



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Washakie Ranger District
and
Wind River Ranger District

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File Code: 1950

Date: December 21, 2001

**SCOPING STATEMENT
REQUEST FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS**

**USDA FOREST SERVICE
Shoshone National Forest
South Zone/Wind River Ranger District**

Project Name: Horse Creek Watershed Improvement Project

County: Fremont County, Wyoming

Legal Description: T43N, R106W, Sections 5 through 9, 16 through 21, and 27 through 30
T43N, R107W, Sections 1 through 30, and 35
T44N, R106W, Sections 29 and 31
T44N, R107W, Sections 22, 25 through 28, and 33 through 36

Proposed Decision Date: Spring 2002

Proposed Implementation Date: Spring 2002 Through Fall 2003

Dear Interested Party:

The Horse Creek watershed is located on the Wind River Ranger District of the Shoshone National Forest, Wyoming. The Forest recently completed a *Watershed Assessment* and a *Roads Analysis* for this watershed. The watershed assessment provides a summary characterization of the human, terrestrial, and aquatic features, conditions, processes, and interactions within the national forest portion of the watershed. The roads analysis resulted in an integrated ecological, social, and economic examination of the transportation system within the watershed. The watershed assessment and roads analysis are available for public review at the Wind River District (Dubois, WY), Washakie District (Lander, WY), and Forest Supervisor's (Cody, WY) offices.

In view of the findings and recommendations presented in the watershed assessment and roads analysis, the Forest proposes the Horse Creek Watershed Improvement Project. The overall purpose of the project is to implement actions that provide a cost-efficient transportation system that balances the need for access with the need for environmental restoration within the watershed.

Public Involvement

We are in the initial stages of our planning and public involvement process for this project. Our proposed action, which is described in detail below, is one alternative that we could implement. It may or may not be the final decision. However, it provides a starting point, which enables the public to submit comments and/or suggest alternative ways to achieve our goals.



The objective of this scoping letter is to **solicit written comments from all concerned parties**. Your comments and suggestions are important, needed, and encouraged. Your input will be used to identify concerns, refine the project, modify the initial proposal, and develop reasonable alternatives. Project alternatives will be determined and the environmental consequences will be analyzed during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process initiated by this scoping letter. Additional information, the purpose and need of the project, and the proposed action are described below.

Background

The transportation system on national forest lands within the Horse Creek watershed is accessed primarily from Dubois, Wyoming via Fremont County Road 285. Initial roading, mostly in the form of wagon roads, occurred during the tie hack era of the early to mid-1900s. Construction of designed roads occurred during the 1950s and 1960s in response to commercial timber harvest activity. Minimal new construction has occurred since. The Forest initiated formal travel management efforts in the mid-1970s. However, increased all-terrain vehicle (ATV) and off-highway vehicle (OHV) use has, and continues to, result in expansion of the transportation system.

The roads analysis team reviewed the existing classified and unclassified road system in order to identify risks and opportunities. The team identified which roads are essential for resource management and public use of the Forest, as well as opportunities to maintain or improve these roads. The team recommended that all other roads be decommissioned and restored.

Purpose and Need

The Forest's transportation system must be cost-efficient while balancing the need for access with the need for minimizing adverse ecological effects. Below is the rationale and factors that led to the initiation of this project.

On January 12, 2001 a final rule revising regulations concerning the management, use, and maintenance of the National Forest Transportation System was published in the Federal Register. This final rule is designed to help ensure that additions to the National Forest System network of roads are those deemed essential for resource management and use; that construction, reconstruction and maintenance of roads minimize adverse environmental impacts; and that unneeded roads are decommissioned and restoration of ecological processes are initiated. This rule directs the use of *FS-643, Roads Analysis: Informing Decisions about Managing the National Forest Transportation System* (USDA Forest Service, 1999).

The Forest conducted the watershed assessment of Horse Creek this year. Watershed assessment protocols require a roads analysis following FS-643 direction. The Horse Creek Watershed Improvement Project is designed to implement some of the recommendations of the watershed assessment and roads analysis.

Existing Conditions

Over the years, a decline in road maintenance funds has resulted in deteriorating conditions of many of the existing roads within the watershed. Consequently, concerns with soil erosion, sediment delivery to streams and wetlands, and wildlife disturbance have increased. Concerns for public safety also exist due to deteriorating road conditions.

The Forest conducted a comprehensive road inventory in the mid-1990s to assess road condition and its effects on soil, water, wildlife, fish, and capital investments made in the roads themselves. The inventory identified unacceptable effects on:

1. Grizzly bear and lynx security due to high road densities and increasing motorized use.
2. Long-term soil productivity and stream health from erosion and sedimentation due to lack of road maintenance, use during wet periods, inadequate or lack of road design, and road length extension by Forest users.

Additional findings presented in the watershed assessment include:

- Stream health inventories conducted in the 1990s validate soil and water concerns related to roads.
- Increased use of motorized forms of recreation. The increased use is resulting in road network expansion, user group conflicts, and safety issues.
- Relocation of two existing trailheads could improve user access, provide acceptable parking, and reduce impacts to resources.
- Noxious weed infestation levels are increasing. Roads provide a conduit for spread.

