" seems to apply to the Limestone Hills Area and therefore the area occupied by both Graymont's mining operations and the Guard's military activities should be eliminated from all alternatives of the Elkhorn Mountains proposed ACEC.

Response: In the Preferred Alternative of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS, the Elkhorns ACEC boundary has been modified to exclude the Montana Army National Guard proposed withdrawal, as well as the Graymont Mine operation, including the Graymont Mine proposed expansion.

U10

Comment: We also ask that in the final RMP, the Sleeping Giant ACEC be expanded so that it includes a portion of the proposed ACEC “Extension.” According to the draft RMP, the ACEC Extension was not carried

forward to the preferred alternative because it did not meet the relevance criteria. The roaded upper half of the ACEC Extension probably doesn't fully meet the relevance criteria, but the lower roadless half (Sheep Creek roadless area) is largely indistinguishable from the existing ACEC and therefore it needs to be evaluated separately. No alternative considered just the roadless portion of the Extended ACEC. The overall terrain of the Sheep Creek roadless area is highly natural and scenic views exist. It also provides habitat for many of the important wildlife species including elk, black bear, mule deer, furbearers, and a variety songbirds and raptors. Although sections of private land break up the ACEC, the landscape is clearly connected and it would be incongruous to manage this land in a manner which is incompatible with the existing ACEC. We ask that in the final RMP, you consider an ACEC Extension that analyzes just the Sheep Creek roadless area.

Response: ACEC nominations were solicited during public scoping conducted for the Butte RMP. The BLM is required to consider designation of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) in draft RMPs or plan amendments. In so doing, the BLM is required under 43 CFR 1610.7-2 to publish such consideration in a notice in the Federal Register listing each proposed ACEC and specifying the resource use limitations, if any, which would occur if it were formally designated. Such a notice must provide a 60-day public comment period on each proposed ACEC designation. The ACEC proposal in the comment was not submitted prior to the release of the Butte Draft RMP/EIS. Therefore, consideration of this ACEC at this time would require an additional Federal Register notice along with an additional 60-day public comment period, as well as a supplemental Draft RMP/EIS for public review. Due to the additional costs and timeframe extension for the Butte RMP associated with this requirement, this ACEC proposal will not be considered in the current Butte RMP revision. However, the BLM would encourage the commenter to resubmit this ACEC proposal for consideration after finalization of the Butte RMP. If designation of this potential ACEC is found to be warranted, it could be done with a RMP amendment.

U11

Comment: Elkhorn Mountains ACEC: MFWP endorses the proposed the ACEC designations for the Elkhorn Mountains as described in Alternative C, rather than Alternative B, primarily because the wildlife linkage values the additional lands on the east side of the Elkhorns provides to the Big Belt Mountains. Appendix H recognizes this linkage (p. 778).

Response: The BLM has modified the boundaries of the Elkhorns potential ACEC in the Preferred Alternative (Alternative B). This boundary now excludes the Graymont Mine permitted area as well as the currently proposed expansion boundaries. Also, the Montana Army National Guard proposed withdrawal area is now fully excluded. The recently acquired Iron Mask property has been included in the Preferred Alternative.

U12

Comment: Sleeping Giant ACEC Extension: Appendix H indicates that the Sleeping Giant ACEC extension does not have any of the wildlife values exemplified by the primary ACEC area, but we do not agree. We think all species that occur within the ACEC area also occur within the proposed extension, and together, both areas constitute a vital linkage for wildlife between ecosystems and island mountain ranges. For these reasons FWP recommends that the extension is included.

Response: The proposed Sleeping Giant ACEC extension as described in **Appendix H** (now **Appendix I** in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS) includes areas that are substantially roaded, including being bisected by Interstate 15, where wildlife habitat is reduced in value compared to that within the existing ACEC. In recent travel planning efforts in the area immediately east of I-15, the BLM acknowledged this locality's importance as a wildlife linkage area and reduced open road densities to some degree during that travel planning effort (Sleeping Giant Travel Plan). Some portions of the proposed ACEC extension do have unroaded characteristics and may provide habitat of similar value to that in the existing ACEC. However, the BLM continues to believe this proposed extension on the whole does not meet relevance criteria for wildlife values.

U13

Comment: The area which was a major corridor for Native Americans for millennia has high historic, recreation, wildlife, and scenic value. The "Bears Tooth" (Sleeping Giant) was one of the few landmarks Lewis and Clark knew about as they planned their expedition through Montana. Members of the Corps of Discovery explored and camped below the Sleeping Giant. They were also awed by the rising cliffs and steep ramparts encountered as they traveled up the Missouri through the Gates of the Mountains – a name given to the area by Lewis and Clark.

The area is home to a spectacular array of wildlife: elk, mule deer, antelope, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, black bear, and grouse. Resident and migrating raptors also inhabit the area and the southern portion of the Gates addition provides critical winter range for elk, turkey, and whitetail deer.

This unique treasure of the big sky state is a source of pride for our region and our family. It seems everyone who visits Helena has the Giant pointed out to them. Folks who have had the experience of hiking to the 'top of the nose' further understand the significance of this landmark. The adjoining lands are largely the same

today as they were when our forbearers, the Synness family, arrived to homestead the area in the 1880s.

Most folks we talk to recognize that Montana is changing very quickly. In order to preserve the existing historic landscape, wildlife corridor and conservation values we support expansion of the Sleeping Giant Area of Critical Environmental Concern

Response: ACEC nominations were solicited during public scoping conducted for the Butte RMP. This comment lacks specificity in its geographical description of the suggested expansion of the Sleeping Giant ACEC. The BLM would encourage the commenter to more specifically describe the area in question for ACEC expansion (providing a detailed map is recommended) and resubmit this proposal for consideration after finalization of the Butte RMP. If designation of this potential ACEC is found to be warranted, it could be done with a RMP amendment.

Special Designations – National Trails/Wild and Scenic Rivers/ Wilderness Study Areas

V1

Comment: The management consideration of User Conflicts is puzzling w/respect to the Continental Divide Trail. Alternative A notes the winter user conflicts on the Divide between motorized and non-motorized uses. However, Alts B and C note that rerouting the Continental Divide Trail would actually enhance conflicts. Does this mean both Alts B and C would result in closure of the existing Trail to snow machine use?

Response: The Continental Divide National Trail segment above Marysville follows a secondary road along the north –south ridge that would remain open to motorized wheeled vehicles yearlong and snowmobiles from December 2 to May 15 (snow conditions permitting). Coordination efforts are currently underway with the Forest Service to identify options for re-routing this trail to enhance user experiences, reduce acquisition costs, and remove conflicts associated with the motorized road. See Volume 1, Chapter 2, Special Designations, National Trails, Management Common to Action Alternatives (B, C, and D) in the RMP.

V2

Comment: Wild and Scenic Rivers: Guidelines for inclusion of river segments in National Wild and Scenic River System are not arbitrary or capricious, as is suggested by this proposed plan when it claims a river's listing would depend on the alternative selected. Because suitability studies have already been conducted, the BLM should be able to conclude at this time if a particular river segment is currently eligible and suitable. Thus, designation is not dependent on the actions or alternatives proposed by this plan. Furthermore, actions should not be included in this plan, across all alternatives that would degrade currently eligible and suitable river segments.

Response: BLM policy is to evaluate river segments within the resource management planning process to determine eligibility, tentative classification, protection requirements, and suitability under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The Wild and Scenic River Suitability Study for the river segments being considered in the Butte RMP revision was developed as part of this RMP revision. The RMP process is used to identify suitable river segments that the BLM recommends to Congress for designation as Wild and Scenic Rivers. BLM Manual 8351, Wild and Scenic Rivers, (page 0.33c) stipulates that one RMP alternative shall provide for designation of all eligible river segments. Another alternative shall provide for no WSR designations. The No Action alternative defers suitability determinations and provides for on-going management to protect all eligible segments. The Record of Decision for the RMP will identify the suitable segments (if any), whose Outstandingly Remarkable Values would then be protected indefinitely under the RMP until Congress acts on the BLM's recommendations. Only Congress can actually designate river segments.

V3

Comment: I agree with many closures; however the proposed Missouri river closures to motor boats from Hauser dam to Holter Lake I don't agree with. Reasons being is those water flows are regulated by dams which were already mentioned in the Helena IR. That is such a small stretch of river that closing it down to boats wouldn't have a big impact on the environment especially with lakes on each end. There are also many residents in the American Bar subdivision that use boats upstream. I myself also own a jet boat and I enjoy that area on a regular basis. That small stretch of river is the main reason that I purchased that boat. I know that there is controversy and complaints about speeding boats in that area and I have witnessed this myself and have also turned in several of individuals to the local game wardens for not following the no-wake law from Beaver Creek up to Hauser dam which is about 1.5 miles. I will agree that a sign should be put up as a reminder to the boaters who don't read the regulations, however in the end it is there responsibility. I agree that certain areas need protection but for such a small section between two large lakes that are regulated by dams, have old dam structure everywhere on the banks and in the water, and permanent houses built next door to each other, doesn't sound all that wild and scenic.

Responses: No designations will be made by the Butte RMP for the river or the adjacent Forest Service lands. The Forest Service will study its lands for suitability in their next Land Use Plan. River use issues such as motorized vs. non-motorized travel could be decided by Congress as part of its designation decision or more likely

through a specific Wild and Scenic River management plan should the area be designated. Closure of motor boat uses on the Missouri River immediately below Hauser Dam within the preliminarily suitable Wild & Scenic River segment is not proposed at this time and is beyond the scope of this RMP Revision.

V4

Comment: Consideration is being given to declaring the stretch of Missouri River between the Hauser Dam and the Gates of the Mountains be designated a wild and scenic river status thus outlawing any type of motor use on the river. This is a very popular area for local fishermen with boats and the older I get the more difficult it is for me to hike long distances to enjoy that portion of the river. Thus, taking a boat there is the only viable means for me to access that area. The area, although very beautiful, is hardly wild in that there are numerous residences in the lower section of the river and numerous old structures closer to Hauser Dam, including the power plant and residences just below the dam. Also with no viable means to launch a drift boat in that area, it would become strictly a walk in area except for the access at Nelson. I agree with maintaining our wilderness areas but this just isn't one of them so please do not restrict motor boat access to that area.

Responses: The Butte Field Office has found 3.1 miles of the Missouri River below Hauser Dam downstream to the end of the BLM boundary in T12N, R3W, Section 13 to be preliminarily suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. No designations have been made for the river or the adjacent Forest Service lands at this point for it is beyond the legal scope or decision making authority of this document. The Forest Service will study its lands for suitability in their next Land Use Plan. River use issues such as motorized vs. non-motorized travel could be decided by Congress as part of its designation decision or more likely through a specific Wild and Scenic River management plan should the area be designated. Closure of motor boat uses on the Missouri River immediately below Hauser Dam within the preliminarily suitable Wild & Scenic River segment is not proposed at this time and is beyond the scope of this RMP Revision.

V5

Comment: EPA encourages the BLM to also consider recommending the Upper Big Hole River and Moose Creek for wild and scenic river designations. The information presented in the Wild and Scenic Rivers Suitability Study (Appendix I) appears to show that these river segments possess eligible characteristics for wild and scenic river designation, and we believe that such designation would promote improved long-term protection of these river segments.

Response: The BLM considers these river segments eligible for Wild and Scenic River designation. However the BLM continues to consider these rivers not ***suitable*** for designation based on management difficulties and challenges associated with suitability criteria described in **Appendix I** of the Draft RMP/EIS (**Appendix J** in Proposed RMP/EIS).

V6

Comment: Segment between Upper Holter and Lower Holter Lake: MWA urges the BLM to also assess the segment of river between Upper Holter Lake, through the Gates of the Mountains, to lower Holter Lake for inclusion in the NWSRS. This segment of the Missouri River deserves careful consideration because it:

(1) is "free-flowing" as that term is defined and understood in the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act ("WSRA") and Interagency Guidelines (47 Fed. Reg. 39455); and

(2) contains many of the same, if not more, outstandingly remarkable values than the segment below Hauser.

Indeed, this segment of the Missouri River is bounded almost entirely by public lands, most of which already have a protective designation, including the Sleeping Giant Wilderness Study Area, Sleeping Giant Area of Critical Environmental Concern, the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area, and the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness Area. Most of the river corridor remains primitive with little evidence of human activity. The only exceptions are the campgrounds in the Gates of the Mountains, and some developed cabins on the west side of Oxbow Bend, accessible only by water, on the boundary of Sleeping Giant WSA. MWA therefore asks that BLM carefully study whether this segment is both "eligible" and "suitable" for inclusion in the NWSRS.

Free-Flowing: While it is true that the Missouri River is controlled and the dam below Holter Lake affects the natural "flow" of the river (just as it does on other segments of the river including the Wild and Scenic segment between Fort Benton and Kipp Landing), such control does not affect the segment's qualification for inclusion in the NWSRS. The segment still qualifies as "free flowing" under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA) and Interagency Guidelines. The definition of "free- flowing" in section 16 of the WSRA (16 USC 1286) explicitly states that a river segment qualifies as free-flowing flows between large impoundments. There are no specific requirements in the Act concerning the length or flow of an eligible river segment. In fact, a river need not even be "boatable or floatable" in order to be eligible. The eligibility criteria only requires that a river segment be of sufficient length if, when managed as a wild, scenic, or recreational river area, the outstandingly remarkable values are protected. As such, we ask that the BLM carefully review and follow the interagency guidelines and manual in determining whether this segment of river is free-flowing.

Data obtained from the U.S. Geological Survey ("USGS") ("Real-Time Data for Montana: Streamflow"

web site) indicates that the river has a substantial flow. USGS gauges located below Hauser Dam show that the long-term median flow is 3,050 cfs and the gauge located below Holter Dam shows that the long-term median flow is 3,910 cfs. While there are no other water gauges between these two locations, according to Larry Dolan, a hydrologist at the Water Management Bureau, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, the river flow in between the two gauges should be similar to the flow recorded at the two gauges. According to his calculations, a typical discharge for the Missouri River below Hauser Dam might be about 4,000 cubic feet per second (cfs). All of the water that flows out of Hauser Dam must ultimately moves downstream. Discharge is a product of the channel area times velocity. Dividing the 4,000 cfs flow rate by the above computed X-sectional area results in an average water velocity through the section of 0.32 feet per second (4,000 ft^3/sec /12,500 ft^2). This is a slow velocity compared to what might typically occur prior to the construction of the dams, but the important point is that there is a flow in this segment of the river between Upper and lower Holter Lake.

Outstandingly Remarkable Values: MWA believes that this segment of the Missouri River includes four outstandingly remarkable values: scenic, historic/cultural, recreation, and wildlife. As outlined below, both individually and in the aggregate, these values make this river segment an exceptional candidate for consideration as a Wild and Scenic River. Designating this segment of the Missouri as Wild and Scenic would help ensure that river corridor's outstandingly remarkable values remain special and that the future management of the river corridor will be compatible with the adjacent protective designations.

Scenic Values: The Sleeping Giant is a BLM Wilderness Study Area which was studied and recommended for Wilderness in 1991. The 1991 BLM Wilderness Study Report describes the Sleeping Giant WSA as "providing outstanding scenic values within the unit. Offsite vistas of the surrounding landscape are outstanding." Lewis also named the Gates of the Mountains, another widely recognized landmark along the Lewis and Clark Historic Trail. In mid-July, 1805, when Captain Meriwether Lewis first viewed the Gates of the Mountains, he described the area in his journal as follows:

"We entered the most remarkable cliffs that we have yet seen. These cliffs rise from the water's edge on either side perpendicularly to the height of 1,200 feet. Solid rock for the distance of 5.75 miles." This view is still available for today and it looks virtually the same as when Capt. Lewis and his Corps of Discovery first laid eyes upon it. The canyon area through the Gates of the Mountains is only accessible by water or traveling more than a dozen miles over trails through the Helena National Forest and Gates of the Mountains Wilderness Area. A pamphlet describing the boat tour of the Gates of the Mountains describes the tour's main attraction as the "inexhaustible scenery – wooded slopes, rugged rock formations, and the placid beauty of the timeless Missouri." Across the river from the Sleeping Giant is the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area which is managed by the State of Montana. In addition to providing valuable wildlife habitat, this primitive area provides a scenic backdrop comparable to the Sleeping Giant WSA.

Historic/Cultural: Along the shoreline, Indian pictographs painted on the rock wall are visible, indicating that indigenous people lived in the area and used the river long before the arrival of the first white explorers. Two sons of Chevalier Vendrye, the French explorer, for instance, passed through the area known as the Gates of the Mountains as early as 1742. They were probably the first white men to gaze upon its precipices. However, the Corps of Discovery explored and camped below the Sleeping Giant when they traveled through Montana in 1805 and Lewis left a record of his passage through the Sleeping Giant/Gates area. This segment of the river is one of the few remaining sections of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail that has changed very little since 1805-06. Evidence of the early white settlers also exists. In the Sleeping Giant Wilderness Study Area there are several deteriorating structures near the river which provide a glimpse into their lifestyles.

The area also features more contemporary history. Mann Gulch in the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness is the site of the raging forest fire that killed 13 smokejumpers 50 years ago. The tragedy was the main subject matter of Norman Maclean's book "Young Men and Fire." A popular guided boat tour provides interpretation of historic and cultural events in the area.

Wildlife: A diversity of important wildlife species live in the Sleeping Giant WSA, including a thriving population of mountain goats that occupies the high outcroppings. Other common species include elk, black bear, bighorn sheep, mule deer, osprey, and golden eagles. Across the river from the Sleeping Giant WSA is the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area, the purpose of which is to provide wildlife habitat for a variety of species, especially elk. All of Montana's big game animals live on or visit the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area at various times. Upland game birds, songbirds, raptors, furbearers and numerous small mammals can be found through much of the year. In the Gates of the Mountains, Bighorn sheep and Mountain Goats scamper in the rocks high above the water. Ospreys, eagles (bald and golden), vultures, and falcons (peregrine and prairie) still soar on the updrafts. The canyon is also home to otters, deer, squirrels, ermine, beaver, mountain lions, black bears, and other wild creatures. The life list for bird species is over 120.

Recreation: High quality recreation opportunities associated with the river corridor include bird watching, hunting, hiking, horseback riding, picnicking, swimming, tent camping, wildlife viewing and fishing. Hunt-

ing for big game and grouse accounts for about half of the use of the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness, along with hiking, backpacking, and horseback riding. Wildflowers are also considered a star attraction.

A stated purpose of the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area is to provide recreational opportunities. It is a popular area for big game hunting and wildlife viewing. The Sleeping Giant also provides a non-motorized backcountry hunting experience. The river provides an important means for the public to access the surrounding protected public lands. It is frequently used to access or return from the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness trail system and it provides the only public access to the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness Study Area. The river also provides access to the canyon's few campgrounds and picnic sites. This segment of the river corridor attracts people from across the nation because of its unique scenic beauty and the historic, wildlife, and recreation values associated with the river corridor. It would make a strong candidate for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System.

Response: While the BLM agrees with the commenter that the area in question has many values as described in the comment, the BLM ultimately considers the area from Upper Holter Lake down to Holter Lake to be impounded. The BLM acknowledges that water is certainly moving through the impounded portion of the Missouri River in this area as described in the comment, but such is the nature of many impounded lakes and reservoirs. The BLM continues to consider this area ineligible for Wild and Scenic River designation due to the impoundment at Holter Dam. The BLM notes that existing management of the Sleeping Giant WSA combined with management of the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness Area provide for protective management of the values described in the comment.

V7

Comment: Based on the public concern for protecting the primitive values of the area that has arisen during past studies of the Sleeping Giant area, many local citizens have expressed support for a Wilderness bill to finally provide this area with permanent Wilderness protection. In order to preserve these Wilderness Study Areas so that they can be considered for Wilderness protection, I urge the BLM to retain the current non-motorized character of these areas in the updated Resource Management Plan. To further preserve the primitive qualities of this area, I urge the BLM to provide the same protection for the roadless area southwest of the Sheep Creek Area and to recommend Wild and Scenic River status to all eligible nearby sections of the Missouri River.

Response: The BLM is required to continue managing for wilderness values in the Sleeping Giant area (Sheep Creek and Sleeping Giant WSAs) until Congress decides whether or not to designate these areas as wilderness. The roadless area southwest of Sheep Creek is not contiguous with the Sheep Creek Wilderness Study Area, nor does it meet minimum size criteria of 5,000 acres to potentially stand on its own as a Wilderness Study Area. While the Butte RMP revision will retain the non-motorized character of these areas, the BLM cannot recommend any additional Wilderness Study Areas in this RMP revision. The BLM has identified the segment of the Missouri River from below Hauser Dam to the upper end of Upper Holter Lake as suitable for Wild and Scenic designation, pending Forest Service concurrence.

V8

Comment: BLM presented only proposals for more road closures and wilderness study areas with no public access.

Response: Chapter 2 of the RMP presents proposed management for a wide range of resources and resource uses. While some road closures are proposed under various alternatives, and management of existing Wilderness Study Areas is addressed, there are no proposals for additional Wilderness Study Areas in the Butte RMP.

V9

Comment: Issue 5: Protect WSAs: The BLM IMP, H8550-1 JULY 1995, does not preclude motorized use in the area. Any road/trail in the area that is in use now could be recovered to wilderness character if and when Congress decides to designate them as wilderness.

Response: The BLM agrees that vehicle travelways existing during the intensive inventories and establishment of the wilderness study area are available for continued motorized use unless specific land use travel plan decisions have been completed since that time. There are no open vehicle ways in the six existing WSAs except for several routes in the Black Sage WSA that lack public access due to land ownership patterns, and one route through a corner of the Humbug Spires WSA. No new trails are permitted in existing WSAs unless they are needed to meet minimum necessities for public health and safety and to protect wilderness resource values.

V10

Comment: The national BLM policy bans bicycles from Wilderness Study Areas. This is wrong as a blanket policy, and should be applied selectively. I saw no WSA area in the Butte District of concern for bike riders, but I could be wrong.

Response: There is no national BLM policy that bans bicycles from Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs). Bicycle use in WSAs is limited to motorized vehicle ways existing at the time of inventory. There are no open vehicle ways in the six existing WSAs except for several routes in the Black Sage WSA that lack public access due to land ownership patterns, and one route through a corner of the Humbug Spires WSA.

V11

Comment: After watching what happens to the land, the air, the wildlife, the burden on taxpayers, as well as firefighters, I believe the "let-it-burn" policy for the wilderness areas, is insanity. Our family has decided we have no choice but to oppose the proposed wilderness designation for the Sleeping Giant. The Sleeping Giant is now categorized as ACEC (Area of Critical Environmental Concern) which fully protects its ecosystems and long term ACEC values (naturalness, primitive and unconfined forms of recreation, solitude experiences, visual resources, native wildlife, and cultural resources).

Response: The BLM has no authority to designate wilderness areas. Only Congress can designate wilderness. The BLM is required to continue managing Wilderness Study Areas (such as Sleeping Giant) so as not to preclude wilderness designation until such time as Congress decides to either designate them as wilderness, or release them from further wilderness consideration.

V12

Comment: Wilderness Study Areas: management for wilderness character would be enhanced through Alternative C in that stipulations would benefit wildlife. MFWP endorses Alternative C for all four Wilderness Study Areas: Sleeping Giant, Sheep Creek, Humbug Spires, and Elkhorns Tack-on.

Response: Management of the four identified WSAs would be same under both the Preferred Alternative and Alternative C. Management for these WSAs is presented in Chapter 2, under sections identified as Wilderness Study Areas and ACECs. These WSAs under both alternatives would be managed under the Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands under Wilderness Review until Congress decides to either designate them as wilderness or release them from further wilderness review. These four areas would be managed as ACECs should Congress release them from further wilderness review. ACEC management for these four WSAs does not change under either Alternative.

Special Status Species

W1

Comment: Thank you for providing information on the Special Status species in the BFO area (Table 3-15, pages 241-245). We are pleased that RMP management direction for Special Status Species promotes T & E and sensitive species protection and recovery (pages 40-41). If proposed management direction could affect threatened or endangered species, the final EIS should include the Biological Assessment and the associated USFWS Biological Opinion or formal concurrence for the following reasons:

(1) NEPA requires public involvement and full disclosure of all issues upon which a decision is to be made;

(2) The CEQ Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA strongly encourage the integration of NEPA requirements with other environmental review and consultation requirements so that all such procedures run concurrently rather than consecutively (40 CFR 1500.2(c) and 1502.25); and

(3) The Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation process can result in the identification of reasonable and prudent alternatives to preclude jeopardy, and mandated reasonable and prudent measures to reduce incidental take. These can affect project implementation.

EPA recommends that the final EIS and Record of Decision not be completed prior to the completion of ESA consultation. If the consultation process is treated as a separate process, the Agencies risk USFWS identification of additional significant impacts, new mitigation measures, or changes to the preferred alternative. If these changes have not been evaluated in the final EIS, a supplement to the EIS would be warranted.

Response: The BLM has worked closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service throughout the development of the Butte RMP. As discussed in the Formal Consultation Section of Chapter 5, a representative from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was a member of the planning team during development of the plan to adequately address and discuss the effects of management actions on listed and proposed species and their critical habitats. Early drafts of alternatives were also provided to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for discussion and review. A draft biological assessment that evaluates the impacts of the preferred alternative on federal threatened and endangered species was submitted concurrently with the public release of the Draft RMP to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. **Appendix G** in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS includes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's biological opinion.

W2

Comment: Biodiversity has become a significant issue in the northern Rocky Mountains (e.g. diversity and uniqueness of flora and fauna, connectivity of habitats, gene pools, species diversity, etc,). Maintenance of biodiversity can minimize the need for listing species as threatened or endangered. Upland and stream corridors and special habitats (i.e. wetlands, threatened and endangered species habitat) in the planning area may need to be maintained to protect genetic diversity. The state of the art for this issue is changing rapidly. CEQ prepared guidance entitled, "Incorporating Biodiversity Considerations into Environmental Impact Analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act," http://tis.eh.doe.gov/nepa/tools/guidance/Guidance-PDFs/iii-9.pdf. We encourage the BLM to include improved evaluation and discussion of biodiversity considerations in the RMP and EIS.

Response: Biodiversity of vegetation (including forests, grasslands, shrublands, and riparian vegetation) and native animal species were identified as issues during the development of the RMP. From these issues, goals were developed that also emphasized biodiversity of native plants and animal species.

Vegetation management prescriptions in Chapter 2 also emphasize the concept of maintaining or improving biodiversity across the landscape. Although the acres of restorative treatments differ by action alternative, the emphasis of all action alternatives is on maintaining and restoring healthy, diverse, and productive native plant communities. All action alternatives would actively restore vegetation on the landscape level to conditions more consistent with landform and climate as well as with the biological and physical components of the ecosystem. Vegetation structure, density, species composition, patch size, pattern, and distribution would be managed to provide habitat for a variety of wildlife species. Management actions would maintain or mimic natural disturbance regimes to provide for diverse and sustainable ecosystems.

The Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section of Chapter 2 also emphasizes maintaining and supporting healthy, productive, and diverse populations and communities of plant and animal species. There would also be an emphasis on conserving federally listed and sensitive species. As described under Management Common to Action Alternatives, the BLM would maintain suitable habitat conditions and minimize fragmentation of linkage corridors in areas occupied by special status species. The intent would be to maintain the function and diversity of all habitats in large "patches" across the landscape. All action alternatives would stress maintaining diverse, healthy, and productive and well distributed aquatic habitats and communities.

General biodiversity principles and considerations were also applied to each step of the NEPA analysis associated with developing Montana/Dakotas Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing (BLM, August 1997). During the scoping process for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing, BLM identified biodiversity issues and opportunities to meet biodiversity goals and objectives. Standards of physical and biological conditions or degree of function required for healthy sustainable ecosystems and guidelines for livestock grazing management were established. These standards and guidelines for grazing management for the Butte Field Office have been incorporated into the Butte RMP (Goals Common to All Alternatives for All BLM Activities). The Land Health Standards would not only be applied to rangelands but would also be applied to all habitat types and for all BLM authorized activities.

W3

Comment: RMP management direction should also include standards, guidelines and procedures that ensure threatened, endangered and sensitive species are considered whenever the use of pesticides are contemplated. Language should be included in Special Use and other permits (i.e. grazing, recreation, etc.) that require the permittee to present requests of all use of pesticides on Federal lands to the BLM for review and approval.

Montana Water Quality Standards do not identify numerical criteria for aquatic life protection for many herbicides, however, it should be recognized that the research and data requirements necessary to establish numerical aquatic life water quality criteria are very rigorous, and many herbicides and weed control chemicals in use are toxic, although numerical aquatic life criteria have not been established. The Montana Water Quality Standards include a general narrative standard requiring surface water to be free from substances that create concentrations which are toxic or harmful to aquatic life. The National Pesticide Telecommunication Network (NPTN) website at http://nptn.orst.edu/tech.htm which operates under a cooperative agreement with EPA and Oregon State University, has a wealth of information on toxicity, mobility, and environmental fate on pesticides which may be helpful (phone number 800-858-7378).

Response: The BLM follows all requirements and recommendations as outlined on herbicide/pesticide labels. The use of herbicides and their affect on the environment has been analyzed in the Vegetation Treatment on BLM Lands in Thirteen Western States Final EIS. This document addresses the use of herbicides on BLM lands. The BLM uses the direction in the Vegetation Treatment on BLM Lands in Thirteen Western States EIS as well as the herbicides labels to provide for proper application of herbicides to protect the environment, birds, wildlife (including threatened, endangered, and sensitive species), and aquatic species. Since public release of the Draft RMP/EIS, the Record of Decision (ROD) has been signed for Vegetation Treatments Using Herbicides on Bureau of Land Management Lands in 17 Western States. The Preferred Alternative in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS has been revised to indicate that this ROD is the guiding and authorizing document for invasive vegetation species management.

The use of any proposed pesticide (to kill insects or other pests) would require site-specific analysis before application that would identify the effects to birds, wildlife (including threatened, endangered, and sensitive species), and aquatic species. The BLM appreciates the information provided by the commenter and will take this into consideration when addressing the use of pesticides. The BLM will use the direction on pesticide labels to provide proper application of pesticides to protect birds, wildlife, and aquatic species.

W4

Comment: We are pleased that the goal under Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plants and Animal Species indicates that impacts would be minimized to riparian areas and wetlands (page 40), but recommend more specific guidance be provided to assure that riparian and wetland functions are considered and protected. We recommend that the RMP include direction that assures that projects tiered from the management plan adequately assess the potential impacts on riparian conditions and functions, and protect riparian conditions and functions. We suggest that it would be appropriate to include management direction focused on restoration of riparian functions and conditions, consistent with the ICB Strategy, since this Strategy provides for improved restoration and maintenance of riparian functions.

For example:

"The BLM will restore and/or maintain riparian structure, composition, and processes, including physical integrity of riparian ecosystems, amount and distribution of woody debris to sustain physical and biological complexity, adequate summer and winter thermal regulation, water quality and hydrologic processes, distribution and diversity of riparian vegetative communities and source habitats for riparian dependent species."

Response: The BLM agrees with the comment and has added the following wording to the goal in Chapter 2:

"The BLM would restore and/or maintain riparian structure, composition, and processes, including physical integrity of riparian ecosystems, amount, and distribution of woody debris to sustain physical and biological complexity, adequate summer and winter thermal regulation, water quality and hydrologic processes, distribution and diversity of riparian vegetative communities and source habitats for riparian dependent species."

W5

Comment: BLM discussed threatened and endangered species, not a BLM responsibility. BLM is responsible for HABITAT and SPECIES MANAGEMENT is with other agencies. BLM did not mention that the gray wolf as well as the grizzly bear is undergoing a delisting process by the USFWS now. Populations are fully recovered under the USFWS recovery plans.

Response: BLM requirements for management of federally listed and proposed species come from the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). There are a total of 18 sections within the ESA, 9 of which contain requirements or authorizations for the BLM. Section 7 of the ESA requires the BLM to look at the impacts to threatened, endangered and candidate species from proposed actions on Federal lands.

In addition, BLM Manual 6840 (Special Status Species Management) identifies that the BLM will conserve listed species and the ecosystems upon which they depend and also ensures that all actions authorized, funded, or carried out by the BLM are in compliance with the ESA.

The proposed de-listing of the gray wolf and grizzly bear are not discussed in the RMP because, even when delisted (such as with the Yellowstone population of the grizzly bear), these species will stay on Montana BLM's sensitive species list. As outlined under the Wildlife section in Chapter 2 of the RMP, management actions will promote conservation of special status (sensitive) wildlife species and the ecosystems on which they depend. The BLM is required to conduct monitoring and assessment of de-listed species under BLM Manual 6840.

W6

Comment: Hikers and wolves impact wildlife more than OHV use yet hikers and wolves are unrestricted.

Response: The BLM has found no evidence that hikers and wolves impact wildlife more than OHV use. The influence of high open road density on grizzly bear, wolverine, elk, and sage grouse, and wildlife in general, are well-documented in the scientific literature. Avoidance of otherwise suitable habitat, habitat fragmentation, mortality from collisions, increased disturbance, and loss of security habitat are all factors that effect how roads influence wildlife use of an area as well as the quality of wildlife habitats.

W7

Comment: The Agency must support any claim that various recreational activities (e.g., off-highway vehicle use, camping, equestrian use, hunting etc.) pose significant threats to endangered species. Claims that are highly speculative and based on little or no reliable data should be excluded from the environmental analysis.

The Agency must establish much more than a causal connection between recreation activities and any perceived declines in the population of any threatened or endangered species known to reside in the project area. At most, the technical data shows that some recreational activities, in some areas, have the potential to displace some species on a very local level. This, however, cannot establish that recreational activities pose a substantial threat to an entire population or subpopulation of a particular plant or animal.

Response: There are three wildlife species that are listed under the Endangered Species Act found in the Field Office; gray wolf, Canada lynx and the Northern Continental Divide population of grizzly bear. Of these listed species, the grizzly bear was identified as the most sensitive to open roads. The Special Status Species section of Chapter 4 (Alternative A), as well as the Wildlife section in the Lewis and Clark County NW Travel Plan Area in Chapter 4 of the RMP provide a discussion on

the effects of open roads to grizzly bear. The influence of open roads on grizzly bear is well documented in the scientific literature and research has found that grizzly bear avoid areas adjacent to open roads and areas with high road densities. A target of one mile of open road per square mile or less has long been used for evaluating habitat effectiveness for grizzly bear and is routinely used by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, US Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the BLM.

W8

Comment: AWL praises the BLM's recognition of the importance of ecological corridor restoration and recommends that the BLM go one step further: the South Fork study by Mace and Manley (1993), the Selkirk/Cabinet-Yaak study by Wakkinen and Kasworm (1997) and two studies cited in the DEIS (on page 559: Mace et al. 1996; McLellan and Shackleton (1989) found that grizzly bears underutilized habitat with >1 mile/mile² of open roads and >2 miles/mile² of total roads. AWL suggests the BLM actually set a standard for open road density at 1 mile/mile² or lower and total road density of 2miles/mile² or lower in important grizzly bear corridors, as identified by Craighead et al (2002).

Response: The BLM is concerned about movement corridors for a variety of species including the grizzly bear, and believes this issue is adequately addressed in the Butte RMP. The Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section (Management Common to Action Alternatives) of Chapter 2 describes the BLM's proposal to maintain suitable habitat conditions and minimize fragmentation in wildlife linkage corridors occupied by special status species.

The BLM will also continue to apply the appropriate level of protection to grizzly bears based on peer reviewed scientific literature, recommendations of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Grizzly Bear Management Plan for Southwest Montana (2002).

W9

Comment: Lewis and Clark TPA: This area is recognized by the United States Forest Service as an important corridor for lynx dispersal by the Lynx Management Direction, adopted by the Forest Service in July 2007/ (USFS 2007). AWL would suggest the BLM consider yearlong or seasonal closures above and beyond those presented in Alternative C in light of the importance of this area to lynx.

Response: Lynx habitat was taken into consideration during travel planning. The BLM believes that the Preferred Alternative adequately considers lynx habitat and other resource and management needs.

The BLM will continue to follow the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy and work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on how to best protect or restore habitat for lynx in this area.

W10

Comment: We are pleased that a goal has been included to protect, maintain, or restore sagebrush habitat in occupied or historic sage grouse habitat (page 40). The 2005 Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse in Montana are recommended for further guidance.

Response: As stated in the Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section (Management Common to All Alternatives) in Chapter 2 of the RMP, management activities would be designed and implemented to be consistent with the National and Montana Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse in Montana (2005).

W11

Comment: Some interests are pushing the wildlife corridor concept as a reason to close areas to motorized use. We have not seen adequate documentation or reasoning to justify this position and suspect that it is being used inappropriately as a reason to justify de facto wilderness by non-motorized interests. Significant issues must be answered before this concept can be given any credibility. Issues include:

1. Why would wildlife follow physically challenging basin divides where food and water is scarce versus other corridors? They don't. This is easily verified by open areas such as McDonald Pass or the jagged areas of the continental divide where we have never observed any significant number of wildlife crossings versus great numbers of wildlife crossings that we have observed in other areas that are more favored by wildlife.

2. There is no data or credible documentation that the continental divide or other basin divides are favored for wildlife migration. Especially theories that purport that wildlife will migrate from Mexico to Canada. This is counter to the types of habitat that different species require in order to survive. There is a significant lack of credible evidence to support the wildlife corridor hypothesis.

3. The lack of authorization or mandate from congress for this sort of designation and use of public land.

Response: The BLM has not limited the discussion on movement corridors to the Continental Divide. Chapter 3 of the RMP (Wildlife Section) discusses the importance of wildlife corridors that vary in size and importance depending on the species and the how the habitat is being used. Movement corridors are described as areas of predicted movement between blocks of suitable habitat. A corridor can function at several scales. It can allow

seasonal movements for a species such as elk migration between summer and winter range or provide for dispersing juveniles such as a subadult cougar who have to leave fully occupied habitat of other adult cougars.

Movement corridors may be small, such in the case of amphibians or small mammals, or large such as with grizzly bear or big game species. If a patch of habitat is too small to support a population over time, corridors connecting patches of habitats can provide a larger habitat structure, and thus support a larger effective population. Movement corridors can also be critical for the flow of genetic material between populations.

Although it may be difficult to know the exact route an animal may take, the importance of movement corridors is documented in the literature and is a pertinent wildlife issue that should be addressed at the landscape level. Therefore the Butte RMP provides discussion and analysis of movement corridors.

W12

Comment: Conservation Actions for Grizzlies (p.737) north portion in Lewis & Clark Co and Jefferson County are connected more to the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem than to the Yellowstone Ecosystem. The Butte RMP area provides critical connections between ecosystems.

Response: The BLM agrees with the commenter. With the delisting of the Yellowstone population of the grizzly bear, this section of **Appendix F** from the Draft RMP/EIS (now **Appendix G**) has been deleted in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

W13

Comment: Alternative D – Oil & Gas Stipulations (p.927) does not provide for grizzly bear at all.

Response: The stipulation for threatened, endangered, and special status species would provide protection to grizzly bear and grizzly bear habitat during oil and gas exploration. Under this controlled surface use stipulation, the BLM could require modifications on those exploration and development proposals that contribute to the listing of a sensitive species (such as the Yellowstone population of grizzly bear). This stipulation would also require modifications to or disapprove a proposed activity that is likely to result in jeopardy to the continued existence of a proposed or listed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat. While two additional Controlled Surface Use stipulations specifically for grizzly bears were inadvertently omitted from **Appendix L** in the Draft RMP/EIS, their proposal for use under Alternative D was included in Chapter 2 (Table 2-21 of Draft RMP/EIS). These stipulations have been added to the fluid minerals appendix for Alternative D (now **Appendix M**) in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

W14

Comment: The west-slope cutthroat trout does not qualify for listing [federal listing under Endangered Species Act].

Response: Although it is unclear what the comment is referring to, the Butte RMP refers to westslope cutthroat trout as a special status or sensitive species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found westslope cutthroat trout were not warranted for listing under the Endangered Species Act. However, to prevent listing under the ESA and to promote the conservation and recovery of this species, a Memorandum of Understanding and Conservation Agreement for Westslope Cutthroat Trout and Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout in Montana was signed by multiple agencies (including the BLM). This Memorandum of Understanding was updated in July, 2007.

W15

Comment: Several times within the EIS analysis of the Bozeman, Livingston, and Helena [oil and gas] areas, the RMP/EIS states that habitat for Arctic Grayling and Bull trout doesn't exist in the planning area. MWF believes these statements are categorically in error. Admittedly, much of their historic habitat is currently unoccupied; it is disingenuous and unprofessional to claim that the habitat does not exist; perhaps this is an oversight and can be corrected in the final. MWF believes the waters near Livingston and Bozeman still retain high potential for grayling restoration and that any and all options for reestablishing fluvial gray ling in the state must be given elevated priority. At the very least, to be a viable portrayal of the biological reality on the ground, the RMP should refer to the waters here as potential grayling habitat even if the habitat is unoccupied.

Response: Although the BLM agrees that suitable habitat may be present in the areas identified by the comment and that re-introductions of certain fish species could be likely in the future, oil and gas stipulations focus on protecting habitat occupied by a species (such as arctic grayling and bull trout) and not potential habitat. The BLM based the mapping of these species on data from Montana Fish, Wildlife Parks (MFISH). When site-specific leases for oil and gas are identified, the BLM will again verify the presence of all fish species in the proposed lease area to determine the appropriate stipulations that should be applied to that lease. **Appendix M** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS describes the process for oil and gas leases.

W16

Comment: In regard to streamside or riparian management buffer zones, we believe riparian buffers should be wider where there are steeper slopes and more erosive soils, and forested streamside buffer zones need to protect canopy cover and shade to buffer water temperatures, and to provide a sustainable source of large woody

debris needed for instream channel structure and aquatic species habitat. Adequate riparian buffer zones also are needed to protect ephemeral and intermittent streams to protect both these streams and their downstream tributaries.

A greater level of the riparian protection is provided for in the Forest Service's Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFS) than is proposed with the preferred alternative (Alternative B) in the draft RMP/EIS. The INFS provides for riparian management zones (RMZs) for forested fish bearing streams that consist of the stream and the area on either side of the stream extending from the edges of the active stream channel to the top of the inner gorge, or to the outer edges of the 100-year floodplain, or to the outer edges of riparian vegetation, or to a distance equal to the height of two site-potential trees, or 300 feet slope distance (600 feet, including both sides of the stream channel), whichever is greatest.

The proposed RMZ for Alternative B, however, only includes a proposed RMZ distance equal to the height of two site potential trees.

Alternative B does not include the additional language stating, "...or to the outer edges of the 100-year floodplain, or 300 feet slope distance, whichever is greatest."

