
RECREATION

Introduction

The Toolbox Fire Recovery project area is a popular recreation area for both local residents and a destination recreation area for forest visitors from elsewhere seeking a variety of outdoor experiences. Recreational attractions include: hunting, fishing, camping, scenic driving, backcountry trail travel, birding, wildlife viewing, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, mountain biking, ATV riding, and a variety of other outdoor-related activities. The recreation emphasis in this area is based on the general “Outback” theme common to the Fremont portion of the recently combined Fremont-Winema National Forest. This theme promotes outdoor activities offering more self-reliance and less development than is commonly found on National Forests located closer to population centers. The developed recreation facilities within or closely adjacent to the Toolbox project area consist of: three campgrounds, three trailheads, one snow-park, one developed dispersed site, one summer trail system, and one winter trail system. One other popular developed recreation facility, Fremont Point Lookout rental cabin, was lost to fire in July, 2002. Numerous undeveloped, but highly used, dispersed campsites are also scattered randomly throughout the project area.

Author’s note: For the purposes of this analysis when describing “historic” background information regarding recreation activities, only activities after 1952, or approximately fifty years prior to the Toolbox fire, are being considered. Detailed information pre-dating that time would not have any real relevance to the intent of this document and would be more appropriately displayed within the context of a Heritage Resource Specialist report. The 1952 date also coincides closely with what we commonly regard as the beginning of the developed recreation program in this vicinity of the Forest.

Recreation activities within the Toolbox project area of the Fremont-Winema National Forest have historically been focused on camping, big-game hunting, and angling. Camping sites have conventionally been located randomly all over the general forest area, as decided by the particular campers’ priorities, with a preference toward sites near water. The primary quarry sought by big-game hunters in this vicinity has traditionally been mule deer. However, since the early-1970s, a growing population of Rocky Mountain elk has attracted the hunting public to this area as well. Anglers of all ages visiting this area have traditionally enjoyed excellent fishing opportunities for both native redband trout and eastern brook trout in all of the areas’ perennial streams. Thompson Reservoir has also historically been a well-known magnet for anglers as a notable source for large rainbow trout. This reservoir has even been the subject of articles in popular national sportsmen’s magazines at times in the past.

During the 1950s through early 70s mule deer season would bring thousands of hunters to the Silver Lake area, including into the Toolbox project area. At that time, multiple-animal and/or mixed-sex bag limits, long open hunting seasons, and extremely high mule deer populations located within relatively open and easy country to hunt were an attraction to a veritable army of sportsmen from throughout the region, particularly from the more populous areas west of the Cascade Mountains. Opening weekend of deer season in those days was typically preceded by an almost continuous day and night convoy of vehicles stretching from the Willamette Valley to the Silver Lake area. This somewhat makeshift assemblage of vehicles usually consisted of an incongruous mixed bag of family sedans, station wagons, and two-wheel-drive pickups of the era, packed with tents, sleeping bags, firearms, camping gear, and eagerly expectant hunters. A significant portion of these people would have what is now the Toolbox project area as their ultimate hunting destination. User-built hunting camps were established throughout the area to accommodate these temporary population explosions. Many of these forest visitors returned to the same camping areas and camps for years, eventually creating the nucleus of what would become the developed recreation sites, as well as many of the dispersed sites, we have today.

In contrast, mule deer season today is almost a non-event in comparison to the influx of short-term visitors this annual event once brought to this portion of the National Forest. Limited available tags, short intermittent open seasons spaced over a longer timeframe, decreased overall deer populations, habitat changes, and other factors have contributed to greatly moderate the surge in numbers of forest visitors found concurrently within this area at one time during the fall big-game hunting seasons. From a recreation program management standpoint this current state of affairs is a definite improvement over the rather chaotic times of the past. Spreading the recreation use of this area out over a longer period of time has enabled the resources available to serve as many or more people while maintaining the quality of the experience being offered.

Trout fishing season is another event that has historically brought a seasonal influx of recreating visitors into this area, however, not in the high numbers or intensity of use as big-game season. Anglers have long enjoyed the excellent trout fishing found along slightly more than 24 miles of perennial streams within the project area. The trout-bearing streams within the project area include Guyer Creek as well as the North Fork, West Fork and main stem of Silver Creek. Silver Creek Marsh Campground has been and continues to be the centrally located camping area of choice used by many anglers of these small, but productive streams. Thompson Reservoir is a 1523 acre irrigation impoundment closely adjacent to the project area. This man-made lake produces large rainbow trout and has been a destination area for anglers from throughout the Pacific Northwest region and beyond for many years. The Thompson Reservoir vicinity has been served for many years by two Forest Service campgrounds located on opposite ends of the lake. These two camping areas, East Bay CG and Thompson Reservoir CG have expanded and changed over the years to meet the needs of the growing numbers of visitors.

