

is unclear, and may be outweighed where private lands with little or no hunting access occur nearby. Components for evaluating and managing for elk security in alternatives B and E would provide greater consistency in approach than under the current plans or under alternative A, but would not guarantee that elk remain on NFS lands, particularly where private land refuges are available. Alternatives C and D, without specific components to manage for elk security, would likely have less constraint on vegetation management projects, would potentially have different impacts on the amount and distribution of secure habitat for elk, but would meet or move toward the desired condition for elk to be available on HLC NF lands.

The alternatives with larger amounts of RWA (D, followed by B and C) could provide greater general security than the existing plans (alternative A) or Alternative E. However, on the ground the difference may be minimal because of the presence of IRAs in alternative E similar to that of the other alternatives. Furthermore, it is not possible to predict whether the differences in the amount and location of RWAs, or the differences in whether motorized travel is allowed or not would have any measurable impact on elk presence or distribution.

## 3.17 Recreation Settings

### 3.17.1 Introduction

Recreation is recognized as a critical resource on the HLC NF due to its contributions to the local economy, its influence in connecting people to the land, its impact on public understanding of natural and cultural resources, and its role as a catalyst for public stewardship.

To address both the challenges and opportunities in recreation management, the FS strives to provide a set of recreation settings, opportunities, and benefits that are sustainable over time. Sustainable recreation is defined as the set of recreation settings and opportunities on the NF that are ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable for present and future generations. For best effect, all aspects of recreation should include the principle of sustainability. As such, the HLC NF developed plan components aimed at providing direction for a sustainable recreation program.

### Issues

A number of issues were raised during the scoping period for the proposed action. The issues that drove alternatives for recreation settings were:

- Changes to ROS settings associated with requests to limit mechanical means of transportation (including bicycles) in some areas on the Forest.
- Site specific changes to ROS settings to address mapping errors found during the analysis period.

Another issue that was analyzed in this section includes:

- The effects to ROS settings associated with RWA designations.

### Measurement indicators

Effects to ROS settings will be measured by determining the acres of desired summer and winter ROS settings by alternative.

### Analysis area

The geographic scope of the analysis is the lands administered by the HLC NF. All lands within the forest boundary form the geographic scope for cumulative effects, and the temporal scope is the life of the plan (approximately 15 years).

### 3.17.2 Regulatory framework

**Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965** (P.L. 88-578, 78 Stat. 897 as amended; 16 U.S.C. 4601-4(note); 4601-4 thru 6a, 4601-7 thru 4601-10, 4601-10a-d, 4601-11): “The purposes of this act are to assist in preserving, developing, and assuring accessibility to all citizens of the United States of America...such quality and quantity of outdoor recreation resources...providing funds for:” 1. States for acquisition, planning, and development of recreation facilities and; 2. Federal acquisition and development of certain lands and other areas.

**Architectural Barriers Act of August 12, 1968** (P.L. 90-480, 82 Stat. 718 51 U.S.C. 4151-4154, 4154a, 4155-4157): This act establishes additional requirements to ensure that buildings, facilities, rail passenger cars, and vehicles are accessible to individuals with disabilities. It covers architecture and design, transportation, and communication elements of recreational site planning and development.

**Rehabilitation Act of September 26, 1973** (P.L. 93-112, Title V, 87 Stat. 390, as amended; 29 U.S.C. 791, 793-794, 794a, 794b): This act requires that programs and activities conducted by federal agencies and by entities that receive funding from, or operate under a permit from, federal agencies provide an equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities to participate in an integrated setting, as independently as possible. The only exception to the requirement is when the program would be fundamentally altered if changes were made solely for the purpose of accessibility.

**Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act of December 8, 2004** (P.L. 108-447, as amended): This act gives the Secretaries of Agriculture and Interior the authority to establish, modify, charge, and collect recreation fees at federal recreational lands where a certain level of amenities have been developed.

**National Forest Roads and Trails Act of October 13, 1964** (P.L. 88-657, 78 Stat. 1089, as amended): This act declared that an adequate system of roads and trails be constructed and maintained to meet the increasing demand for recreation and other uses. This act authorizes road and trail systems for the NFS. It authorizes granting of easements across NFS lands, construction and financing of maximum economy roads (FS Manual 7705), and imposition of requirements on road users for maintaining and reconstructing roads, including cooperative deposits for that work.

**Ski Fees, Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of November 12, 1996** (Pub. L. 104-333, div. I, Title VII, Sec. 701, 110 Stat. 4182; 16 U.S.C. 497c): Section 701 of this act:

- Establishes a system to calculate fees for ski area permits issued under the National Forest Ski Area Permit Act of 1986 (16 U.S.C. 497b);
- Provides for holders of ski area permits issued under other authorities to elect this permit fee system (FS Handbook 2709.11, sec. 38.03a);
- Includes provisions concerning compliance with NEPA when issuing permits for existing ski areas (FS Manual 2721.61f and FS Handbook 2709.11, sec. 41.61b); and
- Withdraws leasable and locatable minerals, subject to valid existing rights (FS Handbook 2709.11, sec. 41.61c).

### 3.17.3 Assumptions

Since adoption of the 1986 plans, recreation activities within the plan area have changed. This analysis assumes that changes to recreational use patterns would occur naturally as a result of factors associated with recreation trends, advances in technology, aging population, aging infrastructure, and climatic changes.

### 3.17.4 Best available scientific information used

The Forest used the best available data and science relevant to inform the analysis for the new forest plan components for recreation settings, recreation opportunities, recreation special uses, and recreation access. Data sources included the latest information from the National Visitor Use Data project, information stored in the corporate data base, and site-specific knowledge from forest personnel.

### 3.17.5 Affected environment

Sustainable recreation settings are the social, managerial, and physical attributes of a place that, when combined, provide a distinct set of recreation opportunities. Sustainable recreation settings and opportunities are affected by trends in recreation uses and the mix of outdoor activities chosen by the public, which continuously evolve. Recreation activities offered on the HLC NF include, but are not limited to, cross-country and downhill skiing, snowboarding, snowmobiling, dog sledding, hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, mountain biking, camping, hunting, fishing, off-highway vehicle driving or riding, picnicking, swimming, boating, paddle boarding, recreation aviation, wildlife watching, visiting historic sites or scenic areas, participating in interpretive programs or tours, and resort use. The FS utilizes a framework called the ROS which describes different settings across the landscape and attributes associated with those settings. All six of the ROS classes are found within the HLC NF. Table 91 defines these classes.

**Table 91. ROS classes and definitions**

ROS Class	Definition
Primitive	Large, remote, wild, and predominately unmodified landscapes. Areas with no motorized activity and little probability of seeing other people.
Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized	Areas of the Forests managed for nonmotorized use. Uses include hiking and equestrian trails, mountain bikes and other non-motorized mechanized equipment. Rustic facilities and opportunity for exploration, challenge, and self-reliance.
Semi-Primitive Motorized	Backcountry areas used primarily by motorized users on designated routes. Roads and trails designed for off-highway vehicles and high-clearance vehicles. Offers motorized opportunities for exploration, challenge, and self-reliance. Rustic facilities. Often provide portals into adjacent Primitive or Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized areas.
Roaded Natural	Often referred to as front country recreation areas, these areas are accessed by open system roads that can accommodate sedan travel. Facilities are less rustic and more developed with campgrounds, trailheads and airstrips often present. Provide access points for adjacent Semi-Primitive Motorized, Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized, and Primitive settings.
Rural	Highly developed recreation sites and modified natural settings. Easily accessed by major highways. Located within populated areas where private land and other land holdings are nearby and obvious. Facilities are designed for user comfort and convenience.
Urban	Areas with highly developed recreation sites and extensively modified natural settings. Often located adjacent to or within cities or high population areas. High probability of seeing large groups of people and opportunities for solitude or silence are few.

### 3.17.6 Environmental consequences

#### Effects common to all alternatives

In all alternatives, natural disturbances, recreation use patterns, and emerging technologies would continue to influence recreation settings across these landscapes. Travel plans would continue to provide site-specific direction for where motorized uses could take place. Additional management direction for recreation may also be provided through recreation special use permits, or, in the cases where recreation uses need to be restricted, through closure orders outside of travel plans.

## Effects common to all action alternatives

The plan components developed for recreation settings remain the same in all action alternatives. Table 92 summarizes the expected effects of each plan component related to recreation settings.

**Table 92. Summary of plan components for recreation settings**

Plan component	Expected effects
FW-ROS-DC-01 through 13	These plan components set up the desired distribution of ROS classes, as well as provide descriptions of each of these classes. The specific locations for each ROS class are mapped by GA for the entire Forest. Recreation opportunity classes establish the expectations for recreation settings across the forest.
FW-ROS-OBJ-01 and 02	These objectives would improve primitive and semi-primitive nonmotorized settings by eliminating motorized incursions into these areas.
FW-ROS-STD-01 through 05	These standards would provide clear direction on the construction of recreation facilities, such as motorized roads and trails, airstrips, and trailheads for each ROS class.
FW-ROS-GDL-01 through 13	These guidelines provide direction for the SIOs of each area, and the expectations of vegetative management in each of the ROS classes.
FW-ROS-SUIT-01 through 32	The suitability plan components lay out specifically where motorized uses, mechanized means of transport, and airstrips may and may not be suitable within the desired ROS classes on the Forest.

### *Settings for recreation aviation*

Public commenters asked for the allowance of more access for recreation aviation activities, especially for provisions for airstrips or locations where motorized aircraft may take off and land. Access for recreation aviation activities would be determined by the ROS classes for all action alternatives. The specifics of where recreation aviation activities may occur is detailed in the suitability plan components in the draft revised plan.

Motorized recreation aviation activities are most appropriate in motorized ROS settings. Nonmotorized recreation aviation uses, such as glide planes and hang gliders, may be found in nonmotorized ROS settings. Facilities constructed in nonmotorized settings would be designed and constructed to meet the facilities development direction for nonmotorized settings.

### *Effects from forest plan components associated with:*

#### **Aquatic ecosystems and soil management**

Activities related to watershed, soil, riparian, or aquatic habitat improvements would have little to no effects related to the overall management of recreation settings.

#### **Fire and fuels management**

Natural, unplanned fires would continue to affect the long-term ecological processes across recreation settings. Fire effects could include a temporary loss of vegetation, reduction in water quality due to sedimentation, and air pollution. However, these effects are part of natural, ecological processes.

#### **Timber and vegetation management**

Timber management would continue on lands suitable for timber production and in those areas where timber harvest could be used as a tool to enhance other resource values. These activities would be most noticeable in the semi primitive motorized, roaded natural, and rural ROS settings. All action alternatives establish suitability direction for the management of timber and vegetation within ROS settings. The sights and sounds of salvage timber sales and associated road building activities may temporarily impact nonmotorized recreation settings.

**Livestock grazing and management**

Livestock grazing would continue to occur in active allotments across the forest and livestock may be found in all recreation settings. The locations of facilities associated with grazing, such as water features and extensive fencing, may have an impact on the less developed recreation settings. The action alternatives provide suitability direction for the management of grazing within developed recreation sites.

**Wildlife management**

Activities related to wildlife improvements and management would occur across all ROS settings. These activities are expected to have little to no affect to recreation settings.

**Recreation and scenery management**

Recreation settings are most affected by the presence or absence of motorized uses. These uses can take place on constructed features such as roads, trails, or airstrips, or they may take place cross country as with motorized over-snow recreation. Travel plans that establish where motorized use can or cannot take place would support and help maintain recreation settings for both summer and winter. All action alternatives establish desired ROS settings that would provide future direction for motorized access and construction/reconstruction of infrastructure.

