

2004-2005 NEW PROJECTS

Habitat Enhancements

1. INDIAN CREEK GRASSLAND RESTORATION Proposal: The Townsend Ranger District is proposing to mechanically remove young Douglas fir trees (< 6" dbh) that have grown into grassland parks in the Sheps, Indian, Ribideau, and Colberg drainages. On about 120 acres, young trees would be cut down, moved to nearby streamside areas, and stacked to provide a barrier to livestock and big game.

Purpose and Need: Currently forage availability has been diminished by the growth of trees in these historically grassland areas; in addition, animal use of the streamside areas has curbed the regeneration of willow, aspen, and alder. This project is needed to enhance the forage base for big game and livestock, restore the grasslands, and protect streambanks and promote the recovery of willow, aspen and alder communities. Work would be completed in 2004.

Issues and Opportunities: Since mechanical treatment (saws) would be used, there is little or no chance of increasing noxious weeds. This project may help keep livestock in the uplands by creating additional forage.

2. SOUTH FORK ASPEN FENCE Proposal: The Townsend Ranger District is proposing to fence about 20 acres of wet meadow and aspen in the South Crow Grazing Allotment (Muddy Lake Pasture) to protect the area following burning. The burning is part of the Crow Creek Decision (Unit #25). The fence would be constructed using metal posts and 3 strands of barbwire spaced in a way that wildlife could easily jump or go under, but livestock would be excluded. Work would be completed in 2005.

Purpose and Need: Livestock use of this wet meadow has curbed aspen and shrub regeneration. The project is needed to exclude livestock from these wet areas to promote aspen and shrub regeneration, and to maintain the integrity of the meadow community following prescribed fire.

Issues and Opportunities: Monitoring would be conducted to determine if big game browsing is a major deterrent to reestablishment of the aspen and alder. There are big game exclosures around aspen stands in Slim Sam Creek that could be used for comparison.

3. BIGHORN SHEEP HABITAT PRESCRIBED BURNS Proposal: In conjunction with FWP, the Townsend Ranger District and the BLM are proposing a prescribed burn on about 500 acres. The Forest Service project is in Power Gulch (lower Crow Creek) where several other similar burning projects have occurred over the past 8 years. The BLM project is south of the Iron Mask Mine along Shep's Ridge. Both projects would include slashing of Douglas fir, Rocky Mountain juniper, and limber pine to provide a fuel bed

for prescribed burning. There is a component of sagebrush interspersed with encroaching fir and juniper would also be burned on the lower slopes of Shep's Ridge. Slashing and "black-lining" would occur in 2004 and burning in 2005.

Purpose and Need: Bighorn sheep prefer to forage in open areas in close proximity to rocky escape terrain. Both of the project areas have rocky escape terrain, but are no longer open due to colonization of trees. These projects are intended to create open areas and increased forage for bighorn sheep. The goal of this project is to kill about 90 percent of the trees to create security and escape habitat for bighorn sheep

Issues and Opportunities: Dalmatian toadflax was identified in the BLM unit and was treated with herbicide during the fall of 2002. The toadflax was especially heavy near the spring (stock tank). Additional pre-work treatment will be conducted during the summer of 2004. Both areas will be monitored after burning and treatment of weeds would occur again if needed. The project requires that areas burned be rested before and after treatments. This is not a problem in Power Gulch, as the area is too steep for livestock. The BLM unit falls within two allotments, Indian Creek and Limestone Hills. Approximately 88 acres fall within the Indian Creek allotment and 300 acres within Limestone Hills.

4. WESTSLOPE CUTTHROAT TROUT HABITAT IMPROVEMENT Proposals: The Townsend Ranger District, in conjunction with FWP, is proposing to enhance habitat in Staubach and Eureka Creeks to help sustain westslope cutthroat trout (WCT) populations. The project includes placing up to 20 trees greater than 8 inches in diameter into a 1-mile reach of Staubach Creek, and up to 25 trees in a 1.5-mile reach of Eureka Creek. Trees would be cut into 10 to 15 foot sections and would be placed in the stream. The logs would be anchored in the stream with rebar or cable, and geo-textile fabric would be used to prevent scour underneath the structures. Logs would be collected and placed using hand tools. Live, standing dead, or recently fallen trees would be used for the project or small boulders; materials would be collected near the project site. Appropriate state and federal stream protection and water quality permits will be acquired prior to initiation of the project. Trees would be collected from outside the riparian area, and at least one tree length from the stream so that future recruitment of woody debris to the stream is not reduced. Work would be completed in 2004-2005.

Purpose and Need: Currently, these streams lack pools. The objective of the project is to increase instream habitat complexity by adding large woody debris and small boulders to Eureka and Staubach Creeks. Increased habitat complexity, particularly the formation of pools, should increase the abundance of WCT by increasing their survival during winter and periods of drought.

Issues and Opportunities: Short-term increases in turbidity may occur during project construction, but this will be minimal with the use of hand tools. To minimize turbidity, construction will occur during low flow periods (August-November).