Today, even though there are more people recreating throughout this geographic area on an annual basis than ever before, the general forest area and the recreational facilities rarely have the “crowded” atmosphere common at times in the past. This apparent contradiction is due to the fact that the seasons of use have expanded to year-round duration and the recreation experiences being sought have diversified beyond the more simplistic hunting/fishing/camping emphasis of the past. Technological advances in camping and various types of motorized and non-motorized transportation equipment as well as increasing over-all populations within the region possessing both the time and the economic means to recreate in the National Forests utilizing these technologies have been major contributing factors toward this trend. Among the most obvious influential factors leading to the current use patterns by this growing number of visitors has been the development, proliferation, and significantly increased public use of high-clearance four-wheel-drive vehicles, the similarly increased popularity of the large live-in vehicles commonly referred to as “motor-homes” or “recreational vehicles”, and the significant increase in use of all terrain vehicles, and snowmobiles. As a general rule, we now have many recreation visitors staying on the forest in their motor-homes or fifth-wheel trailers and radiating throughout the general forest area from that base utilizing a variety of motorized vehicles of all sizes, seasonal, and cross-country capabilities. As the equipment available for the recreating public has improved technologically and as the general economy, until very recently, has provided the assets for the growing population of retirees in this country to acquire those amenities; there has been a noticeable increase in recreation use in this region by better equipped and more self-contained and mobility-oriented visitors than in the past. We are seeing more sophisticated equipment every year. The heavily-laden family sedans, station wagons, or old beater two-wheel-drive pickups of yesteryear has been almost completely replaced in today’s recreation setting by four-wheel-drive trucks, sport utility vehicles, or large self-contained recreational vehicles, usually towing even more equipment. A recreating group of today may be camped in, let us say, East Bay Campground and have some of their members fishing that lake from a boat while, at the same time, others of their party may be out with ATVs, 4WDs, motorcycles, or even snowmobiles pursuing a variety of interests in areas far removed from their base camp, and yet still others of their group may be hiking and fishing the canyons of the areas’ small streams.

This evolution of camping equipment and of motorized transportation has, of course, had effects upon developed recreation use and management. However, visitors who are seeking the more traditional rustic tent camping and foot or horse travel recreational experience will also find ample recreation opportunities that meet their expectations on this National Forest and, specifically, within the Toolbox project area. Others recreational visitors, also seeking a rustic experience, but desiring some creature-comforts and amenities, will also find their needs met. As a rule, developed camping areas on this Forest have expanded, over time, in both overall area and available campsites. During this expansion and modernization the Forest has made a conscious effort to provide facilities appropriate for a range of camping and recreational experiences within the developed sites. Since the early 1990s improvements to the recreational infrastructure have also been made to meet the accessibility standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). These improvements, such as easily accessible low-odor technology vault toilets, expanded parking areas, and ease of site access, have contributed to the increased use of those developed sites, not only by visitors needing such accommodations, but by the general recreating populace as well. In some developed sites a portion of the campsites have been enlarged to accommodate the larger vehicles and trailers in use today.

Another noteworthy recent trend is the fact that forest dispersed sites (isolated sites, lacking improvements beyond a relatively clear flat spot to park) have become increasingly more attractive and utilized by today’s visitors equipped with self-contained trailers and recreational vehicles. These sites occur in abundance throughout the project area and are a contributing factor, albeit a difficult one to track, when considering the overall recreation use of the Toolbox area.

The two existing trail systems within the project area, Pole Butte winter trail and Fremont National Recreation Trail #160 (NRT), and their associated trailheads, having been developed within the past ten years, are relatively recent additions to the recreation infrastructure on the Silver Lake Ranger District.

The Pole Butte winter trail was intended to be, and has served as, the primary winter access route to Fremont Point Lookout recreational rental cabin. Prior to the cabin being destroyed by wildfire in July of 2002 it was very popular with the public and was occupied almost daily on a year-round basis. At the time of the fire, work was underway to get easements across private lands to improve this winter trail by moving portions of it off of the road system; the objective being to provide a more direct route to the cabin with better trail-experience qualities than the road. The loss of the Fremont Point rental cabin destination point has caused that easement work to be put on indefinite hold until the future of the cabin is decided upon.