We believe the riparian protections included in Alternative C are closer to providing the appropriate level of riparian buffer protection for fisheries, and should be included in the preferred alternative, particularly for any surface waters with populations of threatened bull trout within the jurisdiction of the BFO (e.g., Blackfoot River, page 230). We also note that while the Interim Bull Trout Habitat Conservation Plan Strategy (USDI-BLM 1996) is identified among the Plans that need to be considered (page 14), we do not see a clear commitment to provide adequate riparian protections for bull trout in Alternative B. We believe the Alternative C riparian protections are needed at a minimum for bull trout habitat protection.

We also recommend that Alternative C riparian buffers be considered for waters with populations of native westslope cutthroat trout and Yellowstone cutthroat trout and arctic grayling and Class I fisheries (e.g., for Clark Fork, Upper Missouri , Madison, Jefferson, Gallatin, Boulder, and Big Hole Rivers and their tributaries with native westslope cutthroat trout populations, page 219, and especially Muskrat/ Nursery Creek with its genetically pure population of westslope cutthroat trout , page 95, and Upper Yellowstone River and its tributaries with native Yellowstone cutthroat trout). The Alternative C or INFS riparian protection guidelines are more protective of stream resources and promote recovery of native fish populations, and are recommended for consideration by BLM wherever there are important native fish populations that need protection and/or recovery.

Response: The BLM provided for a range of riparian management strategies in the Butte RMP. The riparian management zones under Alternative C follow the more "protective" approach of management consistent with this alternative. The BLM believes that Alternative B provides adequate prescriptions for management of riparian zones in this specific planning area.

The BLM will follow the Interim Bull Trout Habitat Conservation Plan Strategy (USDI-BLM 1996) in occupied bull trout habitat. To make this clearer in the document, reference to the Interim Bull Trout Habitat Conservation Plan has been included under the Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section in Chapter 2 of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. It should be noted that the Missoula Field Office administers the limited lands that contain bull trout habitat under an administrative agreement with the BFO.

W17

Comment: We support low road density in watersheds with native trout populations, particularly in bull trout watersheds. Salmonids are sensitive to the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of roads, and bull trout are exceptionally sensitive to road effects. The USFWS in its 1998 Bull Trout Interim Conservation Guidance identified the importance of road densities for bull trout conservation showing general exclusion of bull trout in watersheds with high road densities (e.g. over 1.7 mi/mi2 of roads), and showing bull trout strongholds to have low road densities (e.g. on average 0.45 mi/mi2 of roads). We also recommend that road densities within crucial winter ranges and along migration corridors be reduced. It would be of interest to identify in the EIS the existing and future road density that would result following road closure and restoration of user-built roads.

We recommend management direction that addresses the adverse effects of high road densities and many road stream crossings upon watershed condition and aquatic health. At the very least it should be assured that roads are not contributing adverse amounts of sediment to waters with sensitive or listed fish species. We encourage BLM to consider including direction that would promote road densities protective of water quality, bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout, and critical wildlife habitats. For example, "In watersheds with native trout population, road density would be at a level that is favorable to water quality and indigenous trout populations, and critical wildlife habitats."

Response: Travel planning under the five site-specific travel plan areas did address the effects of roads on watershed function, riparian function, aquatic habitats and species, fragmentation of habitats, movement corridors, big game winter range, calving habitat, security habitat and disturbance as well as the direct and indirect effects of roads on a variety of wildlife and aquatic species. All action alternatives propose a reduction in road densities in important wildlife habitats. Any future travel planning would also address the above mentioned fac-

tors and existing travel plans could be modified to provide additional protections or improve wildlife habitats when new information becomes available.

The Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species Section (Management Common to Action Alternatives) of Chapter 2 of the RMP states that the negative effects of the transportation system on fish would be reduced. To the extent possible, roads would be located, designed, and maintained to reduce sedimentation, remove barriers to fish passage and to restore or maintain riparian vegetation.

Travel Management - General

X1

Comment: The 3 state 01 OHV Rule also provides for and states: "Motorized cross-country travel by the most direct route would be allowed to retrieve a big game animal that is in possession only in the following field units in Montana: Miles City (FO), Billings (FO), Malta (FO), Lewistown (FO) with the exception of the Great Falls Field Station, and the Custer National Forest with the exception of the Beartooth Ranger District." Does the Butte RMP recognize the need for big game retrieval and identify appropriate cross country travel areas?

Response: Motorized cross-country travel for game retrieval was allowed and analyzed under three of five alternatives in the 3 state OHV EIS. However, in the Record of Decision signed in June 2003, cross-country travel for game retrieval is prohibited with few exceptions on BLM land in Montana and the Dakotas.

The Butte RMP provides for big game retrieval on existing routes, but no cross-country motorized use would be allowed for the retrieval of big game.

X2

Comment: Coordination with affected counties is essential in protecting the counties' property and resources. Many of the counties that will be affected by the Butte RMP have expressed concerns about additional closures of roads and trails to multiple use. The future management activities of federally managed public lands depend largely on the ability to access these lands. Emergency rescue, trail and road maintenance, fire suppression and access to leased areas of mineral, gas and cattle allotments are all important for the health, safety, and welfare of county residents.

Response: In an effort to help the BLM develop site-specific travel management alternatives, two community based collaborative working groups were established. The working groups represented a wide range of public land users and were managed under the sponsorship and involvement of the Lewis and Clark County Board of Commissioners. One working group was assigned to assist with travel planning for the Helena and East Helena Travel Planning Areas while the other group assumed responsibility for travel planning in the Lewis and Clark County NW Travel Planning Area. Each group held a series of five or six meetings and group recommendations for route-specific management were based on consensus.

All counties were invited to be cooperating agencies with the Butte BLM on the RMP. In addition, all counties were briefed on the Draft RMP/EIS, which included travel planning.

X3

Comment: The 2005 legislature passed HJ18 which clearly stated: "Be it resolved that the United States Congress be urged to adopt legislation that would require the U.S. Forest Service and the BLM to not arbitrarily close roads and access to Montana's public lands and to instead that these agencies be properly funded and maintain the current means of access to and on Montana's public lands, trails, and streams." This was a clear mandate from the legislature of the State of Montana to the public land management agencies of the Federal Government that the arbitrary closures of access to federally managed public land in Montana be stopped and current levels of multiple use access be protected. Governor Schweitzer signed HJ18 in April of 2005 as he agreed with the actions of the 2005 Montana House and Senate.

The Montana House and Senate are standing with the citizens of this state to say that enough is enough. The actions by the BLM in the Butte RMP does not follow the mandate set forth in HJ18 or HJ31 and CBU requests that the BLM coordinate with the Montana legislative branches, as required by federal law, when road and trail closures are being proposed. The Montana legislature and Montana citizens have a very large stake in the resources of this state and they are rightfully concerned with the management practices of both the Forest Service and the BLM in recent years. Closures must only be considered as a last resort and then only after resource damage has been identified and mitigation measures have failed. CBU finds it unacceptable that any road and trail closures by your agency are made prior to attempts to mitigate identified resource damage.

Response: The BLM does not arbitrarily close roads and trails in the Butte Field Office. As outlined in **Appendix A** of the RMP, the BLM follows a comprehensive travel planning process to determine how roads and trails are used as well as how natural resources are impacted by those routes. This process, along with input from the public and other government agencies, allows the BLM to determine the appropriate road and trail system for a particular travel plan area.

X4

Comment: The proposed Pipestone Special Recreation Area (SRA) is a good proposal that meets a need for the

increased OHV popularity. The sustainment of the hill climb in the Pipestone area for open use also meets the needs for individuals interested in this growing popular recreation opportunity. This proposed new RMA is adjacent to a much larger area managed by the Forest Service and should be coordinated with their proposed travel management plans to maximize the potential benefit from this proposal and ensure that future management plans are not in conflict.

Responses: The Butte Field Office will continue to stress the importance of this riding area and will strive for collaborative management with the Forest Service so that priority funding and attentive management continues to be a mutual objective.

The BLM believes that the different alternatives as described in the Activity Level Planning for Five High Priority Travel Planning Areas of Chapter 2 provide a suitable range of closed, open, and seasonally restricted roads to meet multiple objectives. The BLM is a multiple use agency and does not manage land for the sole benefit of any one type of use.

X5

Comment: Because there are two levels of management with respect to Travel, definitions describing how management will be conducted for the "Field Office Level" is important. Page 46 indicates that "travel management would be conducted in a manner that would meet, or move toward meeting, Land Health Standards." Time frames should be attached to the "moving toward" statement.

Response: Because of the variables associated with land management, such as budgets, priorities and agency direction, it is difficult for the BLM to attach timeframes with the above mentioned statement. As identified in the Travel Management and Access section of the RMP, travel planning for "high priority" areas is supposed to be initiated within two years of the Off Highway Vehicle Record of Decision. The highest priority travel planning areas in the Butte Field Office are being completed concurrently with the RMP. The four remaining travel plan areas (Missouri River Foothills, Jefferson County Southwest, Broadwater County South, and Park/Gallatin) are considered "moderate priority" and travel planning will be completed for these areas after the RMP is completed. Indeed all of these travel management plans are designed to meet or move towards meeting Land Health Standards. Additionally, during routine monitoring and implementation of these plans, if problems are discovered, management actions are implemented to ensure that progress is being made towards meeting Land Health Standards.

X6

Comment: We concur with the statement on page 48, "BLM would provide for interagency travel management consistency and route connectivity with adjoining public lands", however there is sometimes a lack of continuity in management between adjoining public land ownerships in some BLM/FS areas within the RMP. For example, the existing BLM travel plan for Clancy-Unionville (Sheep Mountain) does not conform to this statement in that the surrounding National Forest lands have route densities at levels that are substantially less than what occurs on BLM lands. In order to bring this area into conformance with Forest Service travel management, and into alignment with other areas of the RMP, we recommend that this area be reevaluated under the RMP provision stating, "Throughout the course of implementing the RMP, site-specific route management decisions may need to be reevaluated and adjusted by BLM in order to accommodate interagency (Forest Service) connectivity." (p. 48)

Response: During this RMP planning process, the BLM did not re-visit decisions made under existing travel plans. Site-specific modifications and changes to existing travel plan areas could be made in the future.

X7

Comment: We request that the significant negative and inequitable impacts that Executive Orders 11644 and 11989 have imposed on motorized recreationists be adequately evaluated, and factored into the preferred alternative. We request that the decision-making provide for actions necessary to provide responsible use of these two Executive Orders. We request that revisions to Executive Orders 11644 and 11989 be made in order to return equitable guidance to federal land-use managers.

Response: Executive Orders are instituted by the President. BLM has no authority to revoke such orders. BLM is required to abide by these Executive Orders. These orders were initiated many years ago in order to ensure that the use of off road vehicles on public lands would be controlled and managed to protect natural resources, promote the safety of all users, and minimize conflict among the various uses of those lands. The BLM supports motorized use, but must take into account resource protection objectives and opportunities for non-motorized use as well. The BLM has no authority to revise executive orders.

X8

Comment: The use of RS 2477 rights-of-way over nearly a century has resulted in an extensive body of case law in the state and federal courts, in which owners of various types of rights-of-way have competed with holders of RS 2477 rights-of-way and in which the availability of those various rights-of-way has been decided by the courts, including the modern State Supreme Court as well as the federal 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, in such cases as Robertson v. Smith, Supreme Court Montana Ten., 1871; Butte v. Mikosowitz, 39 Mont. 350, 102 P. 593, (1909); Moulton v. Irish, 67

Mont. 504, 218 P. 1053 (1923); and Shultz v. Dept. of Army, 10 F.3d 649 (9th Cir. 1993).

RS 2477 rights-of-way have been given a liberal interpretation by state and federal courts in those judicial decisions interpreting what constitutes a "highway" within the meaning of RS 2477, those judicial opinions holding that even the barest foot trail could qualify as a "highway" and that no particular way across federal lands has even been identified, it being sufficient that travelers used an area of federal land as a method of access between two geographic points. After 110 years of public use of RS 2477 rights-of-way, the U.S. Congress repealed the most recent version of RS 2477, 43 USC. 932, but that repeal was, by 43 USC. 1701, specifically made subject to valid rights-of-way existing as of the date of repeal which was 1976.

Schiller, chairman of the High Desert Multiple-Use Coalition, told the Kern County Board of Supervisors at a meeting held on February 19, 2002 to address RS 2477 issues that "the roads represent our custom, our culture, our economy, and our family traditions. I know it's been argued that this is about OHV uses and off-highway vehicles," said Schiller. "It is really about access". We request that any routes proposed for closure and in existence before 1976 be considered as having RS 2477 rights-of-way in order to provide citizens with access to public lands.

Response: Current BLM guidance on recognition of RS 2477 right-of-way claims is contained in Washington Office Instruction Memorandum 2006-159: Non-Binding Determinations of RS 2477 Right-of-Way Claims. Briefly, this guidance states that the BLM does not have the authority to make binding determinations on the validity of RS 2477 right-of-way claims. The BLM may, however, make informal, non-binding determinations for its own land use planning and management purposes. A non-binding determination that the right-of-way exists is required before completing consultation with states or counties on any proposed improvements to a claimed RS 2477 right-of-way, i.e., any work beyond routine maintenance. A non-binding determination may also be appropriate before taking action to close or otherwise restrict the use of a claimed RS 2477 right-of-way. Such determinations must be based on the particular laws of each state in which a claimed right-of-way is situated.

X9

Comment: In Table 4-110 we are not aware of 151 miles of motorized trails in the Elkhorn Mountains after that action. This number must either be in error (which must be corrected and publicly announced) or it is a blatant attempt at misrepresentation of the facts for the purpose of justifying motorized closures (which must be corrected and publicly announced).

Response: The information regarding the Elkhorn Mountains came directly from the "Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Elkhorn Mountain Travel Management Plan" document (August 1995). According to the Decision Notice, there are 151 miles of motorized trail system available on both BLM and Forest Service lands under the selected alternative, Alternative 4-Modified. According to Table 1, page 9, 60 miles of motorized trails are Open from 5/16-10/14, 56 miles are Open from 10/15-12/1, and 35 miles are Open from 12/2-5/15; for a total of 151 miles of available trail. In Alternative 4-Modified, motorized trails that have no width restrictions are also included in the motorized road system miles since they may be used by full-sized motorized vehicles as well as trail vehicles.

X10

Comment: In order to adequately evaluate and disclose motorized and non-motorized recreational resource and opportunity information to the public, the following information using tables and maps must be used and presented in an accurate and concise manner.

1. The miles of non-motorized recreational opportunities available in the project area including all possible cross-country routes and the number of acres available for cross-country non-motorized recreation under the existing condition (it is infinite),
2. The miles of roads and trails and number of acres to be closed to non-motorized recreationists in the proposed condition,
3. The miles of existing motorized roads, ATV trails, and motorcycle trails in the project area meeting the 3-States OHV decision definitions,
4. The acres within the project area open to motorized recreationists under existing and proposed conditions,
5. The percent of motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities in the project area,
6. The miles of ATV trails, motorcycle trails and roads and acres closed to motorized recreationists under both existing and proposed conditions,
7. The cumulative miles of roads, ATV trails, motorcycle trails meeting the 3-State OHV definitions and number of acres closed to motorized recreationists over the past 35 years at 5 year intervals in both the project area and regional area. Once this information is adequately and concisely presented, one can easily see that motorized recreational opportunities are limited in the existing condition and then severely reduced in the proposed condition. This information must be presented in order to understand the significant imbalance of recreational opportunities that exists and the decision is deficient without this information.

Response: The BLM believes the information presented in the Butte RMP is adequate for public analysis. Tables 2-6 through 2-13 provide a full range of summary information for proposed management of BLM routes at the Field Office level and for the five activity level decision areas. Information presented includes area availability for wheeled motorized use; area availability for snowmobile use; miles of motorized routes available for various uses, and miles of non-motorized trails available (includes Closed routes). The maps, particularly the electronic versions, also help illustrate the existing situation and range of alternatives.

X11

Comment: When roads are closed to motorized recreationists, then they in reality become a non-motorized recreational resource and they must be disclosed as such. Unfortunately this procedure has not been practiced to date and the miles of recreational resources have been understated in favor of non-motorized recreationists. All planning projects should disclose the added benefit to non-motorized recreational resources resulting from the closure of roads by adding the miles of closed roads to the miles of existing non-motorized trails. We request that this procedure be used by this project and all future agency projects. Additionally, we request that the cumulative negative impact on motorized recreationists resulting from this lack of adequate accounting be evaluated and adequately mitigated.

Response: Table 2-6, Field Office Level Route Management Summary, in Chapter 2 of the RMP discloses the miles of closed roads proposed under each alternative. Depending on their location, however, some closed roads may be of interest to non-motorized users, while others may provide no interest, and with non-use, eventually fade into obscurity. Some non-motorized users, such as horseback riders and mountain bike riders, may enjoy using closed roads as a convenience form of travel. Others, however, will avoid closed roads, preferring to hike cross-country in a more primitive setting. While closed roads may technically be available for non-motorized use, they do not offer the same quality experience as a trail designed for non-motorized use. This distinction is also shared by motorized users, who prefer to recreate on developed OHV trail systems, rather than on roads, which are often referred to as “troads”.

X12

Comment: In many cases illegal trails are created in response to the lack of adequate motorized opportunities. If there were an adequate number of OHV trail systems, then the need to create illegal trails would be greatly diminished. Therefore, the catch-22 of the closure trend is that in the end it feeds the illegal activity. In other words, it would be a more advantageous and equitable situation to proactively manage motorized recreation.

Response: Illegal trails are created by individuals who have made a conscious decision to violate the law and disregard the BLM’s management of public lands. Illegal activity undermines, rather than promotes the future of motorized recreation; in some cases leading to more restrictive management due to ongoing concerns about such activity. The BLM believes that the Preferred Alternative provides adequate opportunities for motorized recreation.

X13

Comment: Agencies are encouraged to avoid trail closures associated with other actions including timber sales, mining, and livestock grazing. Corrective action should be taken where trail closures in the past have resulted from these sorts of past actions. Loss of motorized trails because of past timber sales should be mitigated by connecting old and new travelways to create looped trail systems. Connector trails should be constructed to avoid dead-end trails. These systems could provide recreation opportunities for a variety of skill levels and visitors.

Response: Temporary road and trail closures are sometimes necessary for public safety during commercial operations, such as timber sales or mining. With regards to permanent closures, when large scale projects (such as timber sales) are proposed in an area with no existing travel plan, the NEPA analysis for the project will oftentimes incorporate travel planning as well. As with any travel planning effort, the analysis looks beyond the impacts and duration of the immediate project, and takes into account a broad range of resource impacts and human use needs for the overall area. The final analysis may result in either more, or less motorized opportunities throughout the travel planning area.

X14

Comment: Some of [the factors contributing to growing OHV popularity] are:

- greater public interest in unconfined outdoor recreational opportunities;
- rising disposable income …
- advances in vehicle technology
- the rapid growth of the West’s cities and suburbs …
- a population with an increasing median age with changing outdoor recreational interests.

Response: The BLM recognizes the growing popularity of OHV recreation. During the past 10 years, the Butte Field Office has spent the majority of its travel plan implementation funding on OHV trail and facility development. In addition, the BLM has successfully received funding from many Montana OHV Trail Ranger grants used to help develop and manage OHV recreation.

X15

Comment: The reason often given by the agency that motorized trail projects including those using OHV grant money cannot be undertaken is that there is a current travel planning process under way or one about to begin or that NEPA compliance must be undertaken. There is a continuous cycle of travel planning undertaken and the public is not able to undertake NEPA compliance. The result is that motorized RTP funding is often under-utilized. At the same time, there is a tremendous need for projects on motorized routes. We need to find a way to break this Catch-22 situation.

Response: With some exceptions, federal law prohibits BLM from implementing any earth disturbing activity, such as OHV trail/facility development, or travel plans (area/route designations) until the proper NEPA documentation has been completed. Once a NEPA decision has been finalized, BLM may move forward with implementation work.

The Butte Field Office has four existing (NEPA compliant) travel management plans. Over the past 10 years, in addition to agency funding, the BLM has successfully applied for and utilized Montana OHV Program Trail Ranger Grants in order to help implement and manage these plans. Five additional plans are being addressed at the activity plan level, concurrent with this RMP revision. Once decisions for these plans have been approved, implementation work can proceed, but not before then.

X16

Comment: A new standard for motorized recreational trails could be developed that would be more beneficial for the environment and motorized recreationists. This new standard would be as nonlinear as possible. The original system of roads and trails was constructed with the shortest distance from point A to point B in mind. The new standard for motorized recreational trails would not necessarily follow the shortest distance and would include many curves to keep the speed down. Advantages of this approach would include: routes could easily be moved to avoid cultural resources and sensitive environmental areas; less visible on the ground and from the air; aesthetically pleasing; lower speeds and greater safety; and greater enjoyment by motorized recreationists. These sorts of trails could be built as mitigation for any motorized closures required as part of an action. Please contact Doug Abelin for more information on the non-linear approach to trail construction.

Response: The BLM agrees that motorized recreation trails should be designed as described in the comment, subject to NEPA and approved travel management plans. The Butte Field Office uses this approach as much as possible for designated OHV trail systems where appropriate.

X17

Comment: Provide open or play areas for motorized recreation opportunity and trials bikes where acceptable in selected areas.

Response: The Preferred Alternative includes two Open designated riding areas, Radersburg, and a motorcycle hill climb located in Whitetail-Pipestone.

X18

Comment: The integrity of the “loop” trail system should be maintained. Loop systems minimize the number of on-trail encounters because non-motorized trail users don’t encounter motorized users going both directions, as they do on non-loop trails. Loop trails also offer trail users a more desirable recreational experience. Agencies are encouraged to provide opportunity for "motorized loop trail systems" to lessen impacts and to provide a better recreational experience. Spurs are useful for exploration and reaching destinations.

Response: Loop trails were considered during the development of travel plan alternatives, and incorporated where feasible. Loop trails do not prevent two-way traffic, however, unless they are managed as one way only.

X19

Comment: OHV owners in Montana, as part of their vehicle registration, contribute $1.50 to a noxious weed abatement program. Non-motorized visitors do not contribute to a weed abatement program. We request that the analysis be based on a balanced discussion of the noxious weed problem. The discussions, decisions, and measures used to mitigate noxious weeds should recognize the relatively minor impact that OHVs have on the noxious weed problem and credit OHV visitors for contributing to a program to control noxious weeds. Additionally, this is another example of predisposition because motorized recreationists have not been given credit for the positive action that they have taken and we have only been penalized for our past cooperation and the initiative taken to control noxious weeds.

Response: All Montana vehicle owners (not just OHV owners) contribute $1.50 of their vehicle registration fees towards the state’s weed abatement program.

X20

Comment: We request that the over-arching management goals for all multiple-use public lands be to:

(1) Manage multiple-use lands for the greatest benefit to the public;

(2) Manage multiple-use lands in an environmentally sound and reasonable manner;

(3) Manage multiple-use lands in a way that avoids the pursuit of environmental extremism; and

(4) Manage multiple-use lands in a way that promotes the shared-use that they were intended for versus segregated-use or exclusive-use.

Response: The BLM agrees with this comment and believes that it is providing for these concepts with the alternatives presented in the Butte RMP revision.

X21

Comment: We request that the process include consideration of the negative impacts that proposed motorized road and trail closures will have on fire management, fuel wood harvest for home heating, and timber management. The analysis should include an analysis of the benefits to the public from the gathering of deadfall for firewood from each of the roads and trails proposed for closure. These analyses are especially significant following a devastating fire season and a period of rising energy costs. The need for firewood gathering is increasing given the increasing energy costs http://www.helenair.com/articles/2003/11/02 /montana/a01110203_05.txt and we have noticed a significant increase in firewood gathering this past year. The closure of roads and trails is occurring at a large scale on all public lands. Therefore, the analysis should also evaluate the cumulative negative impacts of motorized road and trail closures and the conversion of multiple-use lands to limited-use lands on fire management, timber management, and firewood gathering.

Response: The Butte RMP considers impacts of road and trail closures on the wide range of resources and resource uses. These impacts are disclosed in Chapter 4 of the Butte RMP. In implementing the process described in **Appendix A** of the Butte RMP to develop road management proposals, the resource uses referenced in the comment were considered in travel route-specific assessments. Roads identified as "closed" in the Butte RMP would retain roadbeds and could be used in the future to meet needs such as fire suppression and vegetation treatments to reduce wildland fuels buildup. The Butte RMP also provides for firewood gathering throughout the Butte Field Office associated with open routes.

X22

Comment: A reasonable approach to the assessment of equal recreational opportunity would use a comparison of acres and miles of trails per non-motorized visit versus acres and miles of trail per motorized visit. An equal number of acres and trail miles per visit should be the goal but the current management scheme is not achieving this goal. Clearly non-motorized visitors have a significant advantage in acres and miles of trail per visit at this time. Moreover, current management trends are creating more non-motorized acres and trails and significantly adding to the disparity. In order to be responsible to the public, we request that the preferred alternative address this disparity and reverse the trend by managing all of the project area as motorized multiple-use.

Response: The Butte Field Office provides about three times more OHV trails than non-motorized trails and dedicates about 90 percent of its travel funding for the management of motorized uses. In addition to designated trails there are over 415 miles of roads available for riding yearlong or seasonally under the Preferred Alternative in the RMP.

X23

Comment: Agencies are encouraged to keep trails in proposed non-motorized/ wilderness/roadless areas open. Motorized-use on trails in these areas does not detract from the wild characteristics in the proposed non-motorized/wilderness area. Additionally, the Roadless Rule specifically allows for OHV activity in Roadless areas.

Response: With the exception of one route through a portion of Humbug Spires Wilderness Study Area, there are no existing motorized routes with public access in any of the six WSAs within the Butte Field Office and therefore this comment is not pertinent. The Roadless Rule applies to Forest Service Roadless Areas on National Forest lands, but does not apply to BLM lands.

X24

Comment: Equal treatment and access to public lands must be provided for all people including motorized visitors. One example of unequal treatment is demonstrated by the agency sponsored hikes. We have never seen an agency sponsored OHV outing. Another example is the number of agency publications and information on agency web sites promoting non-motorized recreation versus the publications and web site information pages provided for motorized recreationists. Non-motorized recreation opportunities are easy to find using agency web sites and printed information. Yet another example is the use of hiking information signs posted along highways at ranger stations and the lack of the same signs and information for OHV recreation. The Condon Ranger Station is one of many examples of this situation. Most often little or no information is provided about motorized recreation opportunities. The one good example of a motorized web site can be found at http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/centraloregon/recreation/cohvops. There is a need for every forest and district to have a similar motorized recreation web site. Another example of bias is the fact that signs say "Non-motorized Uses Welcome" and we have never seen a sign that says "Motorized Uses Welcome".

Response: The BLM makes a concerted effort to treat motorized and non-motorized recreation users with equality for program support and interaction. On June 24th, 2005, the BLM co-sponsored an OHV ride in the Pipestone area during the Montana Trail Vehicle Rider

Association's three day State Ride. On September 17th, BLM led a hike in the Humbug Spires WSA in support of a three day Montana State, Recreation and Parks Association conference. BLM is currently updating its website so that opportunities for OHV riding and non-motorized use are better identified and explained. The three major OHV riding areas within the Butte Field Office are signed and trailhead facilities have been installed to assist motorized riders. Facilities include parking areas, unloading ramps, maps, riding information, signs, and toilets. Overall, if there have been any errors in balance, they have been in favor of motorized recreation.

X25

Comment: The evaluation team is being strongly directed to seek segregation of visitors for this action. This is not a reasonable goal. We do not seek to separate the public in other public facilities and, in fact, it is illegal. Sharing of public resources among all visitors and especially on multiple-use lands is the over-arching goal that is most reasonable expectation for visitors to those lands. Additionally, segregation of visitors is being used to manipulate recreation resource allocation such that motorized visitors are ending up with a less than adequate and less than representative share of access and recreational opportunities, (miles, acres, and number of quality opportunities). Moreover, the use of segregation as a goal is also a tactic that works against the majority multiple use/motorized recreationists by dividing and conquer the different interests within that large sector.

Response: The BLM recognizes the importance of multiple use management and has utilized these principles in developing the preferred alternative. The Butte RMP provides a diverse array of recreational opportunities for all users in the Butte RMP. In addition to providing opportunities, BLM is also responsible for ensuring quality experiences. In order to accomplish this, a spectrum of diverse natural settings has been proposed that promote both motorized and non-motorized experiences. Proposed designations will provide varying levels of motorized uses within 88 percent of the BLM recreational settings.

The planning team for this RMP was directed to conduct travel management planning decisions for five specific areas. The primary emphasis is to designate route and area availability for motorized and non-motorized travel based on access needs, user demands, resource value concerns, public safety, budget constraints, and other resource uses. Providing opportunities for recreation users to distance themselves based on experience preferences is only one of many considerations analyzed in travel planning.

X26

Comment: Current management trends are attempting to restrict public access to narrow corridors along major roads. This management trend is widespread among all agencies. If allowed to continue, this trend will concentrate over 95 percent of the visitors to less than 10 percent of the area. The cumulative negative impact from concentrating visitors to narrow corridors will result in poor management of public lands and unreasonable access to public lands and recreational opportunities. We request the evaluation of the cumulative negative impacts from management goals that tend to concentrate visitors to narrow corridors and reduce recreation opportunities for motorized visitors. Other associated negative impacts that should also be evaluated include loss of dispersed recreation opportunities, reduced quality of recreation, loss recreation diversity, and unequal number of recreation opportunities. OHV and other motorized recreationists seek the challenge and sense of exploration that primitive roads and motorized trails provide. The preferred travel management alternative should not restrict motorized access and recreation to narrow corridors along a few major roads. This restriction would not provide for the type of experiences that most motorized visitors are seeking and, therefore, does not meet the needs of motorized visitors. We request that the analysis and decision-making avoid restricting motorized access and recreation opportunities to narrow corridors along major roads.

Response: The comment is correct in that the Preferred Alternative does restrict motorized wheeled travel to designated roads and trails and as a result concentrates use along corridors, though not all these corridors are along "major roads". This action is supported by the 2003 Statewide Off-Highway EIS/Plan Amendment decision. Limiting motorized wheeled vehicles to designated routes promotes the sustainability of healthy ecosystems and the overall natural qualities in non-traveled areas. OHV uses have now grown to the point where impacts from cross-country riding can no longer recover naturally. The Butte Field Office will continue to manage the Radersburg Area for open riding and the Pipestone and Clancy/Ohio Gulch areas for high density trail riding. The preferred designated route system does provide access to popular walk-in areas, known attractions, trailheads, and higher elevation destinations for hunters with the goal of distributing users throughout the public lands.

X27

Comment: Inadequate attention and passive support of OHV recreation by agencies in a position to support and manage OHV recreation has contributed to the issues impacting OHV recreationists. Again, motorized access and motorized recreation including OHV recreation are the most popular, fastest growing, and most fundable forms of recreation and should be given a much higher priority. We request that the cumulative negative impact on OHV recreation resulting from less than adequate and enthusiastic support from managing agencies be ade-

quately evaluated in the document and adequately considered during the decision-making.

Response: The BLM does not believe it has paid inadequate attention to OHV recreation with the Butte RMP. OHV recreation has been considered adequately in the context of other resource uses and resource protection throughout the Butte RMP and associated travel planning. The BLM notes that regulations found at 43 CFR§8342.1 indicate in part that in designating areas and trails for OHV use, that "all designations shall be based on the protection of the resources of the public lands, the promotion of the safety of all the users of the public lands, and the minimization of conflicts among various uses of the public lands."

X28

Comment: We would like to see more funding for building roads around uncooperative landowners and developers, and better land swaps etc.

Response: The Butte Field Office will continue to prioritize easement acquisitions and land exchanges that best meet the access needs of the public, enhance recreation opportunities, and provide needed resource protection benefits. These actions will continue to be undertaken where there are willing sellers subject to available funds and staff capabilities.

X29

Comment: Pg. S-8: Issue 3: Alt B does not allow any competitive motorized events. This should be looked at and allowed.

Response: The Alternative B (Preferred Alternative) language regarding organized competitive motorized events has been changed in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. Existing management for the Whitetail-Pipestone Travel Planning Area does allow for consideration (subject to case by case evaluation) for competitive and non-competitive uses in the Pipestone OHV recreation area. In addition to making this correction, BLM has modified Alternative B to allow for additional consideration of organized motorized competitive event opportunities outside Pipestone, subject to management restraints.

X30

Comment: This is not a fair and equitable use of the Butte RMP District. Leaving access open to only non-motorized trail-heads is biased in favor of non-motorized users. The loss of 50 percent of the previous, historical, route use, to motorized users, is not acceptable and needs to be readdressed in a new alternative.

Response: The RMP provides a reasonable range of alternatives that take into account resource protection, and motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities. Of the action alternatives, Alternative D is the least restrictive in regards to motorized use, and provides approximately 76 percent of the existing opportunities (as represented by Alternative A). Alternatives B and C are more restrictive in regards to motorized use, but still provide for approximately 66 percent and 59 percent of the existing motorized opportunities, respectively.

X31

Comment: MSA feels that you need to create an Alternative that addresses the needs of all users, motorized and non-motorized equally and not just close routes and areas because of perceived social issues.

Response: Non-motorized recreation uses are among the multiple uses the BLM is expected to provide for pubic land users. Alternative B strives to provide a balanced approach, addressing the needs of both motorized and non-motorized recreational users. Road and trail closures are not intended to prevent reasonable public access. In addition to addressing a full range of recreational needs, they help achieve desirable road densities for wildlife, help reduce the spread of weeds, and help prevent the kinds of resource damage commonly associated with roads, such as erosion, stream sedimentation, etc.

X32

Comment: The emphasis of a balance of motorized and non-motorized recreation and access opportunities in Alternative B compared to Alternatives C & D totally misleads the public. It is not a balance when looking at Alternative A or conditions that now exist. An Alternative should be developed and brought to the public allowing more access and more opportunities. Then a 'balance' might be achieved. The 'current condition' is viewed by the land managers as bad and in need of change. If those conditions meet the needs and are providing quality recreational opportunities, change is not needed. Changes usually needed are management based: education by signing trails, outreach to the public, trail head signing, and a presence on the ground. Enforcement which is sadly lacking but without a managed system and education, enforcement is inadequate. We ask that you develop a preferred alternative that preserves and enhances multiple-use interests and motorized recreation.

Response: The BLM believes that the alternatives described in the RMP for the five site-specific travel planning areas represent a range of opportunities for different types of public land users.

The action alternatives are intended to help achieve desirable road densities for wildlife, reduce the spread of weeds, provide reasonable opportunities for recreation, and prevent the other kinds of resource damage more typically associated with roads, including erosion, stream sedimentation, damage to riparian habitats, and damage to cultural resources. The routes designated open to motorized travel are intended to provide reason-

able public access. The BLM believes Alternative B represents the most appropriate compromise to address the diverse interests of the public as well as address important resource issues.

X33

Comment: Agencies are encouraged to utilize all trail maintenance and upgrading management techniques, such as, bridging, puncheon, realignment, drains, and dips to prevent closure or loss of motorized trail use. Trails should not be closed because of a problem with a bad section of trail. The solution is to fix the problem area or reroute the trail, not to close it. If funding or manpower is a problem, then other resources should be looked to including local volunteer groups, state, or national OHV funding.

Responses: The BLM uses the travel management planning process to determine road and trail availability. Once these decisions are made then the transportation program is responsible for periodically conducting condition and maintenance assessments. Routes managed under the transportation program can be temporarily closed due to washouts or other natural causes that pose safety or resource concerns, but are not permanently closed. BLM will continue to utilize partnership contributions, volunteer groups, and state OHV grants to help off-set maintenance costs.

X34

Comment: Agencies are encouraged to clear trails early in the year to insure maximum availability and reduction of diversion damage caused by routing around obstacles.

Response: Although the annual timing of trail maintenance is outside the scope of the RMP, the BLM agrees that early prevention and correction is important for mitigating resource damage, promoting public access, and reducing future maintenance costs. The Butte Field Office routinely performs maintenance work from April through October each year with funding provided through state grants, contributions, and the BLM Challenge Cost-Share program. Maintenance workloads are prioritized annually. Major considerations include water bars, signing, brush clearing, blading, adding fill materials, noxious weed control, bridges, cattle-guards, gates, and fencing.

Travel Management – Multiple Use/Public Access

Y1

Comment: Nowhere in the 11# documents is one proposal for more access to public lands. All you read is more closures and restrictions. The maps are so poor and such a large scale they are useless for any review. BLM did not mention RS2477 or present one proposal for more public land access. Now BLM is proposing more closures and retrieve hours like Sawlog it hasn't worked in Pole Canyon except exclude us from using public land for sport hunting. Where is one BLM proposal for more access such as a new road around private land to connect to another BLM roads such as was accomplished in the Hogback south of the Bighole River by persuadable sportsmen?

Response: The BLM believes that the Preferred Alternative provides adequate opportunities for motorized and non-motorized access. As indicated in the Management Common to All Alternatives subsection of the Travel Management and Access section (Chapter 2 of the RMP), the BLM will continue to identify and pursue private property easement agreements as needed to gain agency and public access to important BLM lands.

Due to size and scale limitations, the hard copy travel plan maps in the RMP do not include route numbers or snowmobile management, and cover relatively large portions of the Planning Area. The electronic PDF file maps however, (located on CD, at the back of Volume 1) provide a better scale for the site-specific travel planning areas, as well as numbering of individual routes numbering and delineation of proposed snowmobile management.

Regarding RS2477, current guidance is contained in Washington Office Instruction Memorandum 2006-159: Non-Binding Determinations of R.S. 2477 Right-of-Way Claims. Briefly, this guidance states that the BLM does not have the authority to make binding determinations on the validity of R.S. 2477 right-of-way claims. The BLM may, however, make informal, non-binding determinations for its own land use planning and management purposes. A non-binding determination that the right-of-way exists is required before completing consultation with states or counties on any proposed improvements to a claimed R.S. 2477 right-of-way, i.e., any work beyond routine maintenance. A non-binding determination may also be appropriate before taking action to close or otherwise restrict the use of a claimed R.S. 2477 right-of-way. Such determinations must be based on the particular laws of each state in which a claimed right-of-way is situated.

Site-specific routes managed for Game Retrieval, rather than yearlong Closure, provide hunters with reasonable access. Although public compliance needs improvement, the BLM believes these routes offer a reasonable compromise to the hunting community.

Y2

Comment: What is lacking in the draft RMP is no improvements in public access - no new roads, no improvements in wildlife habitat. To the contrary more public access and public recreational opportunities will be forfeited for the sole benefit of cattle grazing, sage brush burning, etc.

Response: In Chapter 2, in the Travel Management and Access section, under the Alternative B – Preferred Alternative heading, the RMP indicates that the BLM would actively seek agency and public easement agreements in order to maintain current access for popularly traveled routes, and seek additional site-specific opportunities as needed. In terms of improvement in wildlife habitat, the Vegetation Communities section of Chapter 2 describes proposed vegetation treatments that would be designed to improve wildlife habitat. The Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section of Chapter 2 describes additional proposed management designed to improve conditions for wildlife.

Y3

Comment: Motorized recreationists endorsed and accepted millions of acres of area restriction under the Off-Highway Vehicle Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed Plan Amendment for Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota (3-State OHV) decision (http://www.mt.blm.gov/ea/ohv/FSROD.pdf) and the Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use, Final Rule (http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/ohv/final.pdf) as a positive action to control environmental impacts. We accepted area restriction and not area closure. Area closure is permanent. Area restriction allows flexibility as needed to address site-specific conditions. Each motorized road and trail exists because it serves some multiple-use need. Every road and trail is important to some individual for some purpose. Each motorized road and trail must have adequate site-specific analysis to determine all of its values including motorized recreational value. Motorized recreationists gave up 97 percent of the area historically available to them under both the 3-State ROD as the ultimate act of mitigation so that we would continue to have use of existing motorized routes that cover or provide access to an area estimated at less than 3 percent of the total area. Now motorized recreationists have been given almost no credit for our cooperation during that action and we have only been penalized for our past cooperation by a resource management plan that seeks to close 50 percent of the existing motorized routes. This outcome was not part of the 3-StateOHV and this level of closure is not acceptable to us for that reason. The 3-State OHV agreements were not made with the intention of massive closures beyond that agreement. We ask that the BLM include proper recognition of the agreement behind the 3-State OHV and allow continued use of the existing networks of motorized roads and trails without massive motorized closures.

Response: With some exceptions, prior to the 2003 Statewide Off-Highway Vehicle Record of Decision (ROD), interagency travel management allowed for yearlong cross-country wheeled motorized travel on public lands. Coupled with the dramatic increase of OHV use, advances in OHV technology, and changes in population/demographics, this relatively unrestricted management led to adverse resource impacts, as well as increased conflict between motorized and non-motorized users. The ROD is a comprehensive response to these concerns. In addition to the initial wheeled OHV cross-country travel restriction, the ROD requires cooperating agencies to identify, prioritize, and conduct site-specific travel plans for their respective resource areas. During site-specific planning, all roads and trails are to be analyzed, and identified as open or closed to various types of use. As a result, some existing roads and trails may not remain available for motorized use. The BLM notes that the Preferred Alternative in the Butte RMP would entail closure of approximately 34 percent of existing routes, rather than 50 percent as mentioned in the comment.

Y4

Comment: We are asking for continued use of routes that are legitimately recognized by the agencies including those defined by the: 3-State OHV decision and route definitions (or similar definitions), RS-2477 access laws, all agency mapping including current travel plan mapping and historic and current visitor mapping. It is not fair to represent routes as “unauthorized” or “illegal” when they were created in times when it was appropriate. We would like this point corrected in the final document and appropriate changes made to the historic routes proposed for closure because of this reason.

Response: Alternative A represents all existing routes, whether historic, agency created, or user created. None of these routes have been portrayed as unauthorized or illegal in this document, since there was no prohibition against their development. However, unless specifically authorized by the BLM, all user routes known to have been created subsequent to the 2003 Statewide OHV decision are illegal, and as such, were not included as part of the roads and trails inventory.

Y5

Comment: The proposed plan does not create any new OHV routes nor does it create any motorized loops and destinations which are considered very valuable to motorized recreationists. In other words routes are proposed for closure when they could be connected to make OHV loops that would provide much needed public recreation.

Response: The BLM believes it has provided for and accommodated motorized loops within travel plans where practicable in the context of balancing the needs for motorized travel opportunities while minimizing resource impacts and providing opportunities for non-motorized users. For example, the Preferred Alternative for the Upper Big Hole River Travel Planning Area provides for an OHV loop that spans a considerable distance on BLM and adjoining Forest Service lands.

