

APPENDIX C – PROPOSED FOREST PLAN AMENDMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Forest Service requirements for amending forest plans are included in agency regulations and policies. These require that land uses be consistent with forest plans and that proposed activities which would be in conflict with the plan be denied, modified (so as to be consistent), or that the forest plan be amended. Regulations at 36 CFR 219.10(f) direct the Forest Service to consider whether a proposed amendment to a forest plan would be considered a significant change.

The Forest Service is authorized to implement amendments to forest plans in response to changing needs and opportunities, information identified during project analysis, or the results of monitoring and evaluation. The process to consider forest plan amendments, review them for significance, document the results, and reach a decision is contained in the Forest Service Manual (FSM) 1922 and the Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.12, Chapter 5. An assessment of a proposed amendment's significance in the context of the larger forest plan is a crucial part of this process. It is important to note that the definition of significance for amending a forest plan (36 CFR 219.10(f) and FSH 1922.5) is not the same as the definition of significance as defined by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires that proposed forest plan amendments be evaluated for whether they would constitute a significant change in the long-term goods, outputs, and services projected for an entire National Forest. Amendments that are not significant may be adopted following disclosure and notification in an environmental document, such as an EA or an EIS.

The criteria to be examined in an analysis of the significance of a forest plan amendment are detailed in Forest Service Handbook 1909.12, and summarized below. The following discussion uses these parameters to evaluate the significance of adopting the proposed Forest Plan amendments.

1. Timing. When the change in the Forest Plan would take place relative to the planning period and scheduled revisions of the plan.
2. Location and size. Location and size of the area affected compared to the size for the overall planning area.
3. Goals, Objectives, and Outputs. How, or to what degree, the amendment would affect the long-term relationship between levels of goods and services projected by the Forest Plan.
4. Management Prescription. Whether the change would apply only to a specific situation or to future situations across the planning area.

APPENDIX C-1 – MANAGEMENT AREA DESIGNATIONS

As described in the Forest Plan, the GNF has been divided into 26 management areas, each with different management goals, resource potentials, and limitations. The management area boundaries are not firm lines and do not always follow topographic features. The boundaries represent a transition from one set of opportunities and constraints to another, and they are flexible to assure that the values are protected and to incorporate additional information from project level planning.

The Proposed Action would entail a change in management area designation from MA 12 (with an emphasis on dispersed recreation and big game habitat) to MA 2 (with an emphasis on winter sports areas) in the Bradley Meadows area (217.3 acres). Section 13 was acquired by the Forest Service in 1993 through a land exchange; this area currently has no management area designation. In addition to the conversion from MA 12 to MA 2, approximately 57 acres of currently undesignated lands would also be allocated to MA 2. The remainder of Section 13 would be designated to MA 12 to maintain habitat integrity.

The Forest Plan provides the following definition for MA 12:

“These management areas provide important habitat for summer or winter wildlife use in a variety of terrain and vegetative cover types. These areas also offer dispersed recreation opportunities.”

The Forest Plan provides the following definition for MA 2:

“These areas consist of those portions of the Bridger Bowl and Big Sky ski areas under special use permit. They include ski runs, lift facilities, and lodges. These areas have potential for development or expansion of facilities to meet increasing demand for downhill skiing.”

The change in management designation would be as a result of incorporating this area into the SUP boundary for Bridger Bowl. It would allow for the expansion of downhill skiing opportunities on the GNF and would result in an enhanced recreation experience.

In conjunction with the SUP adjustment for the inclusion of the gun tower, MA designations along the proposed southeast SUP boundary would also be changed from MA 11 to MA 2 in small parcels to ensure that all lands within the proposed SUP area are designated MA 2. This would result in approximately four acres changing to MA 2. Additionally, approximately 17 acres would be removed from the SUP area and re-designated MA 11 as part of this proposal.

The Forest Plan provides the following definition for MA 11:

“These areas consist of forested big game habitat. They include productive forest lands that are available for timber harvest, provided that big game habitat objectives are met.”

No additional impacts would be authorized through this amendment beyond what has been analyzed and disclosed in the SDEIS. The proposed changes to Forest Plan standards at Bridger Bowl would take effect following issuance of a Record of Decision (ROD) for this EIS. Implementation of the approved project elements could potentially commence in the summer or fall of 2004 and could affect areas that might be at issue without the proposed amendment. The area affected through adoption of this amendment comprises approximately 274 acres of land to the north of the existing SUP area.