The NRT is a long-distance summer trail with a hiker, equestrian, and mountain bike management emphasis. The construction of this trail has provided access into some regions of the Toolbox Fire Recovery Project area which were not frequently visited by recreating forest visitors in the past. Likewise, the Pole Butte winter trail system has expanded both the season and extent of visitor use in some portions of the project area.

All of the developed recreation facilities within the Toolbox project area have evolved as described over the past forty to fifty years from their very rudimentary origins to their current state as well-maintained, modern facilities that fit well into their respective Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) settings of “Roaded Natural” and “Roaded Modified.” The recreation development within the project area has been primarily user-need and resource protection driven as the visitor base of the Forest has increased over time. The Forest has responded over the years to increased visitor numbers by providing up-grades to existing facilities and by building new facilities as long-term planning and budgets have dictated. This approach has provided the Silver Lake Ranger District with adequate recreation infrastructure to currently serve the public in an efficient and cost-effective manner. The intentional strategy of this Forest to refrain from joining the recreation infrastructure construction boom common during the 1970s and early 80s has actually served the Forest quite well in that it is now able to offer a more rustic, primitive and self-reliant outdoor experience than many areas that have been more developed while not being encumbered by the costs associated with maintaining a huge recreation infrastructure. This rustic “Outback” recreation niche has become increasingly more important and desirable to a portion of the recreating public as other areas have become more urbanized. In recent years a substantial influx of forest visitors seeking this type of recreational opportunity has been noticeable. Currently the Forest has been able to accommodate these increased numbers within the large landscape involved and the dispersed nature of the camping opportunities with little or no noticeable negative impact on the more rustic recreational experience these users are seeking.

Development of future recreation infrastructure within the project area for the foreseeable future will continue to focus primarily on maintenance and up-grades of existing facilities and trails. Increases in frequency and intensity of log-out maintenance operations are anticipated on the burned-over portions of the NRT for the next ten to twelve years to keep it clear of fire-killed wind-thrown trees. Three minor construction projects, a small trailhead for the NRT in the vicinity of Harris Spring on Winter Rim, some minor post-fire relocations of the NRT itself, and the eventual reconstruction of the Fremont Point Lookout Rental Cabin, are planned for undetermined dates in the future.

Regulatory Framework

National Environmental Policy Act

NEPA requires integrated use of the natural and social sciences in all planning and decision-making that affect the human environment. The human environment includes the natural and physical environment and the relationship of people to the environment (40 CFR 1508.14)

Forest Plan Direction

Developed Recreation: Developed sites will be managed for the enjoyment of the recreating public while protecting the associated resources.

Trails: Provide for use of the existing trail system that serves the identifiable needs of the recreating public and satisfies demand levels in a condition that protects the resource and meets minimum requirements for health and safety. Provide sufficient maintenance to protect soil and water resources at their minimum level

Refer to the map in the Project File for Management Area (MA) allocations in burned over areas for the project area. Management goals and standards and the recreational management goals and standards for the MAs which are applicable to this project are described below:

MA-6 Emphasis - Scenic Viewsheds - Recreation Standards

1. Management practices adjacent to recreation areas will provide a physical condition that is at least equal to the Roded Natural setting of the recreation Opportunity Spectrum.

Developed recreation features located in MA-6 included in this analysis consist of: portions of Fremont National Recreation Trail #160, Fremont Point day-use and rental cabin area, Farmwell Trailhead, and Silver Creek Marsh Trailhead, and portions of the Pole Butte snowmobile and Nordic trails.

MA-15 Emphasis - Fish & Wildlife Habitat & Water Quality - Recreation Standards

1. Water bodies and courses, their riparian vegetation, and the immediately adjacent upland areas will be managed to maintain or improve water quality, fish habitat, recreation opportunities, and riparian habitat for dependent species.

The developed recreation features located in MA-15 included in this analysis consist of: portions of Fremont National Recreation Trail #160 and Bunyard Crossing.

MA-13 Emphasis – Developed Recreation - Recreation Standards

1. Provide convenient recreational opportunities at readily accessible and appropriately designed developed sites.

Developed recreation facilities located in MA-13 included in this analysis are: Silver Creek Marsh Campground, Thompson Reservoir Campground, and East Bay Campground.