**Cultural, historic, and tribal resource management**

There are many historic recreation residences and historic special use resorts that contribute to the Roaded Natural and Rural ROS settings on the HLC NF. The action alternatives provide direction for the management of these historic structures.

**Road access and infrastructure**

ROS settings are based on the location of roads, trails, and infrastructure and on whether these features are open and available for public recreational uses. Travel plans establish where motorized use can or cannot take place and support and help maintain ROS settings for both summer and winter. All action alternatives establish desired ROS settings that would provide future direction for motorized access and construction/reconstruction of infrastructure.

**Minerals management**

Areas with active mining may occur across all recreation settings within the HLC NF. Evidence of historic and ongoing mining on forest is an expected part of these settings. New and ongoing mining may affect the recreation settings by creating roads and opening that might not normally be located within certain settings. Additionally, mine reclamation may have impacts on recreation settings, at least in the short-term.

**Alternative A, no action**

In alternative A, recreation settings would continue to be managed under the 1986 Helena NF and Lewis and Clark NF Plans. Travel plans would continue to provide the direction for where motorized uses can and cannot occur, and future wilderness and other laws may determine where various ROS classes may be located. Table 93 describes the plan components in the 1986 plans that provide direction for ROS settings.

**Table 93. Summary of existing plan components for recreation settings**

Plan component	Expected effects
1986 Helena NF Plan Objectives, Resource Activity/Summaries, Recreation and Roadless Page II/2.	Recreation: This objective highlights that approximately 40% of the Forest would be managed in a way that provides primitive or semi-primitive recreation. Roadless: This objective lists specific areas of undeveloped acres outside of wilderness that would remain undeveloped and managed for semi-primitive recreation values. Additionally, this

Plan component	Expected effects
	objectives mentions large blocks over 5,000 acres in size with other resource goals, such as wildlife, that would also be managed for semi-primitive recreation.
1986 Helena NF Plan Management Areas R-1, P-3; Page III/24	Management area R-1 provides direction for large blocks of undeveloped lands suited for dispersed recreation. Motorized uses are not allowed in these areas and they are managed for a semi-primitive non-motorized recreation opportunities. Primitive and semi-primitive non-motorized recreation settings are described for the Big Log RWA in management area P-3.
1986 Helena NF Plan Analysis of the Management Situation Summary, Resource and Support Program Elements, Recreation, Page AMS Summary V/2.	The analysis of the management situation discusses the demand, supply, and production potential of recreation on the Helena NF. The tables and narrative in this section discuss the potential for growth and the ability of the forest to handle the expected potential growth patterns in all of the ROS settings.
1986 Lewis and Clark NF Plan, Forest-wide Objectives, Resource Activity/Summaries, Recreation, Page 2-4.	This objective highlights that approximately 65% of the Forest would be managed in a way that provides primitive or semi-primitive recreation.
1986 Lewis and Clark NF Plan, Desired Future Conditions, First Decade, Rocky Mountain Division and Jefferson Division, Page 2-19.	<u>Rocky Mountain Division:</u> This desired future condition states that the high quality opportunities for semi-primitive motorized and semi-primitive non-motorized opportunities would remain unchanged. <u>Jefferson Division:</u> Desired future condition mentions maintaining semi-primitive recreation in the Middle Fork/Lost Fork Judith and Big Snowies.
1986 Lewis and Clark NF Plan, Desired Future Conditions, Fifth Decade, Jefferson Division, Page 2-21.	<u>Jefferson Division:</u> This desired future condition predicts that that semi-primitive recreation opportunities would decrease slightly and roaded natural opportunities would increase. Also semi-primitive recreation would be maintained in the Middle Fork/Lost Fork Judith and Big Snowies areas.
1986 Lewis and Clark NF Plan, Management Areas, Pages 3-3 through 3-104.	Recreation settings are established for each of the management areas on the Forest.

The 2012 Planning Rule requires the mapping of desired ROS classes and the use of this information in revised forest plans. In order to provide a comparison between alternatives, estimated ROS classes were developed for alternative A. These maps were derived using current travel plan information and site-specific knowledge from forest personnel, and are displayed for both summer and winter.

Table 94 depicts the estimated acreages and percent total of the estimated existing ROS classes for summer in alternative A. Table 95 displays the percent of each estimated existing ROS class for summer in each GA.

**Table 94. Forestwide ROS classes - summer (alternative A)**

Desired ROS Classification	Acres	Percent of Total NFS Lands
Primitive	758,131	26
Semi-primitive nonmotorized	1,031,329	36
Semi-primitive motorized	365,953	13
Roaded natural	700,160	24
Rural	28,018	1
Urban	29	<1

**Table 95. Percent of ROS class by GA in summer (alternative A)**

GA	Primitive	Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized	Semi-Primitive Motorized	Roaded Natural	Rural	Urban
Big Belts	15	34	12	36	3	0
Castles	0	24	23	52	0	0
Crazies	0	59	26	15	0	0
Divide	8	43	11	34	4	0
Elkhorns	0	57	4	38	2	0
Highwoods	0	71	19	10	0	0
Little Belts	8	29	28	35	<1	0
Rocky Mountain Range	58	35	3	4	<1	0
Snowies	75	4	6	15	1	0
Upper Blackfoot	26	48	2	24	<1	0

Table 96 depicts the estimated acreages and percent total of the estimated existing ROS classes for winter in alternative A. Table 97 displays the percent of each estimated existing ROS class for winter in each GA.

**Table 96. Forestwide recreation opportunity classes – winter (alternative A)**

Desired ROS Classification	Acres	Percent of Total NFS lands
Primitive	744,609	26
Semi-primitive nonmotorized	1,151,264	40
Semi-primitive motorized	779,127	27
Roaded natural	181,020	6
Rural	27,595	1
Urban	29	<1

**Table 97. Percent of ROS class by GA in the winter (alternative A)**

GA	Primitive	Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized	Semi-Primitive Motorized	Roaded Natural	Rural	Urban
Big Belts	15	42	26	14	3	0
Castles	0	21	79	0	0	0
Crazies	0	63	37	0	0	0
Divide	8	32	33	22	5	0
Elkhorns	0	73	21	4	2	0
Highwoods	0	93	7	0	0	0
Little Belts	8	45	44	3	<1	0
Rocky Mountain Range	58	36	5	1	<1	0
Snowies	64	4	30	2	0	0
Upper Blackfoot	26	30	28	15	<1	0

## Alternative B

Alternative B would establish desired ROS classes for each GA for both summer and winter, as per the direction provided in the 2012 Planning Rule. Desired ROS settings would provide direction for management of a sustainable recreation program on the forest. These desired ROS classes were based on existing travel plans but were adjusted to incorporate changes to include additional RWAs.

Table 98 depicts the acreages and percent total of the desired ROS classes for summer in alternative B. Table 99 displays the percent of each desired ROS class for summer in each GA.

**Table 98. Forestwide ROS classes - summer (alternative B)**

Desired ROS Classification	Acres	Percent of Total NFS lands
Primitive	846,121	29
Semi-primitive nonmotorized	955,767	33
Semi-primitive motorized	367,377	13
Roaded natural	686,186	24
Rural	28,139	1
Urban	29	<1

**Table 99. Percent of ROS class by GA in summer (alternative B)**

GA	Primitive	Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized	Semi-Primitive Motorized	Roaded Natural	Rural	Urban
Big Belts	15	34	12	36	3	0
Castles	0	24	23	52	0	0
Crazies	0	59	26	15	0	0
Divide	16	36	11	33	4	0
Elkhorns	0	56	4	38	2	0
Highwoods	0	71	19	10	0	0
Little Belts	10	27	28	35	<1	0
Rocky Mountain Range	58	35	3	4	<1	0
Snowies	81	<1	6	13	1	0
Upper Blackfoot	42	34	2	22	<1	0

Table 100 depicts the acreages and percent total of the desired ROS classes for winter in alternative B. Table 101 displays the percent of each desired ROS class for winter in each GA.

**Table 100. Forestwide ROS classes - winter (alternative B)**

Desired ROS Classification	Acres	Percent of Total NFS lands
Primitive	846,121	29
Semi-primitive nonmotorized	1,076,056	37
Semi-primitive motorized	765,796	27
Roaded natural	167,925	6
Rural	27,717	1



Desired ROS Classification	Acres	Percent of Total NFS lands
Urban	29	<1

**Table 101. Percent of ROS class by GA in the winter (alternative B)**

GA	Primitive	Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized	Semi-Primitive Motorized	Roaded Natural	Rural	Urban
Big Belts	15	42	26	14	3	0
Castles	0	21	79	0	0	0
Crazies	0	63	37	0	0	0
Divide	16	26	33	21	4	0
Elkhorns	0	73	21	4	2	0
Highwoods	0	93	7	0	0	0
Little Belts	10	43	44	3	<1	0
Rocky Mountain Range	58	36	5	1	<1	0
Snowies	81	<1	19	<1	0	0
Upper Blackfoot	42	17	28	13	<1	0

### Alternative C

Similar to alternative B, alternative C would establish desired ROS classes for each GA for both summer and winter as per the direction provided in the 2012 Planning Rule. The desired ROS classes in alternative C would also primarily be based on existing travel plans. However, in the center of the Elkhorns and in the Cellar Creek area in the north end of the Divide GA, desired winter ROS classes would change. These areas are currently open to motorized over-snow uses within a semi-primitive motorized ROS settings. In alternative C, the motorized setting in both of these areas would be changed to semi-primitive non-motorized and over-snow motorized uses would no longer be permitted.

In addition, minor changes to summer ROS classes in the Middle Fork Warm Springs drainage of the Elkhorns would change. These changes to summer recreation opportunity classes in the Elkhorns correct mapping errors found in alternative B.

The distribution of ROS classes for summer in alternative C is noted in Table 102. Table 103 displays the percent of each desired ROS class for summer in each GA.

**Table 102. Forestwide ROS classes - summer (alternative C)**

Desired ROS Classification	Acres	Percent of Total NFS Land
Primitive	846,175	29
Semi-primitive nonmotorized	956,076	33
Semi-primitive motorized	367,323	13
Roaded natural	685,877	24
Rural	28,139	1
Urban	29	<1

**Table 103. Percent of ROS class by GA in summer (alternative C)**

GA	Primitive	Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized	Semi-Primitive Motorized	Roaded Natural	Rural	Urban
Big Belts	15	34	12	36	3	0
Castles	0	24	23	52	0	0
Crazies	0	59	26	15	0	0
Divide	16	36	11	33	4	0
Elkhorns	0	57	4	38	2	0
Highwoods	0	71	19	10	0	0
Little Belts	10	27	28	35	<1	0
Rocky Mountain Range	58	35	3	4	<1	0
Snowies	81	<1	6	13	1	0
Upper Blackfoot	42	34	2	22	<1	0

The distribution of ROS classes for winter in alternative C is noted in Table 104. Table 105 displays the percent of each desired ROS class for winter by GA.