APPENDIX C-2 – VISUAL QUALITY OBJECTIVES

The Proposed Action would entail a change in management area designation from 12 to 2 for approximately 217 acres of land in the Bradley Meadows area. As a result, the VQO of *Retention* currently assigned to this area would be changed to *Partial Retention* to reflect management direction for MA 2.

The Visual Management System provides the following definition of Retention:

“Management activities may not be visually evident. Contrasts in form, line, color, and texture must be reduced during or immediately after the management activity.”

The proposed amendment would apply only to the proposed expansion to the north of the existing Bridger Bowl SUP area. Within the special use permit area for Bridger Bowl, the VQO for all lands, including Bradley Meadows, is Partial Retention.

The Visual Management System provides the following definition of Partial Retention:

“Partial Retention requires that any activity must be visually subordinate to the natural characteristics of the landscape. Landscapes with this objective may be modified, but the resulting changes in patterns of vegetation, line, form, color, and texture should not contrast strongly with the adjacent undisturbed landscape.”

No additional impacts would be authorized through this amendment beyond what has been analyzed and disclosed in the SDEIS.

The proposed changes to Forest Plan standards at Bridger Bowl would take effect following issuance of a ROD for this EIS. Implementation of the approved project elements could potentially commence in the summer or fall of 2004 and could affect areas that might be at issue without the proposed amendment. The area affected through adoption of this amendment comprises approximately 274 acres of land to the north of the existing SUP area.

APPENDIX C-3 – HABITAT EFFECTIVENESS INDEX FOR ELK

The Forest Plan outlines several forest-wide standards applicable to elk. Specifically, it requires the agency to follow the recommendations in the publication, “Coordinating Elk and Timber Management, Final Report of the Montana Cooperative Elk-Logging Study, 1970-1985” in evaluating the quality of elk habitat. The elk habitat effectiveness index (HEI) is based on open road densities and cover availability. The Forest Plan standard for HEI is applied at the compartment level, since timber compartments are ecological units defined by topographic and hydrologic features, and they generally encompass an area representative of elk summer range. The Forest Plan states that “*effective cover ratings of at least 70 percent will be maintained*” (page II-18).

Implementation of the Proposed Action would occur in timber compartments 504 and 515. Compartment 504 currently has an HEI of 0.54, while compartment 515 currently has an HEI of 0.50. The HEIs for timber compartments 504 and 515 are both below the minimum standard of 0.70 established in the Forest Plan. Road density would increase within the Study Area with implementation of the Proposed Action. This change would further reduce HEI in compartment 504, but it would not affect HEI in compartment 515.

The existing condition in timber compartments 504 and 515 does not meet Forest Plan standards. As a result, an amendment is necessary to allow implementation of the Proposed Action.

The Forest Plan would be amended to say “*given the need for road access to maintain ski area facilities, timber compartments 504 and 515, as affected by development within the Bridger Bowl Special Use Permit boundary, are exempt from the forest-wide HEI standard.*”

The proposed amendment would apply to timber compartments 504 and 515 as they are the only compartments affected by the Proposed Action and this FP amendment is project-specific. The proposed changes to Forest Plan standards at Bridger Bowl would take effect following issuance of a ROD for this EIS. Implementation of the approved project elements could potentially commence in the summer or fall of 2004 and would be inconsistent with the Forest Plan without this proposed amendment.

APPENDIX C-4 – OLD GROWTH STANDARDS

One forest-wide standard for vegetative diversity states, *“In order to achieve size and age diversity of vegetation, the Forest will strive to develop”* ten percent of the area as old growth *“in timber compartments containing suitable timber.”*

In timber compartment 504, the existing proportion of old growth is currently below the Forest Plan standard of 10 percent; current conditions only display 7.0 percent old growth within the compartment. Implementation of the Proposed Action would further reduce the percentage of old growth within the compartment from seven to 6.95 with construction of the project elements associated with the N-1 Lift and N trails.

The existing condition does not meet Forest Plan standards. As a result, an amendment is necessary to allow implementation of the Proposed Action.

The Forest Plan would be amended to say *“in compartment 504, harvest of old growth will be prohibited on NFS lands outside the Bridger Bowl Special Use Permit boundary.”*

No additional impacts would be authorized through this amendment beyond what has been analyzed and disclosed in the SDEIS.

The proposed amendment would apply only to timber compartment 504 as it would be the only compartment in which old growth is currently below the Forest standard of 10 percent, and will be further reduced with implementation of the Proposed Action. The proposed changes to the Forest Plan would take effect following issuance of a ROD for this EIS. Implementation of the approved project elements could potentially commence in the summer or fall of 2004 and would be inconsistent with the Forest Plan without this proposed amendment.