Y6

Comment: The existing level of motorized access and recreation cannot be dismissed because it is only associated with the No Action Alternative. The existing level of motorized access and recreation is a reasonable alternative and an alternative other than No Action must be built around it.

Response: Alternative A, the No Action alternative, has been considered in the context of travel planning. While this alternative is not being brought forward by the BLM as the Preferred Alternative, in some geographic subareas of the travel planning areas analyzed in the Butte RMP, the Preferred Alternative intentionally matches the No Action alternative. The BLM notes that many changes have occurred since the completion of the last RMP (1984) that require updating travel management. Until the current planning effort, the BLM has never actually conducted its own travel planning and analysis within the five travel planning areas being analyzed within the Butte RMP.

Y7

Comment: It is not environmentally and socially responsible to squeeze motorized recreationists into the small possible numbers of areas and routes, yet this is the goal being pursued by the Butte RMP. There is also a significant public safety aspect associated with squeezing everyone into a small area as accidents will increase with too many motorized recreationists on too few routes. We request that these significant issues be adequately addressed and corrected in the preferred alternative.

Response: The BLM believes the Preferred Alternative provides adequate opportunities for motorized recreation. Given the overall availability of BLM and other interagency routes (USFS), crowding is not generally an issue. However, as with any form of recreation, popular riding areas such as Pipestone and Clancy can become more crowded during holiday weekends, especially during permitted organized events. Riders are encouraged to avoid these areas during peak use. As a basic part of Tread Lightly ethics, all riders are expected to maintain "situational alertness" for other riders and non-motorized users whenever they ride.

The BLM has received no reports of accidents that have occurred as a result of crowding. However, if safety becomes a problem, either on BLM's dual use routes, or at popular designated OHV riding areas, BLM may need to consider more intensive management, or use allocation.

Y8

Comment: Note that non-motorized recreationists can use routes that are both open and closed to motorized recreationists including roads and the evaluation of the opportunities available to non-motorized recreationists must be based on the total of all existing roads and trails. Additionally non-motorized recreationists can use an infinite amount of cross-country opportunity and motorized recreationists can not. This detail must be adequately considered in the allocation of recreation resources.

Response: Non-motorized recreation uses are among the multiple uses the BLM is expected to provide for public land users. The evaluation of opportunities available for non-motorized use is based on those areas or routes restricted to non-motorized use only, not for roads or trails open to both types of use. While non-motorized users can choose to recreate on motorized roads or trails if they wish, most choose not to, given their recreational preference.

Y9

Comment: These surveys and data demonstrate the significant popularity of motorized and OHV recreation and the tremendous public support and need for motorized and OHV recreational opportunities. We maintain that motorized recreationists are the main group of visitors out of the total population of visitors to the national forest visiting the forest five or more days per year. The needs and support of motorized recreationists must be adequately addressed in this planning effort by preserving all reasonable existing motorized recreational opportunities. This planning effort must also adequately address the increasing popularity by creating new motorized recreational opportunities. OHV and dual-sport registrations in Montana grew by at least 24 percent from 2004 to 2005 (http://www.snowtana.com/News/Stories/ OHV register.html). These numbers demonstrate the immense popularity of OHV recreation. These numbers demonstrate that there are not enough existing motorized recreational opportunities. These numbers demonstrate that the agency's motorized closure trend is contrary to the needs of the public. The magnitude of the number of motorized recreationists is real. The misrepresentation of visitor numbers must be discontinued. Proper emphasis must be given to motorized recreation. Additionally, the agency must understand and accept that many motorized recreationists do not participate in the NEPA process. Therefore, the agency should not be driven by the number of perceived participants and comments received. As originally envisioned and stated in law, the NEPA process should be driven by issues and needs and motorized recreationists have significant issues and needs. Motorized recreationists believe and hope that the BLM as a public agency will look out for their issues and needs in an even-handed way. In other words, the agency must not be overly influenced by the comment writing and legal campaigns of organized non-motorized groups and adequately emphasize the needs of lesser organized and funded motorized recreationists. The current proposal does not meet these needs in a multiple-use area that is ideal for motorize use.

Response: There are many surveys and data sources available, such as the National Forest Visitor Use Monitoring Program, that document the popularity and importance of both motorized and non-motorized recreation to the public. The BLM has a commitment to provide for a full range of recreational opportunities, regardless of the level of interest or enthusiasm displayed by any particular interest group. While the number of public comments for a particular issue may be indicative, they are not treated as "votes". The content of each comment is more important to BLM than the number received for any particular issue.

The BLM believes the Preferred Alternative for travel planning in the Butte RMP represents a balanced travel plan that takes into account resource protection, and the divergent interests of both motorized and non-motorized recreational users.

Y10

Comment: Given the demonstrated underutilization of existing wilderness areas, we conclude that there are few quiet visitors even though they make a lot of noise at Forest Service meetings. Given that vast areas of our forests have been set aside for the exclusive benefit of this tiny group of quiet visitors, it is not reasonable to set aside more areas and trails for their needs.

Response: Non-motorized recreation uses are among the multiple uses the BLM is expected to provide for public land users. Non-motorized recreation represents a significant percentage of use on both BLM and USFS managed wilderness and non-wilderness lands. As such, some areas must be identified for non-motorized users to enjoy their recreational pursuits. However, the BLM does not propose to set aside more areas for non-motorized use with the Butte RMP.

Y11

Comment: There is a serious inaccuracy between the agency's representation of motorized versus non-motorized trail use and actual trail use that must be resolved. The routes in the project area are predominantly used by motorized recreationists. We see this actuality every weekend. Site specific trail use observations such as ours must be used and will easily justify motorized use of all existing routes.

Response: The BLM did not include any actual trail use data (motorized, non-motorized) in the Butte RMP. However, there are many surveys and data sources available, such as the National Forest Visitor Use Monitoring Program, that document the popularity and importance of both motorized and non-motorized recreation to the public. Although some non-motorized users (such as mountain bikers) do not mind sharing areas or trails with ATVs or motorcycles, most prefer the quiet recreational experience provided under non-motorized management. As such, surveys (or observations) conducted in motorized areas are most likely to record a high percentage of motorized use. BLM observations (professional knowledge, recreation staff, Trail Rangers) indicate a wide range of recreational use activity throughout the project area.

Y12

Comment: A poll conducted by the Blue Ribbon Coalition http://www.sharetrails.org/uploads/PL/GMUG/GMUG_Survey_Key_Findings.pdf found that the public widely opposed any further reductions in recreational access to the national forest. "Fully 73 percent of local residents say the Forest Service should not reduce public access on local National Forests. Sportsmen are particularly opposed, as 81 percent of the hunters and 76 percent of the anglers say the Forest Service should not change regulations to reduce access or increase roadless areas."

Response: The BLM has no authority to manage USFS lands. The BLM does, however, provide for interagency route connectivity and flexibility for both current and future USFS travel management plans.

Y13

Comment: Resource allocation must include access to an equal number of quality recreational opportunities including alpine lakes, rivers, streams, and overlooks. We are not aware of any law that precludes motorized recreationists from enjoying equal access and allocation of the same resources that non-motorized recreationists enjoy. Equal opportunity laws, case law precedents, and agency guidance have clearly established that the goal for the agency should be equal opportunity for all visitor groups. Motorized recreationists should have a reasonable allocation of quality recreational opportunities but they do not under existing conditions and the disparity must not be worsened by the proposed action.

Response: The BLM agrees in principle that a full range of quality recreational opportunities should be provided for both motorized and non-motorized recreation users. The BLM believes that the Preferred Alternative would accomplish this goal.

Y14

Comment: If light use is being used as a criterion to close motorized routes, then it would also seem fair to convert non-motorized trails that see light use to motorized routes in order to address the concern of over-usage and shortage of motorized routes. We ask for your consideration of this reasoning.

Response: The level of use a motorized route receives is only one criterion among many that has been taken into account during the route management analysis process. Considered with other factors, (resource impacts, human use needs) light use has sometimes helped support a proposal for closure, but has not been used as a

stand alone criterion. Non-motorized recreation uses are among the multiple uses the BLM is expected to provide for public land users. Converting non-motorized trails into motorized trails would not only lead to user conflict as well as undermine resource management goals for the area, such as the establishment of desirable road densities for wildlife.

Y15

Comment: The planning team should formulate an Alternative that maximizes all existing recreational opportunities, as well as anticipates and plans for an increase in recreational use in the future. None of the Draft Alternatives maximize recreational alternatives and most of them fail to provide adequate recreational opportunity to meet the current need.

Response: The BLM believes that the Preferred Alternative, Alternative B, represents a balanced travel plan that takes into account resource protection, while accommodating the divergent interests of recreational users to the greatest extent possible. The Preferred Alternative strives to maximize all types of recreation use, rather than maximizing one type at the expense of another.

Y16

Comment: The public wants the existing roads and trails left open to vehicle use. The existing network of roads and trails in the planning area should be considered an inventory with which to develop recreational trail systems. The Planning Team should look for management alternatives that provide for mitigation instead of closure. Options other than closure should be emphasized in each alternative. Alternatives, or management guidance, directives etc that require closure as the first or only option when resource impacts are identified should be avoided. The Planning Team should carefully consider displaced use. Assuming that closures are eminent in some areas, one could calculate approximately how much existing motorized will be displaced to other areas. The Planning Team should develop alternatives that allow for additional access and additional recreational opportunities in suitable areas in order to properly manage the displaced use. The Planning Team should avoid overly restrictive management prescriptions that limit the land manager's ability to respond to changing recreational patterns.

Response: Public opinion varies widely concerning travel management. Some members of the public want existing roads and trails left open to vehicle use, however, others do not. The existing inventory of roads and trails is represented by Alternative A. However, Alternative A is not being brought forward as the Preferred Alternative. The project team utilized a range of route management options (Open Yearlong, Open/Restricted, Closed, Game Retrieval, etc.) for alternative development. The BLM believes that the Preferred Alternative (Alternative B) provides a balance of quality recreational opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized recreation users. In addition, the BLM believes the Preferred Alternative also provides adequate dispersion, within their respective areas of use, for both motorized and non-motorized recreation.

Y17

Comment: Mountain bikes and motorcycle use should be considered compatible uses. Both are mechanized and both prefer a single-track or narrow trail. Additionally, motorcyclists have been keeping single track trails that mountain bikers have recently discovered, open for many years.

Response: There is a fundamental difference between motorcycles and mountain bikes. Motorcycles are a form of motorized travel, while mountain bikes are a form of non-motorized, mechanized travel.

In general, the experiences sought by non-motorized users are different from those being sought by motorized users. Many non-motorized users seek as natural and primitive an experience as possible when recreating on public lands. Having clean air and water, seeing wildlife, listening to the sounds of nature, and escaping from the noise of everyday life are essential parts of their experience. As such, some places must be identified for non-motorized users to enjoy their recreational pursuits.

Y18

Comment: The need for more non-motorized hiking trails has not been demonstrated or documented. Non-motorized hiking trails in the project are not over-used. At the same time there is need for more motorized access and motorized recreational opportunities yet the dominant thinking within the agency is to close motorized roads and trails and increase non-motorized recreational opportunities.

Response: Non-motorized recreation uses are among the multiple uses the BLM is expected to provide for public land users. There are many surveys and data sources available, such as the National Forest Visitor Use Monitoring Program, that document the popularity and importance of both motorized and non-motorized recreation to the public. The BLM believes the Preferred Alternative represents a balanced travel plan that takes into account resource protection, and the divergent interests of both motorized and non-motorized recreational users.

Y19

Comment: We live in this area and accept the economic compromises of living here so that we can access and recreate on our public lands. We are fortunate to have an abundance of public lands and there is no valid reason why we should not have reasonable opportunity to enjoy them. Our local culture is built on the foundation of

access to visit and use these lands. Now travel planning and other initiatives are severely restricting that access and recreational opportunities. We have only one lifetime to enjoy these opportunities and these opportunities are being systematically eliminated. The impacts of lost opportunities on motorized recreationists are significant and irretrievable and irreversible. We won't be living this life again. NEPA requires adequate evaluation and consideration of irretrievable and irreversible impacts. We request that the evaluation and decision making adequately identify and address these impacts. NEPA also requires adequate mitigation of irretrievable and irreversible impacts. We request that the decision-making provide for adequate mitigation to avoid the irretrievable and irreversible impacts of lost opportunities on motorized recreationists.

Response: Because of the wide range of public perspectives related to travel management, it is unlikely that everyone will agree on the ideal composition of motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities. However, the BLM believes the Preferred Alternative provides adequate opportunities for motorized recreation. Potential impacts to motorized users associated with reduced open road miles are neither irretrievable nor irreversible. Closed roads can be re-opened in the future and new roads can certainly be built in the future as well.

Y20

Comment: Our public lands are a tremendous national resource both in total area and features. Public lands should be available for conflict-free use and enjoyment by everyone. Unfortunately public lands have been turned into a conflict zone by non-motorized fanatics. What is right about this situation? It is a great disservice to the public. We request a management initiative be introduced that will return public lands for the use and enjoyment of everyone for once and for ever.

Response: The BLM agrees that public lands should be available for conflict-free use and enjoyment by everyone. That is why in addition to addressing resource impact issues, the BLM has strived to offer a range of recreational opportunities for everyone's enjoyment. We believe the Preferred Alternative in the Butte RMP achieves this goal.

Y21

Comment: Agencies are encouraged to align non-motorized area boundaries so that they do not encroach or eliminate trails located at the edge of the boundaries.

Response: Areas identified for non-motorized management are not established by drawing boundaries on a map. They are established through comprehensive travel planning; that has subsequently led to spatial opportunities for non-motorized use. Likewise, analysis and management of roads and trails adjacent to non-motorized areas is based on comprehensive travel planning, rather than proximity to non-motorized areas.

Y22

Comment: Agencies are encouraged to provide for motorized trails and vista points on the boundaries outside of the non-motorized areas so the motorized visitors can view those areas.

Response: The BLM believes the Preferred Alternative provides adequate opportunities for motorized users to view these areas.

Y23

Comment: Agencies should recognize that many roads and trails were not originally laid out with recreation in mind and that changes should be made in some road and trail segments to address environmental and safety problems. In most cases, problems can be mitigated to a reasonable level and closures can be avoided.

Response: Site-specific road and trail closures proposals are most often made to achieve a range of resource protection objectives, such as establishing desirable road densities for wildlife, reducing the spread of weeds, preventing soil erosion, stream sedimentation, etc.; and sometimes to help resolve social conflicts. Depending on overall analysis, mitigation measures, water bars, culverts, minor re-routes, etc.; may or may not tip the scales when determining route management. Mitigation is always applicable to roads and trails routes managed as Open Yearlong, or Seasonally Restricted.

Y24

Comment: Agencies are encouraged to treat hiking, horses, and mountain bikes as a form of transportation, just as motorized recreation is a form of transportation.

Response: The BLM considers hiking, horseback riding, and mountain biking as non-motorized forms of travel.

Y25

Comment: There are several opportunities when working with your local clubs to provide ecological and economically sound trail systems for the OHV community. There is the simple fact of promoting or educating the non-motorized community of the thousands of acres available to them that is non-motorized already.

Response: The BLM continues to work closely with local and state motorized recreation organizations. Much of the planning and implementation efforts for the Whitetail Pipestone and Clancy designated OHV Recreation areas were completed with the assistance of these groups. The BLM provides a full range of information (websites, recreation maps, brochures, etc.) that help direct diverse recreation users to areas managed for their respective use.

Y26

Comment: Most of the, motorized, closures, are being driven, by perceived social issues of the non-motorized community and not resource issues.

Response: The majority of motorized closures have been based on resource protection criteria, rather than social issues. Resource protection criteria include: establishing desirable road densities for wildlife, big game winter range, reducing the spread of weeds, preventing soil erosion, stream sedimentation, etc.

Y27

Comment: Issue 3: The vision is to provide a range of quality motorized and non-motorized opportunities and reasonable access for management while protecting natural resources. This vision is sound but flawed, in that it does not meet the motorized definition of a quality experience. There aren't any motorized trails, designated in the EIS, single track, for motorcycle or ATV. Closing 3I7 miles of road and trail and other large blocks of land only is not conducive to your vision. We request that the process include a reasonable multiple-use alternative.

Response: The BLM recognizes the needs of OHV recreational users. As such, the RMP includes 40.5 miles of quality, designated OHV trails being brought forward under all alternatives. Approximately 30.5 miles of trail are located in the Pipestone designated OHV recreation area, and 9.0 miles in the Ohio Gulch OHV designated recreation area (with an additional 2 miles pending development). Another 2.2 miles of OHV (only) trail has been proposed within Alternative D for the Lewis and Clark County NW TPA. The BLM believes the Preferred Alternative, which provides approximately 66 percent of the existing motorized routes, represents a balance of opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized recreation users.

Y28

Comment: Issue 4: The vision is to provide a range of quality recreation opportunities. Closures of access to several routes and areas, is not providing a good mixture of quality opportunities.

Response: The vision is to provide a range of quality recreation opportunities, for all users, motorized and non-motorized alike. As such, some places must be identified for non-motorized use to allow this rather significant segment of the recreating public to enjoy their recreational pursuits.

Y29

Comment: There are very few access routes, very few motorized loops, and very few motorized destinations such as mines and overlooks. The level of closure is excessive. A more reasonable approach would be to close selected routes and mitigate by completing loops and destination routes to create more overall opportunity and a higher quality opportunity. Unfortunately none of the alternatives present this reasonable approach and we request that this deficiency be corrected in the preferred alternative.

Response: The BLM believes the Preferred Alternative, which provides approximately 66 percent of the existing motorized routes, represents a balance of opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized recreation users. Approximately 40.5 miles of quality, designated OHV trails are being brought forward under all the action alternatives.

Y30

Comment: BLM needs to work with private landowners that are closing roads through their lands to public lands. Many roads are being closed arbitrarily and BLM is not doing anything to remedy this when roads are and have been used for over 100 years.

Response: The BLM has no control over private roads (privately owned roads located on private land). However BLM works with private property owners to pursue easement agreements as needed to gain agency and public access to important public lands. It is important to note that the BLM has a policy regarding private property owners with land located immediately adjacent to or surrounding BLM land. If a BLM route travels through private land and that private landowner leaves the route open to the public access, the BLM would leave the BLM route open beyond the private property. If a private property owner denies the public access through their private property onto BLM lands, the BLM would close that BLM route to the private landowner.

Y31

Comment: There are two initiatives that need to be changed: cross country travel and roadless initiatives. There is no evidence that shows motorized use causes permanent damage to wildlife or forest habitat. Signs that say (Do not establish new trails or routes) is all that was needed, instead of no Cross Country travel. This is overkill! The direction of your management is creating the user conflicts. You need to manage the machines, not the people. Manufacturers will adapt their vehicles to the policy or the owners will do so appropriately. These should be horsepower ratings, single track trail, ATV 2 track, and Jeep trail. The noise level standards, (which are not enforced) and perhaps tires with trail friendly treads. The manufacturers are not producing trail friendly machines, because their money is in race machines. Horsepower limits would help in the more primitive and high mountain areas. The motorized users pay trail fees, while no other users do. We are paying for our own closure signs.

Response: The effect of roads, motorized trails, and cross-country travel on wildlife and other resources is

well documented in scientific and peer-reviewed literature. The 2003 OHV Statewide ROD, which (generally) prohibits cross-country wheeled motorized travel, recognized and addressed these concerns. BLM management is directed towards decreasing or minimizing user conflicts, such as those that occur between motorized and non-motorized recreation users over competition for space and the pursuit of a quality recreational experience. While technology is part of the equation, effective travel management involves managing human activity, not technology. Currently, the Butte Field Office does not charge user fees at any of its OHV recreation areas.

Y32

Comment: We are concerned about the loss of access and impact on the handicapped, elderly and physically impaired produced by each motorized closure to historic sites and traditional use areas. The proposed closures deny these citizens access to public lands that are especially important to them. We request that all the roads, trails, and features of interest be analyzed for the access and recreation opportunity that they provide for handicapped, elderly, and physically impaired visitors.

Response: These concerns were taken into consideration during travel planning analysis. The BLM believes that the Preferred Alternative provides reasonable access to all known important historic sites and destination points. The BLM has conducted numerous public meetings throughout the development of the Butte RMP, during which the public was solicited to review BLM maps and provide feedback regarding missing roads and trails, or comment on specific access needs. As a result, the BLM has added several routes that were inadvertently missed, eliminated others that don't actually exist, and been able to provide more accurate maps. However, the BLM did not receive any site specific information or requests regarding access to important historic sites or destination points.

Y33

Comment: Forest Service and BLM law enforcement has taken the position that OHVs cannot legally ride on forest or BLM roads unless the road is designated dual-use. Cumulative decisions have closed OHV trails to the point that there is not an inter-connecting network of routes. At the same time, the agencies have not designated a functional network of dual-use routes to interconnect to OHV routes. Dual-use is essential for the family OHV experience. Therefore, these closure decisions are forcing the OHV recreationists to ride non-designated dual-use routes illegally. The proposed action must include these designations in order to provide a network of OHV routes with inter-connections, where required, using dual-use roads in order to be functional. This will allow OHV enthusiasts to operate legally on forest and BLM roads. We request that a system of dual-purpose roads, and OHV roads and trails that interconnect be one of the primary objectives of the travel management plan and that this objective be adequately addressed in the document and decision. The issue of speed can be adequately and easily addressed by specifying maximum speeds and signing.

The summary dismissal of dual-use designations is neither reasonable nor acceptable per NEPA requirements. Dual-use of routes is a significant issue to us because OHVs cannot use the limited trail system provided by the proposed alternative without traveling on roads. In other words, this part of the proposal alone renders the entire the project area off-limits to OHV use. This outcome is not a reasonable solution for a travel plan and we request that the issue and need be adequately addressed and a revised proposal developed.

Response: BLM roads are not classified as public roads, but rather as Administrative roads, and do not require street legal OHVs. Riders less than 18 years of age, however, are still required to wear an approved helmet. Unless otherwise designated (Open Yearlong, Seasonally Restricted, etc.) all BLM roads are open to dual use. This negates the need for a revised travel management proposal suggested in the comment. Should traffic volumes or user conflicts become prevalent and warrant restrictions, then priority would be given to vehicles legally registered to travel on public highways (See Field Office Level - Management Common to All Alternatives in the Travel Management and Access section of Chapter 2 in the RMP).

The BLM has no jurisdiction over USFS roads, but recommends that all motorized users license and equip their vehicles for street legal use, so as to allow for travel on USFS roads or other public roads managed as open to dual use. BLM cooperates with all adjacent land management agencies (especially the USFS) in order to accommodate interagency route and trail connectivity.

Y34

Comment: No dual-use designations means that family oriented OHV recreation in the area will be eliminated. Family OHV recreation is extremely important to us and the southern area of the project provides an ideal setting for family use with fairly easy routes located away from busy traffic areas and vista points. We request that dual-use or unrestricted width trail designation be used for all of the motorized routes except single-track trails. Without the dual-use designation, the proposed action would transform family OHV trips from a healthy family oriented recreation to an illegal activity. This is not a reasonable nor acceptable outcome. The continual closure of motorized trails has forced OHVs to be operated on BLM and forest roads in order to provide a reasonable system of routes and to reach destinations of interest. The lack of dual-use designations on BLM and forest roads then makes OHV use on these routes illegal. The cumulative negative effect of motorized closures and

then combined with the lack of a reasonable system of roads and trails with dual-use designation have not been adequately considered in past evaluations and decision-making. We request that all reasonable routes be designated for dual-use so that a system of roads and trails can be used by motorized recreationists. Additionally, we request that the cumulative negative effect of all past decisions that have adequately considered dual-use designations be evaluated and considered in the decision-making and that this project include an adequate mitigation plan to compensate for inadequate consideration in the past.

Response: BLM roads are not classified as public roads, but rather as Administrative roads, and do not require street legal OHVs. Riders less than 18 years of age, however, are still required to wear an approved helmet. Unless otherwise designated, all BLM roads are open to dual use, subject to existing route management (Open Yearlong, Seasonally Restricted, etc.). Should traffic volumes or user conflicts become prevalent and warrant restrictions, then priority would be given to vehicles legally registered to travel on public highways (See Field Office Level - Management Common to All Alternatives in the Travel Management and Access section of Chapter 2 in the RMP).

The BLM has no jurisdiction over USFS roads, but recommends that all motorized users license and equip their vehicles for street legal use, so as to allow for travel on USFS roads or other public roads managed as open to dual use. BLM cooperates with all adjacent land management agencies (especially the USFS) in order to accommodate interagency route and trail connectivity.

The BLM does not agree that OHV trail width should be unrestricted. BLM has adopted the 50" trail width restriction on designated OHV trails, consistent with the USFS. (Wording has been added to this effect in the Travel Management and Access section of Chapter 2 under Field Office Level – Management Common to All Alternatives). All OHV trails located within the planning area have been constructed to this national standard, including all ATV cattleguards. BLM recognizes that OHV manufacturers are producing utility transport vehicles (UTVs) that exceed 50" in width; however these vehicles will be restricted to BLM roads only.

Y35

Comment: Figure 2.2 and 2.7 on page 14 of Chapter 2 in the 3-State OHV EIS and Decision clearly shows that existing tracks used by motorcycles are to be considered as motorized trails (http://www.mt.blm.gov/ea/ ohv/ Chapter2.pdf). The evaluation did not adequately consider these routes and is in violation of the 3-State OHV agreement.

Response: A comprehensive roads and trails inventory was completed that documented all established roads and trails, including single track trails in existence prior to the 2003 Statewide OHV ROD. This inventory did not yield any motorized single track trails. While the BLM has received several mapping comments regarding "missing" ATV routes, we have received no such comments regarding motorized single track trails.

Y36

Comment: Motorcycle trail riders enjoy riding single-track trails. Motorized single-track recreation trails are limited at this time and continue to decline. Some BLM and FS districts do not differentiate between ATV and motorcycle trails in their travel plans. Evaluations and travel plans should differentiate between ATV and motorcycle trails. It is critical to preserve the integrity of the existing motorized single-track trails. Single-track trails offer a highly desirable experience for trail bike riders, equestrians, hikers, and bicyclists. They offer a different, more primitive experience than ATV trails or forest roads.

Response: The BLM agrees that (motorized) single track trails are important and need to be managed as such in order to preserve their integrity. The Pipestone designated OHV recreation area provides approximately 5 miles of quality single track only trails, many of which continue onto adjacent USFS managed lands.

Y37

Comment: The evaluation needs to distinguish the difference in trail requirements and impacts between ATVs and motorcycles and use that difference to justify keeping more single track trails open to motorcycles.

Response: The evaluation took into account the differences between trail requirements and resource impacts associated with ATV trails (50" maximum width, dual track) and motorized single track trails (single track only). No changes, either closures or additions, have been proposed for motorized single track trails. The roads and trails inventory conducted for the travel plans analyzed with the Butte RMP did not yield any motorized single track trails other than those authorized in pre-existing travel management plans.

Y38

Comment: We have observed that single-track motorcycle trails require less maintenance for erosion and use. We have also observed that ATV enthusiasts do a good job of clearing downed trees from trails. These characteristics must be adequately considered. Single-track trails that are not appropriate for ATV use should be kept open for motorcycle use.

Response: The BLM's motorized single track trails are managed as open to single track use only.

Y39

Comment: Shared use trails are not something your agency should be shying away from. This is public land

and is to be shared by all. As basic as this may sound, the fact is that all users must learn that their type of recreation is not the only recreation on this public land and they must share.

Response: The BLM is not mandated to provide for every possible use on every possible acre (or trail), but instead for a variety of recreation opportunities as appropriate across the landscape. Conflict between motorized and non-motorized users has been one of the most frequent and major issues of concern addressed during public scoping meetings and written comments for this RMP. As such, some places must be identified for non-motorized use to allow this segment of the recreating public to enjoy their recreational pursuits. While most motorized users do not mind sharing the same space (trail, area) with non-motorized users, the reverse is not usually true. In addition to their preferred means of travel (horse, foot, mountain bike, x-country skis, etc.), many non –motorized users are also seeking a quiet, more primitive recreational experience. By its very nature, motorized use is not quiet. While many non-motorized users would not choose to do so, some, such as mountain bike riders, or joggers, have no problem sharing trails with motorized users.

Y40

Comment: A reasonable alternative instead of all motorized closures is a sharing of resources. A reasonable alternative for accomplishing this can be done by designating alternating weeks for motorized and non-motorized use. The schedule can be communicated to the public by signs at each end of the trail segments, newspaper articles, and through local user groups. This alternative eliminates any reasonable concern about conflict of users (which we think is over-stated and over-emphasized based on reasons discussed elsewhere in this submittal).

Response: Although the commenter's suggestion would help mitigate concerns based on user conflict, the BLM believes it would be too complicated for the public as well as too labor intensive and difficult for the BLM to manage and enforce. Also, this alternative would not address other reasons why roads were identified for closure including reducing habitat fragmentation, reducing disturbance to wildlife, increasing security habitat, protecting habitat for listed and sensitive species, improving watershed and riparian functions, improving aquatic habitats and reducing the spread of noxious weeds.

Y41

Comment: If you truly have to separate the uses and you must "provide" the non-motorized community these large blocks of unique experiences then maybe it is time to provide the motorized community with their unique opportunities without the conflict of different uses.

Response: The primary reason for providing separate areas of use for motorized and non-motorized users is to avoid or minimize user conflict, and provide for a quality recreation experience. In addition to their preferred mode of travel (horse, foot, mountain bike, x-country skis, etc.), many non–motorized users are also seeking a quiet recreational experience. By its very nature, motorized use is not quiet. While most motorized users do not mind sharing the same space (trail, area) with non-motorized users, the reverse is often not true.

Y42

Comment: I feel that for every OHV trail that is closed (not including the boondock recent user-created trails) there should be a new one created for our use.

Response: None of the action alternatives propose maintaining the current level of roads and trails for the various reasons described in the document (reducing resource impacts, road density, establishing a balance between motorized/non-motorized recreation opportunities). However, subject to NEPA and other constraints, BLM can consider site-specific proposals for new OHV trails in areas acceptable for that use.

Y43

Comment: We need game retrieval during certain hours of the day on some of these closed areas.

Response: The BLM believes that the alternative for the five site-specific travel plan areas addressed in the RMP provide for a range of access opportunities (including access for hunters) while protecting natural resources. The needs of hunters, including game retrieval, were taken into consideration during travel planning in each of the five site specific travel plan areas.

Y44

Comment: The level of [road] closure is excessive. It closes 317.5 miles of roads and creates 317.5 miles of new non-motorized routes. This level of closure is excessive. A more reasonable approach would be to close selected routes and mitigate by completing loops and destination routes to create more overall opportunity and a higher quality opportunity. Unfortunately, none of the alternatives present this reasonable approach. I would request that this deficiency be corrected in the preferred alternative.

Response: The BLM is required to develop travel plans in a manner that provides for balance between motorized use opportunities while minimizing impacts to resources such as wildlife, water quality, and soils. The BLM believes the Butte RMP provides a range of reasonable alternatives that take into account resource protection, and motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities.

Y45

Comment: The proposed plan does not include any ATV routes and, therefore, does not rationally address the needs of the OHV recreationists described above. It is unbelievable that the needs of 29,000 OHV recreationists in the area and 290,000 OHV recreationists in the state and thousands of visitors would be totally ignored. We request that the process include a reasonable multiple-use alternative.

Response: The BLM recognizes the needs of OHV recreational users. As such, the RMP includes 40.5 miles of existing designated OHV trails that are being brought forward under all alternatives. Approximately 30.5 miles of these trails are located in the Pipestone designated OHV recreation area, and 9.0 miles are located in the Ohio Gulch OHV designated recreation area (with an additional 2 miles pending development). Another 2.2 miles of OHV (only) trail have been proposed within Alternative D for the Lewis and Clark County NW TPA.

Y46

Comment: We need a multiple-use alternative that is based on ALL of the existing roads and trails available to the public. The process is required by NEPA to be neutral and a neutral process would include fair presentation of all reasonable alternatives including all existing roads and trails plus new motorized opportunities required to meet the needs of the public. Why isn't this reasonable alternative being presented? We are concerned that the process is manipulating the public to believe that an entirely reasonable alternative based on existing roads and trails cannot be considered. Again, the process is predisposed towards motorized closures right from the start. This is not acceptable.

Response: A comprehensive roads and trails inventory was completed that documented all established roads and trails that existed prior to the 2003 Statewide OHV ROD. Throughout the Butte RMP process the BLM has received public input regarding routes that were inadvertently missed, or routes that don't really exist, and map corrections have been made accordingly. The BLM believes the Preferred Alternative represents a balanced travel plan that takes into account resource protection, and the divergent interests of motorized and non-motorized recreational users.

Y47

Comment: I ask you to review other areas to see if you can open more than one area [for general motorized use by handicapped persons]. One specific area is the Iron Mask Mine property.

Response: Due to the land ownership patterns of BLM lands in the Butte Field Office, it is difficult for the BLM to identify large contiguous blocks of land for motorized use by handicapped persons. Site-specific travel planning for the Iron Mask area will be conducted after finalization of the RMP. At that time, Iron Mask can be considered for motorized use by handicapped persons.

Y48

Comment: There is no significant impact from the level of dispersed motorcycle trail use in the project area. There is no legitimate or documented conflict of uses between motorcyclists and other uses on single-track trails in the project area. Note that it is not reasonable to define user conflict as merely seeing someone else on a trail. There is a significant need for an adequate number of miles of single-track for existing and future motorcyclists. There is no legitimate reason why the single-track trails in the multiple-use areas of the project should not be shared between motorized and non-motorized recreationists to a much greater extent. This reasonable alternative must be included.

Response: Within the Butte Field Office, there are very few single-track routes or routes identified for non-motorized use only within areas designated as "Limited" for travel. The vast majority of routes provide for different types and multiple uses of the routes.

Y49

Comment: The draft Butte RMP lacks a true "pro-recreation" alternative that adequately addresses motorized recreation. All of the alternatives developed for consideration represent a significant reduction in routes available for motorized use. Not one alternative even sustains the current opportunity. Conversely, the draft RMP has developed many "preservation" alternatives, where a maximum amount of closures are considered. The increasing demand for OHV recreation opportunities on public lands is extensively documented. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the project team to formulate at least one alternative that maximizes motorized recreation, or at least does not reduce motorized recreational opportunities in the planning area.

Therefore, we request that the project team formulate a wide range of alternatives including at least one Alternative that maximizes motorized recreational opportunities in the project area and addresses the following:

- The project team must formulate at least one alternative that emphasizes OHV use in Roaded Natural and Semi-Primitive Motorized opportunity settings for recreation. The pro-recreation alternative should strive to provide for the current and future demand for OHV recreational routes.
- Alternatives should include areas where OHV trails can be constructed and maintained when demand increases.
- Where appropriate, the agency should use this process to analyze the impacts of any future route construction and include those in the decision.

- Direction for the required process to construct new routes should be incorporated into each alternative.
- At least one alternative should maximize the ability to construct new sustainable trails to meet the current and future need.
- The project team should develop management alternatives that allow for proactive OHV management.
- All alternatives should include specific provisions to mark, map, and maintain designated roads, trails, and areas in cooperation with OHV users.
- All alternatives should include direction to engage in cooperative management with OHV groups and individuals.

A reasonable alternative that must be adequately addressed is the existing level of motorized recreational opportunities plus mitigation projects to protect the environment from existing problem areas, mitigation for past motorized closure cumulative effects, and enhancement for growth. The proposed plan does not accomplish this reasonable goal. A reasonable alternative would manage the area for the public instead of from the public and include OHV routes.

Response: The BLM believes that the action alternatives described in the Butte RMP for the five site-specific travel planning areas represent a range of access opportunities for a variety of public land users while reducing the impacts to natural resources. Alternative A represents the current availability of motorized travel routes. Through the travel planning process, all routes within each of the five site-specific travel plan areas were identified, mapped, and analyzed to determine their effects on wildlife and wildlife habitats, fish and aquatic habitats, soils and riparian areas. Through the travel plan process, alternatives were developed that reduce habitat fragmentation, reduce disturbance to wildlife, increase security habitat, protect or improve habitat for listed and sensitive species, improve watershed and riparian functions, improve aquatic habitats and reduce the spread of noxious weeds while providing for reasonable public access for motorized and non-motorized uses.

As identified in the Travel Management and Access section of Chapter 2 in the RMP, designated routes would be mapped and signed.

Site-specific analysis will be conducted when new trails are proposed for construction or modification.

Y50

Comment: National studies have shown the average age of the hunting population is going up. Limited ability of older hunters reflects a definitive need for additional multiple use access. The Butte RMP does not address this issue adequately and CBU requests that an alternative that would increase multiple use trails be provided for the public to comment on. An ageing population nationwide and the dramatic increase of motorized use of our federally managed public land must be addressed in travel planning decisions. To not provide an alternative that increases motorized opportunities would be acting arbitrary and capricious by your agency.

Response: The BLM believes that the alternatives described in the RMP for the five site-specific travel planning areas represent a range of opportunities for different types of public land users. The travel planning process, as described in **Appendix A**, provides for a comprehensive analysis of each road and trail segment and assures that decisions on road and trails are not made in an arbitrary and capricious manner. The routes proposed to be designated as open to motorized travel in the Preferred Alternative are intended to provide reasonable public access.

Travel Management – Mitigation/ Maintenance/ Closure Methods

Z1

Comment: A sense of magnitude must be used when making decisions about road closures based on indicators such as sediment production. For example, a route should not be closed because it is estimated to produce 10 cubic yards less sediment. The sediment yield must be compared to naturally occurring conditions which includes fires. The recent fires in the Butte and Helena areas discharged thousands of cubic yards of sediment to the area streams which is more than all of the motorized routes in the project area for the next 100 years.

Response: The locations, severities, and magnitudes of impacts from natural events such as wildland fires are not highly predictable and therefore often cannot be accurately depicted. This makes it impossible to credibly describe site-specific sedimentation impacts from motorized uses in the context of natural events. Generalized effects of natural events are discussed in the Cumulative Effects sections for each resource in the Environmental Consequences of Five Site-Specific Travel Plans section of Chapter 4 (Volume II of the RMP). In addition, the BLM cannot control effects of natural events. BLM can better control effects of human activities. Assessing the effects of human activities is the essence of analyzing effects of the BLM's proposed management activities and such assessments lead to various management decisions.

Z2

Comment: With respect to the comment that there is not enough money to mitigate problems, we can work with the BLM as partners in many different grant applications. Also see our comment in the attachment in regards to the significant levels of funding that are generated by motorized recreationists and would be available if the agency would pursue them and the system was working to distribute them equitably. Basically OHV

recreationists generate a significant amount OHV gas tax. These monies should be used to maintain routes, develop routes, conduct education, and mitigate issues but, unfortunately, it is being diverted elsewhere. This significant issue must be addressed.

Response: This RMP does not contain any statements regarding lack of funding for mitigating problems associated with travel planning. The majority of travel management funding for this office has been spent on OHV trail development, trailhead facilities, trail maintenance, and management (Trail Ranger program). In addition to agency funds, the BLM has successfully acquired funding from Montana OHV Program Trail Ranger grants for nearly a decade. To date, very few BLM funds have been spent on non-motorized trail systems or facilities.

BLM has no control over state distribution of OHV gas tax funds, or grants.

Z3

Comment: The environmental document should accurately address the significant negative impacts associated with disturbing existing stable roadways in order to obliterate the existing roadbed. A reasonable alternative would be to reclassify the road to either restricted-width or unrestricted-width motorized trail. We request that the preferred alternative make practical use of this management tool and the benefits that it provides including reduced sedimentation impact, reduced fisheries impact, reduced noxious weed impact, much less construction cost, reduced road inventory, reduced road maintenance and increased opportunities for motorized recreationists. Reclassifying roadways to restricted- or unrestricted-width motorized trail also avoids contributing to cumulative negative impacts on motorized recreationists.

Response: A range of best management practices will be utilized to obliterate those routes identified for decommissioning. In most cases, only site-specific portions of routes will be obliterated (such as at stream crossings, or other problematic areas), rather than disturbing the entire road bed.

Converting closed roads to motorized OHV use defeats the purpose of the closures, such as establishing desirable road densities for wildlife, or establishing a balance between motorized and non-motorized recreation. It can be argued that substituting OHV motorized use for full size motorized use will actually lead to a much higher level of use, and negate any differences in resource impacts.

Z4

Comment: Motorized recreationists have historically provided a significant amount of maintenance in order to keep routes open as part of their normal use. Now because of the significant number of motorized closures, the level of maintenance has been significantly reduced. We know of many motorized routes that are now closed and have become impassable to non-motorized recreationists because of the lack of user provided maintenance.

Response: The BLM has not received any complaints or comments from non-motorized users regarding lack of maintenance for closed roads or OHV trails.

Z5

Comment: We request that maintenance actions be taken before closure actions. We believe that this is a viable alternative that would address many of the issues that are driving the pre-determined decision to closure. OHV recreation generates significant gas tax revenue that could be tapped for this purpose. For more background on this issue please refer to our comments on gas tax and funding.

Response: Route and trail closures are not predetermined decisions. They are made through interdisciplinary team analysis, and are made in order to achieve a range of resource protection objectives, such as establishing desirable road densities for wildlife, reducing the spread of noxious weeds, preventing soil erosion, stream sedimentation, etc. In addition to preventing or minimizing resource impacts, some road and trail closures are established to provide a balance between motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities. While road and trail closures can help reduce maintenance workloads, they have not been proposed for this reason.

Z6

Comment: The lack of money to maintain OHV routes is being used as a reason to close OHV routes and at the same time Recreational Trails Program (RTP) and gas tax money paid by OHV recreationists is not being returned to OHV recreation. There is also unused motorized RTP money available each year. Additionally, the lack of money is used as a reason that new OHV routes cannot be constructed. Motorized recreationists are willing to work in collaboration with the agency to obtain trail and OHV funding for the project area. Additionally, motorized recreationists can be called upon to help with the maintenance of trails in the project area.

Solution: The BLM and Forest Service must aggressively pursue and make use of all available forms of OHV trail funding including RTP, and a more equitable return of the gas tax paid by OHV recreationists.

Response: Lack of funding has not been cited in the Butte RMP as a reason for closing OHV routes, or for not constructing new OHV routes. Site-specific road and trail closures proposals have been made to achieve a range of resource protection objectives such as establishing desirable road densities for wildlife, reducing the spread of weeds, preventing soil erosion, stream sedimentation, etc. In addition to preventing or minimizing resource impacts, some road and trail closures have been

made to help establish a balance between motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities.