**Table 104. Forestwide ROS classes - winter (alternative C)**

Desired ROS Classification	Acres	Percent of Total NFS lands
Primitive	846,175	29
Semi-primitive nonmotorized	1,095,868	38
Semi-primitive motorized	745,984	26
Roaded natural	167,925	6
Rural	27,717	1
Urban	29	<1

**Table 105. Percent of ROS class by GA in the winter (alternative C)**

GA	Primitive	Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized	Semi-Primitive Motorized	Roaded Natural	Rural	Urban
Big Belts	15	42	27	14	3	0
Castles	0	21	79	0	0	0
Crazies	0	63	37	0	0	0
Divide	16	27	32	21	5	0
Elkhorns	0	84	10	4	2	0
Highwoods	0	93	7	0	0	0
Little Belts	10	43	44	3	<1	0
Rocky Mountain Range	58	36	5	1	<1	0
Snowies	81	<1	19	<1	0	0
Upper Blackfoot	42	17	28	13	<1	0

**Alternative D**

Alternative D responds to comments received during public scoping asking the Forest to consider an alternative that increases the amount of RWAs and primitive recreation opportunities on the forest. Additional RWAs and additional primitive, undeveloped areas were identified. The increase of RWAs and the emphasis on undeveloped areas created a shift in the ROS classes, increasing the amount of primitive ROS classes in both summer and winter seasons in alternative D. Table 106 displays the summer ROS classes for alternative D. Table 107 displays the percent of each desired ROS class for summer in each GA.

**Table 106. Forestwide ROS classes - summer (alternative D)**

Desired ROS Classification	Acres	Percent of Total NFS Lands
Primitive	1,231,795	43
Semi-primitive nonmotorized	617,244	21
Semi-primitive motorized	341,327	12
Roaded natural	666,817	23
Rural	26,409	1
Urban	29	<1

**Table 107. Percent of ROS class by GA in summer (alternative D)**

GA	Primitive	Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized	Semi-Primitive Motorized	Roaded Natural	Rural	Urban
Big Belts	22	28	12	35	3	0
Castles	44	5	1	50	0	0
Crazies	43	19	26	12	0	0
Divide	30	26	11	30	3	0
Elkhorns	31	26	4	38	2	0
Highwoods	20	50	20	10	0	0
Little Belts	22	18	26	34	<1	0
Rocky Mountain Range	74	19	3	4	<1	0
Snowies	81	<1	6	13	<1	0
Upper Blackfoot	42	34	2	22	<1	0

Table 108 displays the winter ROS classes for alternative D. Table 109 displays the percent of each desired ROS class for winter in each GA.

**Table 108. Forestwide ROS classes - winter (alternative D)**

Desired ROS Classification	Acres	Percent of Total NFS Lands
Primitive	1,220,681	42
Semi-primitive nonmotorized	754,246	26
Semi-primitive motorized	715,347	25
Roaded natural	167,371	6
Rural	25,971	1

Desired ROS Classification	Acres	Percent of Total NFS Lands
Urban	29	<1

**Table 109. Percent of ROS class by GA in the winter (alternative D)**

GA	Primitive	Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized	Semi-Primitive Motorized	Roaded Natural	Rural	Urban
Big Belts	22	34	27	14	3	0
Castles	44	15	41	0	0	0
Crazies	43	28	29	0	0	0
Divide	30	18	29	20	3	0
Elkhorns	23	50	21	4	2	0
Highwoods	20	73	7	0	0	0
Little Belts	22	33	42	3	<1	0
Rocky Mountain Range	74	20	5	1	<1	0
Snowies	81	<1	19	<1	0	0
Upper Blackfoot	42	17	28	13	<1	0

**Alternative E**

Alternative E responds to comments received during public scoping asking the Forest to consider an alternative that did not identify RWAs and that increased the amount of NFS lands available for timber harvest. In response to these comments, Alternative E does not include any RWAs. Additionally, areas for timber production were identified. The ROS classes in alternative E shifted due to these changes, resulting in an increase in motorized ROS classes and a decrease in the amount of primitive ROS classes. Table 110 displays the summer ROS classes for alternative E. Table 111 displays the percent of each desired ROS class for summer in each GA.

**Table 110. Forestwide ROS classes - summer (alternative E)**

Desired ROS Classification	Acres	Percent of Total NFS Lands
Primitive	723,944	25
Semi-primitive nonmotorized	1,058,230	37
Semi-primitive motorized	244,040	8
Roaded natural	830,397	29
Rural	26,979	1
Urban	29	<1

**Table 111. Percent of ROS class by GA in summer (alternative E)**

GA	Primitive	Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized	Semi-Primitive Motorized	Roaded Natural	Rural	Urban
Big Belts	10	38	7	42	3	0
Castles	0	24	24	52	0	0
Crazies	0	59	25	16	0	0
Divide	0	50	1	45	4	0

GA	Primitive	Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized	Semi-Primitive Motorized	Roaded Natural	Rural	Urban
Elkhorns	0	56	4	38	2	0
Highwoods	0	71	18	11	0	0
Little Belts	8	29	19	44	<1	0
Rocky Mountain Range	58	35	3	4	<1	0
Snowies	75	4	0	21	<1	0
Upper Blackfoot	26	48	<1	26	<1	0

Table 112 displays the winter ROS classes for alternative E. Table 113 displays the percent of each desired ROS class for winter in each GA.

**Table 112. Forestwide ROS classes - winter (alternative E)**

Desired ROS Classification	Acres	Percent of Total NFS Lands
Primitive	710,422	25
Semi-primitive nonmotorized	1,181,189	41
Semi-primitive motorized	302,100	10
Roaded natural	662,234	23
Rural	27,670	1
Urban	29	<1

**Table 113. Percent of recreation opportunity class by GA in the winter (alternative E)**

GA	Primitive	Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized	Semi-Primitive Motorized	Roaded Natural	Rural	Urban
Big Belts	10	46	9	32	3	0
Castles	0	21	35	44	0	0
Crazies	0	63	10	27	0	0
Divide	0	40	4	51	5	0
Elkhorns	0	73	21	4	2	0
Highwoods	0	92	8	0	0	0
Little Belts	8	45	11	36	<1	0
Rocky Mountain Range	58	36	5	1	<1	0
Snowies	64	3	13	20	0	0
Upper Blackfoot	26	30	19	25	<1	0

## Conclusions

Alternative A, the no-action alternative, would not move the HLC NF toward meeting the purpose and need of the revised forest plan which is to provide a range of recreation opportunities using the ROS to display the allocations. The ROS system would continue to be used as a tool for the management of recreation but would not provide maps tied directly to the forest plan. Travel plans would continue to provide the direction for where motorized uses can and cannot occur, and future wilderness and other laws may determine where the various ROS classes may be located.

Alternatives B, C, D, and E each meet the purpose and need of the revised forest plan by mapping desired ROS settings as per the intent of the 2012 Planning Rule. All of the action alternatives would establish desired ROS classes for both summer and winter recreation settings. These ROS classes would provide overall guidance and set expectations for the recreation settings on the Forest. Desired ROS classes would aid the Forest in managing both existing and emerging recreation uses. Additionally, by establishing expected recreation settings early on, the public can clearly identify areas where their preferred recreation activity is allowed. Setting clear expectations and identifying a spectrum of settings for recreation users is important to the long-term management of recreation use on the Forest.

Table 114 describes the percent of each desired ROS class by alternative. Since the 1986 forest plans do not establish a range of specific ROS classes in alternative A, an estimate of the existing ROS classes was developed to be used for comparison purposes when examining all of the alternatives together.

**Table 114. Percent of desired ROS classes**

Alternative	Desired ROS classification	Summer - Acres	Summer - Percent of Total NFS Lands	Winter - Acres	Winter – Percent of Total NFS Lands
A	Primitive	758,131	26	744,609	26
	Semi-primitive nonmotorized	1,031,329	36	1,151,264	40
	Semi-primitive motorized	365,953	13	779,127	27
	Roaded natural	700,160	24	181,020	6
	Rural	28,018	1	27,595	1
	Urban	29	<1	29	<1
B	Primitive	846,121	29	846,121	29
	Semi-primitive nonmotorized	955,767	33	1,076,056	37
	Semi-primitive motorized	367,377	13	765,796	27
	Roaded Natural	686,186	24	167,925	6
	Rural	28,139	1	27,717	1
	Urban	29	<1	29	<1
C	Primitive	846,175	29	846,175	29
	Semi-primitive nonmotorized	956,076	33	1,095,868	38
	Semi-primitive motorized	367,323	13	745,984	26
	Roaded Natural	685,877	24	167,925	6
	Rural	28,139	1	27,717	1
	Urban	29	<1	29	<1
D	Primitive	1,231,795	43	1,220,681	42
	Semi-primitive nonmotorized	617,244	21	754,246	26
	Semi-primitive motorized	341,327	12	715,347	25
	Roaded Natural	666,817	23	167,371	6
	Rural	26,409	1	25,971	1
	Urban	29	<1	29	<1
E	Primitive	723,944	25	710,422	25
	Semi-primitive nonmotorized	1,058,230	37	1,181,189	41
	Semi-primitive motorized	244,040	8	302,100	10
	Roaded Natural	830,397	29	662,234	23
	Rural	26,979	1	27,670	1

Alternative	Desired ROS classification	Summer - Acres	Summer - Percent of Total NFS Lands	Winter - Acres	Winter – Percent of Total NFS Lands
	Urban	29	<1	29	<1

### 3.18 Recreation Opportunities

#### 3.18.1 Introduction

To address both the challenges and opportunities in recreation management, the FS strives to provide a set of recreation settings, opportunities, and benefits that are sustainable over time. Sustainable recreation is defined as the set of recreation settings and opportunities on the NF that are ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable for present and future generations.

#### 3.18.2 Regulatory framework

Please see the regulatory framework for Recreation Settings.

#### 3.18.3 Assumptions

Since adoption of the 1986 plans, recreation activities within the plan area have changed. This analysis assumes that changes to recreational use patterns would occur naturally as a result of factors associated with recreation trends, advances in technology, aging population, aging infrastructure, and climatic changes.

#### 3.18.4 Best available scientific information used

Please refer to the BASI description under the recreation settings section.

#### 3.18.5 Affected environment

Sustainable recreation sites are generally managed on a continuum based on a development scale ranging from 1 to 5. Recreation sites with minimum to low or few site modifications are lower on the development scale (1-2) and are considered “dispersed” recreation sites. Recreation sites with higher site modification and infrastructure on the development scales (3-5) are considered “developed” recreation sites. Table 115 displays the development scale and provides a definition of each.

**Table 115. Recreation site development scales**

Development Scale	Definition	Developed or Dispersed	ROS Setting(s)
1	<i>Recreation sites with minimum site modification.</i> Rustic or rudimentary improvements designed for protection of the site rather than comfort of the users. Use of synthetic materials excluded. Minimum controls are subtle. No obvious regimentation. Spacing informal and extended to minimize contacts between users. Motorized access not provided or permitted.	Dispersed	Primitive
2	<i>Recreation sites with little site modification.</i> Rustic or rudimentary improvements designed primarily for protection of the site rather than the comfort of the users. Use of synthetic materials avoided. Minimum controls are subtle. Little obvious regimentation. Spacing informal and extended to minimize contacts between	Dispersed	Semi-primitive nonmotorized and

Development Scale	Definition	Developed or Dispersed	ROS Setting(s)
	users. Motorized access provided or permitted. Primary access over primitive roads. Interpretive services informal.		Semi-primitive motorized
3	<i>Recreation sites with moderate modification.</i> Facilities about equal for protection of natural site and comfort of users. Contemporary/rustic design of improvements is usually based on use of native materials. Inconspicuous vehicular traffic controls usually provided. Roads may be hard surfaced and trails formalized. Development density about three family units per acre. Primary access may be over high standard roads. Interpretive services informal, but generally direct.	Developed	Roaded Natural
4	<i>Recreation sites that are heavily modified.</i> Some facilities designed strictly for comfort and convenience of users. Luxury facilities not provided. Facility design may incorporate synthetic materials. Extensive use of artificial surfacing of roads and trails. Vehicular traffic control usually obvious. Primary access usually over paved roads. Development density about three to five family units per acre. Plant materials usually native. Interpretive services often formal or structured.	Developed	Rural
5	<i>Recreation sites with a high degree of site modification.</i> Facilities mostly designed for comfort and convenience of users and usually include flush toilets; may include showers, bathhouses, laundry facilities, and electrical hookups. Synthetic materials commonly used. Formal walks or surfaced trails. Regimentation of users is obvious. Access usually by high-speed highways. Development density about five or more family units per acre. Plant materials may be foreign to the environment. Formal interpretive services usually available. Designs formalized and architecture may be contemporary. Mowed lawns and clipped shrubs not unusual.	Developed	Urban

The health and resiliency of the HLC NF’s natural resources are critical to the sustained delivery of their nature-based recreational settings and opportunities. Without healthy resilient landscapes and habitats, many of the recreation opportunities that have historically been enjoyed would not be sustainable. Obvious linkages exist between the types of activities being pursued and the presence and condition of the natural resources.