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) is a land classification system of seven categories, each being defined by its setting and by the probable recreation experiences and activities it affords. The seven management classes are: Urban, Rural, Roded-natural, Roded-modified, Semi-primitive motorized, Semi-primitive non-motorized, and Primitive. The Fremont Forest Plan allocated land into each category except urban and rural.

All of the trails, developed recreation sites, and dispersed recreation sites within the Toolbox Fire Recovery Project analysis area are located within “Roded-natural” and “Roded-modified” ROS setting classifications. No other ROS setting are identified within the analysis area. The division of recreation use occurring between these two settings within the analysis area is approximately 75% in “Roded-natural” settings and 25% occurring in “Roded-modified” settings. This use pattern closely reflects those across the entire Forest for which statistics indicate that 72% of recreation use is occurring in Roded-natural settings which make up 36% of the total forest acres while 22% of recreation use is occurring in Roded-modified settings which account for 53.5% of the total forest acres.

Analysis Methods

The following issue indicators were used to evaluate the effects of the activities proposed in the Toolbox area:

- Change in Motorized Roded Access Opportunities
- Recreation Uses

The timeframe considered in this analysis is from the fall of 2003 for several years to follow.

Analysis Area

The area of analysis consists of all USDA-FS managed lands within the boundary of the Toolbox Fire Complex. Campgrounds and Trailheads in close proximity to the burned area were also considered in this analysis.

Existing Condition

The timing of the construction of the developed recreation infrastructure discussed below is summarized in, Appendix A – Past, Present and Reasonably Foreseeable Future Activities Within the Cumulative Effects Analysis Area, Table A-5.

Developed Recreation

- Silver Creek Marsh/Trailhead has 17 camping sites, a 5 unit day-use area, water, sanitation facilities, and horse facilities. Season of use is from April 15 to November 15.

Direct fire impacts: Loss of wooden perimeter fence, loss of a trail gate, minor vegetation loss, and loss of some signage.

- Thompson Reservoir Campground has 20 campsites, a large group unit, water, sanitation facilities and a boat ramp. Season of use is from April 15 to November 15.

Direct fire impacts: None

- East Bay Campground (also located on Thompson Reservoir) has 17 camping sites, a 4 unit day-use area, water, garbage service, sanitation facilities, and a boat ramp. Season of use is from May 1 to November 11.

Direct fire impacts: None

- Bunyard Crossing is a developed dispersed site with 2 campsites and 2 vault toilets. Season of use is May 15 to November 15.

Direct fire impacts: Loss of one vault toilet and loss of one picnic table.

- Farmwell Trailhead has 5 camping sites, water, toilets and horse facilities. The season of use is May 15 to November 15.

Direct fire impacts: None

- Pole Butte Sno-Park has overnight and day-use parking. The season of use is November 15 to May 1.

Direct fire impacts: None

- Fremont Point Lookout Rental Cabin and Day-use area has one rental cabin with associated vault toilet and a nearby day-use area containing one vault toilet, a parking area, a picnic table, and fire grill.

Direct fire impacts: The rental cabin, its contents and associated vault toilet were completely destroyed; the day-use area toilet received minor damage and some signage was destroyed within the area itself.

Trails

There are two trail systems located within the Toolbox Fire recovery Project area. These consist of portions of the summer-use Fremont National Recreation Trail #160 (NRT), also known as the Southern Oregon Intertie Trail, and portions of the winter-use Pole Butte Snowmobile/Nordic Ski Trail.

The Fremont NRT traverses most of the eastern Fremont National Forest in a generally north/south direction. The trail currently has a total length of 132 miles with an additional 7 miles planned for completion in the future. Of those total miles approximately 28 miles of trail are located within the burned area of the Toolbox Complex. The NRT receives moderate use from early summer to late fall primarily by hikers, equestrians, and mountain bike riders. A Special Use Permit for an outfitter/guide operation offering mountain bike tours along portions of the NRT is pending and is expected to be in place by the summer of 2003.