The BLM has no control over state distribution of Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grants. This office has successfully applied for Montana OHV Program Trail Ranger Grants for nearly a decade, and in conjunction with BLM funding, has developed over 40 miles of quality designated OHV trails and facilities.

Z7

Comment: The lack of funding is often used as an excuse to avoid addressing problems associated with OHV recreation when in reality there is more than adequate funding. This is another example of the absence of a rational connection between the facts found and the choice made. Furthermore, the diversion of gas tax paid by OHV recreationists to other programs has contributed to many of the problems facing motorized recreationists. We request the evaluation of the impact and cumulative negative impacts that have resulted from the diversion of gas tax paid by OHV recreationists to other programs including impacts associated with reduced OHV safety, education, mitigation, and development programs. Additionally, we request that an adequate mitigation plan be included as part of this action to compensate for past cumulative negative impacts.

Response: The Butte RMP does not contain any statements regarding lack of funding for OHV recreation. To date, the majority of travel management funding for this office has been spent on OHV trail development, trailhead facilities, trail maintenance, and management (Trail Ranger program). In addition to agency funds, BLM has successfully applied for Montana OHV Program Trail Ranger Grants for nearly a decade. BLM has no control over state distribution of OHV gas tax funds or grants.

The BLM recognizes the cumulative effects of interagency wide travel plans on motorized use, but believes the Preferred Alternative provides OHV users with a range of quality opportunities.

Z8

Comment: There are cases where OHV gas tax funding has been used to improve a non-motorized trail. There are also cases where OHV gas tax money has been used to improve a trail and then that trail has been closed to motorized use. The use of OHV gas tax funding for non-motorized recreation is improper. We request that these cases be identified and that they be corrected by replacing motorized recreational opportunities that have been closed with new motorized recreational opportunities of equal recreational value.

Response: The BLM has not used Montana State OHV grant funds to construct or improve non-motorized trails, nor improve a motorized trail, and then later close it. There have been instances, however, during which illegal or unauthorized motorized trails have been closed (or decommissioned) during travel plan implementation. In many cases, trails identified for closure have required soil erosion (rolling dips, water bars, etc.) or reclamation in order to prevent recurring damage. This work is consistent with travel plan implementation actions, and not a violation of grant funding.

Z9

Comment: The magnitude of gas tax paid by OHV recreationists is significant. There is no method for direct return of the federal excise tax to OHV recreationists. Therefore, most of the federal excise tax paid by OHV recreationists on gasoline ends up being used for other programs and not for OHV programs. We request that revisions be made to state and federal programs in order to return to OHV recreationists the full amount of gas tax paid by OHV recreationists in the form of funding specifically earmarked for enhanced and expanded OHV Programs. We request that corrective actions (an adequate mitigation plan) be taken to address to return all past and current off-road gas tax monies to OHV recreationists.

Response: Revisions to state and federal programs to return gas taxes paid by OHV recreationists is outside the scope of the Butte RMP. The BLM does not control distribution or redistribution of gas tax monies.

Z10

Comment: If more trails are needed for non-motorized use, they can be established without closing established roads. If a specific conflict is identified, work on solving it without closing a number of roads. In addition, if there is a specific environmental issue or problem with a specific segment of road or motorized trail, it should be identified, a reasonable solution identified and then implemented for that specific area.

Response: The BLM agrees with the comment in principle. However, in most cases, site-specific road and trail closures are made to achieve a range of resource protection objectives, such as establishing desirable road densities for wildlife, reducing the spread of weeds, preventing soil erosion, stream sedimentation, etc; not necessarily to help establish additional non-motorized recreation opportunities. Mitigation is an important tool, but depending on the desired outcome, it is not always applicable.

Z11

Comment: How does the BLM intend to enforce road closures? Gates and signs to signify road closure is often less than effective (USFWS 1993; Zager and Jonkel 1983). However, permanent barriers such as closely set posts combined with secure fencing, or use of natural features such as large boulders that allow passage of stock or foot travel but prohibit the passage of motorized vehicles are a more effective method for decommis-

sioned roads. AWL would also suggest increased policing of decommissioned closed areas.

Response: A range of methods will be employed to effect road closures, including the use of natural materials as described in the comment. Methods that allow access for hikers, horseback riders, and mountain bike riders are taken into consideration, as well as set backs to allow for adequate parking, or camping.

Z12

Comment: We ask that trails being rerouted not be closed until the reroute is complete so that the public can continue to use the much needed motorized recreational opportunity.

Response: As a general rule**,** the BLM avoids or minimizes road and trail closures whenever possible during project work. However, there may be occasions when closure is necessary to ensure public safety, or prevent continuing resource damage.

Z13

Comment: Identify any reroutes that are part of the travel plan proposal because the reroutes are often of lesser quality and the reduction in quality needs to be mitigated.

Response: The Preferred Alternative incorporates several general provisions (but no current specific proposals) for implementing re-routes. These provisions include: avoidance of cultural sites, providing access around private property, and mitigating resource damage caused by short, site-specific sections of roads or trails.

Travel Management – Resource Impacts

AA1

Comment: We support restrictions on motorized uses in wilderness study areas to protect wildlife and the quality of non-motorized recreational uses in these areas. We are pleased that the draft RMP/EIS indicates that WSAs would be closed to motorized travel except Black Sage and the southern portion of the Humbug Spires, which is limited to established routes (page 461). We also recommend that motorized trails or routes created by cross-country travel in such areas be restored (ripped, scarified and revegetated) with closures policed and enforced.

Response: When user created trails are located within Wilderness Study Areas or other areas of the Butte Field Office, the BLM will determine the best course of action for closing these unauthorized routes.

AA2

Comment: A study of National Park elk habituated to human activity and not hunted were more sensitive to persons afoot than vehicles (Shultz, R.D. and James A. Bailey "Responses of National Park Elk to Human Activity", Journal of Wildlife Management, v42, 1975). Therefore, hikers disturb elk more than motor vehicles and "disturbance of wildlife" should not be used as a reason to justify motorized recreation and access closures. Additionally, when there are concerns with wildlife disturbance, restrictions on hikers should be given a greater emphasis than restrictions on motorized visitors.

Response: The BLM realizes that even though a few studies did not find negative effects to deer or other big game species from motorized uses, the overwhelming preponderance of literature does document the negative impacts to many different wildlife species from roads. It is also important to remember that disturbance to wildlife is only one factor the BLM took into consideration during travel planning.

The literature referenced by the comment described that there may have been two different subpopulations of elk in eastern Rocky Mountain National Park arriving in the study area in October. The late arriving elk may have been those summering highest in the park where human contact is less frequent or they may have been elk exposed to hunting outside of the park. Wildlife can become habituated to human activity when the activity is controlled, predictable, and not harmful to the animal. Because late arriving elk had not been habituated to humans or had experienced harassment by hunting, these animals naturally were more easily disturbed by human encounters than the resident elk. Elk in this study also were subjected to spotlighting by humans on foot. It was suggested that recently arrived elk were more sensitive to spotlighting but gradually adapted to human activity and shining as the season progressed. Although elk were found to be more sensitive to approaching humans on foot than to vehicle traffic, the results were not found to be statistically significant.

AA3

Comment: The wildlife sections of many travel plan documents tend to promote two underlying themes; (1) wildlife and forest visitors cannot coexist, and (2) there are significant negative impacts to wildlife from visitors to the forest. Observations of wildlife in Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks and the 600 deer that live within the Helena city limits combined with common sense tell us that wildlife can flourish with millions of visitors and motorized vehicles.

Response: The BLM does believe that wildlife and forest visitors can coexist. The challenge the BLM faces is identifying the appropriate places for certain activities, such as motorized use, while providing suitable habitat for a multitude of wildlife species, including special status species. In order to successfully manage BLM lands for many different types of activities, the BLM must recognize the impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat from those activities, including motorized recreation.

The influence of roads on wildlife is well documented in the literature. The Wildlife sections in Chapter 4 of the RMP provide references on the effects to wildlife from roads.

National Parks are managed to protect wildlife and for the enjoyment of the public. National Parks tend to have extremely low road densities and the majority of visitors to National Parks stay on roads or at major attractions. Wildlife, such as deer, elk and bison, can habituate to human activity when the activity is controlled, predictable, and not harmful to the animal. Unlike National Parks, BLM lands do not have predicted or controlled use. Because hunting is allowed on BLM lands, big game and other game species often have a negative association with humans in these areas. BLM lands have higher road densities than National Parks which results in the public having more access to BLM lands. More access results in less predictable use of an area as well as a potential increase in harassment to wildlife.

AA4

Comment: Road density criteria must be used with reasonable judgment and consider the mitigating effects that an adjacent block of roadless area has on a roaded area that exceeds the desired road density. Oftentimes these areas that exceed the ideal density are very valuable multiple-use motorized areas and border on large roadless areas that provide more than adequate wildlife security thereby effectively mitigating the impacts associated with the roaded area.

Response: For some resources, such as big game winter range, wildlife habitat use does not match boundaries of unroaded areas such that wildlife is able to persist by using only the available habitat in unroaded areas. Therefore, it becomes appropriate or necessary for the BLM to reduce road densities in some roaded areas to provide for such resources. This may be done seasonally, as is often the case with big game winter range seasonal road closures, or on a more permanent basis with yearlong road closures.

AA5

Comment: Road density does not equal motorized trail density. Motorized trails have less impact than roads and this condition must be recognized.

Response: Achieving desirable road density levels helps reduce impacts (disturbances) to wildlife by providing non-motorized buffer areas for big game calving, winter range, etc. The BLM agrees that motorized trails often result in lower levels of direct resource impacts (soil erosion, stream sedimentation, etc.) than full-size roads. However in the context of disturbance to wildlife, there may be no difference in impacts between motorized trails and full-size roads. Additionally, in many cases it can be argued that motorized trail use oftentimes exceeds casual use on full-size roads.

AA6

Comment: Environmental impacts are not unreasonable under the current conditions but environmental impacts will become unreasonable given the agency's current direction to close as many motorized recreational opportunities as possible and that divide will be crossed soon. Therefore, agency management actions are ultimately creating significant unnecessary negative impacts on both the natural and human environment. We are concerned that this unstated goal or policy is not in the best interest of protecting the natural or human environment and ask that goals and policies by modified to allow the public continued use of all reasonable access and recreational opportunities on all multiple-use lands.

Response: The BLM disagrees that the Preferred Alternative represents unnecessary negative impacts on both the natural and human environment. Many changes have occurred since the completion of the last RMP (1984) that have led to increased resource impacts and changes to the human environment. The BLM has a responsibility to re-evaluate the affected environment in light of these changes. The BLM believes the Preferred Alternative overall represents a balanced travel plan that takes into account resource protection, and the divergent interests of motorized and non-motorized recreational users.

AA7

Comment: Non-motorized recreationists traveling cross-country produce similar impacts to cross-country motorcycle travel, i.e. impact on weeds, foot prints, and disturbance of wildlife. Therefore, any areas closed to cross-country motorcycle travel should also be closed to non-motorized cross-country use.

Response: Non-motorized cross country travel creates significantly less resource impacts than motorized travel cross-country travel. This is clearly reflected in the 2003 Statewide OHV ROD, which (unless otherwise managed) prohibits all motorized wheeled cross country travel.

AA8

Comment: Past analyses of the affected environment and environmental consequences have failed to adequately recognize that resources such as fisheries, wildlife, and sediment production are affected far more by nature than by motorized visitors. Relative impact associated with natural events including floods and wildfires is thousands of times greater than impacts associated with timber harvests and OHV recreation, yet proposed action involving timber harvests and OHV recreation are considered to have unacceptable impacts. Drought has a significant impact on fisheries, OHV recreation does not compare. Erosion and other activities of interest such as the spread of noxious weeds occur naturally and at significant rates. Floods, fires, drought, and wildlife diseases have historically created significantly greater impacts

than motorized visitors have. For example, cutthroat trout have never needed to be relocated because of motorized recreation and motorized recreation has never caused a sediment yield anywhere close to 19 tons per acre which both occurred following the Derby fire in 2006 (http://www.helenair.com/articles/2006/11/07/montana/a07110706_02.prt).

Response: The BLM agrees that natural events such as earthquakes, floods, wind, etc., can have significant impacts on the environment, both adverse and positive. While the BLM cannot manage or prevent natural events from occurring, it can and must manage human related activity, including motorized use.

AA9

Comment: The preferred alternative would allow cross-country snowmobile use and travel on all existing routes during the season of use (December 2 - May 15), snow conditions permitting (page 50). Snowmobile use is increasing, and we believe it would be appropriate to include restrictions on snowmobile use where and when such use adversely affects important wildlife habitat, such as grizzly bear and wolverine denning and foraging habitat, and other non-motorized recreational uses. Snowmobile effects on wildlife should be more fully evaluated and if use or timing restrictions are needed to protect wildlife and their habitat additional snowmobile restrictions should be developed. We favor the proposed Alternative C direction that would restrict snowmobile use to designated routes (page 50), rather than use of the unrestricted cross-country snowmobile use allowed in Alternative B.

Response: Of the five site-specific travel plans analyzed in the EIS, the Lewis and Clark County NW Travel Planning Area was the only one within the distribution of grizzly bear. The effects to grizzly bear from snowmobile use were identified during travel planning and both Alternatives B and C would restrict snowmobile use to designated routes during the season of use. This restriction would also provide protection to wolverines and their associated habitats.

The effects to wildlife from snowmobile use were analyzed for each of the five site specific travel plan areas and the BLM believes a reasonable range of alternatives was developed.

AA10

Comment: The impact of OHV recreation on wildlife has been overstated by the agency and wildlife biologists. First, wildlife populations are at all time high (http://www.mtstandard.com/articles/2005/ 11/30/ outdoors/ hjjeiigjjcefjb.txt) at the same time when OHV use is increasing. If there is any impact to be identified, it appears that it should be that the positive impact associated with increasing OHV use and increasing wildlife populations. Secondly, OHV use does not kill wildlife. Wildlife coexists just fine with OHVs. This was recently confirmed again by a study in Yellowstone Park which found that "Most elk, bison, and trumpeter swans barely reacted last winter to the presence of snow coaches and snowmobiles in Yellowstone National Park, according to a study released Tuesday. Scientists watched more than 2,100 interactions between over-snow vehicles and wildlife last year to try to determine how they responded. Of those, 81percent of the animals had no apparent response or they looked and then resumed what they were doing, the study said." (http://www.helenair.com/articles/2005/12/14/montana/a10121405_04.prt and http://www.nps.gov/yell/technical/planning/winteruse/plan/reports/winterrec05.pdf).

Response: The BLM was not able to find all the articles referenced by the comment and the BLM is unsure which wildlife species the comment is referring to with the statement "wildlife populations are at all time high."

The BLM acknowledges the article by the Billings Gazette (12/14/05) referenced by the commenter that looked at the interaction between snow coaches and snowmobiles with elk and bison. The BLM located the peer reviewed article in Ecological Applications volume 16(5) 2006 (Behavior Responses of Bison and Elk in Yellowstone to Snowmobile and Snow Coaches). The study focused on elk and bison and only dealt with over the snow travel, not OHV use. This study found that the frequency and intensity of movement responses by bison and elk were small compared to numerous other studies that reported substantially higher degrees of avoidance to snowmobiles by bison, moose, mule deer, and white-tailed deer. For example, a study in Prince Albert National Park in Canada found that 51 percent of bison fled an area due to human presence. The Yellowstone study also reported that the comparatively less frequent and lower intensity responses of bison and elk in Yellowstone suggest that these animals have habituated to snow coaches and snowmobiles. Wildlife can become habituated to human activity when the activity is controlled, predictable, and not harmful to the animal. Unlike BLM lands, snowmobiles in Yellowstone follow the same routes, do not go off designated routes, and are in less of a position to harass elk and bison. Since only a small percent of Yellowstone is roaded and used by snowmobiles and/or snow coaches, wildlife habitat in the park is dominated by secure, high quality habitat. The use of guides in 2004 provided increased protection against harassment of wildlife in Yellowstone.

In many areas throughout the Butte Field Office, snowmobile use has been allowed off designated trails and use is not predictable or controlled. Thus, the impacts to wildlife species on BLM lands would be expected to be more in line with other studies that found higher degrees of avoidance and flight from an area due to snowmobile use.

AA11

Comment: A study of mule deer found that 80 percent fled in reaction to encounters with persons afoot while only 24 percent fled due to encounters with snowmobiles (David J. Freddy, Whitcomb M. Bronaugh, Martin C. Fowler, "Responses of Mule Deer to Persons Afoot and Snowmobiles", Wildlife Society Bulletin, 1986). A study of the heart rate of elk found that humans walking between 20 to 300 meters from the elk caused them to flee immediately 41 percent of the time while an OHV passing within 15 to 400 meters of the elk caused them to flee 8 percent of the time (Ward, A. L., and J. J. Cupal. 1976. Telemetered heart rate of three elk as affected by activity and human disturbance. USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station. Laramie, WY. 9 pp.). Therefore, hikers disturb deer more than motor vehicles and "disturbance of wildlife" should not be used as a reason to justify motorized recreation and access closures. Additionally, when there are concerns with wildlife disturbance, restrictions on hikers should be given a greater emphasis than restrictions on motorized visitors.

Response: The BLM is aware of the referenced literature and realizes that even though some studies did not find negative effects to deer or other big game species from motorized uses, the overwhelming preponderance of literature does document the negative impacts to many different wildlife species from roads. The BLM also notes that disturbance to wildlife is only one of a number of factors considered during travel planning.

The BLM considered the type and amount of wildlife habitat lost or fragmented due to roads, the introduction of noxious weeds (which reduces the amount of suitable habitat) from roads, loss of connectivity and mortality to wildlife from collision. **Appendix A** in the RMP describes the process used for travel management.

AA12

Comment: A lynx study completed in the Seeley Lake area found no adverse impact to Lynx from winter snowmobile use. The results of this study and the data that was collected must be used in evaluating areas open or closed to snowmobiles. The closure of any area because of winter motorized impact to lynx is not valid and, therefore, must not be used to initiate closures.

Response: Lynx habitat was only one factor considered during travel planning. **Appendix A** of the RMP discusses the process used during travel planning. No roads were recommended for closure based solely on lynx habitat and the alternatives found in the five site-specific travel plan areas provide a full range of open, closed and seasonally restricted roads.

AA13

Comment: Wildlife can and do effectively coexist with motorized visitors in even the most heavily visited places. Therefore, concerns with motorized forest visitors and wildlife are often over-stated and over-emphasized which unfortunately demonstrates a predisposition in the process. The wildlife/visitor interaction in national parks demonstrates that the manner in which visitors coexist with wildlife is the most significant factor in the interaction between wildlife and visitors. The manner in which visitors coexist with wildlife in national forest can be shaped by adequate use of mitigation measures including seasonal closures, educational programs, and trail rangers. Therefore, reasonable alternatives to the closure of motorized roads and trails exist and can be used to address wildlife concerns. We request that these sorts of reasonable alternatives to closure of roads and trails to motorized visitors be adequately considered and incorporated into the preferred alternative. The road density criteria is not valid because hundreds of deer in Helena and elk in the Montanan City area exist just fine with road densities far in excess of the targets for the project area. Obviously there are other factors that have a far greater influence on deer and elk populations and the analysis must uncover and use those.

Response: The BLM believes that the different alternatives as described in the Activity Level Planning for Five High Priority Travel Planning Areas section of Chapter 2 provide a suitable range of closed, open, and seasonally restricted roads.

BLM offices, including the Butte Field Office provide educational brochures to the public on how to ride OHVs responsibly and ethically. The website http://www.treadlightly.org also provides information on safety, riding etiquette, and ethics for motorized recreation. The Butte Field Office had two trail rangers on staff during the summer of 2007. Although the BLM expects to have trail rangers in the future, funding of these positions is dependant upon the BLM's budget.

Road density has been found to be a significant indicator of the effects to wildlife species. The influence of relatively high open road densities is well documented in the literature for grizzly bear, wolf, elk, wolverine, sage grouse, as well as other wildlife species. The Wildlife Section and the Environmental Consequences of Five Site-Specific Travel Plans (Wildlife) in Chapter 4 of the RMP provides references on the effects of roads on wildlife.

AA14

Comment: The Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (NCDE), outside of Glacier National Park, has grizzly bear population densities of about one bear per 20-30 square miles and has human recreation consisting of motorized access, motorized recreation, hiking, fishing, camping, horseback riding, and big game hunting. Glacier National Park annually receives approximately 2-3 million visitors, does not allow hunting, and has grizzly bear population densities estimated at about one bear per 8 square miles. The Yellowstone Ecosystem

(YE) which is comprised of Yellowstone Park and surrounding National Forests, receives more visitation than Glacier Park and has an increasing grizzly bear population estimated at one bear per 30-50 square miles (http://www.r6.fws.gov/endspp/grizzly/bittereis/deischp 2.htm). All indications are that grizzly bear habitat is fully occupied and that additional road closures and obliteration will not produce any more bears and, therefore, motorized closures are not reasonable or productive. Therefore, grizzly bears can coexist at reasonable population densities with multiple-use recreation and there is no compelling reason to close roads and trails to motorized recreationists to increase grizzly populations because the most significant constraint is their need for so many acres between other grizzly bears.

Response: The Yellowstone population of the grizzly bear has been removed from the Endangered Species list. However, the BLM still considers grizzly bears in this ecosystem to be "sensitive." The BLM will continue to apply the appropriate level of protection to those bears based on peer reviewed scientific literature, recommendations of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Grizzly Bear Management Plan for Southwest Montana (2002).

Grizzly bears in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem are still listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act and the BLM will continue to coordinate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as well as Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks on how to adequately protect bears in this area.

The influence of open roads on grizzly bear is well documented in the literature. In developing alternatives for the Butte RMP, the BLM used peer reviewed scientific studies along with recommendations from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. In the Grizzly Bear Management Plan for Southwest Montana (2002), Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks identifies preferred road densities in grizzly bear habitat as 1 mi/mi^2 or less.

AA15

Comment: The number of hunters is declining (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1996 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. http://library.fws.gov/nat_survey 1996.pdf and http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/09/03/national/ printable3228893.shtml). Therefore, there are no compelling reasons "to elevate the level of elk security in the project area and…enhance elk populations" as frequently suggested by wildlife biologists (example; Fish, Wildlife and Parks letter dated February 27, 2002 to Helena National Forest on the Clancy- Unionville Travel Planning Project, bottom of page 9). Additionally, there are no compelling reasons to justify reduced road densities as a sought-after or necessary wildlife management criterion. Lastly, there are reasonable alternatives including permit hunting and seasonal travel restrictions that can better accomplish the outcome sought by reduced road and trail densities. NEPA requires consideration and implementation of all reasonable alternatives. Not considering and implementing reasonable alternatives demonstrates a predisposition in the process.

Response: BLM is responsible for management of wildlife habitat to provide for stable and self-sustaining wildlife populations for both game and non-game species. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks is responsible for the management of game populations. The BLM and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks are concerned with the amount of big game security habitat throughout the Butte Field Office to manage for future populations of elk, to distribute elk throughout different areas and to provide for a diversity of hunting experiences. The Montana Statewide Elk Management Plan (2004) (available at http://fwp.mt.gov) identifies population objectives as well as habitat objectives (including security habitat) by Elk Management Unit. The BLM will continue to work with Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks during site specific projects to help move toward these goals. The Travel Management and Access section (Management Common to Action Alternatives) of Chapter 2 in the Butte RMP identifies that the BLM will continue to coordinate travel restrictions with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to provide adequate access to meet the harvest goals that they set.

There are many compelling reasons to reduce road densities across the landscape. The influence of high open road densities is well documented in the literature for grizzly bear, wolf, elk, wolverine, sage grouse, as well as other wildlife species. Fragmentation of habitats, avoidance of habitat that would be suitable if not for roads, loss of security habitat, disturbance, and mortality due to collision are all factors that influence how roads influence wildlife and wildlife use of habitats. Noxious weeds are often introduced into areas from motorized travel, causing a serious decline in the quantity and quality of wildlife habitat. The Wildlife Section and the Environmental Consequences of Five Site-Specific Travel Plans Section (Wildlife) sections in Chapter 4 of the RMP provide references of the effects from road density to wildlife.

The BLM believes that the different alternatives as described in the Activity Level Planning for Five High Priority Travel Planning Areas section of Chapter 2 provide a suitable range of closed, open, and seasonally restricted roads.

AA16

Comment: A recent Grizzly Bear study in the Swan Valley of Montana found that 99 percent of the bears spent 99 percent of their time on Plum Creek property. This property has been heavily logged resulting in undergrowth plant species that support bears. Thick and overgrown timber does not allow for adequate undergrowth. As we now see by this study, critical bear habi-

tat is quite different than what was once assumed and this new information must be incorporated into this evaluation. The Forest Service should discard the original "road density guidelines" and develop new guidelines that reflect the habitat most critical for bears as one that is timber harvested and roaded. Old outdated science formulated by assumptions should not be used when true science and actual data is now available.

Response: The BLM is not aware of the study referenced by the comment and was not able to locate the study. The BLM is aware of a study on habitat use by grizzly bears in the Swan Mountains from 1997. This study still emphasized the need for roadless core areas for grizzly bears as well as reducing traffic volume.

The effects of open roads to grizzly bears are well documented in the literature. The BLM will continue to use peer reviewed scientific literature, recommendations by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as well as the Grizzly Bear Management Plan for Southwest Montana (2002) to determine how to appropriately manage road densities for the grizzly bear.

AA17

Comment: Wildlife populations are at all time highs. Wildlife has consistently been given higher priority over motorized recreational opportunities for the past 30 years. This priority has led to significant cumulative effects on motorized recreationists which must now be addressed and mitigated. The project must seek a more reasonable balance of multiple-use and motorized recreation opportunities and a lesser, yet reasonable, priority for wildlife management.

Response: One of the reasons that travel planning is necessary is to look at how roads affect many different resources including; soils, vegetation (including vegetation management), wildlife, and fish and aquatic habitats. Another critical need for travel management is to address access for recreation that includes access for both motorized and non-motorized users. **Appendix A** describes the process and criteria used during travel planning. Travel planning in the Butte Field Office began in 1995 with the Elkhorn Travel Plan. The cumulative effects of travel management and access are described in the Environmental Consequences of Five Site-Specific Travel Plans (Cumulative Effects of Travel Management and Access) section in Chapter 4 of the Draft and Final EIS.

The BLM believes that the different alternatives as described in the Activity Level Planning for Five High Priority Travel Planning Areas section of Chapter 2 provide a reasonable range of closed, open, and seasonally restricted roads.

AA18

Comment: Our observations over decades of trail riding have established that significant wildlife mortality does not result from OHV activity. We are not aware of any reports of large animals such as deer, elk, or bear being hit or injured by OHV activity. Additionally, it is extremely rare for OHVs to injure any small animals such as squirrels or chipmunks. We request that wildlife mortality from OHV activity be considered minor and that wildlife mortality not be used as a reason to close roads and trails to OHV visitors. OHV use and wildlife can and do coexist. We do not see any evidence in the field that would indicate that summer motorized recreation use is a significant wildlife problem. We support motorized closures where necessary to protect wildlife during the spring calving season and hunting season while maintaining a reasonable level of access during those periods.

Response: **Appendix A** of the RMP explains the process used during travel planning. The BLM considered many factors when addressing the effects to wildlife from roads. Although road kill is discussed in Chapter 4 of the RMP under Wildlife (Effects Common to All Alternatives) as well as in Environmental Consequences of Five Site-Specific Travel Plans (Wildlife) sections, this factor was not used when recommending roads for closures during the travel planning process (**Appendix A**).

The influence of roads on wildlife is well documented in the literature. As identified in **Appendix A**, travel planning considered specific factors when developing different alternatives for the EIS. Although the effects to summer habitat was not specifically used during travel planning, many other factors that influence wildlife and wildlife habitats were. These included fragmentation of habitat, connectivity, winter range, calving habitat, habitat for special status species and noxious weeds. The BLM believes that the different alternatives as described in the Activity Level Planning for Five High Priority Travel Planning Areas section of Chapter 2 provide a reasonable range of closed, open, and seasonally restricted roads.

AA19

Comment: The current analysis does not adequately consider grizzly bear delisting under the Reasonably Foreseeable actions. This action is imminent. At the same time there is so much emphasis on the management of the area and region as a non-motorized area for grizzly bears. First, we do not feel that OHV recreation has a significant effect on grizzly bears and, secondly, the analysis must be based on the impending delisting of grizzly bears. Other pended delisting of endangered species must also be considered.

Response: The Butte Field Office is located within two separate ecosystems that provide habitat for the grizzly bear, the Yellowstone Ecosystem and the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem. Grizzly bears in the Yellowstone Ecosystem were de-listed in March, 2007, but are still considered a BLM sensitive species. As outlined in

Chapter 3 (Special Status Species) of the RMP, the BLM manages less than 1 percent of habitat for the grizzly bear in the Yellowstone Ecosystem. The BLM will continue to apply the appropriate level of protection to those bears based on peer reviewed scientific literature, recommendations of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Grizzly Bear Management Plan for Southwest Montana (2002).

Grizzly bears in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem are still listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act. The BLM manages roughly 3 percent of grizzly bear habitat in the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem. The negative impacts to grizzly bear from roads are well documented in the literature. Chapter 4 of the RMP in the Environmental Consequences of Five Site-Specific Travel Plans (Lewis and Clark County NW TPA, Wildlife) section discusses the effects to grizzly bear from roads. The BLM will continue to coordinate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as well as Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks on how to adequately protect bears in this area.

The influence of open roads on grizzly bears is well documented in the literature. In developing alternatives for the Butte RMP, the BLM used peer reviewed scientific studies along with recommendations from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. In the Grizzly Bear Management Plan for Southwest Montana (2002), Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks identifies preferred road densities in grizzly bear habitat as 1 mi/mi^2 or less.

Species that become de-listed from the Endangered Species Act (such as the bald eagle) will still be considered BLM sensitive species and subject to special management as long as they are on the BLM's sensitive species list.

AA20

Comment: Route management that would most benefit wildlife and habitat is embodied in Alternative C (p. 47, Table 2-6) but the table does not reflect a maximum density of motorized routes even within Alternative C.

Response: Table 2-6 provides the miles of all roads across the Field Office, including those areas with completed travel plans (Sleeping Giant, Clancy-Unionville, Elkhorn Mountains and Whitetail-Pipestone), site-specific travel plan areas analyzed under the EIS (Helena, East Helena, Lewis and Clark, Boulder-Jefferson and the Upper Big Hole River) and those areas that will have travel planning at a later time (Missouri River, Jefferson County SE, Broadwater County South and Park-Gallatin). Alternative C only displays differences in miles from the other alternatives based on road closures in the five site-specific travel plans analyzed under the EIS. It may seem that Alternative C in Table 2-6 doesn't reflect the lowest density of motorized routes. However, when the five site-specific travel plans are compared, Alternative C does have the lowest density of motorized routes.

Tables 2-9 through 2-13 display the differences between alternatives for each of the five site-specific travel planning areas.

AA21

Comment: Snowmobiling: From a wildlife perspective (subnivean, sensitive wide-ranging carnivores, or big game wintering) Alternative C would result in less snow compaction over a broad area being managed primarily through designated routes: 69.7 percent compared to 44.5 percent for Alternative B and 43.5 percent for Alternative D. (p. 49,126). However, we would support a melding of the provision from Alternative C, designated routes only areas, into Alternative B.

Response: The BLM believes that a reasonable range of alternatives has been developed to address issues associated with snowmobiling. Alternative B would reduce snowmobiling-related effects to wildlife compared to the current condition under Alternative A.

AA22

Comment: For both motorized and snowmobile routes Alternatives B and D would increase routes and create new loop routes, while Alternative C would have no new road or trail construction. Please consider that research indicates that loop routes are not in the best interest of wildlife habitat and security and their construction is to be avoided (Christensen et al 1993).

Response: Future travel planning efforts under both Alternatives B and D could allow some new routes, including loop routes. Analyses for site-specific travel plans, or modifications of existing travel plans would address the effects of new routes, as well as the cumulative effects of existing and proposed road densities on wildlife. The impact from loop routes would be analyzed during site-specific analysis.

AA23

Comment: There is no documentation or data to support closure of any motorized routes in the project area to improve wildlife connectivity. The existing level of roads and trails does not significantly impact wildlife connectivity, i.e. it functions as such with the existing level of roads and trails, and closing any roads or trails to motorized use would not make any measurable difference. Connectivity is another concept being promoted by extreme green groups such as the Wildlands Project to further their agenda to close all land to the public. Additionally, non-motorized routes would have the same impact on wildlife connectivity as motorized routes and the evaluation must recognize this fact.

Response: Connectivity of habitats was only one factor considered during travel planning. **Appendix A** de-

scribes the process and criteria used during travel planning in the five site-specific areas. The influence of open road density on grizzly bear, wolverine, elk, and sage grouse, and wildlife in general, are well-documented in the literature. Avoidance of otherwise suitable habitat, habitat fragmentation, mortality from collisions, increased disturbance, and loss of security habitat are all factors that effect how roads influence the use of an area by wildlife as well as the quality of habitat connectivity across the landscape. A target of one mile of open road per square mile or less has long been used for evaluating habitat effectiveness for elk and grizzly bear, and is routinely used by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the BLM.

AA24

Comment: It is noteworthy that four of the five BLM site-specific travel plan implementation decisions occur with in the Helena Resource Area of MFWP, because they received the most urgent priority. For all of these areas, a decision of "limited" area designations is encouraged. However, route densities must also be minimized to retain functional wildlife habitat and linkage qualities. Recently adopted travel management in the BLM Clancy-Unionville (Sheep Mountain) (up to 5 miles of routes per square mile in some areas) and Whitetail-Pipestone areas, allows for trail densities that are far more dense than what the "limited" designation for these areas would at first lead one to believe.

Habitat effectiveness for wildlife is diminished to 50 percent in areas where route densities approach 2.0 miles per square mile of land (Christensen et al. 1993). Limited designations should in fact "limit" motorized travel to a level that does not severely constrain wildlife usage. It is recommended that 1.5 miles per square mile of land be an upper limit of route density in areas designated as "Limited" (as called for in Alternative C) and where seasonal habitats such as big game winter ranges and grizzly linkage areas occur, management should be at the level of 1.0 (or less) mile per square mile of land as called for in Alternative B and where possible as low as 0.5 as in Alternative C. (p. 44,121)

Response: All five of the site specific travel plan areas in the RMP have "limited" area designations. Under the "limited" designation, motorized use would only be allowed on designated roads and trails unless specific areas of off-road use are designated (no off-road use was identified for the five site-specific travel plan areas). This category of use does not provide guidance on how many miles of roads and trails should remain open within an area. Site specific travel planning is the process to determine road use and density.

The BLM is aware of how roads impact habitat effectiveness for wildlife and took this into consideration during travel planning. Tables 4-62, 4-72, 4-81, 4-83, and 4-92 display road densities in elk winter range for the five travel plan areas by alternative. Although the action alternatives display a range of conditions, all action alternatives would substantially reduce road densities in elk winter range compared to the existing condition. Nearly all action alternatives would reduce open road densities in elk winter range to less than 1 mi/mi^2. For winter range, the Preferred Alternative would provide for open road densities of 1 mi/mi^2 or less in the five travel plan areas.

Of the five site-specific travel plan areas, occupied grizzly bear habitat is found only in the Lewis and Clark County NW Travel Plan Area. As with winter range, the action alternatives would substantially reduce road densities in grizzly bear habitat compared to the existing condition and the majority of action alternatives would result in road densities less than 1 mi/mi^2. The Preferred Alternative would result in an open road density in grizzly bear habitat of 0.8 mi/mi^2.

AA25

Comment: The estimated reduced annual volume of sediment production attributed to proposed motorized closures versus the annual volume of runoff is an actual reduction in sediment production on the order of 10 or less parts per million. This level of predicted sediment reduction should not be considered significant especially when compared to the baseline sediment production and natural events discussed above. This level of predicted reduction in sediment production should not be used as the basis for motorized closures.

Response: The Draft RMP/EIS did not provide any specific sediment production data as related to motorized closures relative to annual volume from runoff. In proposing motorized route closures within the five site-specific travel plans addressed in the Butte RMP, sedimentation was one of several factors considered based on site-specific knowledge and professional judgment of planning team members, as well as mapping of erosion potential for each travel planning area.

AA26

Comment: The Forest Service Stream Systems Technology Center has found, in a paper published in the July 2000 issue of Stream Notes, that roads and trails can easily be hydrologically disconnected from streams. Therefore, the sedimentation concerns can be easily mitigated and should not be used as a reason to justify motorized recreation and access closures except in exceptional cases that cannot be adequately mitigated.

Response: Site-specific Best Management Practices (BMPs) would be implemented to minimize sedimentation from motorized travel, to the extent possible. Site-specific soil impact assessments and BMPs to reduce erosion would reflect local site characteristics and engineering considerations. The findings of the study cited by the comment apply to roads with a particular configu-

ration. Roads in the Butte RMP decision area have a wide range of configurations, some of which may promote sedimentation that cannot be easily addressed. For example, sedimentation from native surface roads on fine-textured soils, with steep gradients, that are outsloped, and are in close proximity to streams may be very difficult to address. Such conditions must be assessed on a site-specific basis with recommended management being a result from site-specific assessments.

AA27

Comment: Roads and motorized vehicles are a major source of weed seed dispersion. Motorized vehicles – cars, trucks, ATVs, motorcycles, and even snowmobiles- are a great vector for spread of weeds. Weed seeds are often caught on the vehicle undercarriage in mud and released on public lands. A single vehicle driven several feet through a knapweed site can acquire up to 2,000 seeds, 200 of which may still be attached after 10 miles of driving (Montana Knapweeds: Identification, Biology and Management, MSU Extension Service).

An effective noxious weed control program must include restrictions on motorized uses, particularly off-road uses. Off-road vehicles are designed to travel off-trail, disturbing soil, creating weed seedbeds, and dispersing seeds widely. Weed seed dispersal from non-motorized travel is of lesser concern because of fewer places to collect/transport seed, and the dispersal rate and distances along trails with non-motorized travel are less. Restrictions on motorized uses may also be needed after burning and harvest activities until native vegetation is reestablished in the disturbed areas to reduce potential for weed infestation of the disturbed sites.

It is particularly important to avoid motorized travel in remaining roadless areas, since roadless areas are often reservoirs of native plants, and limitations on motorized travel in such areas can protect such areas from weed invasion and avoid the subsequent need to treat weeds.

Response: Roads and other sites that concentrate human and animal activity receive priority evaluation and treatment for weeds. The travel planning areas addressed in the RMP and existing travel plans have put some restrictions on motorized uses which will limit weed seed and weed plant part spread, by motorized vehicles, into difficult to treat areas.

In accordance with the 2003 Statewide Off Highway Vehicle Environmental Impact Statement, under a "limited" designation all cross-country motorized wheeled travel is prohibited unless otherwise authorized. In the absence of other existing travel plan direction, all motorized wheeled travel is restricted to existing roads and trails with some exceptions. Motorized travel is not allowed in roadless areas that have been designated as Wilderness Study Areas.

AA28

Comment: Roads and motorized vehicles are a major source of weed seed dispersion. Motorized vehicles – cars, trucks, ATVs, motorcycles, and even snowmobiles- are a great vector for spread of weeds. Weed seeds are often caught on the vehicle undercarriage in mud and released on public lands. A single vehicle driven several feet through a knapweed site can acquire up to 2,000 seeds, 200 of which may still be attached after 10 miles of driving (Montana Knapweeds: Identification, Biology and Management, MSU Extension Service).

An effective noxious weed control program must include restrictions on motorized uses, particularly off-road uses. Off-road vehicles are designed to travel off-trail, disturbing soil, creating weed seedbeds, and dispersing seeds widely. Weed seed dispersal from non-motorized travel is of lesser concern because of fewer places to collect/transport seed, and the dispersal rate and distances along trails with non-motorized travel are less. Restrictions on motorized uses may also be needed after burning and harvest activities until native vegetation is reestablished in the disturbed areas to reduce potential for weed infestation of the disturbed sites.

It is particularly important to avoid motorized travel in remaining roadless areas, since roadless areas are often reservoirs of native plants, and limitations on motorized travel in such areas can protect such areas from weed invasion and avoid the subsequent need to treat weeds.

Response: Proposed management of the five travel plan areas addressed in the RMP should help to limit weed dispersal and spread by motorized vehicles in addition to the existing travel plan management plans already in place. In accordance with the 2003 Statewide Off Highway Vehicle Environmental Impact Statement, under a "limited" designation all cross-country motorized wheeled travel is prohibited unless otherwise authorized. In the absence of other existing travel plan direction, all motorized wheeled travel is restricted to existing roads and trails with some exceptions. Motorized travel is not allowed in roadless areas that have been designated as Wilderness Study Areas.

AA29

Comment: Management of public lands to maximize wild game populations at the expense of other uses is not reasonable and does not meet the requirements of multiple-use laws and policies. We support hunting but we question why hunting's impact on wildlife is acceptable and non-destructive viewing by motorized visitors is not acceptable. We are concerned that public lands that were designated for multiple-use management are not being managed for multiple-use as required under:

1. The Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960 (16 USC. 528 et seq.) defined Multiple-Use as "The management of all the various renewable surface resources of the national forests so that they are utilized

in the combination that will best meet the needs of the American people...". Outdoor recreation is the first stated purpose of the act.

2. Public Law 88-657 states that "the Congress hereby finds and declares that the construction and maintenance of an adequate system of roads and trails within and near the national forests and other lands administered by the Forest Service is essential if increasing demands for timber, recreation, and other uses of such lands are to be met; that the existence of such a system would have the effect, among other things, of increasing the value of timber and other resources tributary to such roads; and that such a system is essential to enable the Secretary of Agriculture (hereinafter called the Secretary) to provide for intensive use, protection, development, and management of these lands under principles of multiple use and sustained yield of products and services".

3. The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) states that "(7) goals and objectives be established by law as guidelines for public land use planning, and that management be on the basis of multiple use and sustained yield unless otherwise specified by law; and, (c) In the development and revision of land use plans, the Secretary shall -- (1) use and observe the principles of multiple use and sustained yield set forth in this and other applicable law;".

4. The BLM Strategic Plan FY 2000 to 2005 states that: "To achieve this mission, the Bureau of Land Management follows these principles: Manage natural resources for multiple use and long-term value, recognizing that the mix of permitted and allowable uses will vary from area to area and over time."

We request careful consideration of the multiple-use needs of the public and implementation of the objectives of multiple-use laws and policies as part of the proposed action.