The HLC NF’s recreation programs contribute to the economic sustainability of Central Montana’s rural communities. Hunting is the primary reason visitors come to the Forest (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 2013b). Both jobs and revenue directly and indirectly result from visitors traveling to the Forest. The remoteness of the forests’ recreational settings encourages visitors to stop and buy groceries, gas, and other supplies to support their off-highway vehicle, stock, backpacking, boating, and biking experiences before entering the Forest. More direct jobs and revenue are associated with the Forests’ outfitter- guide operations, downhill ski areas, and visitors to the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center.

### Developed recreation

Developed recreation opportunities are located throughout the plan area but are primarily concentrated in the roaded natural and rural ROS settings. Developed recreation opportunities are located at specific locations or “sites” and have infrastructure or features that have been designed for health and safety and to facilitate visitor comfort. The types of features and infrastructure often offered at developed sites include developed roads and parking areas, toilets, tables, fire rings, water systems, interpretive signs, and/or fee stations. Depending upon the location and the type of opportunity offered, these developed



sites may or may not have fees associated with them. All of these developed sites are FS operated and maintained. There are no developed recreation facilities operated by concessionaire within the plan area. Ski areas, which have considerable development and infrastructure, are developed recreation sites managed under recreation special use permit. See map in appendix A.

The most common developed sites within the plan area are campgrounds, picnic areas, trailheads, cabin and lookout rentals, ski areas (both Nordic and alpine), interpretation sites, fishing sites, and boating sites. Most of the developed recreation sites are located along main roads and travel ways. Water-based recreation sites are located adjacent to the lakes or rivers on which the activities take place.

The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center is also considered a developed recreation opportunity within the plan area and is located outside of the forest boundary in the community of Great Falls, Montana.

One of the most unique developed recreation opportunities offered within the plan area is the rental of a cabin or lookout. Currently, there are 17 cabins/lookouts available to rent within the plan area. These cabins range from being more rustic to those that have more modern conveniences. A number of these properties are also listed on the National Register for Historic Places.

Table 116 displays the existing developed recreation site types currently managed by the HLC NF. These recreation opportunities are arranged by GA to show their distribution and location.

**Table 116. Existing developed recreation site types by GA**

Site Type	Big Belts	Castles	Crazies	Divide	Elkhorns	Highwoods	Little Belts	Rocky Mountain Range	Snowies	Upper Blackfoot	Outside of GA	TOTAL
Boating Site	3	-	-		-	-	-	2	1	-	-	6
Campground	4	2	1	4	-	1	18	12	1	2	-	45
Group Campground	1	-	-	2	-	-	1	-	1	1	-	6
Horse Campground	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	4	-	1	-	6
Picnic Site	3	-	-	2	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	8
Group Picnic Site	2	-	-	2	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	6
Fishing Site	1	-	-		-	-	1	-	-	-	-	2
Interpretive Center	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Interpretive Site	5	-	-	3	-	-	4	-	-	1	2	15
Observation Site	1	-	-	1	-	-		1	-	-	-	3
Cabin/Lookout	4	-	-	2	2	-	6	2	1	1	-	18
Ski Area Alpine	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	2
Ski Area Nordic	1	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	3
Snow Park (snowmobile)	1	-	-	3	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	7
Trailhead	22	-	-	8	12	1	9	13	2	17	-	84
Scenic Byway Interpretation	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	3
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>215</b>

## Dispersed recreation

Dispersed recreation includes the full suite of recreation opportunities that take place outside of developed recreation sites. Dispersed recreation activities generally do not have fees associated with them and little or no facilities such as toilets, tables, or garbage collection. Common dispersed recreation activities within the plan area include, but are not limited to, camping, hunting, fishing, hiking, off-highway vehicle use, rock climbing, mountain biking, wildlife viewing, photography, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, snowshoeing, dog sledding, visiting historic sites, viewing scenery, driving for pleasure, and exploring. The majority of forest visitors come to the plan area to engage in dispersed recreation activities. Once on the Forest, over 57 percent of visitors participate in some type of dispersed recreation (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 2013b).

Even though dispersed recreation activities happen across all ROS classes, most of the specific dispersed recreation sites (such as campsites) are typically concentrated in the Forests' roaded natural and semi-primitive motorized ROS settings.

### *Dispersed camping*

Dispersed camping is heaviest during the summer holidays (Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and Labor Day weekends) and during bow and general rifle hunting seasons. For both types of dispersed camping users (general and intense) there are places within the plan area where minor site improvements have been made to protect the resource and to reduce the useable area within dispersed sites. GAs such as the Little Belts and the Big Belts have a higher percentage and density of dispersed hunting camps than GAs such as the Elkhorns and the Highwoods that have special tag drawings and receive fewer hunters by comparison.

Another issue associated with dispersed recreation, is the unauthorized creation by the public of new campsites, trails, and/or facilities within the general forest area. In 2009, USFS Region 1 began developing a standardized protocol for inventorying and monitoring resource conditions of dispersed recreation, concentrating on dispersed camping sites.

### *Dispersed day use activities*

Common dispersed day use recreation throughout the plan area includes hunting, driving for pleasure, viewing natural features, photography, bird watching, target shooting, fishing, cross-country skiing, dog sledding, snowshoeing, and others. These activities can happen with individual visitors or with groups of people and tend to occur primarily on the weekends over the course of the year.

In general, these dispersed activities have remained fairly consistent in the past 10 years with a couple of exceptions. Snow shoeing has seen a slight increase with more users noticed on weekends. Recently, snow shoe trails were added to the Silvercrest Cross Country Ski area within the Little Belts GA to address this increased use. District personnel have also noted a slight increase in dog sledding activities. There has been an increase in the number of hunters during archery season, which has created a longer period of use at dispersed hunting camps but has also increased the amount of day use that is taking place across the plan area.

Areas of concentrated dispersed use have seen an increase in the amount and distribution of trash and resource damage to natural resources.

## 3.18.6 Environmental consequences

### Effects common to all alternatives

In all alternatives, natural disturbances, recreation trends and use patterns, and emerging technologies would continue to influence the specific type, amount, and location of recreation opportunities across the

Forest. Travel plans would continue to provide site-specific direction for where motorized recreational uses can take place. Dead and dying trees and other natural occurrences may impact the location and availability of some areas for recreation use. The health and safety of the recreating public would continue to influence recreation management, particularly at developed recreation sites, where visitor use is concentrated.

### Effects common to all action alternatives

Plan components developed for recreation opportunities would remain the same in all action alternatives. See Table 117.

**Table 117. Summary of revised plan components for recreation opportunities (alternatives B-E)**

Plan component	Expected effects
FW-REC-DC-01	This desired condition highlights the need to connect people to the natural and cultural/historic environments in which they recreate.
FW-REC-DC-02	This desired condition focuses on the need to contribute, by providing a variety of recreation opportunities, to the economic stability of the Central Montana area.
FW-REC-DC-03	This desired condition provides direction for the strategic placement of developed recreation sites and facilities to accommodate recreation uses and to protect the natural and cultural resources of the Forest.
FW-REC-DC-04	This desired condition recognizes cabin and lookouts rentals as a valued and unique recreation opportunity on the Forest.
FW-REC-DC-05	Vegetation within developed recreation sites would be managed to ensure the health and resiliency of the trees and the health and safety of the public.
FW-REC-DC-06	This desired condition recognizes dispersed camping as a valued and unique recreation opportunity and provides direction for the long-term management of this recreation use.
FW-REC-GO-01	This goal provides for the operation, maintenance, and delivery of recreation facilities and programs, and information, education, and visitor services while incorporating the support of partnerships and volunteer groups.
FW-REC-OBJ-01	This objective would improve dispersed recreation camping opportunities in areas that have seen damage to natural and cultural resources due to overuse.
FW-REC-OBJ-02	This objective would improve the accessibility of developed recreation sites and programs on the Forest.
FW-REC-GDL-01	The guideline addresses the need to assess changes in the environment that may require changes in the location and availability of recreation opportunities.
FW-REC-GDL-02	This guideline acknowledges that vegetative management in areas where there is concentrated recreation uses should be done in an aesthetic manner and should be tied to desired SIOs.
FW-REC-GDL-03	This guideline provides direction for the groundwater use developments associated with recreation opportunities in riparian areas on the Forest.
FW-REC-GDL-04	This guideline provides direction for the placement of new recreation facilities and infrastructure within expected long-term channel migration zone to reduce potential impacts to fishery resources.
FW-REC-GDL-05	This guideline provides direction for the potential removal of some recreation facilities from riparian areas.
FW-REC-GDL-06	The guideline provides direction on managing roadside vegetation at developed recreation facilities to reduce human-animal interactions.
FW-REC-GDL-07 and 08	These guidelines emphasizes that recreation facilities, for both developed and dispersed recreation sites, should be consistent with desired ROS classes.
FW-REC-GDL-09	This guideline states that minor developments may be necessary at dispersed recreation sites to protect environmental or cultural resources.

Plan component	Expected effects
FW-REC-SUIT-01	Managing trees for timber production would not be suitable in developed recreation sites; however, trees may be cut down to address safety concerns or other resource concerns that would affect the recreating public.
FW-REC-SUIT-02	Developed recreation sites would not be suitable for saleable mineral activities, unless the material is used onsite for administrative purposes.
FW-REC-SUIT-03	Developed recreation sites would be protected from the impacts that can be created by livestock grazing.

An issue brought forward during public scoping was the overall aging of the American public and the need for the FS to provide additional accessibility. The FS is required to meet all law and policy related to accessibility. Developed recreation sites in all alternatives would be upgraded to comply with law and policy. Dispersed recreation sites are not required by law to meet accessibility standards. Neither is it policy or law to provide motorized access to areas that are closed to motorized recreation use in order to meet accessibility standards.

*Effects from forest plan components associated with:*

**Aquatic ecosystems and soil management**

Plan components and activities related to watershed, soil, riparian, or aquatic habitat improvements would have effects on developed and dispersed recreation opportunities on the HLC NF. The plan components that would have the greatest influence on recreation opportunities under the action alternatives are those associated with RMZs. East of the Continental Divide (the majority of the HLC NF), RMZs would be adopted and result in more acres being subject to riparian area plan components as compared to the no-action alternative, in which SMZs would be used. West of the Continental Divide, the area influenced by riparian plan components is the same across all alternatives because RMZs would be defined the same way as riparian habitat conservation zones are in the no-action alternative.