Direct fire impacts: Impacts to the trail itself vary from slight to almost total obliteration dependent upon the behavior and intensity of the fire as it burned through the country. Incremental mortality tables have been established which closely parallel the associated negative impacts to the trail within the areas described. Within these mortality tables there are four categories: Category 1 equals 0-25% mortality, Category 2 equals 26-50% mortality, Category 3 equals 51-85% mortality, and Category 4 equals 86-100% mortality. The Fremont NRT has 6.4 miles in Category 1 areas, 5.2 miles in Category 2, 3.4 miles in Category 3, and 12.5 miles in Category 4. Within the Category 1 portions of the trail the only visible damage is some loss of duff and low groundcover and perhaps a few dead trees adjacent to, or visible from, the trail. Within the

Category 2 and 3 portions much of the ground cover and low brush components are gone and the adjacent stands of trees exhibit significant mortality. Within the Category 4 portions of the trail most, if not all, of the organic material on the ground has been consumed, surface rocks are fractured from the heat, and stands of trees have been reduced to blackened limbless trunks sticking up out of bare mineral soil. In many areas of higher mortality all trail distance/directional signage and reassurance markers are gone, the trail tread is but a trace, dozens of wooden drainage structures were consumed, and four grazing allotment fence gates were destroyed. Three critical trail bridges, of 14, 34, and 42 feet in length, were also destroyed during the fires. The visual resources along the trail were affected in both positive and negative ways. On the positive side, numerous distant scenic vista opportunities, previously screened by foreground vegetation were opened up by the fire. This is particularly the case along Winter Rim other high ridges traversed by the trail. On the negative side, the loss of a high percentage of the vegetative component in the immediate foreground and intermediate background combined with the stark nature of innumerable burned-over trees has created an unappealing visual aspect compared to what was previously available along some portions of the trail. Many of the negative impacts will be relatively short-lived as the land recovers over time and replacement vegetation fills in the current voids. The vegetation that was blocking the views off of areas such as Winter Rim, however, consisted, in many cases, of mature ponderosa pine, white fir, and lodgepole pine trees from 80 to 150+ feet tall. These types of fire-generated visual openings will require multiple decades to return to pre-fire condition.

The Pole Butte Snowmobile/Nordic Ski Trail receives moderate use in the winter by snowmobile enthusiasts and cross country skiers. This trail is the primary access route to the Fremont Point Cabin site, once a very popular year-round recreation rental cabin perched on the edge of Winter Rim. This cabin was destroyed by wildfire in July of 2002. This fact has led to a reduction of use of the Pole Butte winter trail system at this time, but it is still receiving use by winter visitors wishing to access the forest for other reasons. Approximately 3.5 miles of this winter trail are actually within the burned area. The remaining 9.5 miles of this trail are in close proximity to the burn area as well.

Direct fire impacts: A high proportion of this winter trail follows the route of a system road used for passenger vehicles during the snow-free months. The only damage to the trail itself consists of the loss of some reassurance signage and creation of an abnormally high hazard tree concern. The visual aspects from the trail are impacted much the same as those of the NRT as described above.

Dispersed Recreation

Winter Activities

Overall, winter use in this area is light to moderate. There are no groomed winter trails and winter recreation visitors have to pretty much take their recreation opportunities as they find them. The primary winter activity throughout this area is snowmobiling. This activity primarily utilizes the Forest system roads with some cross country activity taking place open areas. Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are also popular winter activities in this area, but they are, at best, a distant second in terms of numbers of participants compared to snowmobiling.

Spring/Summer Activities

Spring and summer dispersed recreational activities within the project area are primarily focused on camping, fishing, and recreational driving with a sight-seeing objective. Fishing activities are predictably focused in areas having perennial water such as Silver Creek and Thompson Reservoir. The camping and recreational driving aspect of dispersed recreation use in this area, however, are much less focused since they can and do occur basically through out the entire area wherever terrain and access allow. There are several popular dispersed camping areas that were burned over by the fires. Most of these sites are along the main roads and adjacent to secondary side roads or spurs.

Fall Activities

The Toolbox area lies within the Silver Big-Game Hunting Unit #76. This area receives moderate use during the fall mule deer and elk seasons. Other fall activities that draw visitors to the area are firewood collection, cone and greens gathering, mushroom picking, and recreational driving, ATV riding, and sightseeing.

Environmental Consequences

Direct and Indirect Effects

Alternative A

Selection of the No Action alternative would result in no changes in regards to the issue indicators listed below for implementing the activities proposed. However, in the absence of fuel management, the intensity and severity of another fire event would not be reduced. If another fire event were to occur, depending on the magnitude, the impacts to recreation could be similar to those of 2002.

Key Issue: Change in Motorized Access Opportunities

There would be no change to motorized access. A total of 271 miles of road will remain open.

Recreation Uses

Dispersed recreation use such as fishing, hiking, camping, and picnicking may be displaced from burned areas to areas that did not burn. There may be an increase in cross-country travel due to less vegetation and debris on the ground. Access to some areas would become blocked by wind-thrown fire-killed trees. Increased trail maintenance frequency and intensity would be required to keep the Fremont NRT open.