Response: If the BLM were to propose alternatives that maximize wild game populations as suggested by the comment, there would be considerably more road closures proposed than are currently proposed with any alternative in the Butte RMP. The BLM believes that both hunting and motorized uses are acceptable on BLM lands. The BLM believes it has provided viable travel plan alternatives in the Butte RMP that meet the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act, FLPMA, and the BLM Strategic Plan. The direction mentioned in bullet #2 of the comment does not apply to the BLM.

AA30

Comment: Pursuing environmental perfectionism is not an equitable goal for management of public lands. "The pursuit of perfectionism often impedes improvement" (George F. Will). The unyielding pursuit of environmental perfection could ultimately lead to radical changes in environmental laws and reduced public support for protection of the environment. Additionally, the expectation of a static environment is unnatural. Ecosystems have been changing since the beginning of time and they should be expected to continue to change and adapt at both micro and global levels. We are equally concerned about protection of the environment but we request the pursuit of a reasonable and practical course of action, which will do more to protect the environment in the long-term. We request that the impacts associated with the pursuit of environmental perfectionism on the human environment be evaluated and that the cumulative negative impact of environmental perfectionism on the human environment be adequately considered.

Response: The Butte RMP does not strive or provide for environmental perfectionism. Problems such as wildland fuels buildup and changing vegetation communities due to long-term fire suppression, changing public demands for resource uses and resource protection, provide much of the rationale for the Butte RMP revision. The BLM has developed a range of alternatives designed to address these circumstances with various resource use and resource impact tradeoffs associated with each alternative.

AA31

Comment: Improve management direction to address water quality degradation associated with roads/motorized uses. We are concerned about impacts of roads and motorized uses on watersheds, water quality, fisheries, soil integrity, wildlife habitat and security, as well as native plants, and ecosystem functions. The draft RMP/EIS lacks information on the condition of existing roads. This is important since the draft RMP/EIS states that road maintenance is the most frequently listed cause for water quality impairment in the Planning Area. The RMP/EIS should disclose road drainage/BMP conditions on the existing BLM road network, particularly roads that may have poor drainage or erosive conditions that may be contributing to water quality and fisheries impacts, and roads which fragment and adversely impact important wildlife habitat, and identify roads which cannot be adequately maintained within agency budgets and capabilities. We also believe the RMP should include a commitment to reduce the road maintenance backlog. Travel management direction should assure that road impacts to water quality, fisheries and wildlife will be mitigated.

Response: During site-specific analysis, erosive soils, excessive grades, and poor drainage are factors that are considered in determining whether a road should be open, closed, or re-routed. These factors are also considered in land health standard assessments during monitoring where subsequent adaptive management principles would be applied to correct problems.

AA32

Comment: Consider additional road closures and road removal in the preferred alternative, particularly closure and restoration of user created roads. We believe roads which cannot be properly maintained should be considered for closure, with natural landscapes and drainages restored (i.e., culverts removed). We recommend that roads that impact water quality and fisheries and sensitive and listed wildlife species, and roads within wilderness study areas be prioritized for closure and obliteration to maximize ecological benefits.

Response: Through the travel planning process, all routes within each of the five site-specific travel plan areas, including user created routes, were identified, mapped and analyzed to determine their effects on wildlife and wildlife habitats, fish and aquatic habitats, soils and riparian areas. Erosion, sedimentation, and impacts to water quality were considered in the route-specific proposals made for each travel plan alternative. Under the Preferred Alternative, a considerable mileage of routes is proposed for closure or decommissioning, including routes that contribute to reduced water quality. The BLM believes that overall the Preferred Alternative strikes the best balance between providing motorized access and reducing road-related impacts to water quality.

AA33

Comment: Devote additional attention in the final RMP/EIS to the issue of policing and enforcement of motorized vehicle access restrictions. Public recreational access and demand has increased significantly in recent years due to motorized vehicles such as trail bikes, off-road vehicles (ORVs), all terrain vehicles (ATVs), and snowmobiles that can access areas much further into isolated public lands than they could historically. Motorized uses push wildlife onto smaller and smaller patches of habitat; reducing migration corridors; increasing adverse effects to wildlife habitat and security; causing soil erosion and adverse effects to water quality and aquatic habitat and fisheries; and spreading weeds. Demand for recreation opportunities on public land may be exceeding the capability of the land and resources to provide recreation in a manner that is consistent with resource and ecosystem protection. Information about illegal motorized off-road uses within the BFO area, and the ability of the BLM to police and enforce restrictions on motorized uses is lacking in the draft RMP/EIS. The BLM should develop and fund an effective enforcement strategy, to assure that ORVs will not violate motorized vehicle access limitations.

Response: Policing and law enforcement issues are beyond the scope of the RMP and are difficult to address in the context of limited and changing budgets. However, the BLM recognizes that education and enforcement are critical to ensure management decisions are followed and has made efforts as funding has allowed to hire trail rangers.

AA34

Comment: We are pleased that the management direction in the wildlife and fisheries section says transportation effects on fisheries resources would be reduced, and to the extent possible roads would be located, designed, and maintained to reduce sedimentation (page 43). We recommend, however, that clearer and more specific management direction be provided to better assure that road impacts to water quality and fisheries will be addressed. Road maintenance, BMP upgrades and road drainage improvements are critical to protecting aquatic health. Roads often tend to become wider and rutted with heavy motorized use, creating a continuing need for monitoring road conditions and carrying out needed repair and erosion control.

Suggested management direction for minimizing road impacts to water quality are as follows:

"Roads needed for long-term management and public recreation access will be managed to provide needed access while maintaining or improving watershed condition, and minimizing impacts on water quality, fish and aquatic life, and hydrologic processes."

"Roads avoid encroachment onto streams and riparian areas in ways that impact channel function or geometry. Sediment deli very from the transportation system would not measurably impact pool frequency, pool habitat, or salmonid spawning habitats."

"Roads analysis will be used for road management decisions, including upgrading to address water quality degradation, construction of new roads, reconstruction, closure, and decommissioning of roads."

"Road stream crossings will be assessed to see if they are stable and adequately provide for fish passage, flood flows, and bedload and woody debris transport, and maintain habitat for aquatic communities and restore connectivity of fragmented habitat."

"Road stream crossings will be stable and simulate natural stream grade and substrate as much as possible in fish bearing streams. Culverts will be properly sized to handle flood events, pass sediment and bedload and woody debris, and reduce potential for washout, and will be properly aligned with the stream channel and designed and placed to allow for fish migration."

"Undersized culverts will be replaced and culverts which are not properly aligned or which present fish passage problems and/or serve as barriers to fish migration will be adjusted. Bridges or embedded or open bottom culverts that simulate stream grade and substrate and that provide adequate capacity for flood flows, sediment, bedload, and woody debris are recommended to minimize adverse fisheries effects of road stream crossings."

"Construction of road stream crossings will occur during periods of low stream flow or in the dry where practicable 10 avoid spawning and incubation periods for important fish, and/or dewatering of the crossing site should occur. Special care will be taken to avoid or minimize impacts to the stream channel and to riparian vegetation during construction. Stream banks disturbed during construction will be revegetated. Operation of equipment within the channels of creeks and rivers only occurs if absolutely necessary and with proper permits and authorizations (e.g., Clean Water Act 404 permits, Montana DEQ 318 authorizations and 401 certification, Montana DFW&P 124 authorizations)."

"Road design will minimize road construction and reduce road density as much as possible to reduce potential adverse effects to watersheds."

"Roads will be located away from streams and riparian areas as much as possible, minimizing road stream crossings, and should consider road effects on stream structure and seasonal and spawning habitats and allow for adequate large woody debris recruitment to streams and riparian buffers near streams if roads must be near streams."

"Roads will be located away from steep slopes or erosive soils, and cut and fill slopes will be stabilized."

Adequate road drainage and control of surface erosion will be provided with measures such as adequate numbers of water bars, maintaining crowns on roads, adequate numbers of rolling dips and ditch relief culverts to avoid drainage running on or along roads and avoid interception and routing sediment to streams."

"Road maintenance (e.g., blading) will only be conducted:

1) when the road surface becomes too rough f or the designated vehicle use;

2) when the surface becomes a safety hazard; or

3) when it is needed to improve road drainage by reducing road surface erosion and sediment delivery from roads to area streams.

Where possible do not remove vegetation growing in ditches draining in sloped roads (since vegetation filters sediment).

Unpaved roads should not be graded (bladed) in a manner that contributes to road erosion and sediment transport to streams and wetlands. Avoid routine general blading of ditch lines on in sloped roads to maintain vegetative cover. Where necessary blade only the ditch segments where blockage problems occur."

"Road maintenance (e.g., blading) will be focused on reducing road surface erosion and sediment deli very from roads to area streams. Blading of unpaved roads in a manner that contributes to road erosion and sediment transport to streams and wetlands should be avoided, graded material should not be sidecast over the shoulder, and shoulders should not be widened to encroach upon and have adverse effects upon streams, wetlands, and riparian areas adjacent to roads."

"Snow plowing of roads later in winter for log haul will also be avoided as much as possible to limit runoff created road nits during late winter thaws that increase road erosion (i.e., it is best to carry out winter logging before late winter thaws and spring break up create conditions that promote increased road erosion during logging truck use..."

Response: In addition to the management direction in the Butte RMP mentioned by the comment, the BLM notes there is additional more specific management direction related to road maintenance in the Transportation and Facilities section of Chapter 2 in the RMP. This direction addresses many of the potential resource impacts intended to be addressed by the suggested additional management direction in the comment. The BLM believes it has provided for adequate management direction for road maintenance.

AA35

Comment: We are pleased that the preferred alternative would close 318 miles of road and decommission 53 miles of road that are currently open to motorized uses (page 637). We especially support road decommissioning, since reductions in road density, especially road stream crossing density, has been correlated with improved aquatic health in many areas. Lower road densities are also often associated with improved wildlife habitat and security. There is also often a relationship between higher road density and increased forest use and increased human caused fire occurrences. Reduction in road density, therefore, may reduce risks of human caused fires, which could be important in an area with high fuels/fire risk and/or wildland/urban interface issues.

While the preferred alternative in the draft RMP/EIS would be an improvement in terms of reducing miles of open roads, Alternative B would still include 87,729 acres of BLM land with "high road density" (i.e., greater than 2 road miles per square mile of area, Table 4-98, page 637). The EPA encourages the BLM to consider additional road closures and road removal in its preferred alternative, particularly closure and restoration roads which contribute to resource damages and that fragment wildlife habitat or threaten wildlife security, and user created roads. There is a need to close and obliterate roads to restore and maintain water quality and critical fish and wildlife habitat, and provide linkages between habitats. Roads that impact sensitive and listed wildlife species and roads within wilderness study areas, and roads that impact riparian areas and streams should be prioritized for closure and obliteration to maximize ecological benefits.

Closures of roads near streams with multiple stream crossings are more likely to have greater water quality benefits than closure/decommissioning of roads on upper slopes and ridges. Roads needed for public access and management need to be properly maintained, and roads which cannot be properly maintained within budgets should be closed and natural landscapes and drainages restored. Road networks within the BFO area should be limited to those that can be adequately maintained within agency budgets and capabilities. We recommend that the BLM consider adding management direction such as,

"Roads not needed for long term management and/or public recreation access, and/or which cannot be adequately maintained within agency budgets or capabilities, will be considered for closure and/or decommissioning."

"Roads scheduled for decommissioning will be analyzed with site-specific analysis to determine decommissioning and/or closure methods (such as stabilization, revegetation, with natural drainage restored) that best protect aquatic and terrestrial resources."

Response: The BLM believes that the action alternatives described in the RMP for the five site-specific travel planning areas represent a range of access opportunities while reducing the impacts to terrestrial and aquatic habitats referenced by the commenter. The effects of roads and trails on wildlife and wildlife habitats, fish and aquatic habitats, soils and riparian habitats is understood by the BLM, and each road segment was assessed during travel planning to determine how it impacted each one of these resources. Travel planning also addressed the effects to terrestrial and aquatic habitats from the entire road and trail system in each travel plan area. Through the travel plan process, alternatives were developed that reduce habitat fragmentation, reduce disturbance to wildlife, increase security habitat, improve watershed and riparian functions, improve aquatic habitats and reduce the spread of noxious weeds while providing for reasonable public access.

The Wildlife sections in Chapter 4 of the RMP specifically address the effects of roads and trails in the five site specific travel plan areas on big game winter range, security habitat, wildlife corridors, grizzly bear habitat, riparian habitats, aquatic habitats, and watershed function. In nearly every one of these habitats, the action alternatives substantially improve the condition of the environment over the existing condition.

Site-specific analysis will be conducted to determine the appropriate treatment method for roads identified for decommissioning.

AA36

Comment: We also note that it is difficult to effectively restrict motorized access and protect public lands with simple gated road closures. Road rip-seed-slash (obliteration or full road recontour) is a more effective and thus, preferred method of road closure. We advise removing culverts and restoring stable drainage ways during road removal to address water quality concerns. It is important that adequate attention be directed to culvert removal and ripping, scarifying and seeding disturbed areas with native seed where "natural reclamation" may take an unduly long time. Suggested direction to address this concern would be:

"Roads will be closed in a manner that poses minimal risk to water quality and aquatic ecosystems. Cross drains, ditches, culverts, and other structures will be managed so that they have a minimal risk of failure, and they provide adequate drainage that prevents accelerated surface runoff, erosion, and sediment delivery to streams."

We also note that adequate budgets need to be provided to close and obliterate roads and restore natural drainages and restore and revegetate natural landscapes.

Response: Roads are identified for closure or decommissioning through site-specific travel planning to protect wildlife or aquatic habitats. Site-specific analysis of these road segments will identify the appropriate method for closure or decommissioning.

The Wildlife, Fish, Wildlife Habitat, Special Status and Priority Plant and Animal Species section of Chapter 2 in the RMP identifies that watershed restoration projects (which would include road closures and decommissioning) would be designed and implemented in a manner that promotes the long-term ecological integrity of ecosystems, conserves the genetic integrity of native species and contributes to meeting riparian standards.

AA37

Comment: Much growth in motorized and non-motorized recreation has occurred since the prior Headwaters Resource Management Plan and the Dillon Management Framework Plan were prepared. Public recreational access and demand has increased significantly in recent years due to motorized vehicles such as trail bikes, off-road vehicles (ORVs), all terrain vehicles (ATVs), and snowmobiles that can access areas much further into isolated public lands than they could historically. Off-highway vehicle (OHV) and all terrain vehicle (ATV) use away from roads and trails, including steep slopes, wet meadows, and around water bodies can cause erosion, rutting, transport of sediment to streams, destruction of riparian and wetland habitat, adverse effects to wildlife habitat and security, and spread noxious weeds. Motorized uses push wildlife onto smaller and smaller patches of habitat; reducing migration corridors; increasing adverse effects to wildlife habitat and security; causing soil erosion and adverse effects to water quality, aquatic habitat, and fisheries; and spreading weeds.

Demand for recreation opportunities on public land may be exceeding the capability of the land and resources to provide recreation in a manner that is consistent with resource and ecosystem protection. It is important that ecosystem protection and sustainability be assured in the face of increasing recreational use of motorized vehicles. Executive Order 11644, "Use of Off-Road Vehicles on Public Lands," requires agencies to ensure that the use of off-road vehicles on public lands will be controlled and directed.

The EPA believes it is important that the RMP Travel Management and Access direction be adequate to maintain and protect ecosystems and other resource values while managing motorized travel to provide recreational experiences. The challenge is in providing adequate access for public recreation and land management while protecting and restoring aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems.

We recommend that management direction include adequate limitations and restrictions on motorized uses to protect against erosion, transport of sediment to streams and degradation of aquatic habitat, spread of noxious weeds, and degradation of wildlife habitat by motorized vehicle uses, especially in wetlands and other environmentally sensitive areas. We are pleased that cross-country motorized, wheeled is prohibited unless otherwise managed in accordance with the 2003 Statewide OHV ROD (page 46). It is important that routes created by cross-country motorized uses (user created roads), which are most likely unmaintained, be closed with natural landscapes restored and revegetated, and with closures policed and enforced. We encourage BLM to include travel management direction to better address impacts from unauthorized user created roads and trails. For example, "The BLM will manage the transportation system to reduce impacts from authorized roads and trails, and stop the development of unauthorized roads and trails, closing and restoring unauthorized user created roads and trails that cause resource damages, with closures policed and enforced."

We also encourage the BLM to include management direction that ensures that motorized access within 300 feet of designated routes to access dispersed campsites does not damage ecologically sensitive resources such as streams, wetlands or areas with rare or sensitive plants. Recreational uses should be directed and encouraged toward more resilient areas where they would cause the least environmental harm.

Response: The BLM agrees with the commenter and the following prescription has been added to the Travel Management and Access Section of Chapter 2 in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS:

"The BLM would emphasize management of the transportation system to reduce impacts to natural resources from authorized roads and trails. The BLM would also stress closing and restoring unauthorized user created roads and trails to prevent resource damage. Ecologically sensitive areas within 300' of roads and trails could be closed to dispersed camping if resource damage is found to be occurring in these areas."

AA38

Comment: MFWP appreciates clear recognition of the following on page 231: "The PA (Planning Area) is an important wildlife linkage area that connects the Yellowstone Ecosystem, the Continental Divide, the Gravelly Mountains, the Tobacco Root Mountains, the Belt Mountains, and the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem allowing the potential for movement and genetic exchange among geographically dispersed wildlife populations. "

- Again, MFWP asserts that BLM lands play a crucial and unique role in connecting segments of functional wildlife habitat throughout the landscape in that these lands often occur at lower elevations, scattered across valleys, and exist as vital links or stepping stones between mountain ranges, OR they are crucial pieces in core habitats such as the Great Divide and Sleeping Giant areas.

- Road density (p. 235) for 11 analysis areas displayed in Table 3-13 reveals that the two areas with the highest road densities occur in the Helena Resource Area of MFWP (Clancy and Granite Butte). The acreage percentage of each that falls within the High Density (2-3 mi/mi2) and Very High Density (>3 mi/mi2) is 66 and 67 percent, respectively. The Helena Resource Area is clearly in need of assertive and more restrictive travel management if wildlife habitats and corridors are to be sustained.

Response: The BLM is already proposing to reduce road densities in this area which should improve wildlife habitats. The Preferred Alternative attempts to balance the needs of providing motorized access while providing for resource protection.

Travel Management – Travel Plan Implementation

BB1

Comment: Agencies are encouraged to develop OHV programs that address more than law enforcement needs. OHV programs should actively promote the development, enhancement, and mitigation of OHV recreation opportunities.

Response: The Butte Field Office has successfully obtained funding from Montana OHV Program Trail Ranger grants for nearly a decade, and in conjunction with BLM funding, has developed over 40 miles of quality designated OHV trails and facilities. Beginning in 2006 (and continuing to date) the focus has begun to shift from OHV implementation to OHV management. Over the past two years, (non-law enforcement) Trail

Rangers have been recruited to assist with OHV management at popular riding areas and continue area-wide travel plan implementation work. Trail Rangers are responsible for a variety of duties and responsibilities, including: greeting riders, providing visitor information (maps, brochures), education, and information about responsible OHV use on public lands, monitoring for compliance with the BLM's travel plan rules and regulations, monitoring for resource damage, monitoring visitor safety, and offering minor first aid in emergencies. In addition to public contact duties, the Trail Rangers are responsible for conducting trail inventories, trail monitoring, sign installation, minor trail maintenance, and assisting with noxious weed management.

BB2

Comment: Considerable trail and environmental mitigation work could be accomplished by programs similar to AmeriCorps and Job Corps if they were given that direction and organized to provide that assistance.

Response: Although the comment is outside the scope of the RMP, the BLM agrees. BLM has utilized Montana Conservation Corp and Outward Bound to assist with a variety of motorized and non-motorized travel plan projects.

BB3

Comment: Current management philosophy seems to be that the only way to address a problem is by closing access to public lands. Eliminating opportunities does not solve problems. An approach that is more reasonable to the public including motorized visitors is to maintain recreation opportunities by addressing problems through mitigation measures such as education, signing, seasonal restrictions, user fees, and structural improvements such as water bars, trail re-routing, and bridges. There may be problems with certain motorized roads and trails but we should work to solve and mitigate them and not to compound them by enacting more closures.

We request the agencies to support and use mitigations and education as a means to address and mitigate problems rather than closures. Most problems associated with visitors can be addressed by education. Education should be the first line of action and all education measures should be exhausted before pursuing other actions. There are situations where education is far more effective than law enforcement. The elimination of much needed recreational opportunities is not reasonable without first exhausting all possible means of education to address the problem. Educational programs could include use of mailings, handouts, improved travel management mapping, pamphlets, TV and radio spots, web pages, newspaper articles, signing, presentations, information kiosks with mapping, and trail rangers. Restrictions or closures are not always obvious to the public. Education can also be in the form of measures such as the use of jackleg fences with signs at the end of motorized trails in sensitive areas so that public is made aware of the end of the motorized trail and the surrounding area closure. The use of public education to address problems may require effort and time but it is more reasonable than the use of closures. We request the full use of education to address visitor problems.

Additionally, individual motorized recreationists and groups can be called upon to assist with the implementation of the educational process. An alternative to motorized closures in many cases would be to keep motorized opportunities open and use education on principles such as those found in the Tread Lightly program and Blue Ribbon Coalition Recreation Code of Ethics and Principles to address and eliminate specific issues associated with motorized recreationists. These efforts could include the use of pamphlets, information kiosks, and presentations. Education can also be used to address and eliminate issues associated with non-motorized recreationists by encouraging their use of reasonable expectations, reasonable tolerance of others, and reasonable sharing of our land resources. To date, educational measures have not been adequately considered, evaluated or implemented.

We request that educational measures be incorporated as part of this proposed action and that the cumulative negative impact on motorized recreationists of not using education in all past actions involving motorized recreational opportunities be addressed. Additionally, we request that an adequate mitigation plan be included as part of this action to compensate for past cumulative negative impacts associated with inadequate use of education measures in past actions.

Response: The BLM agrees that public education is an important component of motorized recreation management. BLM websites provide a range of OHV information and education (Tread Lightly). The Butte Field Office has a number of OHV information and educational brochures available in the office's public room. BLM recreation personnel, including Trail Ranger staff (weekends/holidays), are available to answer questions regarding OHV use and opportunities. BLM has installed informational bulletin boards, with travel plan maps and other interpretive information, at all popular OHV use areas. Thanks to organized motorized groups, there are opportunities for new users to learn Tread Lightly ethics and skills while recreating with knowledgeable club members.

Education and mitigation (erosion control, etc.), however, won't always preclude the need for road or trail closures, depending on the relative importance of resource concerns, such as providing big game calving habitat, winter range habitat, or reducing road/trail density to address watershed concerns.

BB4

Comment: The evaluation of a balance of opportunities should also include an accounting and comparison of facilities including trailhead facilities at wilderness areas versus trailhead facilities at OHV areas. Most wilderness trailhead facilities include parking lots, horse handling facilities, kiosks with information, campgrounds, and restrooms and they are funded without any direct connection to the users. Motorized recreationists generate more than adequate gas tax and OHV sticker revenues (over $500,000 in FY 2003 in Montana, FWP OHV program and RTP) but have few facilities to show for it versus a great need for facilities. Additionally, another $311,274 that was designated for motorized programs and that could have been spent on badly needed motorized recreational facilities were instead spent on non-motorized facilities. We request an adequate evaluation and consideration of these imbalances be made part of this project and actions taken that will correct these imbalances.

Response: It is outside the scope of the RMP to plan for funding of specific recreational facilities. The BLM agrees that development of facilities needs to consider recreational use levels as well as provide a balance for the variety of recreational users within the BFO. The BLM does not agree that motorized recreation facilities in the Butte Field Office have suffered. To date, the majority of travel planning funding (includes several FWP OHV grants) and facility development conducted by the Butte Field Office has benefited motorized use, with the Pipestone and Clancy designated OHV riding areas being prime examples. Following finalization of the RMP, the lack of support for non-motorized recreation facilities will likely be addressed through site-specific planning for additional non-motorized trail systems and facilities.

BB5

Comment: Where possible, agencies are encouraged to provide trailheads for motorized trails that are convenient to urban areas. Where possible, agencies are encouraged to provide trailheads for motorized trails that are located at the boundary of urban areas and trails that connect urban areas to public lands and form motorized recreation opportunities similar to the Paiute Trail in Utah (www.marysvale.org/paiute_trail/contents.html).

Response: Throughout the development of this Plan, there has been considerable public interest and debate regarding OHV use on BLM lands adjacent to urban development (rural/urban interface). Given the high level of interest, the BLM initiated two balanced "community based collaborative working groups" (see **Appendix A**) to assist with the development of travel plans for three such areas. With some minor adjustments, the working group recommendations have ultimately been brought forward in the Preferred Alternative in the Butte RMP.

BB6

Comment: Agencies are encouraged to implement a standard signing convention that is easily understood. For example, there are often misunderstandings about seasonal motor vehicle restrictions due to the "No" symbol with the actual closure period shown below in small text that is often not seen or understood. In this example, the road or trail is open except during the period below but it is often misinterpreted as closed.

Response: The BLM has been participating in an interagency cooperative road and trail management agreement since 1997 (USFS, BLM, FWP, Montana Division of Forestry, Plum Creek Timber Company, etc.). The agreement encourages cooperating agencies to use similar signing philosophies, sign formatting, and language in order to provide a clear and consistent message to the public regarding travel management direction. The BLM believes its signing philosophy, sign formatting, and language do provide the public with clear direction. In addition, we are installing informational bulletin boards, with site specific travel planning maps, and in some cases brochure size field maps for convenient public use.

BB7

Comment: The difficulty of a particular route required can be identified by a signing system similar to ski runs so that recreationists are made aware of the skill levels required and so that a wide variety of routes for all skill levels can be enjoyed. The following sort of motorized trail identification and rating system would be very helpful to the motorized public and would allow users to match up their experience level and equipment to the most appropriate trails. This system is similar to ski trails. Note that the easiest = green, more difficult = blue, and most difficult = black. The original map may be viewed at _____.

Response: While this comment is beyond the scope of the Butte RMP and associated travel plan decisions, the BLM agrees that a rating system similar to what has been suggested could prove useful to the user. The BLM will consider including this information on future OHV trail maps or through other interpretive means.

BB8

Comment: Agencies should not use motorized access in areas closed to motorized access by the public because:

(a) The public will see the tracks and could become upset that the motorized closure is being violated and/or

(b) The public will see the tracks and conclude that motorized access is acceptable.

Response: The BLM has a provision to allow travel variances in order to conduct essential business (refer to **Appendix A**). Travel variances are requests by the pub-

lic, commercial interests, interagency personnel, or BLM personnel to temporarily use motorized vehicles on closed roads, seasonally restricted roads, and cross country (off road) use. Authorized personnel (whether agency or private citizens) are required to keep a copy of the variance with the authorized vehicle (s), and displayed in the window. Variances are processed on a case by case basis and are temporary in nature. This is in contrast to providing motorized access to the public on a daily basis.

BB9

Comment: The types of variances to travel plans issued for "casual use mineral exploration" (p. 48) needs to be defined.

Response: The variance process would be the same for any type of proposed activity, including casual mining exploration. A description of the variance process is found in **Appendix A.**

BB10

Comment: Additional funding is needed for expanded and enhanced OHV programs to effectively address the concerns and needs of OHV recreationists including programs:

- To provide greater promotion of responsible OHV recreation,
- To provide greater promotion of OHV tourism,
- To provide greater promotion of an OHV Safety program and distribution of safety educational materials,
- To provide greater promotion and distribution of educational materials on land use and visitor ethics,
- To provide greater promotion and distribution of educational materials on OHV and hunting ethics,
- To actively promote and support the development of local OHV organizations in all areas of the state to further promote OHV educational and awareness programs,
- To promote greater registration of OHVs which will produce greater support for the OHV Program,
- To develop and distribute a monthly or quarterly newsletter to all registered OHV owners,
- To develop and distribute OHV information including maps and listings of OHV recreational opportunities,
- To develop multiple-use recreation opportunities on public lands as allowed under existing laws,
- To develop and operate a collection and distribution point for OHV recreational and educational information links to OHV clubs, etc.
- To provide a Trail Ranger program that supports OHV recreationists similar to the State of Idaho's,
- To mitigate all existing concerns with OHV recreation on public lands in cooperation with federal and state agencies and in conformance with all existing laws and a Memorandum of Understanding dated February 25, 2002 between U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service and the Blue Ribbon Coalition, and
- To develop and promote all reasonable OHV recreation opportunities on public lands in cooperation with federal and state agencies and in conformance with all existing laws and a Memorandum of Understanding dated February 25, 2002 between U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, and the Blue Ribbon Coalition.

Response: The items identified in the comment are all outside the scope of the RMP or do not apply to the BLM. The BLM does implement a number of actions listed as a part of administering the recreation and travel management programs in the Butte Field Office.

BB11

Comment: Site-specific monitoring of motorized versus non-motorized use must be provided for each route.

Response: While monitoring is an important management tool, the BLM is not required to monitor each motorized route (whether road or trail) to determine the respective levels of motorized and non-motorized use. More useful monitoring data would include: use level, trend, trail condition, travel plan compliance, and resources impacts (noxious weeds, erosion, impact to wildlife, etc.).

Travel Management – Travel Planning Process

CC1

Comment: Agencies are encouraged to return trails that used to be on trail inventories to the current inventory. Agencies are encouraged to add all existing road ands trails that are not on the trail system inventory to the roads and trail inventory.

Response: A comprehensive roads and trails inventory was completed that documented all established roads and trails that existed prior to the 2003 Statewide OHV ROD. Throughout the development of the RMP, the BLM has asked the public to review our maps and provide feedback regarding missing roads and trails, or other mapping issues. As a result, we have added several routes that were inadvertently missed, eliminated others that don't actually exist, and been able to provide more accurate maps.

CC2

Comment: First and foremost CBU has found a lack of sufficient trail inventory and analysis on all projects we have been involved with in Montana. This very much concerns us as we feel this is required by the 3 state 01 OHV Rule and applies to the Butte RMP. The rule for travel planning specifically states that "Through travel planning, roads and trails would be inventoried, mapped, analyzed and designated as open, seasonally open, or closed. In addition, site specific travel planning would identify areas for trail construction and/or improvement or specific areas where cross country travel may be appropriate."

We request that your agency provide the public with a complete trail inventory. This inventory should include at the very least but not limited to, length, tread material, slope, maintenance records, any location of resource damage and if found, mitigation for this damage that you would propose. Travel planning is a site specific planning action and should be used by an agency to develop long term, sustainable trail systems. How would one develop a reasonable plan without the information provided with a comprehensive trail inventory and analysis? CBU finds it very difficult to accept the Butte RMP without this information.

Response: Analysis of the five site-specific travel plan areas in the RMP began with a comprehensive mapping effort of the road and trail systems. Through the use of existing maps, aerial photo interpretation and on the ground verification, roads and trails were mapped for the five travel plan areas. Each road and trail segment was then analyzed during the travel planning process to assess the impacts of the roads and trails to wildlife and wildlife habitats, fish and aquatic habitats and soils. Analysis of the road and trail systems also addressed the need of the road for human use (including recreational use). From these analyses, different alternatives were formed to provide for a range of access opportunities while protecting or improving soils and habitat conditions for plants, wildlife, and aquatic species.

Refer to **Appendix A** for more information on the travel planning process.

CC3

Comment: A science-based approach to the analysis of forest roads is presented in the Forest Service publication FS-643 Roads Analysis which was published in August 1999. This document includes a comprehensive overview of considerations and issues, suggested informational needs and sources, and analytical tools that should be evaluated during the analysis of forest roads. Many of the considerations and issues presented in FS-643, if evaluated adequately and fairly, would support keeping primitive roads and trails in the project area open for motorized recreation, handicapped, elderly, and physically impaired.

We request full use of the FS-643 Roads Analysis Manual in order to adequately account for the social, economic, cultural, and traditional values that motorized roads and trails provide to the public. FS-643 should be used on every road and trail segment in order to adequately identify and evaluate the needs of motorized visitors and in order to avoid contributing to additional cumulative negative impacts to motorized visitors.

Response: There is no requirement for the BLM to use Forest Service publication FS-643 in assessing roads for travel planning. For the Butte RMP, the BLM followed the procedure described in **Appendix A** to assess the resource uses and resource impacts associated with each travel route. This process considered many of the same variables described in the Forest Service publication.

CC4

Comment: A motorized travel plan is a plan that specifically designates roads, trails and areas for motorized use, designates which vehicles will be allowed on which routes and if seasonal restrictions apply. A comprehensive trail designation plan does the same thing except it includes all trail uses, including mountain bike, equestrian and hiking. This is a very important distinction because the anti-access groups will attempt to convince the planning team to develop a "comprehensive" travel plan by using only the existing inventory of motorized routes. They do this by identifying existing motorized trails that are good for mountain bikes, equestrians, bird-watching, or whatever. The current approach is inequitable, because it takes the current motorized route inventory and tries to make it the route inventory for all users. It leaves out the possibility for constructing or otherwise developing non-motorized trails and ignores existing non-motorized trails that exist in both the planning area and adjacent lands. Now, that doesn't mean the agency can't take into consideration the effect each alternative will have on non-motorized visitors. It can - and it should be part of the NEPA analysis. But that is totally different from specifically providing a non-motorized trail system via the existing inventory of motorized routes. We support the creation, designation, and management of non-motorized trails, but not at the expense of motorized visitors.

We request that the agency not use the existing motorized trail inventory for designating non-motorized trails. Instead, if there is a need for non-motorized trails, then the agency should consider options that do not reduce the existing opportunity for motorized users. The draft Butte RMP lacks a true "pro-recreation" alternative that adequately addresses motorized recreation. All the alternatives developed for consideration represent a significant reduction in routes available for motorized use. Not one alternative even sustains the current opportunity. The draft RMP has developed many "preservation" alternatives, where a maximum amount of closures are considered. The increasing demand for OHV recreation

opportunities on public lands is extensively documented. Therefore, it is important for the project team to formulate at least one alternative that maximizes motorized recreational opportunities in the project area.

Response: The project team did not use the comprehensive inventory of existing roads and trails (whether motorized or non-motorized) as a basis for creating additional non-motorized trails in the planning area. The team did use the inventory to analyze each route, and compare its respective level of impact to resources versus its importance for agency or public use; which includes providing a balance of motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities. The BLM did not receive any public comments from non-motorized users advocating closing motorized routes in order to convert them to non-motorized trails. While Alternative A emphasizes motorized recreational opportunities in the project area, the BLM believes that the Preferred Alternative provides for the best balance.

CC5

Comment: Wilderness criteria and standards should not be applied to these multiple-use lands. The law requires that lands designated for multiple-use by congress be managed for multiple-use.

Response: The BLM does not apply wilderness criteria and standards to lands managed for multiple use.

However with regards to multiple use, the BLM is not mandated to provide for every possible use on every possible acre, but instead for a variety of recreation opportunities as appropriate across the landscape. As such, some places are identified for non-motorized use to allow this segment of the recreating public to enjoy their recreational pursuits.

CC6

Comment: Any measurable impact from OHV use is automatically and incorrectly judged to be significant. OHV impacts are a small fraction of natural actions. Nature should be used as the standard for comparison of OHV impacts.

Response: The BLM does not automatically consider impacts from OHV use as "significant". All resource impacts, whether resulting from OHV recreation, livestock use, camping, etc., are analyzed on a case by case basis, for the scope of the activity. Depending on site-specific circumstances (grade, aspect, soil type, season of use, level of use, etc.) some OHV recreation activities may result in greater resource impacts than other uses. The BLM does not use nature (naturally occurring impacts, such as flooding, wind, wild-land fire, etc.) as a standard for comparison of OHV impacts. The BLM cannot manage effects from natural events; however BLM can manage human caused impacts such as OHV use.

CC7

Comment: The site specific analysis of each road or trail to be closed must address or identify where the public would go to replace the motorized resource proposed for closure. In other words, the analysis must adequately evaluate the site-specific value of a road or trail proposed for closure to motorized recreationists. It must also quantify the significant negative cumulative impact experienced when motorized recreationists could not find a trail or road with a similar experience in the area.

Response: These considerations were taken into account during the travel planning process. The BLM understands the importance of motorized recreation and believes the Preferred Alternative provides adequate opportunities in the project area.

CC8

Comment: Along with the standardization of signs, there is also a significant need to standardize or simplify seasonal closure dates as much as possible. We suggest that the number of different closures periods should be kept to a maximum of two, if possible, in order to avoid confusion and resulting misunderstandings.

Response: The BLM agrees that as much standardization and simplification of seasonal closure dates as possible would promote the most understanding throughout the public. For the Butte RMP this concept was considered as much as possible in developing seasonal closure dates associated with site-specific travel plan alternatives.

CC9

Comment: Implement seasonal closures, where required, with input and review by OHV recreationists that will:

(1) provide the maximum amount of OHV recreational opportunity during the summer recreation season in order to disperse all forms of trail use and thus minimize impacts to trail users;

(2) provide winter OHV recreation opportunities in low-elevation areas that are not critical winter game range;

(3) provide OHV recreation and access during hunting season by keeping major roads and OHV loops open while closing spur roads and trails necessary to provide reasonable protection of game populations and a reasonable hunting experience; and

(4) provide OHV recreation opportunities during spring months in all areas where erosion and wildlife calving conditions reasonably allow.

Response: These considerations were taken into account during the travel planning process, as well as resource impact analysis and consideration of opportunities for non-motorized recreation. There has been substantial public input and review throughout the planning process.

CC10

Comment: Existing seasonal closures tend to separate the motorized and non-motorized peak use seasons. One size does not necessarily fit every circumstance but standardize or simplify seasonal closure dates as much as possible. The number of different closure periods should be kept to a maximum of two, if possible, in order to avoid confusion and resulting misunderstandings.

Response: The BLM does not agree that seasonal use restrictions tend to separate the motorized and non-motorized peak use seasons. The peak season for most (wheeled) motorized and non-motorized users is the same, spring through late fall (5/15-12/2). The same is true for the winter sports season, with both groups of users active from early winter through early spring (12/1-5/16). The BLM agrees that seasonal restriction periods should be kept to a minimum (such as the above examples), however this is not always possible.

CC11

Comment: We have also been told that the agency could evaluate new routes at a later date. First, we strongly recommend that the BLM take whatever time is necessary to adequately address the public's needs. The schedule is not an adequate or reasonable amount of time especially considering that the public has been able to access and enjoy this area for decades. Secondly, we have requested the reopening of routes before. The BLM has no history of reopening or creating any new routes for OHV use at a later date. Thirdly, whenever we suggest a new route, the agency is hesitant to reopen or pursue the environmental analysis required to address it. Therefore, we are uncomfortable banking any hopes of mitigation and enhancement on a new project at a later date. And lastly, a later date probably means 10 to 15 years out (if ever) and many of us who are impacted now may not be able to take advantage of any new opportunities at a “later date”.

Response: The BLM can consider site-specific proposals for new OHV trails in areas acceptable for that use, subject to NEPA documentation and other constraints. However, with the exception of four existing travel management plans, the Butte Field Office has nine additional planning areas it must address in the near future. Five of these are high priority areas, and are being addressed concurrently with this RMP revision. An additional four “moderate” priority travel plans will be initiated following the completion of the RMP.

CC12

Comment: The environmental document should consider the following visitor profiles in addition to OHV enthusiasts as motorized visitors who use roads and trails within public lands. People out for weekend drives, sightseers, picnickers, campers, hunters, hiking, rock climbing, target shooters, fisherman, snowmobile enthusiasts, woodcutters, wildlife viewing, berry and mushroom pickers, equestrians, mountain bikers, and physically challenged visitors who must use wheeled vehicles to visit public lands. All of these multiple-use visitors use roads and motorized trails for their recreational purposes and the decision must take into account motorized designations serve many recreation activities, not just recreational trail riding.

Response: The needs of this wide range of recreational users were taken into account during the travel planning process.

CC13

Comment: Agency planning including travel management projects should be a process to quantify and address the needs of the public for motorized access and motorized recreational opportunities. Instead, it is approached in just the opposite direction as a closure process that ignores the needs of the public for motorized access and motorized recreational opportunities. Every travel planning process listed in Table 2 has reduced motorized access and motorized recreation. A travel planning process has never resulted in increased recreational opportunities for motorized recreationists. The travel management process as currently practiced is not equitable because: (1) it does not adequately address the needs of the public for multiple-use recreational opportunities including motorized access and motorized recreation, and (2) it is deceptive to represent the process as a travel management process that will address the needs of the public when it is really just the opposite, i.e. a closure process that does not fairly and adequately address the needs of the public. We request that the process either be renamed to “Travel Closure Process” in order to end the deception of the public OR (as we strongly prefer) that the process be redirected to meet the needs of the public for a functional network of motorized roads and trails for access and recreation with practical and reasonable consideration of the environment.

Response: The BLM’s travel planning process provides numerous opportunities for public input, and takes into account the needs of both motorized and non-motorized recreation users. While it is true that many recent agency travel plans have resulted in fewer motorized opportunities, this trend reflects comprehensive analysis of impacts to wildlife, fisheries, soil, water, forest, rangeland health, and other resources in addition to human needs, including recreation. The BLM also notes that the five site-specific travel planning areas being assessed in the

Butte RMP have never undergone any interdisciplinary travel planning prior to this effort, meaning that the BLM has never previously undertaken an effort to design travel plans in these areas that address resource impacts and user conflicts as described under 43 CFR § 8342.

CC14

Comment: A reasonable test of significance of impacts from motorized closures on motorized recreationists must be used. A reasonable test would include evaluation of indicators including:

1. Where else can motorized recreationists go within a reasonable distance and with equal recreation value?
2. Do motorized recreationists have an adequate selection of the recreational resources with the proposed motorized closure(s)?
3. What is the balance of recreational opportunities in the area and region as demonstrated by the information developed from the outline shown in Table 1?
4. Are the existing motorized recreational opportunities sufficient for the needs of the public?
5. Are there documented user conflict and can the recreational resources be reasonably shared? Note that it is not reasonable to define user conflict a merely seeing someone else on a trail.
6. What are the cumulative effects of this motorized closure combined with all other motorized closures?

Response: These and similar considerations were taken into account for both motorized and non-motorized users during the travel planning process. The BLM believes the Preferred Alternative provides adequate motorized recreation opportunities in the project area.

CC15

Comment: Why use so many indirect attempts such as public meetings and open houses to gather feedback from motorized recreationists? Why not just go directly to motorized recreationists in the field and at club meetings and ask them? NEPA encourages direct coordination with the impacted public instead of a process tailor made for special-interest environmental groups.