Many developed and dispersed recreation sites are located in RMZs and near sources of water across the forest. Aquatic and soil management activities may have an impact on developed and dispersed recreation. Existing recreation sites may be hardened with gravel to reduce impacts to bare soil and/or areas may be confined with parking barrier to keep the recreation public out of sensitive resource areas. New construction of developed recreation sites, including considerations for outhouse location and water systems, would need to meet more stringent requirements. Vegetation management that may occur within recreation areas would also need to meet RMZ plan components. Where possible recreation sites and facilities would be located outside of RMZs. Plan components in the revised plan encourage the removal or relocation of recreation facilities that are currently within RMZs if they are degrading aquatic or riparian resources.

In summary, all action alternatives provide direction and guidance for the management of recreation opportunities to protect watershed, soil, riparian and aquatic habitats, most specifically within RMZs. The area on which these components apply is greater with the action alternatives than with the no-action alternative on landscapes east of the Continental Divide. These components may limit or restrict the development of certain recreation opportunities or facilities within RMZs, and over time may decrease the number of recreation facilities found in those areas.

**Fire and fuels management**

Unplanned and prescribed fires would continue to affect the long-term ecological processes across recreation settings and may impact the location and availability of recreation opportunities on the Forest. Fire could create a temporary loss of vegetation, reduction in water quality due to sedimentation, reduction in recreation access to some recreation opportunities, and air pollution which could cause displacement of some forest visitors to other areas on the forest or to other forests in the region.

### Timber and vegetation management

Timber management would continue on lands suitable for timber production. These activities may be noticeable from within developed recreation sites. Additionally, dispersed recreation sites may be located within or very near timber harvest units which may create concerns about health and safety and may cause visitors to relocate until activities are complete.

### Livestock grazing and management

Generally, the grazing of livestock is not allowed within developed recreation sites and many developed recreation sites are surrounded by fencing to ensure grazing occurs outside of these areas. However, grazing is more common within or near dispersed recreation sites where fences are less common and where there are fewer constructed recreation features. The action alternatives provide suitability direction for the management of grazing within developed recreation sites.

### Wildlife management

Activities related to wildlife improvements and management would affect recreation opportunities across the HLC NF. Most notable is direction for food storage for bears in developed sites and at outfitter guide camps. Additionally, the grizzly bear amendment establishes direction for the development of future recreation opportunities in some GAs of the forest.

### Cultural, historic, and tribal resource management

There are many historic lookouts and cabins across the HLC NF that are rented and used for recreational purposes. These sites contribute to the variety of developed recreation opportunities offered on the Forest. Future expansion of the lookout and cabin rental program may include additional historic structures.

Additionally, many existing developed and dispersed sites are located on or near landscapes that have cultural significance on the Forest. Expansion of developed sites or development of dispersed sites may impact these cultural/historic landscapes.

All action alternatives provide plan components that would protect and enhance these cultural and historic resource values.

### Road access and infrastructure

Most developed and dispersed recreation sites are accessed from open roads and trails. Infrastructure, usually buildings, site furniture, and water systems, is generally found at the most developed recreation sites. Deferred maintenance has been an issue as facilities and recreation sites age. Travel plans establish where motorized use can or cannot take place and support and help maintain ROS settings for both summer and winter.

All action alternatives developed plan components that provide future direction for road access and the construction/reconstruction and maintenance of infrastructure across the Forest.

### Minerals management

Areas with active mining may impact the recreation settings of the area immediately surrounding the mining area. The action alternatives provide suitability direction for the management of saleable mineral activities within developed recreation sites.

### Alternative A, no action

In the no-action alternative, recreation opportunities would continue to be managed under the 1986 Helena and Lewis and Clark Forest Plans. Both of these plans provide direction for developed recreation and motorized and non-motorized dispersed recreation. Additionally, the 1986 plans provide very limited direction for the management of cabin and lookout rentals, and there is no direction for the management of the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center. In alternative A, travel plans would

continue to provide the direction for where motorized uses can occur, and wilderness and other laws may determine where various recreation facilities and opportunities occur. Table 118 displays the plan components in the 1986 plans that provide direction for recreation opportunities on the HLC NF.

**Table 118. Summary of existing plan components for recreation opportunities**

Plan component	Expected effects
1986 Helena NF Plan; Forest-wide Management Direction, Goals 1 and 2, Page II/1.	These plan components provides for a range of outdoor recreation opportunities, including motorized and non-motorized opportunities.
1986 Helena NF Plan; Objectives, Resource Activity/Summaries; Recreation, Page II/2.	This objectives emphasizes using Recreation Opportunity Guides to communicate recreation opportunities to the public. It also speaks to emphasizing dispersed recreation opportunities, including both motorized and non-motorized opportunities. This objective also encourages the use of partnerships with private, State and other federal agencies to provide recreation opportunities and to close, eliminate, or relocate recreation opportunities that are no longer needed or no longer cost efficient.
1986 Helena NF Plan, Forest-wide Standards, Recreation 1, 3, and 5, Page II/14 through II/15.	<u>Recreation Standard 1:</u> This standard aims to maintain existing developed sites while encouraging dispersed recreation opportunities. New developed recreation facilities shall generally not be constructed and removal of some developed recreation sites may be necessary to meet other recreation needs. <u>Recreation Standard 3:</u> Recreation opportunity guides were developed that described the primary recreation opportunities on each ranger district. <u>Recreation Standard 5:</u> The “Pack-in Pack-out” policy is emphasized in dispersed recreation and wilderness areas.
1986 Helena NF Plan, Management Areas, Pages III/3 through III/92.	Each of the management areas provides direction for recreation opportunities.
1986 Lewis and Clark NF Plan Forest-wide Objectives, Resource Activity Summaries, Recreation; Page 2-4.	This objectives emphasizes using Recreation Opportunity Guides to communicate recreation opportunities to the public. Dispersed recreation opportunities would be emphasized. “Pack-in Pack-out” would be encouraged. An increase in winter trails programs, winter cabin rentals, camping, picnicking, and other developed site opportunities are expected.
1986 Lewis and Clark NF Plan, Forest-wide Standards, A-1, A-2, and A-5, Pages 2-25 through 2-26.	<u>A-1 Recreation Information:</u> Use recreation opportunity guides to describe the primary recreation opportunities on each ranger district. <u>A-2 Developed Recreation:</u> Provides guidance for developed recreation opportunities. <u>A-5 Winter Dispersed Recreation Opportunities:</u> Provides direction for both motorized and non-motorized winter snow trails.
1986 Lewis and Clark NF Plan Management Areas, Pages 3-3 through 3-104.	Each of the MAs provides general direction for recreation opportunities.

**Alternatives B – E**

See effects common to all action alternatives, above.

**Cumulative Effects**

There are a wide variety of recreation opportunities in the central Montana area and the HLC NF contributes substantially to those opportunities. In addition to the recreation experiences that the HLC NF offers, other recreation opportunities exist on lands managed by: MTDFWP; the BLM; the National Park Service, and private organizations such as the Nature Conservancy. Coordination with other agencies and organizations to provide recreation opportunities would continue to be necessary to meet public demands.

**Conclusions**

The specific number and kind of developed recreation facilities and the number of dispersed recreation sites would not vary in any of the alternatives, including alternative A. However, the action alternatives

would include plan components that would provide additional direction for the construction of new recreation sites in riparian areas, the development of future water supplies, the management of dispersed recreation, and the management of cabin and lookout rentals.

By providing the plan components outlined in the action alternatives, the HLC NF would meet the purpose and need of the revised forest plan, ensuring that recreation opportunities are ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable for present and future generations.

## 3.19 Recreation Special Uses

### 3.19.1 Introduction

Recreation special use permits provide for occupancy and use of the NF through issuance of permits. Permitted recreation uses provide specific recreational opportunities to the public and deliver economic benefits to rural economics.

### 3.19.2 Regulatory framework

Please see the regulatory framework for Recreation Settings.

### 3.19.3 Assumptions

Since adoption of the 1986 plans, recreation activities within the plan area have changed. This analysis assumes that changes to recreational use patterns would occur naturally as a result of factors associated with recreation trends, advances in technology, aging population, aging infrastructure, and climatic changes.

### 3.19.4 Best available scientific information used

Please refer to the BASI description under the recreation settings section.

### 3.19.5 Affected environment

The HLC NF has both commercial and non-commercial recreation permits. Table 119 gives a summary of the number and kinds of recreation special use permits currently managed by the HLC NF.

**Table 119. Summary of recreation special uses permits by GA**

GA	Recreation Residences	Organization Camps	Resorts	Ski Areas	Outfitter and Guides
Big Belts	-	-	-	-	4
Castles	1	-	-	-	1
Crazies	-	-	-	-	2
Divide	11	1	-	-	1
Elkhorns	-	-	-	-	1
Highwoods	3	-	-	-	-
Little Belts	58	1	-	1	21
Rocky Mountain Range	98	-	4	1	19
Snowies	-	-	-	-	-1
Upper Blackfoot	1	-	-	-	7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>57</b>



### Recreation special events

The HLC NF also provides recreation special use permits for recreation special events on the Forest (Table 120). Special event permits are issued to groups or organizations for events that are short-lived or temporary in nature.

**Table 120. Number of recreation special use permits issued for special events by ranger district from 2013 through 2017**

Ranger District	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Helena	7	4	1	5	4
Lincoln	3	4	2	5	4
Townsend	0	0	0	1	0
Belt Creek-White Sulphur Springs	4	1	5	6	2
Judith-Musselshell	0	2	3	3	3
Rocky Mountain	0	0	0	0	0

### 3.19.6 Environmental consequences

#### Effects common to all alternatives

In all alternatives, natural disturbances, recreation use patterns, and emerging technologies would continue to influence the need for recreation special use permits across the Forest. Vegetative conditions can seriously impact the location and infrastructure of recreation special uses. Additionally, the condition of aging infrastructure can have both long and short-term effects to permit holders. Emerging technologies as well as shifts and changes in recreational interests can influence the kinds and location of special uses on the landscape.

#### Effects common to all action alternatives

Plan components developed for recreation special uses would remain the same in all action alternatives and provide general guidance for recreation special uses. Specific guidance regarding individual permits would remain a part of the permit process. Direction for overall forest capacity and needs assessments would occur outside of the forest planning process. The revised forest plan would not set limits on number and kind of special uses provided on the HLC NF in any of the action alternatives.

Table 121 summarizes the expected effects of each plan component related to recreation special uses.

**Table 121. Summary of proposed plan components for recreation special uses**

Plan component	Expected effects
FW-RSUP-DC-01	Recreation special uses would provide unique opportunities, services, and experiences depending upon a demonstrated demand for a specific recreation opportunity.
FW-RSUP-DC-02	Recreation special uses would provide services while ensuring public health and safety and the protection of natural and cultural resources.
FW-RSUP-DC-03	This desired condition recognizes that recreation special uses contribute to the local economy and must remain compatible with ecological and social capacity thresholds.
FW-RSUP-DC-04	This desired condition highlights the historic values of buildings under special use permit while providing for permitted uses to occur.
FW-RSUP-DC-05	Vegetative management would be used to provide for public health and safety and the protection of permitted uses and facilities.
FW-RSUP-GDL-01	This guideline provides direction for the development of permits that reduce conflict with other users and natural resources.

### *Effects from Forest Plan Components Associated With:*

#### **Aquatic ecosystems and soil management**

Plan components and activities related to watershed, soil, riparian, or aquatic habitat improvements would have effects to some recreation special use permits. The plan components that would have the greatest influence on recreation opportunities under all action alternatives are those associated with RMZs. East of the Continental Divide (the majority of the HLC NF), RMZs would be adopted and result in more acres being subject to riparian area plan components as compared to the no-action alternative, in which SMZs would be used. West of the Continental Divide, the area influenced by riparian plan components is the same across all alternatives because RMZs would be defined the same way as riparian habitat conservation zones are in the no-action alternative. Please refer to the RMZ section.