Alternative C

Key Issue: Change in Motorized Access Opportunities

This alternative would decommission 69 miles of road, close 72.9 miles, and leave 129.1 miles open. It would also temporarily re-open 21.4 miles of unclassified existing road and construct 16 miles of temporary new road. *The long-term impact of Alternative C on this key issue would be the elimination of 141.9 miles of existing road currently open for recreational use.*

Recreation Uses

The necessary project-related temporary closures of trails, roads and active salvage areas would impact activities such as hiking, skiing, snowmobiling, mushroom picking, firewood gathering, camping, fishing and seasonal hunting. Forest visitors who want to recreate at a specific location may find they cannot access the location, and their recreation experience could be diminished. Other visitors, who don't have a site-specific location they want to use, would likely be displaced to unaffected areas of the Forest, resulting in little or no negative effect on their experience. Harvest activities would generate an increase in short-term localized noise throughout and adjacent to the active salvage units. Helicopter use would generate noise that can be heard further away from the local sale area. Temporary roads re-opened and/or constructed for this project would receive occasional use by recreating Forest visitors as they discover them. This use is expected to be light and short-lived. Trails and developed camping areas adjacent to or within a salvage unit could be impacted both physically and visually. Logging would remove vegetation, leave stumps and slash piles, and could impact the Fremont NRT with skidding activities. However, mitigating measures designed to avoid or minimize these impacts include:

- Material to be salvaged within 150 feet of the NRT or a developed recreation site will be directionally felled, skidded, or yarded away from the constructed feature wherever practical.
- Crossings of the NRT with skidding equipment will be minimized, with the optimum number of crossings being none.
- If crossings of the NRT are unavoidable within practical limits, the impacted portions of trail tread will be rehabilitated.
- Use existing landings or new landings 200 feet or further away from the NRT or developed recreation sites, preferably screened by residual forest or topography from the trail, unless no practical options exist.
- Areas of light project-generated slash in close proximity to trails will be lopped and scattered a minimum of 15 feet off of trail tread.
- Heavier concentrations of project-generated slash requiring piling in the vicinity of trails or developed recreation sites will be piled a minimum of 50 to 75 feet away from the trail or constructed feature of a recreation site utilizing natural visual screening wherever practical.

Helicopter salvage operations could generate safety concerns for recreational users in developed recreation facilities or along the NRT. The mitigating measures designed to avoid or minimize this potential concern is:

- All developed recreation sites and any portions of the NRT adjacent to helicopter units or located under flyover routes to be used for aerial log retrieval operations will be temporarily closed until such operations are completed.

Reforestation and pre-commercial thinning activities could impact the NRT with unwanted slash, vegetation, and ground disturbance. Mitigations to avoid these impacts include:

- Reforestation site preparation activities will avoid impacting the NRT with slash accumulations or ground disturbance.

- Planting will not occur within the constructed eighteen to thirty-six inch width of the NRT tread and within 6 feet of either side of the centerline of the NRT.
- Pre-commercial thinning of areas immediately adjacent to the trails or developed recreation sites will avoid impacting the constructed features with slash by directional felling and dispersal of material away from the constructed feature.

Alternative D

Key Issue: Change in Motorized Access Opportunities

This alternative will decommission 71.6 miles of road, close 75.5 miles, and leave 123.9 miles open. It will also temporarily re-open 5.7 miles of existing unclassified road. *The long-term impact of Alternative D on this key issue would be the elimination of 147.1 miles of existing road currently open for recreational use.*

Recreation Uses

The number of miles of permanent road left open to the recreating public is lowest and the number of miles of existing road proposed for closure is highest in this alternative. This alternative would decrease the possible effects related to recreational use of temporary roads in the project area in comparison to all other alternatives with the exception of alternative A, the “no action” alternative. The “limited-intervention” emphasis of this alternative would leave a markedly higher proportion of the fire-killed trees standing along the length of the Fremont National Recreation Trail #160. A proportion of those trees would eventually come down on or across the trail and create barriers for users which may diminish their recreational experience. Trail management activities such as maintenance would also be impacted by the increased frequency and intensity of log-out operations to keep the trail open. Other effects of this alternative would be common to Alternative C.