Response: Public involvement efforts surrounding this RMP have been numerous and equitable. The BLM has encouraged OHV recreationists and all interests to participate in the numerous scoping and review meetings held during the development of this document. Chapter 5 in this document describes the public involvement portion of this planning effort. In addition, all special interest groups have had a standing invitation to meet with BLM during throughout this process to discuss their concerns. The latter approach provided opportunities for organized groups to meet individually with the BLM to provide input. As a result, BLM representatives met with several individuals and organized groups to give them more opportunities to provide specific input on the Butte RMP.

CC16

Comment: Motorized recreationists have not had the opportunity to develop mitigation plans required to address the significant impact resulting from cumulative effect all closures.

Response: Any organization or member of the public can provide the BLM with suggested management, including mitigation, associated with proposed management. During the public comment period on the Butte Draft RMP/EIS, a number of individuals, agencies, and organizations in the public provided management suggestions to the BLM on the Butte RMP.

CC17

Comment: If the present trend continues for a few more years, the loss of motorized access and recreation will be so significant that the collection of meaningful data will be precluded because motorized opportunities will be largely eliminated and motorized visitors will be permanently displaced (absent from public lands). Based on our observations, we estimate that motorized access and recreation opportunities have been reduced by at least 50 percent since the 1960's by the significant cumulative negative effect of wilderness designations, wilderness study areas, national parks, monument designations, roadless designations, non-motorized area designations, travel management, wildlife management areas, and other restrictive management designations.

Response: The BLM does not agree that motorized opportunities will be largely eliminated from the project area. BLM will continue to provide a range of recreational opportunities for all recreational users, motorized users included.

CC18

Comment: With the agency's commitment in the current management plan to the application of "Limits of Acceptable Change" (LAC) for determining management strategies there is an inherent obligation on the agency's part to provide specific direction that certain measures, such as visitor education and the provision of new facilities would be implemented before limiting use. A common thread in LAC application nation-wide is that these regulations apply to all visitors, not to specific groups. Why are motorized recreationists being disenfranchised from this directive? There has not been an adequate attempt by the agency to educate the public that areas and trails in the project area or anywhere else must be shared by all users and that new facilities are

needed to address the needs of motorized recreationists. The decision for this project must correct this deficiency.

Response: The travel planning process did not include use of Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) as an assessment tool during its analysis. LAC is better suited for recreation planning, rather than travel planning. However, some of the concepts embodied in LAC, such as assessing and managing for desired social and environmental conditions, were taken into consideration during travel plan analysis.

With regards to sharing areas and trails, the BLM is not mandated to provide for every possible use on every possible acre or trail, but instead for a variety of recreation opportunities as appropriate across the landscape. In general, the experiences sought by non-motorized users are different from those being sought by motorized users. Establishing separate areas for non-motorized recreation helps reduce user conflict.

CC19

Comment: I do not believe that the preferred alternative identified (B) is in keeping with the concept of multiple use and does not address the need to provide dispersed use of the “Public Lands” which should ultimately help reduce the environmental impact of any one location. If the BLM finds it absolutely necessary to reduce the number of roads in these travel plan areas, implementing Alternative D in each area would provide a realistic gauge as to whether or not more restrictive measures are actually necessary. This approach combined with increased educational programs could actually provide desired results without significantly reducing access to the areas in question.

Response: The Preferred Alternative provides a wide range of dispersed recreational opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized users. Multiple use does not mean providing for every possible use on every possible acre or trail, but instead for a variety of recreation opportunities as appropriate across the landscape. The BLM believes the Preferred Alternative represents the best balance of resource protection objectives and diverse recreational opportunities.

CC20

Comment: All of the alternatives developed for consideration represent a significant reduction in routes available for motorized use. Not one Alternative even sustains the current opportunity.

Response: The reductions reflected in the action alternatives are the result of comprehensive interdisciplinary analysis that took into account resource protection needs, as well as providing opportunities for motorized and non-motorized recreational users. Alternative B, the Preferred Alternative, provides approximately 66 percent of the existing opportunities, while Alternatives C and D provide 59 percent and 76 percent, respectively. The BLM believes the Preferred Alternative represents the best balance.

CC21

Comment: The five high priority areas (page 47) that should be under consideration with the guidelines set by the OHV ROD, with all routes identified, mapped, and evaluated are addressed in this plan only by identifying them as non motorized areas. Once these areas are identified as non-motorized any further consideration for a "balanced approach" has been lost.

Response: The five high priority travel planning areas have not been addressed or identified as “non-motorized” areas. Alternatives for these areas are being analyzed in this RMP under the Limited management area designation. The “Limited” management area designation pertains to all forms of motorized use, wheeled and snowmobile. In most cases, travel management under the limited area designation restricts all forms of wheeled motorized use to designated roads and trails, with a range of route management (Open Yearlong, Seasonally Restricted, OHV use only, etc.). As a result, opportunities for motorized or non-motorized recreation vary depending on site-specific travel planning analysis. The remaining four moderate priority travel planning areas in the Butte Field Office will undergo site-specific travel planning under the “Limited” area designation after finalization of the Butte RMP.

CC22

Comment: The areas with current travel plans are described as "limited" (page 268) is misleading. With the exception of the Whitetail-Pipestone that actually provides trail opportunities for the OHV community, the other limited areas would be described as extremely limited.

Response: The “Limited” management area designation pertains to all forms of motorized use, wheeled and snowmobile. Depending on site specific travel planning, areas managed under the limited areas may or may not support designated OHV trail systems. It should be noted that the Clancy-Unionville travel plan provides 9 miles of Designated OHV trail system, with an additional 2 miles pending development. And unless otherwise managed, all BLM roads are open to dual use (non street legal OHV travel).

CC23

Comment: Note that the project team does not include any OHV enthusiasts, but does include many non-motorized enthusiasts.

Response: The planning team for the Butte RMP included people with a wide range of personal views regarding OHV use, non-motorized recreation opportunities, and resource protection. Regardless of personal bias, planning team members were required to provide

input to the travel planning process based on their respective areas of professional expertise.

CC24

Comment: Motorized recreationists prefer an interesting assortment of loop and spur routes for a variety of purposes. Each road and trail should be inventoried and viewed on the ground to determine its recreational value and any significant problem areas that require mitigation measures. Each road and trail should be evaluated for its value as a motorized loop or connected route. Many opportunities for connecting routes to create loops and figure 8 routes for access and recreation can be observed by inspecting the Alternative B travel plan maps. However, Alternative B does not include any of these reasonable route alternatives. Each spur road and trail should be evaluated for its value including: a source of dispersed campsite(s), exploration opportunities (especially young riders), destination such as an old mine and viewpoint or as access for all multiple-use visitors. Every problem has a solution. Every impact has a mitigation measure. We request that travel management alternatives be developed with the objective of including as many roads and trails as possible and dressing as many problems as possible by using all possible mitigation measures.

Response: The BLM considered loops in the development of the travel plan alternatives within the five site-specific travel plan areas. Where feasible, the BLM incorporated loops, in the context of multiple use management, including the consideration of natural resources.

CC25

Comment: NEPA documents must concentrate on the issues that are truly significant to the action in question, rather than amassing needless detail. Agencies shall focus on significant environmental issues and alternatives and shall reduce paperwork and the accumulation of extraneous background data. Statements shall be concise, clear, and to the point, and shall be supported by evidence that the agency has made the necessary environmental analyses. These requirements have not been met. We request that these deficiencies be addressed by developing a preferred alternative that identifies all of the existing roads and trails available to motorized recreationists including non-system routes and those falling under some undefined definition of "unusable" and those additional routes required to meet the needs of the public.

Response: A comprehensive roads and trails inventory was completed during 2003-2004 that made a good faith effort to document all established roads and trails (historic; agency or user created) that existed prior to the 2003 Statewide OHV ROD. Each alternative was analyzed using this comprehensive inventory. Alternative A (the "No Action" alternative) would leave all the currently open routes open. Alternative A, however, is not being brought forward as the Preferred Alternative.

CC26

Comment: All roads to be closed to full-size vehicles should be converted to ATV routes. This is a reasonable alternative for all existing roads.

Response: Routes analyzed and proposed as closed to motorized use are closed to all forms of wheeled motorized vehicles. This is consistent with providing adequate resource protection, as well as providing for a reasonable balance of non-motorized recreational opportunities.

CC27

Comment: The road density evaluations must also consider the viable alternative of closing a reasonable number of routes during hunting season and other critical seasons and then opening them during the summer recreation season. This strategy would effectively address road density criteria without nearly as many motorized closures as proposed.

Response: The approach described in the comment is a fundamental part of travel planning. Under the Preferred Alternative, many routes would be managed as seasonally restricted (closed December 2 – May 15) during the winter months to provide big game winter habitat or prevent soil erosion, and afterwards are open to summer recreation. However, for some areas, yearlong closures are necessary to provide adequate resource protection and/or provide for non-motorized recreation opportunities.

CC28

Comment: The roads and trails in the project area are not new or "user created" travelways. These roads and trails have existed for many years. The public has relied on them for access for many years and for many purposes. This pattern of use is well established. A reasonable travel management alternative would use area closure to prevent the creation of unwanted trails by visitors and, at the same time, allow the public to use all of the existing motorized routes. Too many management actions have been enacted without the development of this reasonable alternative.

Response: Under Alternative A, all currently open roads and trails would be brought forward and retained under current management. The BLM believes the Preferred Alternative represents a balanced travel plan that takes into account resource protection, and the divergent interests of motorized and non-motorized recreational users.

It is true that many of the routes located within the decision area (BLM lands) were created prior to the establishment of FLPMA (1976). However, many more

routes have been created since then, either initiated or authorized by the agency, or created through public use (wood cutting, OHV recreation, camping, hunting, mining, etc.). Prior to the 2003 Statewide ROD, there were few restrictions regarding motorized use, and the public was allowed to create user made roads and trails at will. Some of these roads and trails have resulted in unacceptable resource impacts, and have been proposed as seasonally restricted, closed, or decommissioned.

CC29

Comment: The statistics in Table 4-110 through 4-113 do not accurately disclose the significant negative cumulative effects on motorized recreationists from past actions in the immediate area. The closure of 328 miles of routes in the Elkhorns was almost 100 percent of the high quality jeep and OHV routes. Also, the miles of non-motorized trails in the Elkhorns can certainly be determined and far outnumber the real miles of motorized trails. The percent closure in the Sleeping Giant is extremely significant with 20 miles out of 29 closed or 69 percent and that number did not include any inventory of single-track or ATV trails. The miles of routes closed to motorized use in the Clancy-Unionville decision was not accurately identified in the ROD and included the closure of an undisclosed number of miles of roads and trails and 28 miles of identified roads including #2001 an extremely valuable OHV route commonly known as the Brooklyn Bridge route. In Table 4-111 210 miles of roads were closed in the North Belts or 57 percent of the existing routes. The following table is a better representation of the motorized closures in the Gallatin National Forest decision. Basically OHV recreationists gain a lot of road miles (80 to 375 miles) which we had already and lost a lot of extremely valuable trail miles (749 to 405).

Response: The BLM believes that the data presented in these tables in the Butte RMP accurately characterizes the point being made in the text of the cumulative effects section for travel planning. Recent agency decisions have altered availability of motorized uses in various ways, including reducing availability of routes for some motorized uses.

CC30

Comment: Cumulative effects must include reasonably foreseeable actions including the Badger-Two Medicine and Rocky Mountain travel plan in the Lewis and Clark National Forest, the Little Belts and Crazy Mountains travel plan in the Lewis and Clark, the South Belts in the Helena National Forest, the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Forest Plan, etc. The cumulative effects on motorized recreationists are staggering and are not being adequately disclosed and addressed**.**

Response: In Chapter 4 (in Volume II), in the Cumulative Effects of Travel Plans at the Planning Area Scale section, under Travel Management and Access, the BLM has considered and described recent travel planning decisions reached by other agencies (including recent BLM site-specific travel plan decisions within the past 10 years) within and adjacent to the Planning Area of the Butte RMP. This includes consideration of recent decisions made by the Helena National Forest for the North Belts travel planning area, the BLM Dillon Field Office, as well as the Gallatin National Forest. Other decisions identified in the comment are either not final decisions (such as the Beaverhead-Deerlodge Forest Plan), or are not adjacent to or near the Butte RMP Planning Area (such as the Badger-Two Medicine and Rocky Mountain travel plan).

CC31

Motorized closures are being enacted incrementally and without adequate disclosure and consideration of the cumulative effects. Resource Management Plans and Travel plans are created or revised every 10 years. If 25 to 50% of the existing motorized recreational opportunities are closed in each successive plan (a typical range), then over the course of 3 travel planning cycles or about 30 years in a given area, only 13 to 42% of the original motorized recreational opportunities will remain at the end of the third cycle. This trend is being ignored at all levels including the actions listed in Table 2 in CTVA comments dated June 27, 2005. The resource management plan for the Butte area does not adequately recognize and address this trend. The national planning policy does not recognize and address this trend. Therefore, this cumulative effect is being effectively ignored and that failure to notice will result in the ultimate loss of any meaningful motorized recreational opportunities and the creation of de facto wilderness from large blocks of multiple-use lands. Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored.--Aldous Huxley. We ask that this significant negative cumulative effect on motorized recreationists be adequately recognized, evaluated and mitigated at all levels starting with this project**.**

Response: The BLM believes that the Chapter 4 section on Cumulative Effects of Travel Plans at the Planning Area Scale in Volume II of the Butte RMP adequately addresses the trends associated with land management decisions related to motorized uses. The BLM believes it has provided viable travel plan alternatives within the Butte RMP in the context of following 43 CFR § 8342 to balance motorized uses and opportunities with non-motorized uses and resource protection.

CC32

Comment: There has never been an accounting of the cumulative negative impact of all motorized closures that have occurred over the past 35 years. Actions that have contributed to the significance of the cumulative negative impact on motorized recreation include millions of acres and thousands of miles of roads and trails associated with Endangered Species Act; Continental

Divide National Scenic Trail; forest fires; timber harvests, forest plans; view shed plans; resource plans; watershed plans; roadless plan; creation of wildlife management areas, monuments, non-motorized areas, wilderness areas, and wilderness study areas; area closures, and last but certainly not least, travel plans. This cumulative negative impact has not been quantified and it is significant. In order to evaluate this cumulative negative effect, an accounting of all motorized closures must be done at 5-year increments going back to the creation of the wilderness act. This accounting needs to be done on a local forest or district level in addition to statewide and regional levels. For example, loss of motorized access and motorized recreational opportunities since 1986 in our immediate area (Helena National Forest) include: 18 separate closures in the Big Belts with the loss of over 100 miles; 130 miles in other areas of the forest; closure of 191,000 acres and 75 miles in the Elkhorn Mountains; and closure of 625,447 acres in the remainder of the forest. Both adjoining public lands and public lands further away have experienced similar trends.

Therefore, the cumulative negative impact of all motorized access and recreational closures is significant. Simply, there are very few places left where motorized recreationists can recreate and yet the trend continues. This stealthy attack on motorized recreational opportunities must be acknowledged. Please quantify and consider these cumulative negative impacts and develop a preferred alternative that will mitigate the significant impact on motorized recreationists that has occurred.

Response: The BLM believes it has adequately considered cumulative effects of past travel planning actions within the Butte RMP Planning Area. In Chapter 4 (Volume II), in the Cumulative Effects of Travel Plans at the Planning Area Scale section, under Travel Management and Access, the BLM has quantified and described recent travel planning decisions reached by other agencies (including recent BLM site-specific travel plan decisions within the past 10 years) within and adjacent to the Planning Area of the Butte RMP. There is no requirement to examine motorized route closures in 5-year increments dating back to the creation of the Wilderness Act.

CC33

Comment: The current trend agency decision makers have pursued; closing large blocks of land and many miles of trails and low level roads, has compounded the cumulative effects on motorized recreationists. Social Conditions (page 480) recognizes "some cumulative effects". None of the land management agency proposals have accurately evaluated the cumulative effects that have taken place over the last 10 years. While the numbers of OHV recreationists is increasing, by the agency's own estimated figures, the opportunities have continually been decreasing. As stated, other federal agencies may be following a 'trend' but we would expect BLM to evaluate the need and the cumulative effects of the past in the process of proposing plans that will have such a long lasting impact on the OHV community.

Response: The BLM believes it has adequately considered cumulative effects of past travel planning actions within the Butte RMP Planning Area. In Chapter 4 (Volume II), in the Cumulative Effects of Travel Plans at the Planning Area Scale section, under Travel Management and Access, the BLM has quantified and described recent travel planning decisions reached by other agencies (including recent BLM site-specific travel plan decisions within the past 10 years) within and adjacent to the Planning Area of the Butte RMP. With travel plan alternatives contained in the Butte RMP, the BLM is not considering closing large blocks of land. The BLM believes it has provided viable travel plan alternatives within the Butte RMP to address the need to balance motorized uses with the need to provide for non-motorized uses and to provide for resource protection.

Travel Management - User Conflicts

DD1

Comment: Creating more separate use areas will not solve the conflict between motorized and non-motorized users. People have to realize that multiple-use areas are just that-MULTIPLE USE. All visitors to multiple-use must be expected to share. If people want to go to an area that is completely non-motorized, they can. There are areas specifically set aside for this purpose. Taking more and more multiple-use land away will only create more problems.

Response: The BLM is not mandated to provide for every possible use on every possible acre or trail, but instead for a variety of recreation opportunities as appropriate across the landscape. Establishing separate use areas for motorized and non-motorized users does help reduce conflict. In general, the experiences sought by non-motorized users are different from those being sought by motorized users. As such, some places must be identified for non-motorized use to allow this rather significant segment of the recreating public to enjoy their recreational pursuits. In addition to their preferred means of travel (horse, foot, mountain bike, x-country skis, etc.), many non–motorized users are also seeking a quiet recreational experience. By its very nature, motorized use is not quiet. Noise is widely recognized by the motorized community as major social conflict. While most motorized users do not mind sharing the same space (trail, area) with non-motorized users, the reverse is not usually true for this reason.

DD2

Comment: It is not reasonable to define user conflict as merely seeing someone else on a trail. There is a significant need for an adequate number of miles of single-track for existing and future motorcyclists. There is no

legitimate reason why the single-track trails in the multiple-use areas of the project should not be shared between motorized and non-motorized recreationists to a much greater extent.

Response: The BLM agrees that merely seeing someone else on a trail or in an adjacent area does not constitute a user conflict, whether occurring among users engaged in the same recreational activity (i.e., ATV riders) or divergent activities (ATV riders/hikers). However, in addition to their preferred means of travel (horse, foot, mountain bike, x-country skis, etc.), many non–motorized users are also seeking a quiet recreational experience. By its very nature, motorized use is not quiet. Noise is widely recognized by the motorized community as a major social conflict. As such, while most motorized users do not mind sharing the same space (trail, area) with non-motorized users, the reverse is not usually true for this reason.

The BLM believes that the Preferred Alternative provides adequate motorized single track opportunities, such as those provided for at the Pipestone designated OHV recreation area.

DD3

Comment: Wheeled recreationists have with their noisy machines (ATVs) reduced hunting opportunities over here [Helena Travel Planning Area]. Maintain and monitor access. If you can't control it - close it.

Response: Current travel management in the Helena area (Alternative A) falls under the direction of the 2003 Statewide Off Highway Vehicle Record of Decision, which restricts all motorized use to existing roads and trails. Under the action alternatives, a range of site-specific route management has been proposed for these existing roads and trails (Open yearlong, Open/Restricted, Closed). The BLM believes that the Preferred Alternative will help reduce resource impacts and user conflicts in this area, and resolve some of the concerns expressed in the comment. In addition, the BLM has initiated a Trail Ranger program with a primary focus on providing public education and monitoring for travel plan compliance.

DD4

Comment: Roadless Rule: I understand that this plan would abide by all federal laws in carrying out its management objectives. However, it is not clear how the Clinton Administration's "Roadless Rule" that is currently in appeals would impact the proposed alternatives. Of particular interest is the Preferred Alternative B, which considers new roads for the commercial harvest of forest and woodland products (page 29). Was the science that was used to craft the Roadless Rule considered when creating these alternatives? If so, this is not clear in the analysis as it is currently presented in the plan. The Roadless Rule, should it become law, will impact management direction for the Butte Field Office; and its effects on public lands can, and should, be declared at this time in this document.

Response: The Roadless Rule applies to Forest Service Roadless Areas on National Forest lands, but does not apply to BLM lands.

DD5

Comment: In Chapter 4, page 448 the following statement is made "Likewise, there is a direct correlation between travel management decisions and the level of conflict between motorized and non-motorized users. Travel management decisions that create separate use areas reduce conflict between motorized and non-motorized recreation users. Conversely, travel management designations that mix motorized and non-motorized recreation use lead to increased conflict." There is no significant documentation of user conflict in the project area and this issue is being blown out of proportion to serve the interest of non-motorized recreationists. We request copies of any documentation of user conflicts in the area and request that it be categorized and weighed against the overall number of visitor-days to the area. A more reasonable expectation is that all visitors to multiple-use must be expected to share.

Response: The BLM does not agree that there is no significant documentation regarding conflict between motorized and non-motorized recreation users. Conflict between motorized and non-motorized users has been the most frequent and major issue of concern addressed during public scoping meetings and written comments for this RMP. Likewise, it has been a frequent and contentious issue for previous travel planning efforts conducted in the Butte Field Office (Sleeping Giant, Whitetail-Pipestone, Clancy-Unionville, etc.). Furthermore, a review of public scoping comments and written comments received during the development of recent interagency travel management plans, such as the Dillon Field Office (BLM) or Gallatin National Forest (USFS), will yield the same results.

With regards to multiple use, BLM is not mandated to provide for every possible use on every possible acre, but instead for a variety of recreation opportunities as appropriate across the landscape. As such, some places are identified for non-motorized use to allow this segment of the recreating public to enjoy its recreational pursuits.

DD6

Comment: Out of the 10,469 recreationists that were observed, 168 were hikers and all of the meetings were pleasant. We have not experienced any user conflict in eight years of observations.

Response: The BLM notes that observations cited in the comment were on motorized routes. The BLM acknowledges that hikers and other non-motorized users

electing to recreation on motorized routes have no expectations for a non-motorized experience, nor standing for complaint.

DD7

Comment: Conflict on multiple use trails: Synthesis of the Literature and State of Practice; Report No.: FWWA-PD-94-031 "Conflict in outdoor recreation settings (such as trails) can best be defined as "goal interference attributed to another's behavior" (Jacob & Schreyer 1980, 369). As such, trail conflicts can and do occur among different user groups, among different users within the same user group, and as a result of factors not related to users' trail activities at all. In fact, no actual contact among users need occur for conflict to be felt. Conflict has been found to be related to activity style (mode of travel, level of technology, environmental dominance, etc.), focus of trip, expectations, attitudes toward and perceptions of the environment, level of tolerance for others, and different norms held by different users. Conflict is often asymmetrical (i.e., one group resents another, but the reverse is not true). The use of Executive Orders 11644 and 11989 to "minimize conflict with other uses" should be evaluated from the perspective of "fair-mindedness of expectations". To provide non-motorized experiences we have designated and set-aside wilderness/non-motorized use areas. Just as motorized recreationists do not expect to be able to use motorized vehicles in wilderness/ non-motorized use areas, non-motorized enthusiasts should not expect to go to multiple-use areas and experience wilderness conditions.

Response: The BLM agrees with the comment. Non-motorized users who knowingly choose to recreate in an area or on trails open to motorized use have no standing for complaints. While many non-motorized users would not choose to do so, some, such as mountain bike riders, or joggers, have no problem sharing trails with motorized users.

DD8

Comment: User conflict as identified in the listed alternatives is such an ambiguous issue and should not even be a consideration in this or any other travel plan. The concept of user conflict appears to be promoted mainly by the staunch environmental groups that do not think anyone in or on a motorized vehicle should be allowed in the mountains.

Response: For the purposes of travel planning for this RMP, user conflict refers to conflicts between motorized and non-motorized recreation users, over competition for space and the pursuit of a quality recreational experience. In addition to their preferred means of travel (horse, foot, mountain bike, x-country skis, etc.), many non–motorized users are also seeking a quiet recreational experience. By its very nature, motorized use is not quiet. In fact, the motorized community recognizes that noise is the single biggest social conflict. OHV sound can carry for long distances, and mask the sounds of birds, animals, and wind in the forest. Loud OHVs can startle stock or endanger equestrians. While most motorized users may not mind sharing the same space (trail, area) with non-motorized users, the reverse is not usually true for these reasons. As such, some places must be identified for non-motorized users to enjoy their recreational pursuits.

DD9

Comment: The cumulative negative effects of more restrictive travel plan decisions include the concentration of use on fewer miles of road and trail, such that traffic density is increased and recreation enjoyment is reduced. To experience the cumulative effects of motorized closures first hand one can visit the Whitetail-Pipestone area on Memorial Day and Copper Creek near west of Phillipsburg on July 4th and see hundreds to thousands of multiple-use recreationists forced into small areas with limited opportunities by the cumulative effects of many motorized closures produced by forest plans and travel plans. Travel decisions affecting public lands that restrict motorized recreation in one area may consequently increase motorized use in another where site-specific travel plans are not yet in place. Cumulatively then, this "leapfrog" effect may increase resource damage, create more law enforcement problems, generate discord between motorized and non-motorized recreationists, and make future site-specific travel planning more difficult. This cumulative negative effect must be adequately considered as part of this project.

Response: The BLM believes the Preferred Alternative provides adequate opportunities for motorized recreation. Given the overall availability of BLM and other interagency routes (USFS), crowding is not generally an issue. However, as with any form of recreation, popular riding areas such as Pipestone and Clancy can become more crowded during holiday weekends, especially during permitted organized events. Riders are encouraged to make alternate plans, and avoid these areas during peak use for a more enjoyable recreation experience. However, if crowding or other related issues become a problem, the BLM may need to consider more intensive management, or use allocation at these popular sites.

DD10

Comment: There needs to be better coordination between adjoining National Forest and BLM lands when making maps, laying out trails, and establishing travel plans. In some cases a trail is open in one jurisdiction but becomes closed when it crosses over the boundary to another jurisdiction resulting in an overall loss of motorized recreation opportunity.

Response: The RMP provides for interagency route connectivity and flexibility for both current and future USFS travel management plans. The BLM has consulted

with the USFS on this specific issue at public and interagency meetings throughout the Butte RMP process to coordinate route-specific travel planning.

DD11

Comment: A study of sound levels from OHV use was found to be less than the background noise of the wind in treetops (Nora Hamilton, Mendocino National Forest, memorandum to the file, November 17, 1992). Also, the USDA FS Technology and Development Program in a report prepared in 1993 and titled "Sound Levels of Five Motorcycles Traveling Over Forest Trails" found that at distances over 400 feet, motorcycles do not raise the ambient sound level (they are no louder than background levels of noise). Absolute quiet is not a reasonable expectation. Sound from motorized sources such as airplanes exists even in the most remote areas. It is not reasonable to expect absolute quiet in areas intended for multiple-use. The sound level of motorized recreation use is not greater than natural sounds, and therefore, sound level should not be used as a reason to justify motorized recreation and access closures.

It is not reasonable to enact motorized closures based on the issue of sound when viable alternatives could be pursued. The Sierra Club in their ORV Handbook makes the following statement "The fact is that most ORV noise is unnecessary; even motorcycles can be muffled to relatively unobjectionable noise level". We request that agencies initiate an education campaign (loud is not cool) to promote the development and use of quiet machines. OHV brochures such as those published by the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest include public awareness information on the importance of sound control.

Response: The BLM agrees that absolute quiet is not a reasonable expectation, particularly for non-wilderness lands. Many states, including Montana, have enacted OHV sound limit laws. Organized OHV groups are doing a good job of educating the public, as well as monitoring their own members for excessive noise issues. OHV noise, however, continues to remain one of the primary complaints and conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users. In general, the experiences sought by non-motorized users are different from those being sought by motorized users. Many non-motorized users seek as natural and primitive an experience as possible when recreating on non-wilderness lands. Having clean air and water, seeing wildlife, listening to the sounds of nature, and escaping from the noise of everyday life are essential parts of their experience.

DD12

Comment: During the 1970's, when Executive Orders 11644 and 11989 were created, snowmobile and motorcycles were much louder than today's machines. Concern with sound levels led to the creation of Executive Orders 11644 and 11989. Today's technology provides machines that are significantly quieter than in the 1970's. Furthermore, the technology now exists to make vehicles even quieter. Therefore, concern with sound levels can be mitigated by establishing a reasonable decibel limit for exhaust systems. States such as California and Oregon have enacted sound emission limits. We encourage all jurisdictions to adopt the stationary sound test procedures as set forth in the Society of Automotive Engineers J-1287 June 1980 standard. Public land-use agencies could establish reasonable sound limits and use this approach to address the sound level issue. This alternative would be more equitable than closures. We request that this reasonable alternative to motorized closures be pursued and incorporated into the preferred alternative and decision-making.

Response: Executive Orders 11644 and 11989 were initiated to address a wide range of concerns regarding motorized recreation (resource impact, public safety, social conflicts), not just sound levels. The BLM agrees that advances in technology, as well as new laws (Montana's 96 decibel sound limit) have improved OHV sound levels. OHV noise, however, continues to remain one of the primary complaints and conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users. In general, the experiences sought by non-motorized users are different from those being sought by motorized users. Wilderness status withstanding, many non-motorized users seek as natural and primitive an experience as possible when recreating on public lands. Having clean air and water, seeing wildlife, listening to the sounds of nature, and escaping from the noise of everyday life are essential parts of their experience.

DD13

Comment: I have a major problem understanding what the safety issues is between non-motorized and motorized users. It is common sense that if you hear a vehicle (truck, car, 4 wheeler or snowmobile) coming down the road or trail you should get out of the way.

Response: Safety is the responsibility of all users, but especially for motorized users who may unknowingly be sharing road or motorized trail with hikers, horseback riders, or mountain bikers. Maintaining "situational alertness" and watching for other users is a basic element of "Tread Lightly" and "Right Rider" OHV ethics.

Travel Management – User Data

EE1

Comment: The agency does not observe visitors on weekends and holidays and consequently is unaware of actual visitor usage. The agency simply needs to go out and count the different recreationists and mode of access on multiple-use lands on any weekend. This is what we have done and our data is an accurate representation of actual visitor usage on multiple-use lands. We feel very strongly that the current approach and data used by the

agency to represent the historic public use of multiple-use lands does not provide an accurate representation and that the table of observations above is a reasonable representation.

Response: Given BLM budget constraints, it is true that the BLM's field presence is typically greater on weekdays in dispersed use areas. One exception to this has been the travel management program over the last three years. Under this program the Butte Field Office has focused its Trail Ranger seasonal employees to make visitor contacts, monitor use, and conduct maintenance work in areas where motorized uses and management concerns are greatest during the weekends. This effort has been very successful and the Butte Field Office plans to continue it, provided that funds are available.

EE2

Comment: Surveys conducted by Citizens for Balanced Use (CBU) in Bozeman show that motorized users travel on average 50 miles per day per visit to our public lands while non-motorized travel on average 2 miles per day per visit. The quality experience of motorized recreation requires on average 25 times the amount of trail that non-motorized users require. The result of this survey shows a definite need of more trails being provided for the motorized community yet the Forest Service is continuing to close trail after trail to motorized use. This action is unreasonable and should be considered unacceptable. The ratio of motorized versus non-motorized trails should be 50 miles per day of use versus 2 miles per day of use or 25:1. Non-motorized side may say that the agency does not have an obligation to provide 25 times the miles of motorized trails. However, 95 percent of the visitors are motorized recreationists and the ratio of motorized versus non-motorized visitors is 95:5 or 19:1, so 25:1 is not an unreasonable goal.

A reasonable goal for the split of trails should be 50/50 motorized/non-motorized. Remember that 25:1 is justified based on actual usage. The proposed plan does not achieve this balance with only 25% of the existing routes meeting the definition of a motorcycle or ATV trail. We request that a more reasonable proposal be developed.

Response: The Butte Field Office provides about three times more OHV trails than non-motorized trails and dedicates about 90 percent of its travel management funding for the management of motorized uses. In addition to designated trails there would be over 415 miles of roads available for riding yearlong or seasonally under the Preferred Alternative in the RMP.

EE3

Comment: Telephone or other off-trail surveys to establish the percent of visitors who are hiking are inaccurate because everyone will respond that they "hike" but it may only be from the tent to the outhouse or a ¼ mile out in a meadow. Surveys have not established whether the respondent actually hikes any appreciable distance or uses a specific route. Surveys based on actual observations of activity in the field are a far more accurate determination. Surveys must ask how far did you hike, how long did you hike, and did you use a trail? Once accurate survey information is compiled then it will establish that the majority of hiking experiences are less than 1 mile and that many hikes do not involve trails. This accurate information must be developed immediately and hiking trails should be reduced to meet the factual level of need and use.

Response: The Butte Field Office manages approximately 15 miles of established hiking trails and about 40 miles of designated OHV trails. In addition hundreds of secondary roads are available for both motorized and non-motorized travel. Approximately 90 percent of the travel management budget over the last ten years has been used for motorized travel purposes**.** Based on this situation, BLM does not believe that hiking trails must be reduced or that proposed management is based on inaccurate information.

EE4

Comment: We are very concerned that a built-in bias exists with visitor use monitoring data based on the fact that all wilderness visitors must sign-in in order to visit a wilderness area and at the same time there are no self-reporting opportunities for multiple-use visitors. Therefore, multiple-use visitor data does not exist because it is not collected or it is under-stated.

Response: The Butte Field Office does not manage any established wilderness areas. Proposed management contained in the Butte RMP was not based on the information of concern identified in the comment.

EE5

Comment: In order to conserve energy, adequate motorized recreational opportunities are needed within a short distance of the cities and towns in our area. In order to conserve energy, we request that all reasonable OHV routes within short distance of urban areas be developed and that urban OHV trail heads be developed where ever public right-of-way allows access to public land. The motorized trails and trailheads developed by the City of Boise (http://www.ridgetorivers.org/)are a good example of how motorized trails and connections can be incorporated into an urban situation.

Response: Throughout the development of the RMP, there has been considerable public interest and debate regarding OHV use on BLM lands adjacent to urban development (rural/urban interface). Given the high level of interest, BLM initiated two balanced "community based collaborative working groups" (see **Appendix A**) to assist with the development of travel plans for three such areas. With some minor adjustments, the working group recommendations have been incorporated into the Preferred Alternative.

Energy conservation is a concern for all recreational users, motorized and non-motorized alike. However, it was not used as a criterion during travel planning.

EE6

Comment: Agencies are encouraged to establish OHV census collection points at road and trail collection points. Include an OHV category on all trail and road census sheets.

Response: Although outside the scope of the RMP, the BLM agrees with this comment. Road and trail traffic counter data provides useful management information.

EE7

Comment: Agencies are encouraged to provide good statistics on the level of use by the various public land visitors and use these statistics in the decision processes. Management for exclusive-use runs counter to Congressional directives for multiple-use.

Response: The Butte Field Office does gather and report visitor use annually using the Recreation Management Information System (RMIS) (USDI-BLM 2008b) by Recreation Management Areas and sites. This information is compiled using traffic counters, permits issued, field observations, limited surveys and professional judgment. See Chapter 3, Social and Economic Environment, Recreation and Tourism for more information.

EE8

Comment: The population in the immediate four-county project area is at least 108,000 (http://ceic.commerce.state.mt.us/Demog/estimate/pop/County/COEST2006-01-30.htm) that visit the Butte RMP project area is estimated to be at least 100,000 and the number of OHV recreationists in the area is estimated at 29,100. The travel plan must address the needs associated with the numbers and popularity of at least 29,100 motorized and OHV recreationists by providing for adequate motorized recreational resources. The current proposal does not meet the needs of 29,000 OHV recreationists in the immediate area and 272,000 OHV recreationists state-wide, which is unreasonable for a multiple-use area that is ideal for motorized use.

Response: The BLM recognizes and has addressed the growing popularity of OHV recreation. To date, the majority of travel management funding for the Butte Field Office has been spent on OHV trail development, trailhead facilities, trail maintenance, and management (Trail Ranger program). Examples include the Pipestone and Clancy Designated OHV riding areas. Very few BLM funds have been spent on non-motorized trail systems or facilities. The BLM believes Alternative B, the Preferred Alternative, represents a balanced travel plan that takes into account resource protection, and the divergent interests of motorized and non-motorized recreational users.

Travel Management – Winter Use/Snowmobiles

FF1

Comment: Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth recognized the true popularity and magnitude of motorized recreation in his January 16, 2004 speech which stated "Off-highway vehicles, or OHVs, are a great way to experience the outdoors. But the number of OHV users has just gotten huge. It grew from about 5 million in 1972 to almost 36 million in 2000." We agree with the Forest Chief that 36 million is a significant number of recreationists. Additionally, the USDA Southern Research Station has recently validated the growing popularity of OHV recreation in their Recreation Statistics Update Report No. 3 dated October 2004 (http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/trends/RecStatUpdate3.pdf). This document reports that the total number of OHV users has grown to 49.6 million by the fall 2003/spring 2004. Based on the 2000 estimates OHV and motorized recreationists are about 64 percent of the population that actually visits the forest (36 million/56 million). This popularity is also representative of BLM managed lands. OHV registrations in Montana grew 24 percent from 2004 to 2005 (MDFWP).

The typical use of public lands including the Butte RMP project area and the typical needs of the public in our region are described on Table 2-7 in the Social Assessment of the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest dated October 2002 (http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/bd/forest_plan/revision/reports_documents/social/Forest%20 Social%20Assessment%20Masterfinal%20.pdf). This document reported that the total number of forest visitors in Forest Service Region 1 for year 2000 was 13,200,000. The total number of wilderness visits was estimated at 337,000 or 2.55 percent. Therefore, millions of visitors to public lands (nearly all at 97.45 percent) benefit from management for multiple-use and benefit from motorized access and mechanized recreational opportunities which are consistent with our observations of visitors enjoying motorized access and mechanized recreation on public lands. Therefore, millions of visitors to public land s (nearly all at 97.45 percent) benefit from multiple-use and motorized access. We need more areas to ride, not less.

Response: It is agreed that OHVs provide a great means for enjoying the outdoors and that use is increasing. The Butte Field Office realizes that demands are high and these needs were considered in combination with all other resource values and uses prior to identifying the Preferred Alternative.

FF2

Comment: It is difficult for the snowmobile user to distinguish wilderness or closed area boundaries where no obvious geographic feature marks the boundary. In wilderness or other areas with motorized closures, snowmobile users should be protected against inadver-

tently entering wilderness or closed areas. Ecological and wilderness values could be protected by designating non-motorized buffer zones around all wilderness. We also recommend that Wilderness Study Areas be considered for designation for non-motorized uses in order to protect wilderness characteristics and values in these areas.

Response: Although this comment is outside the scope of the RMP, the BLM considers it the snowmobile user's responsibility to know where they are located in the Field Office and to avoid Wilderness Study Areas. The BLM, however, endeavors to sign travel plan areas. Under the Interim Management Policy and Guidelines for Lands under Wilderness Review, no snowmobiling is allowed in the six Wilderness Study Areas in the Field Office and all Wilderness Study Areas are closed to motorized travel with the exception of several travelways in Black Sage WSA (that lack public access), and one route in the southern portion of Humbug Spires.

FF3

Comment: Some Federal land managers have policies that prohibit off-trail snowmobile use until at least 6 inches of snow has accumulated. Snow in alpine areas is highly susceptible to wind movement which can leave bare or thinly covered areas that would be difficult or impossible to avoid given the speed of snowmobiles. Fragile alpine vegetation may need protection against such use.

Response: The BLM agrees that sensitive areas should be protected from impacts from snowmobile use and has added the following management prescription to all action alternatives:

"Snowmobile use would be subject to restrictions outlined in specific travel plans. It is the rider's responsibility to avoid locations where wind or topographic conditions may have reduced snow depth and created situations where damage to vegetation or soils could occur, or where vegetation is taller than the protective snow cover. Ecologically sensitive areas could be closed to snowmobiling if resource damage caused or exacerbated by snowmobile activity is found to be occurring in these areas."

FF4

Comment: Snowmobile Use: As stated in the report compiled by the University of Wyoming for the State of Wyoming's Department of State Parks and Cultural Resources (State of Wyoming DSPCR 2000), "The previous policy of encouraging dispersed human use over the landscape has unintended consequences for a broad range of wildlife. Although this policy dilutes human impacts over a broader area, it also exposes more of the landscape to these impacts. There is a consensus among the literature reviews that activities such as snowmobiling should be restricted to defined trails during daylight hours. This would reduce the amount of area impacted by human activities and allow some animals to habituate to the predictable disturbance. It would also minimize vegetation destruction, erosion, and the total area of snow compaction, thereby preserving subnivean fauna." (p11) Much literature speaks to the negative effects of snowmobiles on wildlife and habitat (Dorance et al 1973; Mahoney et al 2001; Schmid 1974; Wanek and Schumacher 1974) and the BLM recognizes the negative influences of snowmobiles throughout the DEIS. It is therefore puzzling to American Wildlands that the BLM permits cross country snowmobile use in its preferred plan. American Wildlands does not believe the elimination of snowmobiling is necessary. However, snowmobiling should be managed to minimize wildlife and habitat disturbance.

The most effective means of minimizing wildlife and habitat disturbance would be to restrict snowmobile use to designated routes as described in Alternative C.

Response: The BLM recognizes the need to minimize impacts to wildlife from cross-country snowmobile use. The Preferred Alternative would increase the Butte Field Office acreage of lands in the "closed" area designation for snowmobile use by approximately 27,640 acres. Most of the additional proposed snowmobile area closures are located in the Upper Big Hole River Travel Planning Area and are designed to minimize disturbance to big game in winter range areas and bighorn sheep. While the BLM acknowledges that restricting snowmobile use to designated routes may be the most effective alternative to minimize wildlife disturbance, the BLM also notes its multiple use mission which allows for snowmobile uses. The Preferred Alternative provides for some snowmobile use while reducing impacts to wildlife associated with snowmobile use.

FF5

Comment: Helena TPA: Pg. 514: (Cross-country snowmobile use would be allowed, as well as snowmobile travel on all existing routes during the season of use (12/2-5/15), conditions permitting.) If the existing routes you are proposing, in Table 4-55, then this is a net loss of 38.6 miles of routes now in use for snowmobile use leaving only 13.6 miles open.

East Helena TPA: Pg 542: (Under Alternative B, cross-country snowmobile travel would be allowed, as well as travel on all existing routes during the season of use (12/2-5/15), except for the North Hills, Dana's Bar, and the area located to the west of Prickly Pear Creek. The remaining areas (McMasters Hills, Ward Ranch, and Spokane Hills) would be closed to all cross-country snowmobile use, including travel on existing roads and trails.) Does this mean that North Hills, Dana's Bar, and the area west of the Prickly Pear Creek, along with the other areas that are listed as closed, are closed to snowmobile use also? If the existing routes you are proposing, in Table 4-65, then this is a net loss of 22.9 miles of

routes now in use for snowmobile use leaving only around 16 miles open. They are also losing seven large areas of cross-country use.