Many special use permits require access to areas located within RMZs and near sources of water. Where possible recreation special uses would be located outside of RMZs. Plan components for RMZs would limit road construction and vegetation management activities that could occur in association with special use permits.

All action alternatives provide direction and guidance for the management of recreation special uses to protect watershed, soil, riparian and aquatic habitats, most specifically within RMZs. The area on which these components apply is greater with the action alternatives than with the no-action alternative on landscapes east of the Continental Divide.

#### **Fire and fuels management**

Unplanned and prescribed fires would continue to affect the long-term ecological processes across the HLC NF. Fire could create a temporary loss of vegetation, reduction in water quality due to sedimentation, reduction in recreation access to some areas, and air pollution which could cause displacement of some forest visitors to other areas on the forest or to other forests in the region.

#### **Timber and vegetation management**

Timber and vegetation management activities would occur on lands suitable for timber production. These activities may be noticeable from areas where recreation special uses area taking place. In some cases, such as downhill ski permit areas, vegetation management is an effective tool for creating additional opportunities and/or protecting forest visitors (i.e. hazard tree removal on ski runs). All action alternative include plan components for the management of vegetation around developed recreation sites and permanent structures associated with recreation special uses.

#### **Livestock grazing and management**

Generally, the grazing of livestock associated with recreation special uses is allowed within areas associated with the recreation special use permits. The action alternatives provide suitability direction for the management of grazing within developed recreation sites and associated with recreation special uses.

#### **Wildlife management**

Activities related to wildlife improvements and management would affect recreation special uses across the HLC NF. Most notable is direction for food storage for bears in developed sites and at outfitter guide camps. Additionally, the grizzly bear amendment establishes direction for the development of future recreation opportunities in some GAs of the forest.

#### **Cultural, historic, and tribal resource management**

Many of the recreation residences and resorts on the HLC NF are historic and have a need to be managed for their historic values in addition to their recreational values. Future expansion and remodeling of these requires additional planning and approval to ensure that historic values are not damaged. All action alternatives provide plan components that would protect and enhance the historic resource values associated with recreation special use permits.

**Road access and infrastructure**

All action alternatives developed plan components that provide future direction for road access and the construction/reconstruction and maintenance of historic buildings and infrastructure associated with recreation special use permits on the Forest.

**Alternative A, no action**

In the no-action alternative, recreation special uses would continue to be managed under the guidance provided in the 1986 Helena and Lewis and Clark Forest Plans. See Table 122.

**Table 122. Summary of existing plan components for recreation special uses**

Plan component	Expected effects
1986 Helena NF Plan, Forest-wide Standards, Recreation (7) Page II/15.	“Outfitter and guide use will generally be maintained at a level determined from the highest of 2 years of actual use experienced during the period 1979-1983. Applications for new special use permits will be considered on a case-by-case basis with consideration for resource limitation and public need.” This standard provides specific direction for the management of the special uses program. It also does not allow for new or additional information on recreation special uses beyond the year 1983 and may not be including the variety of special use requests that the HLC NF currently receives.
1986 Helena NF Plan, Appendix O, Pages O/1 and O/2.	Provides guidance for special uses and subdivisions including: “occasional” events, commercial recreation developments, and recreation cabins on the forest. This appendix does not include direction for all recreation special uses on the forest and leaves forest managers flexibility for determining the needs of permits on case-by-case basis.
1986 Lewis & Clark NF Plan, Forest-wide Objectives, Resource/Activity Summaries Recreation, Page 2-4.	“Recreation residence permits will be continued except where there are substantial conflicts with public needs or resources values.” This objective does not provide guidance for the special needs of historic values of recreation residences. Additionally there are no objectives for other recreation special use permits.
1986 Lewis & Clark NF Plan, Forest-wide Standards, Recreation Residences A-3, Travel Shelters A-4, Winter Dispersed Recreation A-5, Land Uses J-3 (3) and (7) Pages 2-26 and 2-62.	These standards provide direction for recreation residences, travel shelters, and winter dispersed recreation opportunities. Specifically, Standard A-3 outlines the use of FSM 2720 for the administration of recreation residence permits. Standard A-4 authorizes the use of permits to developing travel shelters. Standard A-5 encourages cooperative agreements for motorized and non-motorized winter snow trails. Standard J-3 provides direction for a number of kinds of special uses. Relevant to recreation, (3) states that special uses will be provided to support Forest goals and objectives and (7) provides direction to maintain the number of outfitter-guide permits to the 1984 level, but to consider new outfitter-guide permits on a case-by-case basis.

**Alternatives B – E**

See effects common to all action alternatives.

**Conclusions**

In alternative A, the special uses program would continue to be managed by the direction provided in the 1986 Helena and Lewis and Clark Forest Plans. Direction in the 1986 plans focuses primarily on recreation residents and outfitter and guides, and does not provide guidance for other recreation special uses such as ski areas, resorts, organization camps, or special events.

Under the action alternatives, the Draft Plan components would provide overall direction for the management of all recreation special uses across the HLC NF. Specific guidance regarding individualized permits would remain a part of the permit process. To be responsive to the frequent changes and flexible

in the overall management of the recreation special uses program, direction for overall forest capacity and needs assessments would occur outside of the forest planning process.

By providing the plan components outlined in the action alternatives, the HLC NF would meet the purpose and need of the revised forest plan, ensuring that recreation special uses are ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable for present and future generations.

## 3.20 Recreation Access

### 3.20.1 Introduction

Access to and through the forest is facilitated year round, and in a number of ways. Visitors select their access based on their preferred setting, experience, and mode of transportation. Roads, motorized trails, nonmotorized trails, rivers, and airstrips penetrate the forest for visitors to walk, bike, boat, ride, drive, or fly to their destinations.

This section reviews the effects of the plan components associated with recreation access. These effects are measured by the following indicators:

- Miles of open road
- Miles of motorized trail
- Miles of trail open to mechanized means of transport
- Miles of groomed trail
- Acres open to motorized over-snow uses

### 3.20.2 Regulatory framework

Please see the regulatory framework for Recreation Settings.

### 3.20.3 Assumptions

Since adoption of the 1986 plans, recreation activities in the plan area have changed. This analysis assumes that changes to recreational use patterns would occur naturally as a result of factors associated with recreation trends, advances in technology, aging population, aging infrastructure, and climate changes.

### 3.20.4 Best available scientific information used

Please refer to the BASI description under the recreation settings section. All road and trail miles are derived from the Infrastructure database and are approximate.

### 3.20.5 Affected environment

Access to and through the forest is facilitated year round and in a number of ways. In many cases, travel routes destinations and these routes are often recognized by unique designations, such as scenic byways, historic trails, and WSRs. In other cases, forest access, through roads and trails, links local communities with forest settings and facilitates backyard recreation opportunities.

#### Travel plan direction

Travel plan direction has been established for all areas of the HLC NF. These travel plans provide direction to users as to which parts of the NF can be accessed for motorized recreation activities. Table 123 lists the name of the travel plans that provide direction for the HLC NF.

**Table 123. Travel plans by GA**

GA	Name of Travel Plan	Decision Signed (ROD or DN)
Big Belts	North Belts	2005
	South Belts	2007
	Winter South Belts	1999
Castles	Little Belts, Castles, and Crazies	2007
Crazies	Little Belts, Castles, and Crazies	2007
Divide	Divide Travel Plan	2016
	Soundwood	1998
	Clancy Unionville	2003
Elkhorns	Elkhorns Travel Plan	1995
Highwoods	Highwoods Access	1993
Little Belts	Little Belts, Castles, and Crazies	2007
Rocky Mountain Range	Badger Two Medicine	2009
	Birch Creek South	2007
Snowies	Big Snowies Access and Travel Management	2002
	Little Snowies Vegetative Management and Public Access	1993
Upper Blackfoot	Blackfoot Winter Travel Plan	2013
	Blackfoot Non-Winter Travel Plan	2017

### Roads

Roads are the primary routes that recreationists use to access the HLC NF. Roads often provide direct access to recreational facilities. Forest travel plans dictate which roads are open and for how long. Table 124 displays the miles of road by GA and type of road access.

**Table 124. Miles of road by GA and by type of road access**

GA	Miles of Road Open Year Round	Miles of Road Open Seasonally	Miles of Road Closed Year Round	Total Miles of Road
Big Belts	172	201	333	705
Castles	64	9	3	76
Crazies	36	2	7	45
Divide	309	29	216	554
Elkhorns	75	96	116	286
Highwoods	11	0	1	12
Little Belts	504	351	166	1,020
Rocky Mountain Range	101	18	15	134
Snowies	44	7	34	85
Upper Blackfoot	244	135	193	571
Outside GA <sup>1</sup>	132	9	21	162
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,690</b>	<b>855</b>	<b>1,105</b>	<b>3,650</b>

1. Miles of road outside of GA boundaries that the FS manages on private or other public lands.

### Trails

Table 125 displays the miles of trails broken out by GA within the plan area. Trails are further identified by motorized trails, nonmotorized trails outside of wilderness, and wilderness trails.

**Table 125. Miles of trail by GA and type of trail**

GA	Miles of Motorized Trail	Miles of Non-motorized Trails Outside of Wilderness	Miles of Wilderness Trail	Total Miles Trail
Big Belts	62	107	39	208
Castles	87	15	0	102
Crazies	31	50	0	81
Divide	6	76	0	82
Elkhorns	9	102	0	111
Highwoods	28	10	0	38
Little Belt Mountains	470	226	0	696
Rocky Mountain Range	70	456	457	983
Snowies	13	105	0	118
Upper Blackfoot	36	77	98	211
<b>Totals</b>	<b>812</b>	<b>1224</b>	<b>594</b>	<b>2,630</b>

### Groomed trails and motorized over-snow areas

The groomed trails on NFS lands are often only a small portion of a larger network of groomed trails that extend onto state, county, and private roads and lands. These trails are often groomed by local snowmobile clubs. In addition, the Forest has approximately 892,311 acres open for over-snow motorized use during the winter season. Table 126 shows the number of miles of groomed trails and where they are located on the Forest.

**Table 126. Miles of groomed trail by GA**

GA	Miles of Groomed Trail
Big Belts	73
Castles	0
Crazies	0
Divide	97
Elkhorns	0
Highwoods	0
Little Belt Mountains	278
Rocky Mountain Range	0
Snowies	0
Upper Blackfoot	86
<b>Totals</b>	<b>534</b>

Over-snow motorized use is very popular on the Forest. Table 127 displays the approximate acreages that are open for over-snow motorized uses on the HLC NF.

**Table 127. Acres open to motorized over-snow use by GA**

GA	Acres open to motorized over-snow recreation use
Big Belts	80,035
Castles	55,130
Crazies	21,292
Divide	114,340
Elkhorns	25,364
Highwoods	0
Little Belt Mountains	368,763
Rocky Mountain Range	27,653
Snowies	34,632
Upper Blackfoot	127,742
<b>Total</b>	<b>854,951</b>

*Aviation recreation*

Another recreation activity that receives considerable attention within the HLC NFs plan area and is growing in popularity is aviation recreation. Owners of small aircraft use backcountry air strips to access dispersed campgrounds or dispersed recreation areas. Table 128 displays these air strips and the GAs in which they are located.