Project Goals

The primary purpose of the project is to provide a cost efficient transportation system that improves environmental condition within the watershed. Relative to roads that the watershed assessment team identified for decommissioning and restoration, the project goals are to:

- Restore natural drainage patterns to the extent practicable
- Reduce erosion and sediment delivery to streams and wetlands
- Reduce effects on grizzly bear and lynx security
- Reduce road associated risks and impacts of major storm events

Forest Plan Related Goals

The Shoshone National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) contains numerous goals related to the Horse Creek transportation system (USDA Forest Service, 1986):

- Maintain or improve soil productivity and water quality
- Rehabilitate lands in declining and unsatisfactory watershed condition
- Develop a transportation system that meets land and resource management needs at lowest cost and least disturbance to the environment
- Implement travel management practices, including both seasonal and permanent closures, to protect road and trail investment
- Manage motorized travel on roads, trails and snow to protect land and resource values at lowest cost and with a minimum of regulations
- Provide adequate trails and trailheads for both motorized and non-motorized use in both winter and summer seasons

Forestwide Management Requirements of the LRMP related specifically to unnecessary roads include (USDA Forest Service, 1994):

- Obliterate roads when they meet the following criteria:
 1. They are no longer needed for administrative purposes or resource management activities, and

2. They will not be needed for administrative purposes or resource management activities for the next 20 years, and
3. There is little or no public need for them.
 - Obliterate excess roads when an area accessed by multiple roads can be adequately managed by fewer or only one road.
 - Obliterate roads if the obliteration is needed to meet other resource management objectives.

Proposed Action

The proposed action is targeted towards meeting the project goals. Under the proposed action, the following recommendations of the watershed assessment team would be implemented:

- a) All existing roads identified as essential for public access and resource management would be maintained on the forest transportation system.
- b) Roads identified for decommissioning and restoration in the road analysis would be obliterated according to direction in the Forestwide Management Requirements of the LRMP (USDA Forest Service, 1994).
- c) The portion of Forest Service Road (FSR) 512 from its intersection with FSR 511 to its intersection with FSR 512.1B will be converted to a motorized trail. This portion of FSR 512 is approximately 2.3 miles long and is currently a four-wheel drive/high clearance vehicle road.
- d) The two trailheads for Forest Trails 810 and 811 would be relocated and combined into one trailhead. The new trailhead would be located at the north end of FSR 736 in T43N R107W Section 12 (behind the T-Cross ranch) and continue to provide access to the Parque Creek and Horse Creek areas.

The two attached maps illustrate the existing transportation network (Map 1) and proposed transportation system (Map 2) for the watershed.

A cultural resource survey has been completed for the project area. Historical resources would be protected.

Possible Alternatives

Your input will be used to develop alternatives, which we will analyze during the NEPA process. The range of alternatives will include a “No Action” alternative (i.e. no change to the current transportation system would occur).

Nature of Decision

The decision to be made is whether or not to authorize the transportation system plan as proposed, or to authorize an alternative to the proposal. Also, the decision may include what mitigation measures need to be applied to the proposal.

Based on public comment from this scoping notice and the environmental analysis, the Forest Service will determine if significant issues or concerns exist. If significant issues or concerns do exist, the analysis and eventual decision will address them.

Contacts

The public is provided this opportunity to identify and submit issues and concerns they feel the Forest should address. If you feel we have overlooked something or have additional information, comments need to be as specific as possible to assist us in the analysis. To be most helpful, comments should be submitted in writing no later than January 22, 2001.

Comments can be submitted to Mark King, South Zone NEPA Coordinator by:

1. Mail - Shoshone National Forest, Washakie Ranger District, 333 East Main Street, Lander Wyoming 82523-3499.
2. Phone – (307) 332-5460.
3. E-mail – jmking@fs.fed.us
4. Fax – (307) 578-1204, Attention – Mark King

For additional information specific to this project, please contact project leader Brad Higginson by phone at (307) 578-1289 or by e-mail at bhigginson@fs.fed.us.

Citations

- Shoshone National Forest (a), 2001. Watershed Assessment, Horse Creek (1008000102). Shoshone NF, Cody, Wyoming.
- Shoshone National Forest (b), 2001. Roads Analysis Report, Horse Creek Watershed Assessment, Hydrologic Unit Code 1008000102. Shoshone NF, Cody, Wyoming.
- USDA Forest Service, 1999. Roads Analysis: Informing Decisions about Managing the National Forest Transportation System. FS-643. Washington Office.
- USDA Forest Service, 1994. Land and Resource Management Plan, Shoshone National Forest, Amendment No. 94-001. ROD Appendix A. Cody, Wyoming.
- USDA Forest Service, 1986. Land and Resource Management Plan, Shoshone National Forest. Cody, Wyoming.

Again, your comments are important to us.

Sincerely,

/s/ Burns Davison
BURNS DAVISON
District Ranger

ATTACHMENTS: MAP 1
MAP 2