Lewis and Clark TPA; Pg. 574 (Compared to Alternative A, opportunities for cross country snowmobile travel would be reduced with the area identified in the northwest portion of the TPA (Marysville area) restricted to designated routes only, during the season of use (12/2-5/15) , conditions permitting.) This does not reflect the loss of the closures, decommissioned, and conversion of motorized routes to non-motorized routes. This is a dramatic loss in this TPA.

Boulder Jefferson City TPA: Pg 603: (Area-wide cross-country snowmobile use, as well as travel on all existing route s during the season of use (12/2-5/15), conditions permitting would continue to be allowed in all the action alternatives.) This appears to be a no loss situation but there is a net loss of around 50 miles of now motorized route loss, leaving 4 miles of routes open year-round.

Upper Big Hole TPA Pg. 632: (Snowmobile management would continue to remain substantially in effect as represented by the 1996 Southwest Interagency Visitor/Travel Map. However, several additional areas would be closed to cross country travel, and travel in other areas would be restricted to existing designated routes and trails. Proposed cross-country closures include the area located between the Soap Gulch and Camp Creek roads, the Goat Mountain/Maiden Rock area, and the Sawmill Gulch/Nez Pierce Ridge area. The proposed closures would have little impact on snowmobile use due to the poor snow conditions in these areas.) Not only are you proposing to close large blocks of land, you also propose to close many miles of routes now in use by snowmobile users. All of the above TPAs need to be looked at again and a more equitable alternative developed. Closing over 50 percent of the Butte RMP routes and area is unacceptable.

Response: For the Helena Travel Planning Area, cross country snowmobile use as well as use on existing routes would be allowed under the Preferred Alternative, so there would be no loss of existing snowmobile opportunities. Much of this area lacks adequate snow conditions for snowmobile use throughout the majority of most winters, however. The area is not currently used substantially by snowmobilers.

For the East Helena Travel Planning Area, incorrect wording on page 542 of the Draft RMP/EIS has been corrected in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS to indicate that the North Hills, Dana's Bar, and the area west of Prickly Pear Creek would be open to cross-country snowmobile use under the Preferred Alternative.

For the Lewis and Clark County NW Travel Planning Area under the Preferred Alternative, 12,649 acres of the BLM total of 17,000 acres in the area would remain open to cross-country snowmobile use, as well as use of existing routes. Approximately 888 acres in the area of the Great Divide Ski Area would be closed to snowmobile use. Snowmobile use would be restricted to designated routes (not all existing routes) in the northwest corner of this area, totaling about 3,463 acres.

For the Boulder/Jefferson City TPA, there would be no loss of snowmobile opportunities under the Preferred Alternative. Much of this area lacks adequate snow conditions for snowmobile use throughout the majority of most winters, however. Because this entire travel planning area is within a big game winter range area, the BLM has proposed winter seasonal closures to wheeled motorized use on most routes in this area under the Preferred Alternative.

For the Upper Big Hole River Travel Planning Area, the BLM stands by its original proposal in the Preferred Alternative to close an additional approximately 15,325 acres to snowmobile use in lower elevation areas to provide for improved big game winter range and to reduce disturbance to bighorn sheep populations. These lower elevation areas often lack adequate snow conditions for snowmobile use during most winters.

The Preferred Alternative for the travel plans addressed in the Butte RMP constitute an approximately 34 percent reduction in routes open to wheeled motorized use, rather than the 50 percent reduction suggested by the comment. The BLM believes its Preferred Alternative best balances the needs to provide adequate access while protecting resources.

Travel Management Boulder/ Jefferson TPA

GG1

Comment: The proposed Boulder/Jefferson City Travel Management Plan substantially reduces the motorized roads available from 60 miles to 27 miles with only 3.7 being open year round and the remaining being seasonally restricted. The proposed area is adjacent to the larger Forest Service property and this plan should be coordinated with travel management and land use plans involving a proposed new wilderness area and road closures that should help accommodate the needs of non-motorized users.

The other important aspect of road density reductions under this proposal is the ability to access wildland fires will be reduced at a time when large timber stands are dying due to the bug infestations.

Response: The BLM evaluated each road and trail segment for its effects to wildlife and wildlife habitats, fish and aquatic habitats, riparian areas and soils in the Boulder/Jefferson City Travel Planning Area. Each route was also assessed for human uses which included; access for fire suppression, vegetation management, public lands access, and recreation. From this analysis, a range of travel management alternatives in this planning area was developed. Coordination on routes that access Forest Service lands was also conducted. Routes that are

closed to public use can be used during emergency situations as described in the Travel Management and Access section, Field Office Level – Management Common to All Alternatives subsection of Chapter 2 in the RMP. Cross-country travel in emergency situations is also allowed.

GG2

Comment: Boulder Jefferson TPA: American Wildlands supports Alternative C and recommends further closing and decommissioning of roads where possible. American Wildlands also recommends the decommissioning of any "dead end" routes to avoid user-created loops especially those near Basin Mountain.

Response: For the Boulder/Jefferson City TPA, the BLM believes that Alternative B would provide the best mix of road closures and continued road use to meet the needs of the BLM's multiple use missions. Road closures proposed under Alternative B would improve wildlife habitat compared to the current condition in this area. Road closures would be implemented through a variety of means that would include a combination of signing of open routes and physical installation of gates, berms, or down trees to close off closed routes.

GG3

Comment: Boulder-Jefferson City TPA: Open roads in the planning area would likely increase due to development and management of private lands. Alternatives B and C would have greater beneficial cumulative affects to wildlife and wildlife habitat from closing roads than Alternatives A and D."

Soils: Alternative C contains by far, the least soil erosion impact than any other alternative, and "would provide the greatest benefit on water resources…thus allowing these areas to vegetatively recover, stabilize soils, and reduce erosional outputs to streams." (p. 584)

Weeds: "Overall, Alternative C would reduce weed spread more than any other alternative." (p.586)

Riparian: Alt. C would contribute most to riparian vegetation benefits (p. 589).

Wildlife: "Alternative C would decrease harassment to wildlife during all seasons of use, especially during the winter and spring, over all alternatives. This alternative would also improve habitat and reduce fragmentation more than all other alternatives." "Actual road density in elk winter range would be 0.8 mi/mi2." "There would be substantially more acres of functional winter range." Snowmobile use would be "limited to open roads only…This would substantially reduce the negative effects to wildlife from snowmobile use and be the most protective of all alternatives." (p. 591).

Alternative B and C would have particularly beneficial cumulative effects to core and subcore habitats and to wildlife movement corridors (p. 594).

Please consider modifying your preferred alternative to provide for conditions more favorable towards wildlife, similar to what is found in Alternative C.

Response: Under the Preferred Alternative, the BLM is already proposing to reduce road densities in this area in part to improve the quality of big game winter range. The Preferred Alternative attempts to balance the needs of providing motorized access while providing for resource protection.

GG4

Comment: Trail #510124: This trail is to end on BLM land, but people have added to it by crossing private property and coming out on Depot Hill Rd. I would request that you post the end of trail with a sign indicating end of trail.

Response: This is an implementation issue that has been addressed on the ground outside the scope of the Butte RMP.

GG5

Comment: Trail #510123b - this trail also ends at private property but people have continued on and made a trail that comes out on Depot Hill Rd. This crosses private property and they have cut cables and fences to continue to use this road. I would like this trail posted at the end or closed where it intersects with BJ041. There is a gate at this intersection and it has been left open many times allowing the cattle of two ranches to cross onto other BLM lands, etc.

Response: This is an implementation issue that has been addressed on the ground outside the scope of the Butte RMP.

GG6

Comment: The next area of concern is just north of Trail #5103. Last year people started to drive off the road and make a trail that leads up through the burned trees and dead ends in a park on the Boulder Hill. This trail was not there before last year. There was a fire road that was cut in there in 2000 but it was reclaimed after that.

Response: The Off-Highway Vehicle EIS Record of Decision (ROD) was signed in 2003, and established the benchmark for designated vehicle routes. Trails created after 2003 must be designated for specific purposes and subject to environmental analysis. Since the BLM is not designating this as a route in the Boulder/Jefferson City travel plan, this route will be closed to the public.

GG7

Comment: There is also another trail that connects with Trail #5129. This trail starts just NE of where Trail 58102B connects with the county road. It is used a lot during hunting season and crosses private property. I

have spoken with the property owners and they are having trouble with people littering and partying on their property. They stated they don't mind people crossing but they don't like having to clean up the mess all the time. This is a nice trail but it is not on your map. I would like you to consider adding it, but perhaps finding a better place to enter from.

Response: In developing the travel plan alternatives, the BLM did not consider this route to be crucial to motorized use in this area. The BLM does not have an easement for this route as it originates on private land and passes onto BLM lands. Given that the property owner is having some difficulties associated with public access through their lands, the BLM does not propose adding this route to the BLM road network.

GG8

Comment: MAP 19: Boulder/Jefferson City. This area provides riding opportunities until early winter and then again beginning in late winter. The attached maps where I have added road numbers are the routes used most for winter travel and are preferred summer use routes.

Road 510120 - This road is the only place where there is a wide view of the Cataract Creek drainage, the mountains west of Basin Creek, and the mountains southerly towards Butte. It is a picture taking opportunity. The road grade is level, grassed in and has no erosion. I think this road should be left open.

Response: Road #510120 was proposed for closure in the Preferred Alternative because it is redundant to a county road as well as another BLM route that has a right-of-way on it. Since the route with which this road is redundant will remain open, the BLM continues to propose closing Road #510120 in the Preferred Alternative.

GG9

Comment: MAP 19: Boulder/Jefferson City. This area provides riding opportunities until early winter and then again beginning in late winter. The attached maps where I have added road numbers are the routes used most for winter travel and are preferred summer use routes.

Roads BJ047, 5101 and 5107 - These routes are used through December and are used again beginning the first of May. I would like the closed restriction changed to 1/1 to 5/1. During heavy snow years the ATV use would end earlier and begin later than these dates. During lean snow years the lost opportunity would be acceptable.

Response: The closure dates proposed in the Preferred Alternative are set to improve winter range for wildlife. BLM coordinates with other land management agencies to arrive at the most effective dates, utilizing data provided by Fish, Wildlife and Parks on the timing and patterns of animal movement. The BLM continues to propose the December 2 – May 15 closure dates for these routes to improve winter range and to provide for consistency of seasonal closure dates on BLM routes in the Boulder/Jefferson City Travel Planning Area.

GG10

Comment: MAP 19: Boulder/Jefferson City. This area provides riding opportunities until early winter and then again beginning in late winter. The attached maps where I have added road numbers are the routes used most for winter travel and are preferred summer use routes.

Road 5108 and the east end of 5107 - Road 5108 is the main power line access route. It is a well constructed route and does not have any erosion. About mid point along the route there is a nice view point. The panorama is 180 degrees plus, including the Elk Horn Mountains, Boulder, the Boulder Valley, mountains to the south and southwest, to Jack Mountain. I think this route should be kept open with the same restriction dates as described above. The east end of 5107, from the junction with 5108 to Comet, is not gravel surfaced and has continuous erosion occurring. Maintenance on this route is greater than route 5108. I would like to have this route left open but if some road has to be closed then I prefer 5108 be open and the east end of 5107 be closed.

Response: The BLM has changed the Preferred Alternative to open Road #5108 with seasonal restrictions (closed December 2 – May 15) to address this comment and to acknowledge that this route has a utility right-of-way on it.

GG11

Comment: MAP 19: Boulder/Jefferson City. This area provides riding opportunities until early winter and then again beginning in late winter. The attached maps where I have added road numbers are the routes used most for winter travel and are preferred summer use routes.

Road 5129 and 5128 - The same comment about 5107 above applies here. I suggest the closed restriction date be changed to 1/1 to 5/1 even though early winter and late winter access occurs later and earlier than it does on route 5107.

Response: The closure dates proposed in the Preferred Alternative are set to improve winter range for wildlife. BLM coordinates with other land management agencies to arrive at the most effective dates, utilizing data provided by Fish, Wildlife and Parks on the timing and patterns of animal movement. The BLM continues to propose the December 2 – May 15 closure dates for these routes to improve winter range and to provide for consistency of seasonal closure dates on BLM routes in the Boulder/Jefferson City Travel Planning Area.

GG12

Comment: MAP 19: Boulder/Jefferson City. This area provides riding opportunities until early winter and then again beginning in late winter. The attached maps where I have added road numbers are the routes used most for winter travel and are preferred summer use routes.

Road 099, 5130, 101, BJ033 and BJ134 - These routes are dead end spur access to power line towers. I see hardly any sign of vehicle use, the road beds are grassed, and erosion is not occurring. Because BPA has maintenance responsibility, the BLM is not saving maintenance dollars by closing these routes. Instead the BLM is spending funds for gate installation and yearly gate maintenance that appears to have a very low benefit/cost ratio. What is the B/C ratio? Also the numerous closures to almost nowhere may not seem reasonable to the public. Instead the closures may be creating a negative "stay out of your public land" image.

Response: The BLM notes that BPA does not have maintenance responsibilities on the short routes identified in the comment so if these routes are to remain open then BLM would have maintenance responsibilities. In addition, the BLM uses a variety of methods to close routes so not all routes are closed with gates that require maintenance. Routes mentioned in the comment remain proposed for closure in the Preferred Alternative.

Travel Management - East Helena TPA

HH1

Comment: The proposed plan converts the North Hills from a multiple-use area to a non-motorized area which is contrary to the overall needs and input from the public. This is the second closest and next to last motorized area in close proximity to Helena and the impact of this proposed closure has not been adequately addressed or mitigated. Because of the significant cumulative effects any motorized closure must be mitigated. Additionally and more importantly, this direction is completely contrary to the input received at the public meeting and demonstrates the strength of the motorized closure agenda within the agency.

Response: There has been considerable public interest and debate regarding motorized and non-motorized use levels and needs in the North Hills. Given the high level of interest, BLM initiated a community based collaborative working group to assist with the development of a travel plan for this rural/urban interface area (see **Appendix A**). With some minor adjustments, the working group recommendations for North Hills were incorporated into what ultimately became the Preferred Alternative.

HH2

Comment: East Helena: Map 10 & 12 – Bad because it cuts off access to a lot BLM ground and existing roads. Map 11 – pretty good, but some of the game retrieval roads should have seasonal restrictions on them to allow American citizens to camp and recreate in those areas during the summer months (May-Sept.) too. Map 13 – best, but need to provide "restricted" summer access, especially around the Spokane Hills areas.

Response: Alternatives A-D provide a varying range of opportunities for motorized and non-motorized recreation. The BLM believes that the Preferred Alternative (represented by Map 11) provides the best balance of resource protection and recreation use. The Preferred Alternative reflects the long history of non-motorized use for the Ward Ranch, McMaster Hills, and Spokane Hills areas.

HH3

Comment: East Helena TPA: Page 54, Alt B "Spokane Hills". I suggest opening to handicapped persons Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday during hunting season with no permit required.

Response: Under the Preferred Alternative, this area would be available to handicapped persons for hunting during a two week period. In accordance with state law, a valid Montana State Disabled Conservation License or Permit to Hunt from a Vehicle would be required, as well as a BLM permit. The permit requirements or restrictions would be coordinated with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks to ensure hunter safety and a quality hunting experience. This management is consistent with USFS management and other BLM offices.

HH4

Comment: One long-standing area of user conflict has been recreational shooting in the North Hills. Neither the RMP nor the Travel Management Plan addresses this significant issue of public safety. Certainly "safety' would be considered part of a quality experience as stated in the vision statement for the RMP. With fewer hunters, less and less of the recreating public are familiar with firearms, resulting in lower tolerance levels and higher expectations for quiet recreational experiences. Recreational shooting in the North Hills has been historically concentrated along route EH05l6; resulting in many user conflicts and impacts to resources. Because of the excessive fuels load in portions of the North Hills and the area's vulnerability to fire, the declining numbers of hunters and interest in hunting in the Rocky Mountain states, the travel management plan for the East Helena TPA should be revised to designate EH05l6 as the only motorized route in the North Hills . This revision to the plan would result in reduced risk of trespass OHV use, increasing the BLM and local enforcement agencies' ability to control risky behaviors such as the use of the area for "keggers". Designation of this route as a "no shooting" zone with an appropriate safety area where no shooting would be allowed would provide for

increased public safety as well as comply with the underlying vision of the RMP for quality experiences on public lands.

Response: Alternative C addresses your concerns, as it restricts all motorized use to route EH0516. However, Alternative B is the BLM's preferred alternative in part because it represents a combined effort between the BLM and a community based collaborative working group specifically established to help develop travel planning for the North Hills (refer to Appendix A). Although travel planning for the North Hills may have an indirect impact on illegal OHV use, shooting safety, wildland fire, keggers, etc, these are issues best addressed through other management action, law enforcement patrols, and site specific recreational activity planning. Outside the scope of the RMP, the BLM is currently working with the Western Montana Resource Advisory Council and a community based collaborative working group, to help resolve the shooting safety issue.

HH5

Comment: East Helena TPA - Maps provided for the North Hills erroneously indicate that a major change from the status quo (Alternative A) would occur with any other alternative. But for years, the roads that have been open would remain open, and roads that have been closed would remain closed, which is what is proposed in Alternative C. The same two access routes that have existed for years for the North Hills portion of the East Helena TPA would remain in effect. In fact, all alternatives except Alternative C would open roads in the North Hills in opposition to cooperative efforts that MFWP has been involved in with BLM for several years (2007 Block Management map enclosed). There was no discussion in the RMP that Alternative C has essentially been the status quo for the North Hills for years. You should address this.

Response: Alternative A represents the status quo. Under Alternative A, all of the routes shown on the map are open to motorized use. As indicated in the legend, many of these routes are closed, however, during the big game hunt (closed 10/15-12/1) to provide a non-motorized hunting experience. This is consistent with the September 30, 1991 Block Hunting Management agreement. Each of the Action Alternatives, however, represents a distinct departure from this existing management. Under the Preferred Alternative (Alternative B), year round motorized access is reduced. All of the routes managed as seasonally restricted under Alternative A are permanently closed under Alternative B. Under Alternative C, with the exception of routes 516/516a (open yearlong), all other routes are Closed. Alternatives B and C enhance non-motorized hunting recreation opportunities. Alternative D does represent a departure from the 1991 Block Hunting Management agreement. Under Alternative D, several additional routes would remain open yearlong to motorized use in order to provide higher elevation access during the hunting season.

HH6

Comment: We would like to meet with you or representatives from your office in the near future to go over our travel plan maps along adjacent boundaries to discuss management consistency across federal lands. We have completed the North Belts Travel Plan and the Elkhorns Travel Plans, and will complete the South Belts Travel Plan by December 31, 2007. We are just beginning to work on the Blackfoot and Continental Divide Travel Plans. Our goal is to provide for management consistency forest-wide. Towards this end, we feel it is necessary to coordinate on some specific items, similar to our coordination efforts with the BLM on the Elkhorns Travel Plan and the Statewide OHV Plan. Some topics include:

a. Continued coordinated management of route designations, route closures, and route closure dates.

b. Continued coordinated management in the Missouri River corridor from Holter Lake upstream to Canyon Ferry Lake.

c. Reroute of a road onto BLM to bypass private land where no public right of way exists in the vicinity of Hellgate Canyon.

d. Maintaining an open ATV route across BLM lands to coincide with the Helena National Forest's North Belts Travel Plan between Avalanche Creek and Magpie Creek.

e. Clarification of BLM guidelines and signing of the Jimmy's Gulch Road north of Confederate Gulch in the Big Belts as it relates to public access.

f. Coordination of travel management signing on adjoining lands.

g. Coordination of road maintenance.

Response: Upon review by the BLM, this comment is outside the scope of the RMP and site-specific travel plans being concurrently addressed.

HH7

Comment: York Bridge West: BLM lands in this area should be developed as a hiking area. It would be the perfect complement to the Devil's Elbow site; the views from the top of the ridge (above the York Bridge) encompass most of Hauser reservoir and the entire Helena Valley. The terrain is open and the soils permit easy construction of tread, the parking is already there (along the dead-end spur to the old bridge location). The ground is very weedy - especially on the lower slopes off York Road, but increasingly on the ridge top. And there is vehicle trespass (mostly pickups, some ATVs) coming off the private subdivision roads to the south and pioneering routes along the open ridges (which is why weeds are spreading on to the ridge). The entire area should be closed to all motor vehicle use (as per your

Alt. C.) But it should also be designated, and developed as, a hiking area. As such, it should have NSO stipulations for Oil & Gas leasing and its ROS should be semi-primitive modified.

Response: The BLM notes that much of this area in question is proposed for No Surface Occupancy stipulations for oil and gas leasing and a semi-primitive modified Recreation Opportunity Spectrum designation in the Preferred Alternative. The BLM believes that proposed management in the Preferred Alternative to leave Road #EH037 open for a portion of its length as the only open motorized route in the area is appropriate and consistent with managing this area primarily as non-motorized.

Travel Management - Helena TPA

II1

Comment: We also support nighttime closures for travel in the Scratchgravel Hills trail system, with the exception of allowing hunters access approximately 1 hour before sunrise and one hour after sunset.

Response: The Preferred Alternative for the Helena Travel Planning Area has been modified in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS so that all interior roads in the Scratchgravel Hills would be closed to public motorized travel yearlong at the five proposed trailheads, with the exception of a few perimeter right-of-way routes and routes to private residents. This modification is due to the high degree of user conflicts and illegal activity taking place in this area. This change will negate the need for the dusk to dawn closure since the use of motorized vehicles will not be allowed during any time of the day.

II2

Comment: I prefer Alternative C which keeps access to the existing trail heads. I did want to address the issue of dumping on the BLM property. You might be aware of the mound of tires being dumped at the end of Echo Drive. There are also frequent beer cans dumped along the road. Just last year there was a contractor rack for a truck and stolen tools thrown in the trees. We called the sheriff on both cases. I would like the BLM to consider shutting down access after dark to motorized vehicles in the Scratch Gravel area. I feel the amount of garbage and tires dumped would decrease somewhat if the access at night was not allowed. Also the weeds and fire control are a concern of all in the area.

Response: The Preferred Alternative for the Helena Travel Planning Area has been modified in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS so that all interior roads in the Scratchgravel Hills would be closed to public wheeled motorized travel yearlong at the five proposed trailheads, with the exception of a few perimeter right-of-way routes and routes to private residences. This modification is due to the high degree of user conflicts and illegal activity taking place in this area. The BLM believes that the revised Preferred Alternative would reduce problems with dumping and illegal activities after dark. Other problems could be largely eliminated through proactive community involvement, such as a “Citizens Watch” program.

II3

Comment: The proposed plan converts the Scratch Gravel Hills from a multiple-use area to a non-motorized area which is contrary to the overall needs and input from the public. This is the last motorized area in close proximity to Helena and the impact of this proposed closure has not been adequately addressed or mitigated. Because of the significant cumulative effects any motorized closure must be mitigated. Additionally and more importantly, this direction is completely contrary to the input received at the public meeting and demonstrates the strength of the motorized closure agenda within the agency.

Response: There has been considerable public interest and debate regarding motorized use in the Scratchgravel Hills. Given the high level of interest, BLM initiated a “community based collaborative working group” (see **Appendix A**) to assist with the development of a travel plan for this rural/urban interface area. With some minor adjustments, the working group recommendations were brought forward as the Preferred Alternative; which allows for some limited motorized use. It should be noted, however, that 8 of the 9 working group members favored Alternative C, the non-motorized alternative for the Scratchgravel Hills. BLM supports motorized recreation. However, after consideration of public comments and other factors including the close proximity to residential development, sharp social conflict, and occurrence of unlawful activities, the BLM does not believe that this area lends itself to motorized use. The Proposed RMP/Final EIS has been adjusted to close the Scratchgravel Hills to wheeled motorized use beyond the five trailhead locations in the area.

II4

Comment: It seems that under all alternatives of the travel plan, BLM plans to designate an "open yearlong" route in a very short section of BLM land where no road currently exists, nor has one ever existed (labeled "new road" on the attached copies of the map). This is of concern to us, because in order for anyone to use this very short section, they would have to enter our first property via a private road, leave that property, enter or second property via the same private road, and then leave our second property and enter BLM land onto this proposed new section of road. This would be difficult, because we have fenced our property's perimeter, including the stretch where the proposed road would intersect our property. We have no intention to allow any access to BLM via our private road through our property, and do

not think there is any legal basis to ask us to do so. We would respectfully suggest landowners in the area be allowed access via the current well-traveled existing road on BLM (labeled "existing road) on the diagrams.

Response: All roads with current right-of-way grants issued by the Bureau of Land Management are shown as open on the travel planning maps under each of the action alternatives. Further investigation of the issue raised by the comment shows that a right-of-way grant was issued to cross BLM land via Route 75 on August 26, 1997.

II5

Comment: I would like to comment on the Helena portion of the Resource Management Plan, in particular concerning road #68. On all alternatives, this road remains open. I would like to address reasons for closing this road.

1. RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES. These are limited to an extremely small segment of BLM land surrounded by private lands. Houses are close enough to the road and the land it accesses that hunting opportunities other than bow are nonexistent or minimal at best. Also, a letter from the BLM, dated 7/22/05 states that access through this area, lot 25, section 35, T.11 N, R.5 W, is non motorized and is limited to walk-in only. In addition, this road dead-ends after its short distance, which I would assume is under a half a mile total in length.

2. WILDLIFE: Due to extensive cattle grazing during the summer, very little forage remains in winter. Despite this, whitetail and mule deer frequently utilize this area. Elk do travel through but do not seem to spend as much time here. I have also witnessed wolves and bear cross this land. Granted these are not critically endangered species but nonetheless are enjoyed by most Montanans. If vehicular traffic would increase, these4 creatures may well leave the area.

3. CULTURAL: I have discussed with Dr. Richard Buswell, a known expert in the old Mullen Road, about this area. He believes that a portion of the Mullen Road may cross this region. Under your guidelines, I feel this should also be considered in your ultimate decision.

4. The present leaseholder of the grazing permit sublets this area out to another rancher. The lessee, as well as the rancher, has access to this property through road #7. In fact, this is how he normally accesses his own house. He has been given right-of-way by the BLM through your property on the opposite end. It is my understanding that his road, #68, did not exist in the true sense of a road but as a cattle trail until he repeatedly drove across it over the years. This would thus qualify as a user-created trail, which is why you are examining all of these roads.

So in summary, there are minimal recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat would be affected, possible cultural significance, and finally it is a user-created road. This was not a road and had never been one until certain individuals decided to make one. Given these facts, I feel the road should be closed rather than be left open as presently is suggested in all alternatives.

According to a letter received by the Pujols from the BLM (enclosed), it is quite clear that the BLM has no administrative or public access over this road on private property. It is apparent that BLM understands that it does not have an easement over our property. Without an eminent domain action and compensation, how can BLM open a little piece of “road” that can only be accessed from across our property?

Response: As noted, the BLM does not have administrative or public access through your private properties; therefore, the status of Road 68 in the Helena travel planning area has been changed from open to closed under each of the action alternatives.

II6

Comment: Scratchgravels: The key characteristics are their small size and the fact they're surrounded by ever increasing residential development. The key concerns are public health & safety, limiting public nuisances and maximizing recreational opportunities. Regarding public health & safety, fire is the over-riding concern, followed by shooting (still a problem, but minor compared to what it used to be.) The major 'nuisances' now are ORV use and late night 'parties.' So I strongly urge you to 'close' the entire area to use after dark. Mineral development and utility corridors would be inappropriate 'nuisances' here; so I support making the Scratchgravels a 'no-lease' area and an 'exclusion' area respectively. (The oil & gas potential in the batholith probably insignificant; and with all the surrounding roads, and existing towers in the north hills, Spokane Hills, Boulder Hill, MacDonald Pass, etc., there's no need to trash the Scratchgravels.)

Response: The Preferred Alternative for the Helena Travel Planning Area has been modified in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS so that all interior roads in the Scratchgravel Hills would be closed to public motorized travel yearlong at five trailheads, with the exception of a few perimeter right-of-way routes and routes to private residents. This change will negate the need for the nighttime closure since the use of motorized vehicles will not be allowed during any time of the day.

The Scratchgravel Hills are proposed as an “avoidance” area for utility rights-of-way in the Butte RMP. This means rights-of-way would be strongly discouraged. Authorizations made in avoidance areas would have to be compatible with the purpose for which the area was designated and not be otherwise feasible on lands outside the avoidance area. To meet a portion of the BLM’s

mission of providing opportunities for oil and gas exploration and development, in the Preferred Alternative the western portion of the Scratchgravel Hills area provides for oil and gas leasing with No Surface Occupancy stipulations, while the east side allows for leasing with Controlled Surface Use and Timing Limitations.

II7

Comment: Please consider modifying your preferred alternative to provide for conditions more favorable towards wildlife, similar to what is found in your Alternative C.

Helena TPA

• The Scratchgravel Hills are heavily impacted by motorized users, yet this block of BLM land is crucial for wildlife movement. Under Alternative C, one motorized route would be allowed to the heart of the area with two other routes accessing from different boundaries, and several trail head accesses would be allowed.

• Soils: Alternative C would "provide for closure or decommissioning of about 86 percent of BLM roads in the TPA, thus allowing these areas to vegetatively recover and stabilize soils.

• Water: "Alternative C would reduce the contribution to adverse cumulative effects from BLM roads and would provide for the most closed roads." (p. 496) Alternative B would decommission more roads but close fewer roads.

• Weeds: "Alt. C would restrict wheeled motorized travel to five non-motorized trailheads in the Scratchgravel Hills… and would provide the least number of wheeled motorized routes in the Helena TPA." This approach would diminish the spread of noxious weeds.

• Riparian: "Alt C would make the greatest contribution to riparian vegetation by closing the greatest mileage of riparian roads on BLM lands of all alternatives." (p. 501)

• Wildlife: "Alternative C would allow for more breeding, foraging, and hiding habitat as well as improve more movement corridors for a wide variety of species more than all other alternatives." (p.503)

Response: The Preferred Alternative for the Helena Travel Planning Area has been modified in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS so that all interior roads in the Scratchgravel Hills would be closed to public motorized travel yearlong at five trailheads, with the exception of a few perimeter right-of-way routes and routes to private residents. Although the Preferred Alternative in the Draft RMP/EIS would have improved conditions for wildlife here compared to the existing condition, this modification of the Preferred Alternative in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS should benefit wildlife even greater than in the Draft RMP/EIS.

II8

Comment: I generally hike or ride my horse in the area between Head Lane and Echo Lane (trails 0501, 0509, 0510 and 050128 on the BLM maps in the document). Alternative B, the "preferred alternative" raises several concerns:

1. This area currently receives little motorized traffic. Listing it as an authorized route would carry the risk of attracting users to trailer in ATVs and motorcycles, thereby increasing motorized use.
2. The Scratchgravel Hills is an extremely dry area, with fragile vegetation, erodable soils, and primitive roads. Motorized use jeopardizes the vegetation which is easily damaged and slow to regrow. This is of particular concern since there is no on-site law enforcement presence to prevent off road travel and user created trails.
3. Motorized travel increases the spread of noxious weeds.
4. Motorized travel increases fire risk.
5. In the past, motorized use has been associated with garbage dumping, littering, and keggers.
6. The area recommended as a motorized route is now used mostly by hikers, mountain bikers and horseback riders, who would be displaced if motorized use increases.

Response: Alternative B has been modified so that this road segment would be closed to public motorized vehicles yearlong under the Preferred Alternative in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

II9

Comment: Close the Scratchgravels to all ORV use. There would be vehicle access to the existing 'trailheads' at Tumbleweed Dr and Norris Rd, and a similar trailhead could be constructed just inside the fence on John G Mine Rd. The one through route for passenger vehicles from Echo Lane to Head Lane (via 509 & 510a) is OK. (This is essentially your Alt. B, but slightly scaled back.) With ORV use eliminated, the Scratchgravels would be a premier area for horseback riding, mountain biking and walking. And whereas a neighborhood kid on his ATV can tear around the whole area in less than an hour, a walker or rider can easily spend half a day or more on the many tracks and trails. With the development and other changes occurring in the valley, now is the time to create a few, easily accessible non-motorized areas near Helena.

Response: The Preferred Alternative for the Helena Travel Planning Area has been modified in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS so that all interior roads in the Scratchgravel Hills would be closed to public motorized travel yearlong at the five proposed trailheads, with the exception of a few perimeter right-of-way routes and routes to

private residents. This modification is due to the high degree of user conflicts and illegal activity taking place in this area. This change will enhance non-motorized experiences for walking, jogging, horseback riding and mountain biking.

II10

Comment: I would prefer to see as little motorized vehicle use, particularly by off road vehicles (OHVs), as possible in the Scratchgravel Hills (SGH) and other BLM areas. However, in the SGH, OHVs have carved many off road trails into the hills, and many of the trails are redundant and badly eroded. It seems that as one trail becomes too eroded and rocky to ride, another is created nearby. In some areas the swath of eroded hillside is more than 50 feet wide. Weed densities are higher along these trails and roads, and it looks like as though many of the weeds in the SGH area have been spread along these roads and trails by OHV activity. The SGH is one of the driest areas of Montana, and vegetation is very slow to recover. I would prefer that the Alternative C travel plan be implemented in the SGH and other areas covered by the Draft, because Alternative C allows the least amount of OHV activity. Currently, OHVers in the SGH ride off established routes and trails, through private property (sometimes cutting fences to do so), and I do not believe that this activity would be prevented by "signing off" some routes. In addition to erosion and weed spread caused by OHVs, these vehicles are aggressively noisy which disturbs wildlife as well as nearby homeowners. More and more homes are being built near the SGH, and I believe more people would use the SGH for non-motorized activities (hiking, walking, jogging, horseback riding, etc.) if the official routes were better marked. The SGH area is small enough that much of it can be easily enjoyed on foot within a few hours.

Response: The Preferred Alternative for the Helena Travel Planning Area has been modified in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS so that all interior roads in the Scratchgravel Hills would be closed to public motorized travel yearlong at the five proposed trailheads, with the exception of a few perimeter right-of-way routes and routes to private residents. This change will enhance non-motorized experiences, provide resource protection, and minimize use violations. Once the travel plan is complete it is anticipated that reclamation work and some non-motorized trail enhancements will be initiated.

II11

Comment: I reside at 680 Blue Grouse Road within the Sunny Vista Subdivision which is located ¼ mile south of the Scratch Gravel Hills. In the past and before "off road vehicles", you would see heavy usage by 4X4 trucks and jeeps but primarily on existing roads and it was manageable. But since ORVs have taken over, there are many, many more new trails, new roads and acres and acres of land where the vegetation has been torn up and now gone. One good example of the latter is the west slope of the southern peak.

Realistically, I think the BLM has only two choices. Either open up the entire area to ORVs or restrict it entirely. The only other option is to open up a couple roads like your Preferred Option B, but with enforcement. Since you do not have the budget nor does the county for enforcement, this option does not appear to be a viable.

So, I recommend no ORVs allowed in the area. Your preferred option B is fine for trucks and jeeps.

Response: The Preferred Alternative for the Helena Travel Planning Area has been modified in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS so that all interior roads in the Scratchgravel Hills would be closed to public motorized travel yearlong at the five proposed trailheads, with the exception of a few perimeter right-of-way routes and routes to private residents. This change will enhance non-motorized experiences, provide resource protection, and minimize use violations.

II12

Comment: This letter is in response to your colored map showing road closures of BLM land use in the Norris Road Addition. On studying the map, we cannot see where you acknowledge our 4 acres which contains our two residences. We think we have determined approximately the location of our 4 acres. Our land is on the east side of private property, which on your map shows directly north of Norris Road Trailhead. As your map shows the road closure, we would have no reasonable access to our property.

Response: The status of Road #0520 has been changed from closed to open to just beyond your residences under the Preferred Alternative in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS. Route #H112 would also remain open under the Preferred Alternative. However, it should be noted that current casual use does not guarantee future use of that existing road. Travel management plans can and do change and the status of roads can also change. To ensure long term legal access to your property, or if you want to make repairs or do maintenance to the existing road, the BLM recommends that the Butte Field Office be contacted about obtaining a right-of-way.

Travel Management – Lewis and Clark County NW TPA

JJ1

Comment: The concerns raised during the meetings with the Marysville group appear to have fallen on deaf ears. I do not see most of those concerns resolved except with Alt. A, which BLM told us isn't even a consideration.

Response: Marysville was one of three high interest areas addressed by a community based collaborative working group initiated to assist BLM with the development of a travel plan (see **Appendix A**). There was vigorous discussion among this group regarding motorized use, both wheeled and snowmobile. In the end, the working group was able to arrive at a consensus travel plan proposal. This working group proposal was incorporated into what ultimately became the Preferred Alternative. The BLM believes that the Preferred Alternative represents a balance of opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized users. Public comments received at the working group meetings for this area were incorporated into Alternative D, but were not ultimately included in the Preferred Alternative.

JJ2

Comment: We applaud BLM for developing community based collaborative working groups to assist in development of site-specific travel management alternatives for the travel plans in Lewis & Clark County (page 52). While we do not object to site-specific travel plans developed by collaborative community groups, we do recommend that the information about adverse effects of roads and motorized uses that are identified and discussed in our comments above is provided to groups so such effects may be adequately considered in their deliberations.

Response: The BLM evaluated each road and trail segment for its effects to wildlife and wildlife habitats, fish and aquatic habitats, riparian areas and soils. Each route was also assessed for human uses which included access for fire suppression, vegetation management, public lands access, and recreation. All of this information was provided to the working groups upon their request. BLM personnel also attended working group meetings to present data, site-specific information and any concerns related to specific roads and trails when requested by working groups. Concerns and/or issues with the overall transportation network in the travel plan areas were also presented to the working groups.

JJ3

Comment: Lewis & Clark NW TPA: I sat in on most of the Marysville workgroup meetings and I strongly feel that all motorized users were not adequately represented. The one person representing motorized use was mainly interested in snowmobile access which was not a major issue as that use is affected by the travel plan a lot less than other motorized use in this area.

Response: The BLM disagrees that all motorized users were not adequately represented in the working group for the Lewis and Clark County NW TPA. At least four additional working group members expressed support for motorized use (both wheeled and snowmobile) during the meetings. Snowmobile use was in fact a frequent and important topic of discussion, given that Marysville is a winter recreation destination for many people.

JJ4

Comment: Travel plan statistics were not included for each of the project areas including the Jimmie, Marysville, Sieben area. This lack of adequate disclosure must be corrected.

Response: Tables 2-6 through 2-13 provide statistical data for routes at the Butte Field Office scale and for each of the five Activity Level Planning areas. The Jimmie [New] area is located in the Upper Big Hole River Travel Planning Area; the Marysville and Sieben areas are located in the Lewis and Clark County NW Travel Planning Area.

JJ5

Comment: Lewis & Clark County NW TPA: All of the alternative maps give the impression that routes through the private land of the Sieben Ranch and O'Connell Ranch (in Lyons Creek) are open yearlong. That is not the case. Routes that are open on the Sieben Ranch and the O'Connell Ranch are only open during the hunting season.

Response: Because BLM does not manage routes on private lands, these routes are identified as "non-BLM routes" and not given an access designation on the maps. Only BLM routes are identified as "open", "closed" or "seasonally restricted" as described in the Travel Management and Access section, Field Office Level – Management Common to All Alternatives subsection of Chapter 2 in the RMP.

JJ6

Comment: Lewis & Clark NW TPA: The BLM has not applied a range of limitations (or availability) for snowmobile use. Alternative C is the only alternative with meaningful reductions in the areas within which snow machines can operate. Alternatives B and D provide the same area limits, and these are only different from Alt A because of the artificial designation of "limited" which has, indeed, limited meaning. The only difference between the miles of motorized routes available between Alts B and D is 0.2 miles, whereas Alternative C would provide less than 20 percent of that value. Barring any meaningful attempt to consider the effects of snow machine use on area resources, BLM should implement limitations on all areas and acres currently open.

Response: The BLM believes it has provided an appropriate range of snowmobile limitations under travel plan alternatives for the Lewis and Clark County NW Travel Planning Area (TPA). The BLM notes that this particular TPA has more established snowmobile use than other TPAs considered in the Butte RMP. However, the Preferred Alternative would eliminate snowmobile use on 5.7 miles of routes currently available. Most of these

eliminated routes are in the northwest corner of the TPA and the BLM believes this is most important wildlife habitat in the TPA.

JJ7

Comment: Lewis & Clark County NW TPA: Wildlife: More than other alternatives, Alternative C would decrease harassment to wildlife during all seasons but especially during winter and spring, it would reduce road density to 0.7 mi/mi^2 on elk winter range, it would have substantially more acres of functional elk winter range, it would close the same number of acres to cross country snowmobile use as other alternatives, it would provide for more acres of big game security increase the acreage of core and subcore habitat with low road density, it would have the least miles of roads in wildlife movement corridors, it would protect and restore more riparian habitat, it would have the lowest road density within occupied grizzly bear habitat at 0.6 mi/mi2. "Through travel management, Alternative C would provide the greatest benefit to grizzly bears and other special status species by reducing fragmentation of habitats, protecting larger blocks of habitat, and reducing disturbance in occupied grizzly bear habitat" (p. 561-562).

Recreation: Alternative C "would result in enhancement of non-motorized opportunities. Snowmobiles would be restricted to designated routes only during the season of use (12/2-5/15)" (p. 573). Both circumstances would benefit wildlife and habitat.

Please consider modifying your preferred alternative to provide for conditions more favorable towards wildlife, similar to what is found in your Alternative C.

Response: The BLM is already proposing to reduce road densities in this area under the Preferred Alternative which should improve wildlife habitats. The Preferred Alternative attempts to balance the needs of providing motorized access while providing for resource protection.

Travel Management - Upper Big Hole River TPA

KK1

Comment: Upper Big Hole River TPA: American Wildlands does question the seasonal closure of the road southeast of Divide that separates two open roads. American Wildlands suggests yearlong closure of this road.

Response: Routes BH127 and 010113 provide a motorized connector route between the Soap Gulch and Camp Creek roads. Route BH127 (2.39 miles) provides the majority of access across this area, and would be seasonally restricted (closed to motorized traffic) from 10/15 to 5/15 in the Preferred Alternative. Route 010113 (1.07 miles) provides the remainder of the access, and would be seasonally restricted (closed to motorized travel) from 12/2 to 5/15 in the Preferred Alternative. Accordingly, motorized travel between Camp Creek and Soap Gulch via these two routes would really only available from 5/16 to 10/14, a period of five months. However, there is very little motorized travel on these roads during this open period; the majority of use actually occurs during the big game hunting season (approximately mid October to mid November) when these roads are closed. As such, the BLM believes that the Preferred Alternative provides adequate protection for wildlife residency and movement.