**Table 128. Airstrips and the GAs where they are located**

GA	Name of Air Strip	Location
Little Belt Mountains	Russian Flats Backcountry Airstrip	T11N R11E Sections 7, 12, and 13
Rocky Mountain Range	Benchmark Backcountry Airstrip	T20N R10W Sections 15, 16, and 22
Upper Blackfoot	Lincoln Community Airport	T14N R08W Sections 19 and 20

**3.20.6 Environmental consequences**

**Effects common to all alternatives**

In all alternatives, natural disturbances, recreation use patterns, and emerging technologies would continue to influence recreation across these landscapes. Travel plans would continue to provide site-specific direction for where motorized and nonmotorized uses can take place. The three current airstrips would remain available under all alternatives.

**Effects Common to all action alternatives**

The plan components developed for recreation access would remain the same in all action alternatives. Desired ROS classes would provide a variety of recreation access opportunities across the HLC NF and travel plans would provide site-specific determinations on where motorized uses may occur. Table 129 summarizes the expected effects of each plan component related to recreation access.

**Table 129. Summary of proposed plan components for recreation access**

Plan component	Expected effects
FW-ACCESS-DC-01, 02, and 03	These desired conditions state that the forest would provide a variety of access options for recreation uses on system roads, trails, and airstrips, and that users stay on these designated systems to recreate.

Plan component	Expected effects
FW-ACCESS-DC-04	This desired condition states that facilities that support recreation access ensure the public health and safety and protect natural and cultural resources.
FW-ACCESS-GO-01	The FS works in cooperation with landowners, other agencies, and partners to provide legal access to public lands.
FW-ACCESS-GDL-01	Unauthorized recreation trails should be rehabilitated.
FW-ACCESS-GDL-02	Trailheads and airstrips should be strategically located to provide the best opportunities for recreation access.

Public commenters asked for the allowance of more access for recreation aviation activities, especially for provisions for airstrips or where motorized aircraft may take off and land. Access for recreation aviation activities would be determined by the ROS classes for the action alternatives. Please see the recreation settings section for further clarifications.

*Effects from forest plan components associated with:*

**Aquatic ecosystems and soil management**

Plan components and activities related to watershed, soil, riparian, or aquatic habitat improvements would have effects recreation access on the HLC NF. The plan components that would have the greatest influence on recreation opportunities under all action alternatives are those associated with RMZs. East of the Continental Divide (the majority of the HLC NF), RMZs would be adopted and result in more acres being subject to riparian area plan components as compared to the no-action alternative, in which SMZs would be used. West of the Continental Divide, the area influenced by riparian plan components is the same across all alternatives because RMZs would be defined the same way as riparian habitat conservation zones are in the no-action alternative.

In order to accomplish aquatic and soil management activities, recreation access routes, such as roads and trails, may be temporarily closed or rerouted. Where possible recreation access facilities, such as roads and trails, would be located outside of RMZs. Plan components for RMZs would limit road construction that could occur in association with recreation access.

All action alternatives provide direction and guidance to protect watershed, soil, riparian and aquatic habitats, most specifically within RMZs. The area on which these components apply is greater with the action alternatives than with the no-action alternative on landscapes east of the Continental Divide.

**Fire and fuels management**

Unplanned and prescriptive fires would continue to affect the long-term ecological processes across the Forest. These fire activities could create a temporary loss of vegetation, reduction in water quality due to sedimentation, or reduction in recreation access to some recreation opportunities on the Forest.

**Timber and vegetation management**

Timber management would continue on lands suitable for timber production. These activities may be noticeable from roads and trails across the forest. Additionally, temporary road and trail closures required to accomplish timber and vegetation management activities, may have short term impacts to recreation access.

**Livestock grazing and management**

Grazing of livestock is allowed within approved allotments across the Forest. There would be little to no effect of livestock grazing to recreation access on the Forest.



## Wildlife management

Activities related to wildlife improvements and management would occur across the Forest. These activities are expected to have little to no affect to recreation access.

## Alternative A, no action

Recreation access would continue to be managed under the 1986 Helena and Lewis and Clark Forest Plans. Travel plans would provide the direction for where motorized uses can and cannot occur, and wilderness and other laws may determine where various recreation facilities, such as trailheads and airstrips, occur. Table 130 describes the plan components in the 1986 Helena and Lewis and Clark Forest Plans that provide direction for recreation access.

**Table 130. Summary of existing plan components for recreation access**

Plan component	Expected effects
1986 Helena NF Plan, Objectives, Resource Activity/Summaries Facilities, Page II/6	This objective states that transportation facilities such as roads and trails would be constructed, managed, and maintained to cost effectively meet the Forest land and resource objectives and visitors' needs. This objective also talks about the integration and coordination of public and private with NF system roads and trails.
1986 Helena NF Plan, Forest-wide Standards, Facilities/Road Management, Facilities/Trails, Pages II/31 through II/33	The road management standards generally focus on the availability of roads, trails, and areas to motorized uses. This standard also provides criteria for road, trail, or area restrictions. The trails standards reference FSH 2309.18 and outline priority trails work as well as provides direction for construction, reconstruction, abandonment, and/or rerouting of trails.
1986 Helena NF Plan, Management Areas, Pages III/3 through III/97	Each of the management areas provides direction for recreation access, generally in discussions of roads and trails facilities.
1986 Lewis and Clark NF Plan, Forest-wide Objectives Facilities, Page 2-8	This objective states that transportation facilities, such as roads, trails and airfields, would be constructed, managed, and maintained to cost effectively meet the Forest land and resource objectives and visitors' needs. This objective also talks about the integration and coordination of public and private with NF system roads and trails. This objective ensures adequate and safe airfield facilities for the Forests' needs.
1986 Lewis and Clark NF Plan, Forest-wide Standards, Travel Planning L-2, Maintenance and Construction of Roads, Trails, and Other Facilities L-4, Pages 2-64 through 2-71.	These standards provide direction for road and trail facilities on the Forest. Specifically, Standard L-2 provides direction for the development of travel plans for roads and trails. Standard L-4 provides direction for the proper construction, reconstruction, and rehabilitation of roads and trails on the Forest.
1986 Lewis and Clark NF Plan, Management Areas, Pages III/3 through III/97.	Each of the management areas provides direction for recreation access, generally in discussions of roads and trails facilities.
1986 Lewis and Clark NF Plan, Appendix O, Roads and Trails Management	This table describes the amount of public access and the categories of trail management by management area. This table does not discuss winter trails or airstrip access.

## Alternative B

The amount and location of RWAs in alternative B would have an effect on recreation access. In alternative B, nine (9) areas were identified as RWA. These nine RWAs are located within five GAs and total approximately 213,076 acres. Motorized uses and mechanized means of transport (including bicycles) would be considered unsuitable and would not be allowed in RWAs in alternative B.

Identification of RWAs would affect the number of roads, motorized trails, groomed snowmobile trails, and motorized over snow areas available for motorized recreation uses. Additionally, the number of non-motorized trails available for mechanical means of transport would also be affected.

### Roads

Approximately 12 miles of open road would be closed in alternative B. These miles of open road are located in the Snowies GA. Table 131 displays the miles of road by GA and the type of road access that would be available in alternative B.

**Table 131. Miles of road by GA by type of road access (alternative B)**

GA	Miles of Road Open Year Round	Miles of Road Open Seasonally	Miles of Road Closed Year Round	Total Miles of Road
Big Belts	172	201	333	705
Castles	64	9	3	76
Crazies	36	2	7	45
Divide	309	29	216	554
Elkhorns	75	96	116	286
Highwoods	11	0	1	12
Little Belts	504	351	166	1,020
Rocky Mountain Range	101	18	15	134
Snowies	32	7	34	73
Upper Blackfoot	244	135	193	571
Outside GA <sup>1</sup>	132	9	21	162
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,678</b>	<b>855</b>	<b>1,105</b>	<b>3,638</b>

1. Miles of road outside of GA boundaries that the FS manages on private or other public lands.

### Trails

Access on approximately 0.1 mile of motorized trail would be closed in alternative B. This small segment of motorized trail is located in the Snowies GA. Additionally in alternative B, approximately 205.7 miles of nonmotorized trails would be closed to mechanized means of transportation, including bicycles. These trails are located within the Big Belts, Divide, Little Belts, Snowies and Upper Blackfoot GAs.

Table 132 displays the miles of trails broken out by GA within the plan area. Trails are further identified by motorized, nonmotorized/non-wilderness and wilderness trails.

**Table 132. Miles of trail by GA and type of trail (alternative B)**

GA	Miles of Motorized Trail	Miles of Non-Motorized Trails Outside of Wilderness	Miles of Wilderness Trail
Big Belts	62.0	88.1	39.0
Castles	87.0	15.0	0
Crazies	31.0	50.0	0
Divide	6.0	59.7	0
Elkhorns	9.0	102.0	0
Highwoods	28.0	10.0	0
Little Belts	470.0	213.1	0
Rocky Mountain Range	70.0	456.0	457.0

GA	Miles of Motorized Trail	Miles of Non-Motorized Trails Outside of Wilderness	Miles of Wilderness Trail
Snowies	12.9	6.7	0
Upper Blackfoot	36.0	17.8	98.0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>811.9</b>	<b>1,018.4</b>	<b>594.0</b>

#### *Groomed trails and motorized over-snow areas*

The number and location of groomed trails would not change in alternative B (Table 133); therefore, the miles of available groomed trail in alternative B would be the same as those described in alternative A, the no-action alternative.

**Table 133. Miles of groomed trail by GA (alternative B)**

GA	Miles of Groomed Trail
Big Belts	73
Castles	0
Crazies	0
Divide	97
Elkhorns	0
Highwoods	0
Little Belt Mountains	278
Rocky Mountain Range	0
Snowies	0
Upper Blackfoot	86
<b>Totals</b>	<b>534</b>

There are a number of motorized over-snow areas that are within identified RWAs in alternative B. Motorized uses in RWAs would not be suitable in alternative B and would not be allowed. Therefore, in alternative B the amount of motorized over-snow areas would be reduced by approximately 24,289 acres (11 acres in Divide GA, 13,144 acres in Big Snowies GA, and 11,134 acres in Upper Blackfoot GA). Table 134 displays the total acres of motorized over-snow areas that would remain open in alternative B.

**Table 134. Acres open to motorized over-snow use by GA (alternative B)**

GA	Acres open to motorized over-snow recreation use
Big Belts	80,035
Castles	55,130
Crazies	21,292
Divide	114,329
Elkhorns	25,364
Highwoods	0
Little Belt Mountains	368,763
Rocky Mountain Range	27,653
Snowies	21,488
Upper Blackfoot	116,608
<b>Total</b>	<b>830,662</b>

## Alternative C

Alternative C was designed to address a number of comments received during public scoping of the proposed action. Specifically, alternative C addresses the desire to retain motorized uses and mechanized means of transport within RWAs. Alternative C includes the same nine (9) RWAs identified in alternative B, but allows for motorized uses and mechanized means of transport (including bicycles) to continue so long as these uses do not affect the wilderness characteristics within the RWAs.

In addition to allowing motorized and mechanized uses within RWAs in alternative C, a number of changes to ROS settings in the center of the Elkhorns and in the Cellar Creek area in the north end of the Divide GA would affect the recreation access in alternative C. Currently, identified areas with the Elkhorns and Cellar Creek area are open to motorized over-snow uses within a semi-primitive motorized ROS setting. In alternative C, the semi-primitive motorized setting would be changed to semi-primitive non-motorized and over-snow motorized uses would no longer be allowed. A reduction of approximately 30,949 acres of motorized over snow areas would occur in alternative C as a result of these ROS changes.