Recreation Projects

1. **OUTFITTER and GUIDE PERMIT Proposal:** The Townsend and Helena Ranger Districts are proposing to review and reissue the 3 existing outfitter guide permits in the Elkhorn Mountains and to issue a 5-year permit for Jeff and Marie Hoeffner who offer day-use hiking and horse trips. The other outfitters include LaMonte Schnur and Larry Richtmyer (Battle Creek Outfitter), who offer summer horseback camping trips as well as hunting services. The permits would be issued in 2004.

Purpose and Need: The Hoeffners have had consistent use days for the past 3 years. A 5-year permit would eliminate the year-to-year workload for both the Forest Service and the Outfitter.

Issues and Opportunities: There may be potential conflicts with the general public in some areas affected by outfitter activities.

2. **CROW CREEK (#109) AND POE PARK (#110) TRAIL Proposals:** The Townsend and Helena Ranger Districts are proposing to initiate two trail projects scheduled to occur during the 2004 field season under the Trails Capital Investment Program (CIP). The first proposed project entails reconstruction of the Crow Creek Falls Trail #109 from the Jump Off trailhead to the Tizer Basin Loop Trail/Road #4032. The second would reconstruct portions of the Poe Park Trail #110 from Hall Creek trailhead to where it intersects with Little Tizer Creek Trail #130. The Crow Creek Trail project includes reconstructing 3,228 linear feet of trail, constructing 800 linear feet, putting in 345 square feet of retaining wall, reconstructing 3 switchbacks; installing 2 bridges, installing 60 square feet of puncheon, and obliterating 600 linear feet of old trail. The Poe Park Trail project includes 1,160 linear feet of construction, 3,038 linear feet of reconstruction, 11 waterbars, 130 feet of lead-out ditch, 382 feet of turnpike, one log foot bridge, 75 feet of puncheon, and obliterating 916 linear feet of old trail. Both projects would be completed by the fall 2005.

Purpose and Need: Currently, these trails have some steep, unsafe sections as well as bridges that do not meet trail standards. Both trails are receiving more use. These projects will improve the safety and enjoyment of these trails for users as well as aid in resource protection through reduced erosion and sedimentation into nearby creeks. Where possible, the new design incorporates full bench construction on steep side slopes with switchbacks adequate for pack and saddle use.

Issues and Opportunities: All soil and water best management practices will be followed as well as obtaining the appropriate permits for bridgework. There may safety and financial constraints to constructing portions of trail #109 for use by pack horses, resulting in managing trail #109 from the jump off trailhead to the bench where the trail is the old road to Crow Creek Falls exclusively for foot use. If this occurred, horse user access to Crow Creek would be from Eagle Guard Station on trails #112 and #134.

Elkhorn Travel Plan Modifications:

1. SOUTH FORK BEAVER CREEK Proposal: The Townsend Ranger District is proposing to open about 1 mile of a closed road (405 B-1) from the bottom of Weasel Creek to the edge of private land in the South Fork of Beaver Creek during the summer and fall months (5/16-12/1), starting in October 2004.

Purpose and Need: Currently the road is closed yearlong, but accesses private mining claims. Access to private land, specifically a cabin, has been via travel variance permits. Access requests are generally during the big game hunting season when other hunters hike the road. There have been problems in the past with permit compliance. Opening the road would give everyone an equal opportunity to access this area for part of the year.

Issues and Opportunities: There are safety issues that would need to be addressed because the road is steep, narrow, and goes through the 1988 Warm Springs Fire where there are abundant snags near the road. Before it reaches the mining claim with the cabin, it crosses other mining claims for which there is no right of way. There is a suitable turn-around point on a grassy ridge prior to the first private claims.

2. BADGER GULCH Proposal: The Townsend Ranger District is proposing to re-route road 405-L1 to avoid private mining claims. This road is in the Indian Creek watershed and connects the Badger Gulch Road (405-M) with the North Fork Indian Creek Road (#360). The ½ mile re-route would cross an intermittent drainage, and come down a ridge (about 20% slope) and connect with 405M about ¼ mile west of the current designated route. The vegetation is grassland/sagebrush with some scattered fir. Construction would occur in 2005 pending funding.

Purpose and Need: The current road is a designated motorized route from 5/16-12/1 as per the 1995 Elkhorn Travel Plan decision. In 2001, a landowner closed the route through his private land, eliminating this connection. Re-routing the road would give everyone an equal opportunity to use this route for part of the year.

Issues and Opportunities

: This project would require heavy equipment and ground disturbance. Cultural resources and sensitive plants would be surveyed prior to disturbance. A decision is needed about what to do with the portions of existing route on the National Forest, which are needed for private owners to access their land.

3. MCCARTY CREEK Proposal: The Jefferson Ranger District (Beaverhead Deerlodge National Forest) is proposing to allow seasonal (5/16-10/14) motorized ATV use on about 1 mile of trail connecting the County Road in section 36 just east of Boulder with the McCarty Creek motorized trail (#74). Work would include signing, marking, and possible hardening of a ford across McCarty Creek. Work would occur in 2005.