KK2

Comment: If you close this "road" (referring to Teddy Creek closure, T1N, R12W, SW SW Sec 11) it should be closed at the narrows leaving the lower 300 yds off Hwy 43 open to allow for off highway parking for hikers and hunters.

Response: The BLM agrees that road closures should be done in a manner that addresses such site-specific issues mentioned in the comment. Implementation of the closure in this instance (Route #189015) would likely consider the described use of this area.

KK3

Comment: Change proposed closure of roads for the Upper Big Hole Travel Plan DEWEY AREA T.1S; R.10W parts of sections 5, 6, and 8. Allow parts of roads BH226, BH227, an unmapped portion of 189012 and the mapped portion of 189012, to remain open for travel by ATVs, snowmobiles, and motorcycles, except during the big game hunting season, 10/15 to 12/1 of each year.

Rationale: Safety is an issue to be considered when traveling between parking areas at Triangle Gulch, road 189007 and Quartz Hill road BH204, on ATV's, snowmobiles and motorcycles. These are popular parking areas used when traveling loop trails through the Vipond Park area. Your proposed closure of these roads would force users to travel on Hwy 43 to return to vehicles left in the parking areas.

History: this proposed route is presently being used, and future travel should be considered on this route as a safe alternative to avoid travel on Hwy 43. Portions of these roads proposed for closure are part of a former power line service road that has existed for many years. I would be available to guide BLM personnel through this area and show them the existing route, and other unmapped roads. We currently have volunteers who would be able to work with the BLM to improve and mark this travel route as proposed.

Response: The BLM has changed the Preferred Alternative on these routes for them to remain open for travel by ATVs, snowmobiles, and motorcycles, except during the big game hunting season, October 15 – December 1 of each year, as suggested by the comment.

KK4

Comment: With regards to the proposed closure on road number 189014, we would like access to remain open for weed control and firewood cutting, perhaps restricted to the dry season. As an alternate we would like to propose leaving road 189014 open to four wheeler and dirt bikes for wild game retrieval. This road being centrally located along Tie creek road would make it a good candidate for this purpose. It would also allow for weed control.

Response: After considering this comment, the BLM continues to propose closure of this route in the Preferred Alternative. The BLM considers the vicinity where this road is located to be important for big game winter range, wildlife connectivity to areas across the Big Hole River, and as habitat for at least one sensitive species where motorized disturbance could preclude habitat use. The BLM notes that although proposed for closure, this routebed would remain intact and could be used in the future for administrative purposes associated with weed treatments and potential fuels reduction efforts if needed in the future. In the context of game retrieval, the BLM also notes that it is a relatively short distance (approximately 1 mile) from the Tie Creek road which runs across the slope of this area and is proposed to remain open during hunting season, to the bottom of the hill. The BLM notes that this road could be opened in the future on a temporary basis as a firewood cutting area to help address fuels concerns.

KK5

Comment: We mentioned public access across the Big Hole River at Sawlog and Toomy respectively. The BLM spent a lot of tax dollars fixing the road through their land and the forest service did the same above the Sawlog crossing. If these two accesses are closed this will not only be a waste of tax payer dollars, but stop the very young hunters and the older hunters from wanting to wade the river to hunt, let alone pulling something like an elk all the way back to their rigs. Road closure agreements with the Forest Service and BLM were put in place, but a large segment of the recreating public will be left out if these crossings are off limits. Leave these accesses as they are - believe me there is enough country for wildlife to escape into.

Response: The BLM has changed the Preferred Alternative for the Sawlog Crossing to match Alternative D. This would be for the road to be open with a seasonal restriction (closed December 2 – July 15). This proposed management could change in the future pending coordination with the Forest Service and Department of Natural Resources to provide an alternative means of access to this area.

KK6

Comment: MAP 23: Upper Big Hole River. This is another area that provides winter wheeled recreation opportunities. The opportunities are all winter but the distance of upstream use in the Soap Gulch and Camp Creek drainages depends on snow depth.

Road BH123 - Unloading of ATVs occurs at Melrose. Any access, winter or summer, use this route to go from Camp Creek to Soap Gulch and/or back. This connection is the alternative to riding on the paved road north from Melrose to access Soap Gulch. This route is much safer for the rider to use. Also the south end of this rout is used to access road BH122a. I would like for this route to be left open. A hunting season closure, as now in place, is acceptable.

Road BH122a – I use this route for access for wildlife viewing. I would like to see it left open.

Response: The BLM follows a comprehensive travel planning process to determine how roads and trails are used as well as how natural resources are impacted by those routes. The BLM evaluated each road and trail segment for its effects to wildlife and wildlife habitats, fish and aquatic habitats, riparian areas and soils. Each route was also assessed for human uses which included; access for fire suppression, vegetation management, public lands access, and recreation. Because Road BH123 recently washed out, the route will remain proposed as closed under the Preferred Alternative due to soil erosion concerns. Road BH122a will also remain proposed as closed under the Preferred Alternative due to wildlife habitat concerns, including big game winter range, and because use of BH123 (washed out as described above) is necessary to access BH122a. .

KK7

Comment: MAP 23: Upper Big Hole River. This is another area that provides winter wheeled recreation opportunities. The opportunities are all winter but the distance of upstream use in the Soap Gulch and Camp Creek drainages depends on snow depth.

Road BH125, BH126, BH127, 010113, 010115, BH139 and BH140 – Depending upon snow depth various parts of all of these routes are used until mid January and then again beginning early March. The proposed closure dates almost eliminates our winter riding opportunities. The existing hunting season closures have been acceptable.

Response: Under the Preferred Alternative the BLM will continue to propose Road #s BH125, BH126, BH127, 010113, 010115, BH139 and BH140 as open with a seasonal restriction (closed October 15 – May 15) because of their location in big game winter range and subsequent importance to wildlife habitat, including bighorn sheep.

KK8

Comment: MAP 23: Upper Big Hole River. This is another area that provides winter wheeled recreation opportunities. The opportunities are all winter but the distance of upstream use in the Soap Gulch and Camp Creek drainages depends on snow depth. Road BH141 (south end) – Closure of this route eliminates a nice winter loop. I would like for this route to be left open except for hunting season closure. Road BH141 (north end) – This route is a very important summer and early winter connector for looping rides. It is rocky, rough, and is mostly grassed in. This portion is much more important to retain open than the south end.

Response: Both the north end and south ends of Road BH141 are located in big game winter range and occupied bighorn sheep habitat. After further consideration the BLM has changed the proposal for the north end of Road #BH141 to designate it as open with a seasonal restrict of December 2 – May 15 in the Preferred Alternative. The BLM continues to propose yearlong closure for the south end of this route in the Preferred Alternative.

KK9

Comment: MAP 23: Upper Big Hole River. This is another area that provides winter wheeled recreation opportunities. The opportunities are all winter but the distance of upstream use in the Soap Gulch and Camp Creek drainages depends on snow depth.

Road BH148 - This is another important route that is a loop through Forest Service lands. The road also is access to two fence lines.

It is an old road and is grassed in and has very little erosion. I would like to have this road left open with hunting season closure acceptable.

Response: The BLM continues to propose closing Road #BH148 in the Preferred Alternative as it is redundant with a nearby open Forest Service route (0106). While Road #BH148 passes through BLM lands and accesses Forest Service lands, coordination with the Forest Service indicates that this route is not needed or desired to remain open by the Forest Service.

KK10

Comment: MAP 23: Upper Big Hole River

This is another area that provides winter wheeled recreation opportunities. The opportunities are all winter but the distance of upstream use in the Soap Gulch and Camp Creek drainages depends on snow depth.

Road 010114 - This route and the others in the canyon provide great explorer riding. Do you really need to close these routes? Isn't access for fence maintenance needed?

Response: Analysis of Road 010114 showed the route is located along a creek bottom, resulting in degraded riparian conditions. The route will remain proposed as closed under the Preferred Alternative due to these riparian concerns. Closure of this or any other route will not affect maintenance duties as temporary travel variances may be granted on closed routes for administrative duties.

KK11

Comment: In the Upper Big Hole River Travel Planning Area we believe the planned game retrieval system for the Sawlog Gulch area needs to be reexamined in close consultation with the U.S. Forest Service, the majority landowner in the area. This past summer, FWP tried to coordinate a review of the affected travel routes with the Wise River Ranger District. Unfortunately the ignition of large fires in the upper Big Hole took precedence over this review. We feel that some vehicular access through the National Forest is critical for the greater Sawlog area and the management of wildlife populations. If having vehicles ford the Big Hole is the major concern, then please consider options such as acquiring an access easement, building a new access road across public lands or suspension bridges that may also accommodate ATVs. A used bridge from the Montana Department of Transportation may be another option worth pursuing. Your access proposal creates a horseman's hunting paradise and I question whether or not that is good for elk population management or the sport of hunting.

Response: The BLM has changed the Preferred Alternative for the Sawlog Crossing to match Alternative D. This would be for the road to be open with a seasonal restriction (closed December 2 – July 15). This proposed management could change in the future pending coordination with the Forest Service and Department of Natural Resources to provide an alternative means of access to this area.

KK12

Comment: Leave Route BH103 in the Dewey area open in order to access the cemetery for burial.

Response: Access to the Dewey cemetery was taken under consideration, and the Preferred Alternative has been changed to propose that Road #BH103 remain open yearlong.

KK13

Comment: Change seasonal restriction dates for Route 010104 from 12/2-5/15 to 10/15-12/1 to match current Forest Service management.

Response: After coordination with the Forest Service, the BLM continues to propose managing Road #010104 as open with the seasonal restriction of December 2 – May 15. The Forest Service has indicated willingness to

change its management direction on connecting routes to match BLM's management so as to provide consistency for the public.

KK14

Comment: Leave an unmapped route open during summer fore firewood retrieval. Member of public is concerned about fire danger adjacent to his land/residence.

Response: Under the Preferred Alternative, the unmapped route has been mapped and proposed to be managed as closed yearlong. Should a firewood cutting project be analyzed and implemented in the future, use of a travel variance would provide flexibility to temporarily open the road. A firewood cutting project, however, is a separate project-level issue and is beyond the scope of the RMP.

KK15

Comment: Change management status for Route BH037 from "decommission" to "open to OHV use". Local resident would like access to an OHV trail on Forest Service lands (the "Cat Walk" trail).

Response: After coordination with the Forest Service, the BLM has changed its proposed management of this route in the Preferred Alternative to "closed". Further changes to management of this route may occur pending the outcome of travel planning by the Forest Service on the adjoining route.

KK16

Comment: Local rancher would like to see routes BH54 and BH55 managed as open to the public at least during hunting season. He allows the public to cross his property, and then onto routes 54 and 55 so they can access Forest Service lands for hunting.

Response: The Preferred Alternative has been changed to propose managing roads #BH54 and #BH55 as open yearlong.

Water

LL1

Comment: Chapter 4, Effects on Resources, Water Resources, Effects Common to All Alternatives, page 323, last 2 paragraphs: Managing riparian areas and wetlands to be at or moving towards proper functioning condition (PFC) can contribute to improvements in water quality. However, the discussion as written could be misleading because it implies a simple, cause-and-effect relation. While improving PFC is desirable, doing so would not guarantee an improvement in water-quality conditions as other processes within the watershed upstream from or within the ground-water system could contribute to water-quality problems masking any improvements due to PFC.

Response: The second to last paragraph dealing with PFC states that there "should be" improvements in water quality. It did not intend to guarantee improvements. It also did not attempt to deal with the magnitude of the improvements. The last paragraph clearly identifies the role of upstream areas and ground water on water quality. The BLM believes this wording is appropriate.

LL2

Comment: List the Montana Nonpoint Source Management Plan and associated BMPs among the primary sources of information for BMPs and nonpoint source pollution management in Appendix D of the RMP. The latest Montana Nonpoint Source Management Plan is available at, http://deq.mLgov/wqinfo/ nonpoint/2007NONPOlNTPLAN/Final/NPSPlan.pdf. The RMP should be consistent with the Montana Nonpoint Source Management Plan.

Response: The Montana Nonpoint Source Management Plan will be referenced as a source of potential BMPs in the BMP appendix (**Appendix E** in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS).

LL3

Comment: The list of impaired waters included in the draft RMP appears to need review and will likely need revision (Table 3-3 pages 212-213), since it is based on Montana's Clean Water Act Section 303(d) list for 2004 (page 212) . The most current Montana 303(d) list is the 2006 list, which list can be accessed on the web at http://www.deq.state.mt.us/CWAIC/default.aspx. We did a brief comparison of the 2006 303(d) list with RMP Table 3-3 for the Jefferson River drainage, and noticed many streams on the 2006 303(d) list in the Jefferson River drainage that were not included in Table 3-3 (e.g., Charcoal Creek, Cherry Creek, Fish Creek, Fitz Creek, Halfway Creek, Hells Canyon Creek, Little Pipestone Creek, North Willow Creek, Norwegian Creek, South Boulder River, South Willow Creek, Willow Creek, Whitetail Creek).

We did not see a clear or comprehensive watershed map in the RMP that identified locations of BLM land in relation to surface waters, with stream names identified, so we were not able to determine the amount of BLM land within these additional 303(d) listed drainages. Table 3-3 should be reviewed and revised appropriately to show all impaired water bodies that have BLM land within their drainages based on the most current 2006 Montana 303(d) list.

Also, a comprehensive watershed map (or maps) clearly identifying surface waterbodies and their approximate drainage boundaries and locations of BLM land should be included in the RMP/EIS. Lack of such a watershed map(s) limits the ability to fully review and evaluate

consistency of the draft RMP/EIS with the Clean Water Act and applicable Federal and State water quality policies and regulations.

Response: The 2006 list was not finalized when the Draft RMP/EIS was being prepared. This table has been updated in the Proposed RMP/Final EIS to show the 2006 information.

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) web site provides an excellent assessment database that allows for queries of specific basins. This includes maps that show water bodies, ownership, TMDL planning areas, and other landmarks. This database can be found at:

http://deq.mt.gov/cwaic/default.aspx?yr=2006.

The total miles of impaired streams located on BLM managed lands is 77.37 miles. The BLM cannot estimate miles of potential improvement, since too many factors that could influence water quality are outside of BLM's control. These factors include land ownership, drought, fires, and State and EPA priorities. In many cases, the source of the impairment is located well above the BLM managed lands and therefore is out of BLM's control. In these cases the impaired water simply flows through the BLM parcel.

To address water quality restoration, the BLM will work with the State of Montana and the EPA on the development and implementation of water quality restoration plans for all TMDLs that involve BLM managed lands. This commitment has been made under the 2002 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the DEQ and BLM.

The development of TMDLs is prioritized to address State and EPA priorities for water quality improvement. This information is needed to even begin estimating miles of potential improvement. The BLM does not maintain our own schedule, as we wish to be consistent with DEQ and EPA approved priorities. We look forward to working with your agency in improving water quality in streams influenced by BLM management.

While the BLM does not maintain its own schedule for restoring water quality, during its budgeting process the BLM does give a high priority to those projects that would improve the water quality of listed streams. This allows us to take action to improve water quality, on BLM managed lands, prior to the approval of TMDLs.

LL4

Comment: The draft RMP/EIS states that the Land Health Standards would be implemented to ensure water quality meets State standards and beneficial uses are protected or restored, and that Best Management Practices (BMPs) would be used to prevent non-point source water pollution and mitigation measures would be applied on a case-by-case basis (page 81). It is relevant to note that the Montana DEQ has issued guidance ("Requirements for Nonpoint Sources of Pollution Impacting High Quality and Impaired Waters") that differentiates BMPs from the "reasonable land, soil, and water conservation practices" that are required by Montana WQS (Administrative Rules of Montana 17.30 Subchapters 6 and 7). "Reasonable soil, land, and water conservation practices" are defined by the Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM 17.30.602) as "methods, measures, or practices that protect present and reasonably anticipated beneficial uses." Such practices include but are not limited to structural and nonstructural controls and operation and maintenance procedures. Appropriate practices may be applied before, during, or after pollution producing activities.

This MDEQ guidance says differentiation between BMPs and "reasonable land, soil, and water conservation practices" is necessary because BMPs are largely practices that provide a degree of protection for water quality, but may or may not be sufficient to protect beneficial uses (achieve WQS). Therefore, Montana's "reasonable land, soil, and water conservation practices" generally include BMPs, but may require additional conservation practices, beyond BMPs, to achieve WQS and protect or restore beneficial uses.

The key point is that the protective or restorative practices that are used by BLM should be adequate to achieve WQS (i.e., protect or restore beneficial uses) in order to meet the Montana Water Quality Act and Federal Clean Water Act requirements. Standard BMPs alone may not always be sufficient.

Response: The Water Quality Land Health Standard was established to ensure an end result – meeting State Water Quality standards and ensuring the support of beneficial uses. BMP's were identified as a means to the end, and not the end itself. If BMPs are not sufficient to meet or move towards meeting state water quality standards, additional measures would be necessary to achieve the end result. One of the primary sources of water quality impairment, originating on BLM managed lands is livestock grazing. The Montana Nonpoint Source Management Plan (2007) states that "a strategy for reducing impacts of grazing on water quality and riparian and channel condition should include implementation of multiple BMPs prescribed on a site-specific basis, focusing on those areas especially susceptible to impacts from grazing, or contributing the largest pollutant loads." This led to objectives 6.2 and 6.3 that emphasize the use of BMPs for dealing with Montana's Non-point strategy for pasture and rangelands. The BLM agrees with the State on the value of grazing BMPs.

LL5

Comment: Appendix D of the draft RMP identifies sources of BMPs for land management; however, Appendix D fails to mention Montana's Nonpoint Source Management Plan and its associated BMPs. The Montana Nonpoint Source Management Plan describes the

Montana Department of Environmental Quality's (MDEQ's) strategy for controlling nonpoint source water pollution, including identification of BMPs. Nonpoint source pollution (which is contaminated runoff from the land surface that can be generated by land use activities, including agriculture, forestry, mining, and others), is Montana's single largest source of water quality impairment. We recommend that the Montana Nonpoint Source Management Plan be listed among the primary sources of information for BMPs and nonpoint source pollution management in Appendix D of the RMP. The latest updated Montana Nonpoint Source Management Plan is available at, http://deq.mt.gov/wqinfo/ nonpoint/2007NONPOINTPLAN/Final/NPSPlan.pdf

Response: The Montana Non-Point Source plan was not complete when the Draft RMP/EIS was released. The BLM agrees that this is a useful plan and will include it as a primary source of information.

LL6

Comment: We are pleased that the draft RMP/EIS states that all action alternatives would emphasize maintaining diverse, healthy, productive, well-distributed aquatic habitats and communities to increase populations of native fish and other aquatic species (page 43), the preferred alternative would also increase and maintain habitat for native and locally important fish (page 44). The Clean Water Act requires that Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) be prepared to promote water quality restoration in 303(d) listed waters. The MDEQ and EPA are under a Federal District Court Order to develop TMDLs for 303(d) listed waters. A TMDL:

Identifies the maximum load of a pollutant (e.g. sediment. nutrient, metal) a waterbody is able to assimilate and fully support its designated uses; allocates portions of the maximum load to all sources; identifies the necessary controls that may be implemented voluntarily or through regulatory means; and describes a monitoring plan and associated corrective feedback loop to insure that uses are fully supported;

Or can also be viewed as, the total amount of pollutant that a water body may receive from all sources without exceeding WQS; or may be viewed as, a reduction in pollutant loading that results in meeting WQS.

In accordance with the terms of a Consent Decree for a lawsuit in Federal District Court, the EPA and MDEQ are required to address impaired waters listed on Montana's 1996 303(d) list, unless those waters are adequately assessed and water quality is determined to be fully supporting beneficial uses, and the waters are not listed on the Montana 2006 303(d) list.

The MDEQ has divided the State of Montana into TMDL Planning Areas, grouping streams with similar water quality problems and land ownership on a watershed basis. Each TMDL planning area may include 4 to 10 impaired watersheds that have specific TMDL preparation needs. A schedule for development of TMDLs is shown at http://deq.mt.gov/wqinfo/ TMDL/TMDLSchedule2006.pdf.

Montana's approach is to include TMDLs as one component of comprehensive Water Quality Restoration Plans (WQRPs). The MDEQ and EPA are sharing development of TMDLs; although EPA retains authority to approve all TMDLs. TMDLs/WQRPs contain eight principal components:

1. Watershed characterization (hydrology, climate, vegetation, land use, ownership. etc.)
2. Description of impairments and applicable water quality standards.
3. Pollutant source assessment and estimate of existing pollutant loads, including pollutant loads in tributaries to 303(d) listed waters.
4. Water quality goals/restoration targets.
5. Load allocations (i.e., TMDLs).
6. Restoration strategy
7. Monitoring Strategy
8. Public involvement (30 day public comment period, informational meetings, etc.)

Response: In the Water Resources section of Chapter 2 of the Butte RMP, under Management Common to All Alternatives, the Butte RMP indicates that the "BLM would continue to coordinate and cooperate with Montana Department of environmental Quality (MDEQ) and communities in the development of Water Quality Restoration Plans and Source Water Protection plans." This includes TMDLs.

LL7

Comment: We are pleased that management direction under the Water Resources (page 81) indicates that all necessary permits pertaining to projects affecting water quality, wetlands and streams will be obtained. Discharges of fill material into wetlands and other waters of the United States are regulated by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, 33 USC. 1344, which is administered jointly by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and EPA. It is important for the RMP to ensure consultation with the Corps of Engineers to determine applicability of 404 permit requirements to specific project level construction activities in or near streams or wetlands, (e.g., contact Mr. Allan Steinle of Corps of Engineers Montana Office in Helena at 406-441-1375). The 404(b) (l) Guidelines (found at 40 CFR Part 230) and Corps of Engineers, EPA, and USFWS Wetland Specialists should be consulted to provide specific environmental criteria and guidance when BLM projects need a 404 permit. See Corps of Engineers Montana Regulatory Office website for further information, https://www.nwo.usace.army.mil/html/od-rmt/ mthome.htm.

Response: This is a legal requirement that will be met. Chapter 2 of the RMP, under Vegetation Communities,

Management Common to All Alternatives, Riparian subheading (Page 21 paragraph 1 right column in Draft RMP/EIS) indicates that the BLM's position with regard to existing regulations is that "Riparian and wetland management would be consistent with all state and federal laws and regulations". This includes all permitting requirements.

LL8

Comment: We are pleased that BLM would continue to coordinate and cooperate with MDEQ in the development of Source Water Protection Plans (page 82). The 1996 Amendments to the Safe Drinking Water Act require all States with primary enforcement authority for public water supply supervision programs (such as Montana) to carry out a source water assessment program for all public water systems (PWSs) within the State. Information on source water assessments can be found on the Montana DEQ website at: www.deq.state.mt.us/wqinfo/swp/index.asp.

It would be helpful if Source Waters for Federally-regulated public water supply systems within the BFO Planning and Decision Areas were identified in the RMP/EIS. Source Water is untreated water from streams, rivers, lakes, springs, and aquifers that is used as a supply of drinking water. Source Water Protection Areas are areas delineated around sources of drinking water and mapped by the States for each Federally-regulated public water system. A Federally-regulated public water system provides water for human consumption through pipes or other constructed conveyances to at least 15 service connections or serves an average or at least 25 people for at least 60 days a year.

RMP management direction should assure that public water supplies including ground water aquifers are adequately protected from risks (e.g., use of mitigation measures and barriers). We note that there is a USFS document entitled, "Drinking Water from Forests and Grasslands ", General Technical Report SRS-39, that is meant for the Forest Manager, that may be of interest to the public and BLM.

We encourage BLM to contact Mr. Joe Meek of MDEQ at 406-444-4806 to obtain guidance for incorporating source water protection into the Federal Land Management Planning Process. We are also enclosing guidance for "Incorporating Source Water Protection into Federal Land Management Planning Process "following our detailed comments.

Response: Public water systems are identified in the Water Resources section of Chapter 3 of the RMP (page 213 in the Draft RMP/EIS). There are four municipal watersheds in the Butte Field Office. They are the Missouri River Siphon, Tenmile Creek drainage, Big Hole River Intake, and Moulton Reservoir. The Tenmile Creek drainage is Helena's primary source of drinking water. Additional water is obtained, as needed, during the summer months from the Missouri River Siphon which is located on the downstream side of Canyon Ferry Dam. The Big Hole River Intake encompasses a major portion of the Big Hole watershed upstream of the intake and is an important source of drinking water for the city of Butte. Moulton Reservoir is about five miles north of Butte and provides additional drinking water for Butte.

LL9

Comment: We also believe the RMP/EIS monitoring program should include watershed/water quality assessment/monitoring for evaluation of watershed and riparian restoration success and achievement of proper functioning condition and beneficial use support (i.e. Water Quality Standards compliance). We suggest addition of a Water Resource Monitoring and Assessment direction to address such monitoring. For example, "BLM will establish aquatic monitoring and assessment programs incorporating adaptive management to monitor and assess water quality, proper functioning condition, and aquatic habitat conditions to measure effectiveness of watershed protection and restoration efforts and progress towards attainment of desired conditions and goals (e.g. sub-basin and watershed assessments, landscape and project scale analysis, inventories, BLM wide monitoring, etc.)."

Monitoring programs are important elements in maintaining and restoring the health of watersheds, riparian, and aquatic resources, and are key to achieving riparian, wetlands and other aquatic goals. The achievement of Water Quality Standards (WQS) for activities that generate nonpoint source pollution occurs through the implementation of BMPs, and although BMPs should be designed to protect water quality, they need to be monitored to verify their effectiveness. If found ineffective, the BMPs need to be revised, and impacts mitigated. It is through the iterative process of developing and implementing BMPs and mitigation measures, and monitoring effectiveness of BMPs and mitigation measures, with adjustment of measures where necessary, that Water Quality Standards are achieved. Also, the success of watershed and riparian restoration is dependent on monitoring programs that measure and evaluate progress toward achievement of restoration goals.

Monitoring programs should address the types of surveys, parameters to be monitored, indicator species, budget, procedures for using data or results in plan implementation, and availability of results to interested and affected groups. The monitoring program should include discussion of how the three types of monitoring (implementation, effectiveness, and validation monitoring) are incorporated into BLM's adaptive management program. Information, including a contact person, should be provided on how the public can receive information on mitigation effectiveness and monitoring results. The relationship between national BLM and BFO monitoring

on a broad scale vs. project monitoring activities should be described. The design of monitoring programs should:

1) ensure State Water Quality Standards (WQS) for support of beneficial uses are met;
2) provide a mechanism to initiate additional measures if needed to meet State WQS;
3) evaluate the effectiveness of the BMPs, and/or the need for additional or revised BMPs, Standards and Guidelines, other direction or need to change existing direction;
4) evaluate the accuracy of estimates made in the analysis, including cumulative effects of the RMP and other activities on the health of the ecosystems being managed, and risk of potential damage to ecosystems (requires a companion process to take rapid protective steps when high risks are identified); and
5) provide a data management system and resources to allow feedback mechanism for future projects.

We also note that it would be helpful if BLM aquatic monitoring and assessment methods and indicators for evaluation of water quality conditions were consistent with those used by the State (i.e., Montana Dept. of Environmental Quality-MDEQ) and EPA for evaluation of water quality and support of beneficial uses of surface waters. Perhaps RMP Guidelines would be appropriate place for such direction.

It would also be appropriate to revise the discussion of water quality parameters on pages 722 and 723 of Appendix E (Rangeland Health Standards) to include the multiple indicator approach that the MDEQ and EPA uses for evaluating beneficial use support to account for complexity of chemical, physical and biologic processes, and potential lack of certainty regarding the effectiveness of a single indicator. For example, using multiple indicators like:

Water Column	Streambed Sediment	Channel Condition	Biological	Other
Suspended	% fines	Pool/ Riffle	macro-invertebrate community metrics	Large woody debris
turbidity	particle size distribution	W/D	periphyton	canopy cover
Temperature	pool filling	entrenchment		
specific pollutants		bank stability		

Information on State and EPA water quality monitoring beneficial use support indicators are available on the MDEQ website, http://www.deq.state.mt.us/wqinfo/monitoring/index.asp

Indicators and parameters such as these are being incorporated into TMDLs by the Montana DEQ and EPA. We recommend that the BLM coordinate and discuss aquatic monitoring methods and indicators with Rosie Sada, Aquatic Monitoring Program Manager of MDEQ in Helena at 406-444-5964, and Tina Laidlaw, Aquatic Monitoring Specialist with EPA, in Helena at 406-457-5016. The following documents are references for developing an aquatic monitoring program:

The Forest Service publication, “Guide to Effective Monitoring of Aquatic and Riparian Resources, “RMRS-GTR-121, available at, http://www.fs.fed.us/rm/pubs/rmrs_gtr121.html.

The Forest Service publication, "Testing common stream sampling methods for broadscale, long-term monitoring, “RMRS-GTR-122, available at, http://www.fs.fed.us/rm/pubs/ rmrs_gtr122.html.

“Aquatic and Riparian Effectiveness Monitoring Plan for the Northwest Forest Plan, “ Gordon H. Reeves, David B. Hohler, David P. Larsen, David E. Busch, Kim Kratz, Keith Reynolds, Karl F. Stein, Thomas Atzet, Polly Hays, and Michael Tehan, February 2001, available on-line at, www.reo.gov/monitoring/watershed/aremp-compile.htm.

Monitoring Guidelines to Evaluate Effects of Forestry Activities in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska; Lee H. McDonald, Alan W. Smart, and Robert C. Wissmar; May 1991; EPA/910/9-91-001;

“Aquatic Habitat Indicators and Their Application to Water Quality Objectives within the Clean Water Act, “Stephen B. Bauer and Stephen C. Ralph, 1999, EPA-910-R99-014. (This publication is available on-line at, http://www.pocketwater.com/reports/ahi.pdf)

Western Pilot Study: Field Operations Manual for Wadeable Streams; Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Program Protocols, Edited by David V. Peck, James M. Lazorchak, and Donald J. Klemm, April 2001, available on-line at: http://www.epa.gov/emap/html/pubs/docs/groupdocs/surfwatr/field/ewwsm01.pdf.

Montana DEQ's Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment information can be found on the website, http://www.deg.state.mt.us/wqinfo/monitoring/Functions.asphttp://www.deq.state.mt.us/

Rapid Bioassessment Protocols for use in Streams and Rivers; James A. Plafkin, May 1989, EPA/444/4-89-001.

“Montana Stream Management Guide; for Landowners, Managers, and Stream Users”, Montana Dept. Of Environmental Quality; December 1995.

The Forest Service Region 5 document entitled. “Water Quality Management for Forest System Lands in California: Best Management Practices. “ September 2000, is a useful reference for BMP development and BMP effectiveness monitoring. It can be found at the website

http://fsweb.r5.fs.fed.us/unit/ec/water/water-best-mgmt.pdf.

"Protocol for Developing Sediment TMDLs" EPA 841-B-99-004. October 1999. http://www.epa.gov/owow/tmdl/sediment/pdf/sediment.pdf.

Response: The BLM notes that RMP level monitoring concentrates on whether or not we are meeting the objectives, goals, and standards established in the plan. Project level monitoring deals with specific projects and areas. Both levels of monitoring are important to protecting water quality and riparian and aquatic health.

With regard to using consistent monitoring methods as DEQ, the BLM notes that we have an existing agreement in place with the State DEQ where they actually perform the BLM's water quality monitoring. The approved objectives of this agreement are to expand the State's water quality monitoring network to lands influenced by BLM management. The resulting data will be used to: (1) determine reference conditions, (2) complete beneficial use assessments, and (3) develop TMDLs. The BLM will use this data to ensure its management meets all state and federal standards. The acknowledged benefits of this partnership are:

1. BLM resources would benefit from the availability of water quality data that can be used to implement sound resource management decisions.
2. The BLM would meet its water quality monitoring obligations identified in the BLM/DEQ MOU of 2002 (including any update or replacement)
3. DEQ would have the ability to expand its water quality monitoring network to the prairie region of Montana.
4. DEQ could utilize BLM resource specialist to obtain information regarding the management of various watersheds.
5. The public would benefit from the improved management of public lands due to better integration of land management and water quality monitoring.

This core monitoring program includes the collection of physical, chemical, and biological parameters.

With regard to the riparian standard, the BLM's primary assessment tool is the PFC methodology. This method is used during Land Health Assessments which take a holistic look at the landscape (including uplands and riparian). This method was identified in objective 6.1 of DEQ's recently released "Montana Nonpoint Source Management Plan" as an appropriate riparian assessment tool in rangeland areas. This plan states that this objective is to "Support land management agency (DNRC, BLM, USFS, and NRCS) utilization of PFC interdisciplinary functional assessments as a first tier approach of riparian grazing leases on federal and state public lands to assess and implement riparian grazing management strategies. Support site specific grazing BMPs (i.e. water developments, fencing, etc) and planned grazing systems which incorporates record keeping and monitoring." In addition to DEQ's support, the PFC methodology was used in developing the Lake Helena TMDL (the primary TMDL for this planning area). The Lake Helena TMDL was completed by EPA and it emphasized the use of PFC for assessing riparian conditions (section 3.3.3.6). Given this support from EPA, DEQ, and the BLM; we believe this method is appropriate for monitoring riparian conditions and potential non-point source pollution.

Many of the parameters identified in the comment are more appropriate for project level monitoring, where specific objectives are established and specific parameters designated. Although not specifically a part of the land health assessment process, many of these parameters are considered during the PFC assessment where the collection of site specific supporting information is encouraged.

The BLM agrees that as TMDLs are establish for this area, some of the indicators and parameters listed in the comment could become a part of the TMDL. As we've previously committed to implement relevant portions of approved TMDLs, we would evaluate any relevant parameter identified in a TMDL. However, these would be site specifically established by the State and EPA and not programmatically assigned by the BLM. In addition, the BLM is currently funding DEQ to collect water quality monitoring data on BLM managed lands. This partnership is led by DEQ's Rosie Sada and Mike Suplee and includes any data DEQ deems appropriate.

The BLM will provide more specifics on its RMP monitoring plan in the Record of Decision for the plan that identifies and describes the Approved RMP. Thank you for your list of references, they will be extremely useful in implementing site specific site evaluations.

LL10

Comment: We did not see much discussion of ground water impacts associated with oil and gas leases. Will the BLM or oil and gas operators conduct any ground water monitoring in association with oil and gas leases and/or transport of oil and gas products within the BFO Planning Area? Are any impacts to ground water quality anticipated as a result of oil and gas exploration, development and transport within the BFO area?

Response: The BLM does not forecast any appreciable ground water impacts associated with federally approved oil and gas activity in the Butte Field Office based on the low level of oil and gas activity forecast in our Reasonably Foreseeable Development (RFD) Scenario for the Butte RMP. Additionally, the BLM has no intention of conducting ground water monitoring or requiring operators to conduct ground water monitoring in the Butte

Field Office at this time due to the low level of activity forecast.

The BLM forecasts a total of 19 conventional wells in the Field Office; of which six are forecast to be discoveries. We have forecast a total of 12 successful step-out (development) wells. The RFD scenario forecasts that seven of the 18 producing wells, original discoveries and step-out wells, will be on federal minerals and under BLM jurisdiction. Due to uncertainties we have not forecast how many of the unsuccessful wildcat wells will be federal and how many non-federal. The BLM forecasts 10 wildcat coal bed natural gas (CBNG) wildcat wells. We expect six of the wildcat CBNG wells will be producing wells. These are expected to be followed by 24 producing step-out wells. As noted in the RMP none of the coal bed natural gas wells are expected to be federal.

The BLM does not regulate oil and gas drilling and other operations on non-federal minerals in Montana. That is the job of the Montana Board of Oil and Gas Conservation. In the case of federally approved activities, the BLM will administer oil and gas activities under applicable laws, regulations, Onshore Oil and Gas Orders, and Notices to Lessees. Our procedures for regulating oil and gas activities on federal leases are described in **Appendix M** of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS.

LL11

Comment: Table 4-50 is misleading when considering the roads in question in the Scratchgravel Hills. The table references the effects on water and fishery resources in the Scratchgravel Hills is misleading and very minimal as there are no perennial streams in this immediate area. Table 4-50 gives the impression that closing the roads in the immediate Scratchgravel Hills will have an effect on non-fish bearing streams even though it does not specify which roads are within 300 feet of a perennial stream.

Response: The information provided in Table 4-50 applies to the entire Helena Travel Planning Area (TPA), not just Scratchgravel Hills. There are perennial streams in other areas of the Helena TPA outside the Scratchgravel Hills.

LL12

Comment: The full cost of motorized usage (both wheeled vehicles and snowmobiles) should be factored into the analysis. The Clancy-Unionville BLM travel plan may be contributing to water quality problems that exist in that area of Lump Gulch (on the impaired water body list, p. 212).

Response: During travel management planning the BLM evaluates its actions versus all standards. While Lump Creek is currently listed on the 303(d) list, the probable sources are agriculture, range, grazing – riparian, and resource extraction. Motorized use was not identified as a probable source of impairment. In addition, this area is not within one of the travel planning areas being addressed in concert with the Butte RMP revision.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE PROPOSED RMP /FINAL EIS

The Proposed RMP/EIS has been sent to all parties expressing continuing interest in the RMP.

Copies of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS are also available for public review at the following locations:

BLM Butte Field Office

BLM Dillon Field Office

BLM Missoula Field Office

Helena National Forest Supervisor's Office

Gallatin National Forest Supervisor's Office

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest Supervisor's Office

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest Butte Ranger District/S.O. Annex

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest Wise River Ranger District

Butte Public Library

Helena Public Library

Bozeman Public Library

Dillon Public Library

Whitehall Public Library

Anaconda Public Library

Livingston Public Library

Boulder Public Library

The Draft RMP/EIS is also available electronically at the Butte Field Office website at, www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/fo/butte_field_office.html.

Concurrent with the distribution of the Draft RMP/EIS, a Notice of Availability was published by EPA in the Federal Register which marks the beginning of the 90-day public comment period. BLM also published a Notice of Availability in the Federal Register announcing the availability of the Draft RMP/EIS for public comment.

Hard copies of the Proposed RMP/Final EIS have been distributed to the following organizations, agencies, and individuals who requested them, or as required by regulation or policy.

Federal Government Agencies

Bureau of Reclamation

Environmental Protection Agency – Region 8

US Army – Montana National Guard

US Fish & Wildlife Service – Helena

US Fish & Wildlife Service – Billings

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest Butte Ranger District/S.O. Annex

USDA Forest Service – Beaverhead-Deerlodge NF - Dillon

USDA Forest Service – Beaverhead-Deerlodge NF - Whitehall

USDA Forest Service – Beaverhead-Deerlodge NF – Wise River

USDA Forest Service – Gallatin NF

USDA Forest Service – Helena NF – Helena

USDA Forest Service – Helena NF – Townsend

USDA – National Resources Conservation Service – Dillon

USDA – National Resources Conservation Service – Townsend

State Government Agencies

Honorable Brian Schweitzer, Governor of Montana

Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology

Montana Department of Environmental Quality

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks - Bozeman

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks – Butte

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks – Helena

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks – Townsend

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks – Dillon

Montana State Historic Preservation Office

Local Governments

Beaverhead County Commission

Beaverhead County Weed Coordinator

Broadwater County Commission

Broadwater County Weed Coordinator

City of Helena Parks and Recreation

Deer Lodge County Commission

Deer Lodge County Weed Coordinator

Gallatin County Commission

Gallatin County Weed Coordinator

Jefferson County Commission

Jefferson County Weed Coordinator

Jefferson County Weed District

Lewis and Clark County Commission

Lewis and Clark County Planning Department

Lewis and Clark County Weed Coordinator

Park County Commission

Park County Environmental Council

Park County Planner

Park County Weed Coordinator

Silver Bow County Commission

Silver Bow County Weed Coordinator

Tribal Governments and Committees

Arapaho Business Council

Blackfeet Planning and Development

Blackfeet Tribal Council

Chippewa Cree Business Committee

Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes

Crow Tribal Council

Fort Belknap Community Council

Fort Peck Tribal Executive Board

Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee

Nez Perce Tribes Cultural Resources Committee

Northern Cheyenne Tribal Council

Shoshone Business Council – Fort Washakie

Shoshone-Bannock Tribes Business Council – Fort Hall

Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians

Congressionals

U.S. Representative, Dennis Rehberg

U.S. Senator, John Tester

U.S. Senator, Max Baucus

Nongovernmental Organizations and Businesses

American Wildlands

Boone and Crockett Club – Townsend

Butte Skyline Sportsmen

Capital Trail Vehicle Association (CTVA)

Driftwood Ranch
East Pioneer Experimental Stewardship Program
Elkhorn Working Group
Gold Prospectors Association
Graymont Western US, Inc.
Helena Mineral Society
International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Jefferson River Watershed Council
Johns Ranch, Inc.
Lamarche Creek Ranch
Lewis and Clark Search and Rescue
Lorengo Logging
Mining City Trailriders
Montana Foundation for North American Wild Sheep
Montana Logging Association
Montana Mining Association – Helena Chapter
Montana Natural Heritage Program
Montana Snowmobile Association
Montana Stockgrowers Association
Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Association – Bozeman
Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Association – Great Falls
Montana Trout Unlimited
Montana Tunnels Mining, Inc.
Montana Wilderness Association – Bozeman
Montana Wilderness Association – Dillon
Montana Wilderness Association – Helena
Montana Wildlife Federation
Montana Wood Products Association
Northwestern Energy
Pacific Legal Foundation
PPL Montana, LLC (PPLM)
Public Lands Access Association, Inc.

Reinhardt Ranch
Renewable Technologies
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Safari Club International – Southwest Montana Chapter
Safari Club International – Washington, DC Office
Silver City Lumber, Inc.
Sims Ranch
Skyline Sportsmen Association
Smurfit Stone Container Company
Snowmobile Alliance for Western States
Stanchfield Cattle Company
State Land Coalition
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Teddy Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Three Horse Ranch
Tomahawk Ranch
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An interdisciplinary team of resource specialists from the BLM Butte Field Office, and the State of Montana BLM office prepared this RMP/EIS. Maxim Technologies, a subsidiary of Tetra Tech Inc. assisted the BLM in the planning process and preparation of these documents (**Table 5-2**). Rick Hotaling, Field Manager of the Butte Field Office, provided guidance, oversight, and support in developing the Draft RMP/EIS and moving the planning process forward.

Table 5-1
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