Alternative E

Key Issue: Change in Motorized Access Opportunities

This alternative would decommission 14.6 miles of road, close 67.4 miles, and leave 188.9 miles open. It would also temporarily re-open 15.8 miles of existing unclassified road and construct 13.3 miles of new temporary road. *The long-term impact of Alternative E on this key issue would be the elimination of 82 miles of existing road currently open for recreational use.*

Recreation Uses

Alternative E and Alternative G would both leave the highest number of miles of permanent road (188.9 mi.) open of any action alternative. The recreational use of these roads would generate greater impacts to the area than the other alternatives with the exception of Alternative A, the “no action” alternative. Alternative E would have the least impact and need for mitigation related to helicopter logging systems of any alternative that includes helicopter use. It is the only alternative with helicopter units that has none within the immediate vicinity of the Fremont NRT, eliminating temporary trail closure and closure enforcement impacts. Other effects of this alternative on recreation would be common to Alternatives C.

Alternative G

Key Issue: Change in Motorized Access Opportunities

This alternative would decommission 71.6 miles of road, close 10.4 miles and leave 188.9 miles open. It would also temporarily re-open 21.4 miles of existing unclassified road and construct 16 miles of temporary new road. *The long-term impact of Alternative G on this key issue would be the elimination of 82 miles of existing road currently open for recreational use.*

Recreation Uses

Alternative G would have effects to recreation resources relative to miles of permanent road left open identical to Alternative E, as discussed above. The “active management” emphasis of this alternative, which includes high salvage volume and more aggressive fuels reduction, would significantly reduce the fire-killed material along the Fremont NRT corridor that is anticipated to generate increased impacts to trail access and maintenance. This same “active management” emphasis could increase the impacts on recreating forest visitors from smoke, other fuels treatment activities, and salvage activities in the vicinity of developed recreation sites and along the Fremont NRT corridor more in this alternative than any other. Other effects of this alternative would be common to Alternative C.

Alternative H

Key Issue: Change in Motorized Access Opportunities

This alternative would decommission 71.6 miles of road, close 72.9 miles, and leave 126.5 miles open. It would also temporarily re-open 19.7 miles of existing classified road and construct 14.9 miles of temporary new road. *The long-term impact of Alternative H on this key issue would be the elimination of 144.5 miles of existing road currently open for recreational use.*

Recreation Uses

This alternative does not propose any helicopter salvage thereby eliminating impacts and mitigation measures relative to helicopter logging systems on recreation resources such as trail/site closure and closure enforcement. Other impacts associated with this alternative are common to Alternative C.

Cumulative Effects

Alternatives A, C, D, E, G, and H

Change in Motorized Access Opportunities

All of the alternatives would have effects upon motorized access opportunities. Each of the action alternatives would close varying amounts of miles of existing road as part of the fire recovery project. Alternative A, the “no action” alternative would also effectively close many secondary roads much of the time. Such closures would be due to the tremendous numbers of fire-killed trees adjacent to all roads that would continuously deteriorate and fall. The resulting over-abundance of downed debris would, in all probability, exceed the Forests’ ability to keep anything other than the main roads open.

Cross-country motorized access opportunities have been increased in some areas due to vegetation and debris barrier removal by the fire. This condition could be further exacerbated by various proposed project activities. The potential for environmental resource damage from irresponsible motorized travel through these areas does exist. Monitoring since the fires indicates that, at this time, no notable increase in off-road travel or associated resource damage has been observed. Current Forest policy does not prohibit motorized cross-country travel within any of the Management Areas found within the Toolbox Fire Recovery Project Area. However, regulations up to and including area closure orders, are in place to deal with resource damage from motorized use if it should become a problem.

Recreation Uses

Developed recreation sites would be affected by higher recreation visitor numbers than in the past. Visitors displaced from the many dispersed camping sites by the effects of the fires and the salvage harvest on both public and private land would be attracted to the unburned developed facilities. (See Appendix A – *Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Future Activities within the Cumulative Effects Analysis Area*, Table A-13 and A - 16)

Mushroom and forest product gathering may increase in burned areas. This would raise the demands upon the dispersed camping areas, campgrounds, and trailheads in, and adjacent to, the analysis area. This effect is expected to be of relatively short duration, possibly lasting only one or two harvest seasons. There are separate Forest policies and regulations in place to manage mushroom harvest.