Purpose and Need: There currently is no motorized access between the motorized McCarty Creek Trail #74 and the McCarty Creek Road; both access routes “dead-end”.

Trail #74 was a historic motorized route to the town of Elkhorn. If motorized access were allowed to connect these 2 routes, it would provide a seasonal motorized loop trail opportunity with Trail #73.

Issues and Opportunities: Trail #74, has a few challenging sections that need to be reconstructed if motorized use increases as a result of this change.

4. MILL CREEK RETRIEVAL ROUTE Proposal: The Helena Ranger District is proposing a big game retrieval route from the Warm Springs Road #226 on a closed road (225-D1) down slope to the point where it crosses Mill Creek (approximately 3/4 mile); this would be managed similarly to other retrieval routes in the Elkhorn Mountains (during the big game season, vehicles would be permitted to use the road between 11 am and 3 pm to retrieve a legally harvested animal. This change may begin in 2004 if necessary mitigation measures are in place.

Purpose and Need: Local users suggested that there are currently no retrieval routes on this side of the Elkhorn Mountains. This route would enable hunters, who otherwise hunt from foot to drive 3/4 mile closer to a harvested animal.

Issues and Opportunities: Barriers would likely be needed to prevent use of existing spur roads off the Mill Creek retrieval route and to keep vehicles from crossing Mill Creek; there may also be issues regarding weed spread in this area. A decision is needed on whether legitimate users would need to obtain a key to the gate on the road, which is currently locked during the big game hunting season.

5. WARM SPRINGS CREEK ROAD PLOWING Proposal: The Helena Ranger District is proposing to authorize private or County snowplowing of the middle two miles (Forest Service jurisdiction) of the Warm Springs Creek Road (#226). This would connect plowed Warm Springs Creek Road with plowed McClellan Creek Road (#294) during the winter months.

Purpose and Need: The road provides access to several private in-holdings. Historically, these in-holdings were either without improvements, or were occupied seasonally. The road was allowed to drift shut during the winter months. Recent sale and/or expected year-round development of several of the properties will result in requests within the next two years to plow the connecting route between the Warm Springs Creek Road and the McClellan Creek Road.

Issues and Opportunities: Plowing of the road would eliminate snowmobiling on the road, and parallel snowmobile route opportunities are limited. Multiple private parties and Jefferson County all have partial interests in this proposal. If a private permit is issued, it should be issued to a single Road User's Association. Public safety and water quality issues would need to be addressed.

Road Maintenance

1. PRICKLY PEAR ROAD Proposal: The Helena Ranger District is proposing to use native materials (boulders, logs) to construct about 8 water bars, 3 water run-outs, and one drain basin to help drain water from the Prickly Pear Road (motorized trail) from the Forest Boundary to the junction with the Bullock Hill loop. The project would also include placing debris on about 6 “duplicate” user-created road cuts, hardening of one ford, and replacement of an old culvert. Work would commence in 2005 pending funding.

Purpose and Need: Currently, the road is not well drained. Because it closely follows the creek, water is transporting excessive sediment into Prickly Pear Creek, which has a native westslope cutthroat trout population. This project would help reduce sediment delivery into Prickly Pear Creek.

Issues and Opportunities: This is a motorized trail, open to full size vehicles as well as ATV’s. The addition of waterbars and draindips may decrease the speed of travel by all motorized users.

2. WARM SPRINGS CREEK ROAD Proposal: The Helena Ranger District is proposing to improve the Warm Springs Road (# 226) where it is within Forest jurisdiction. Work would include surfacing with crushed rock aggregate, constructing armored ditching to drain water, replace culverts, and widening the road in a few places to improve visibility and to provide pullouts. Work would begin in 2005, pending funding.

Purpose and Need: The road currently has a native surface of decomposed granite, which is highly susceptible to erosion. Consequently the road is often rutted with large potholes. To keep the road from causing resource damage and vehicle damage, it requires continual maintenance. These improvements are designed to remove water and prevent erosion to decrease long-term maintenance costs.

Issues and Opportunities: Surfacing could have the result of increased traffic as the road is currently difficult to drive by some types of vehicles.

TRAILHEAD WEED TREATMENTS Proposal: The Townsend and Helena Ranger Districts are proposing to treat noxious weeds with herbicide at 25 trailheads. All weeds would be sprayed in the parking area, as well as ½ mile of adjacent road and trail. Work would begin in the fall of 2004, pending funding.

Purpose and Need: Trailheads are areas where vehicles, people, and pack stock congregate and therefore are a major source and destination for noxious weeds. This project would focus weed spraying in these high risk weed prone areas.

Issues and Opportunities: Weeds would be pulled in stream-side areas. Trailwork would be done with horses or backpack sprayers. This work is being submitted for a FWP trail grant and is authorized under an existing Forest-wide Weed EIS.