The Fremont National Recreation Trail (NRT) crosses approximately one and a half miles of private land in the vicinity of Lewis Spring. These lands are crossed by the trail on an easement which extends out to five feet of either side of the centerline of the trail creating a trail corridor ten feet wide. The lands crossed by the easement are owned by United States Timberlands Company. This company already has harvested, or will soon be harvesting, all of the lands adjacent to the trail. (See Appendix A – *Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Future Activities within the Cumulative Effects Analysis Area*, Table A-13) The only protection to the trail through the area covered by the easement is the agreement to, “... restore the trail to the same condition that immediately preceded closure”; “closure”, in this case, being for harvest activities. Taking into consideration the more aggressive techniques and reforestation site preparation methods often employed by private industry and considering the probable absence of mitigation measures to protect the recreation values along the trail, it is anticipated that the trail experience will be considerably altered for users along this trail segment. Timber harvest and other land management practices associated with maximized wood fiber production will be obvious and dominate the fore and middle-ground scenery for many years into the future along this relatively short segment of the NRT corridor.

Other activities that would have effects on the portion of the Fremont NRT within the Toolbox Fire Recovery Project area include:

- The pre-commercial and commercial thinning activities scheduled for 2004 and 2007 within 800 acres of the Upper Silver Creek watershed associated with the Triad Thinning Project will have visual impacts when viewed from the trail. These impacts will be relatively short lived. (See Appendix A – *Past Present and Reasonably Foreseeable Future Activities within the Cumulative Effects Analysis Area* Table A – 16)
- Seven helicopter harvest units planned for the Winter Fire Rehabilitation Project on the Paisley Ranger District are located approximately four miles south of the southern portions of the NRT within the analysis area. Helicopter log retrieval operations associated with these units will have audible effects on the NRT and Fremont Point day-use area. Impacts will be minimal and short-term.
- The planned Construction of Harris Spring Trailhead will have effects on the NRT and the access roads in the northern portions of Winter Rim. (See Appendix – *Past, Present, and Reasonably Foreseeable Future Activities within the Cumulative Effect Analysis Area*, Table A – 5)
- The planned reconstruction of Fremont Point Lookout Rental Cabin will have the short-term effect of additional noise and traffic to this relatively isolated portion of the NRT during actual reconstruction and the long-term effect of re-introducing increased human presence on a regular basis in the form of live-in visitors to this relatively isolated portion of the NRT. (See Appendix A – *Past Present and Reasonably Foreseeable Future Activities within the Cumulative Effects Analysis Area*, Table A – 5)

Implementation or non-implementation of the planned Fremont Point Cabin reconstruction project would also have effects on the Pole Butte Winter Trail. If the cabin is reconstructed, the Forest would likely proceed on the currently curtailed easement work which is necessary to implement the planned relocation and improvement of the route from Pole Butte Sno-Park to Fremont Point. If the cabin is not reconstructed, it is unlikely that the Forest would expend the funds necessary to complete this easement work and the trail, without its popular destination attraction, would become a lower priority for future improvements.

Monitoring

Monitoring of the developed recreation sites and the portion of the Fremont National Recreation Trail within the Toolbox Fire Recovery Project Area to track the short and long-term effects of the project activities and associated mitigation measures on these recreation resources will be accomplished by the following methods:

- Periodic condition review of developed facilities and the NRT corridor by Forest Recreation/Trail Coordination Staff.

- Regular inspection and upward reporting of site/trail and surrounding area conditions by District maintenance crews.
- Forest and Ranger District follow-up of recreation visitor comments or concerns related to project-related conditions.

This Toolbox Fire Recovery Project specialist report was prepared during March, April and May of 2003. It will be used, along with specialist reports from multiple resource areas, to prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Toolbox Fire Recovery project. This specialist report will become a part of the planning record for the project, filed under:

“Toolbx/ Planning Record/ E_Specialists_reports_data_inventory_and_collection”

This report will be filed both in the ‘hard-copy’ planning record binders, on file at the Silver Lake Ranger District, and on the Fremont National Forest “K-Drive”. In the interest of planning process efficiency, particularly in light of time and budget constraints, editing that occurs to the content of this report during the preparation of the DEIS will be reflected in the DEIS and will not necessarily be entered back into the content of this report. To insure the accuracy of such edits, I will review the content of both the DEIS and the (Final) FEIS and certify that their content is consistent with the analytical conclusions in this report. If during DEIS or FEIS editing, substantially different conclusions or interpretations are reached or substantial additional analysis is prepared from that displayed in this report, an addendum to this report will be prepared.

/s/ Larry Hills

Specialist: Larry Hills

Discipline: Recreation/Trails

Date:

5/13/2003