Also, minor changes to summer ROS classes in the Middle Fork Warm Springs drainage of the Elkhorns would change. These changes correct mapping errors found in alternative B but would have limited direct effect on recreation access.

Also in response to public comment, alternative C would prohibit the use of mechanical means of transport (including bicycles) in an area called the “Elkhorns Core” (map in appendix A). Closing this area to mechanical means of transport would support a remote, undeveloped “core” area within the Elkhorns that would allow only non-motorized and non-mechanized uses in both summer and winter. Approximately 60 miles of trails would be closed to mechanical means of transport in the Elkhorns core as a result of these closures.

### Roads

There would be no road closures in alternative C. The miles of open road would remain the same as those in alternative A, the no action.

### Trails

There would be no motorized trail closures in alternative C. There would, however, be approximately 60 miles of non-motorized trails within the Elkhorns Core area that would be closed to mechanized means of transportation, including bicycles. Table 135 displays the total miles of trails of motorized, non-motorized/non-wilderness, and wilderness trails by GA.

**Table 135. Miles of trail by GA and type of trail (alternative C)**

GA	Miles of Motorized Trail	Miles of Nonmotorized Trails Outside of Wilderness	Miles of Wilderness Trail
Big Belts	62	107	39
Castles	87	15	0
Crazies	31	50	0
Divide	6	76	0
Elkhorns	9	82	0
Highwoods	28	10	0
Little Belts	470	226	0
Rocky Mountain Range	70	456	457

GA	Miles of Motorized Trail	Miles of Nonmotorized Trails Outside of Wilderness	Miles of Wilderness Trail
Snowies	13	105	0
Upper Blackfoot	36	77	98
<b>Totals</b>	<b>812</b>	<b>1,204</b>	<b>594</b>

*Groomed trails and motorized over-snow areas*

There are no groomed trails in RWAs in alternative C; therefore, the miles of available groomed trail in alternative C would remain the same as those described in alternative A.

Motorized over-snow uses would continue to be allowed within RWAs in alternative C. However, there would be a reduction of approximately 30,949 acres of motorized over snow use as a result of changes to the winter ROS classes outside of RWAs. These changes would occur in the center of the Elkhorns GA (reduction of 17,878 acres) and in Cellar Creek in the Divide GA (reduction of 13,071 acres). In these areas, semi-primitive motorized areas would be changed to semi-primitive nonmotorized areas and motorized over-snow uses would no longer be allowed. Table 136 displays the total acres of motorized over-snow areas that would remain open in alternative C.

**Table 136. Acres open to motorized over-snow use by GA (alternative C)**

GA	Acres open to motorized over snow recreation use
Big Belts	80,035
Castles	55,130
Crazies	21,292
Divide	101,268
Elkhorns	7,486
Highwoods	0
Little Belt Mountains	368,763
Rocky Mountain Range	27,653
Snowies	34,632
Upper Blackfoot	127,742
<b>Total</b>	<b>824,001</b>

*Direct effects*

In alternative C, approximately 60 miles of non-motorized trails in the core of the Elkhorns GA would be closed to mechanical means of transportation (including bicycles). Table 137 lists these trails.

**Table 137. Nonmotorized trails closed to mechanized means of transport in the core of the Elkhorns GA (alternative C)**

Trail Number	Trail Name	Miles
101	Eagle Interpretive	0.2
109	Crow Creek	4.54
110	Poe Park	2.25

Trail Number	Trail Name	Miles
112	Longfellow Clear Creek	8.7
113	Elk Park	4.16
114	Moose Creek	3.09
115	Beaver Creek	7.32
116	Sheep Park	1.83
117	Pole Creek	0.5
127	South Crow Lakes	1.3
129	Manley Park	0.8
130	Little Tizer Creek	1.66
131	Leslie Lake	1.77
133	Crazy Creek Longfellow	2.96
134	Falls Creek	1.85
135	Long Park	2.72
301	Montgomery Park	4.03
302	McClellan Creek	5.32
343	Casey Meadows	3.7
344	Jackson Creek	0.66
374	Casey Peak	1.09
TOTAL		60.46

## Alternative D

Alternative D responds to comments received during public scoping asking the Forest to consider an alternative that increased the amounts of RWAs and primitive recreation opportunities on the forest. Additional RWAs and additional primitive, undeveloped areas are identified in alternative D.

Motorized recreational uses and mechanized means of transport (including bicycles) would not be suitable within RWAs in alternative D. This alternative would see a decrease in the miles of open road, motorized trails, nonmotorized trails open to mechanized transport (including bicycles), groomed trails, and acres open to motorized over-snow uses.

Alternative D also identifies additional primitive, undeveloped areas outside of RWAs. Motorized uses would also not be suitable in these primitive undeveloped areas; however, mechanical means of transportation (including bicycles) would be allowed.

## Roads

Approximately 22.8 miles of open road would be closed in alternative D. Road closures would occur in the Big Belts, Castles, Little Belt Mountains, Big Snowies, and Divide GAs. Table 138 displays the miles of road by GA and the type of road access that would be available in alternative D.

**Table 138. Miles of road by GA by type of road access (alternative D)**

GA	Miles of Road Open Year Round	Miles of Road Open Seasonally	Miles of Road Closed Year Round	Total Miles of Road
Big Belts	171.7	201.0	333.0	705.7
Castles	57.9	9.0	3.0	69.9

GA	Miles of Road Open Year Round	Miles of Road Open Seasonally	Miles of Road Closed Year Round	Total Miles of Road
Crazies	36.0	2.0	7.0	45.0
Divide	307.3	29.0	216.0	552.3
Elkhorns	75.0	96.0	116.0	287.0
Highwoods	11.0	0	1.0	12.0
Little Belts	500.7	351.0	166.0	1,017.7
Rocky Mountain Range	101.0	18.0	15.0	134.0
Snowies	32.2	7.0	34.0	73.2
Upper Blackfoot	244.0	135.0	193.0	572.0
Outside GA <sup>1</sup>	132.0	9.0	21.0	162.0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,668.8</b>	<b>857.0</b>	<b>1,105.0</b>	<b>3,630.8</b>

1. Miles of road outside of GA boundaries that the FS manages on private or other public lands.

*Trails*

Access on approximately 59.4 miles of motorized trail would be closed to motorized and mechanized means of transport, including bicycles, and 360.1 miles of non-motorized trails would be closed to mechanized means of transport in alternative D. These trails are located within the Big Belts, Castles, Crazies, Divide, Little Belt Mountains, Snowies and Upper Blackfoot GAs.

Table 139 displays the miles of trails broken out by GA within the plan area. Trails are further identified by motorized, nonmotorized/non-wilderness and wilderness trails.

**Table 139. Miles of trail by GA and type of trail (alternative D)**

GA	Miles of Motorized Trail	Miles of Non-Motorized Trails Outside of Wilderness	Miles of Wilderness Trail
Big Belts	62.0	72.1	39.0
Castles	55.1	5.5	0
Crazies	31.0	26.5	0
Divide	3.6	51.8	0
Elkhorns	9.0	102.0	0
Highwoods	28.0	10.0	0
Little Belt Mountains	448.4	116.2	0
Rocky Mountain Range	70.0	456.0	457.0
Snowies	12.9	6.7	0
Upper Blackfoot	32.6	16.1	98.0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>752.6</b>	<b>862.9</b>	<b>594.0</b>

*Groomed trails and motorized over-snow areas*

Approximately 2.4 miles of groomed trail would be closed in alternative D. These trails are all located within the Blackfoot Meadows RWAs in the Divide GA. Table 140 displays the miles of groomed trails that are available by GA in alternative D.

**Table 140. Miles of groomed trail by GA (alternative D)**

GA	Miles of Groomed Trail
Big Belts	73.0

GA	Miles of Groomed Trail
Castles	0
Crazies	0
Divide	94.6
Elkhorns	0
Highwoods	0
Little Belt Mountains	278.0
Rocky Mountain Range	0
Snowies	0
Upper Blackfoot	86.0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>531.6</b>

A number of motorized over-snow areas are located within identified RWAs in alternative D. Motorized uses within RWAs would not be suitable in alternative D and would not be allowed. Therefore, in alternative D the amount of motorized over-snow areas would be reduced by approximately 79,107 acres (26,331 in Castles GA, 4,754 acres in Crazies GA, 6,347 acres Divide GA, 13,176 in Little Belt Mountains GA, 13,144 acres in Big Snowies GA, and 15,355 acres in Upper Blackfoot GA). Table 141 below displays the total acres of motorized over-snow areas that would remain open in alternative D.

**Table 141. Acres open to motorized over-snow use by GA (alternative D)**

GA	Acres open to motorized over-snow recreation use
Big Belts	80,035
Castles	28,799
Crazies	16,538
Divide	107,993
Elkhorns	25,364
Highwoods	0
Little Belt Mountains	355,587
Rocky Mountain Range	27,653
Snowies	21,488
Upper Blackfoot	112,387
<b>Total</b>	<b>775,844</b>

## Alternative E

Alternative E responds to comments received during public scoping asking the Forest to consider an alternative that does not identify RWAs and that increases the amount of forest lands available for timber production. In response to these comments, alternative E does not include any RWAs.

No changes in miles of open roads, motorized trails, nonmotorized trails open to mechanized means of transport, groomed trails, acres open to motorized over-snow uses, or airstrips would occur. Travel plans would continue to provide the direction for where motorized uses can and cannot occur.

## Conclusions

Under alternative A, recreation access would continue to be managed under the 1986 plans. No changes in miles of open roads, motorized trails, trails open to mechanized means of transport, groomed trails, acres open to motorized over-snow uses, or airstrips would occur. Travel plans would continue to provide



the direction for where motorized uses can and cannot occur. Wilderness and other laws may determine where future changes to recreation access may occur.

The plan components for recreation access would remain the same in all of the action alternatives. By providing the plan components outlined in the action alternatives, the HLC NF would meet the purpose and need of the revised forest plan, ensuring that recreation access is ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable for present and future generations.

The miles of open road, motorized trails, trails open for mechanized means of transportation (including bicycles), groomed trails, and motorized over-snow acres would change by alternative. Table 142 compares the miles of open road, motorized trails, trails open for mechanical means of transport and acres open to motorized over-snow uses by alternative. There are currently 3 airstrips located on the HLC NF and there would be no changes to those airstrips in any of the alternatives.

**Table 142. Miles of open road, motorized trail, trails open to mechanized means of transport, and acres open to motorized over-snow uses by alternative.**

Measurement Indicators	Alternative A	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D	Alternative E
Miles of open road	3,650	3,638	3,650	3,631	3,650
Miles of motorized trails	812.0	811.9	812.0	752.6	812
Miles of nonmotorized trail open for mechanical transport	1224	1,018.4	1,204	862.9	1224
Miles of groomed trail	534	534	534	531.6	534
Acres open to motorized over-snow use	854,951	830,662	824,001	775,844	854,951

## 3.21 Scenery

### 3.21.1 Introduction

The scenery of the forest is important to the overall settings and experiences people encounter when visiting the Forest. Therefore, maintaining natural appearing landscapes contributes to recreation experiences and sense of place within the Forest. Understanding the values of scenic character and maintaining scenic integrity are important components of scenery management.

This section reviews the effects to SIOs related to changes in ROS settings as well as the effects of plan components associated with scenery. These effects are displayed by acres of desired SIOs by alternative.

### 3.21.2 Regulatory framework

Please see the regulatory framework for Recreation Settings.

### 3.21.3 Assumptions

This analysis assumes that natural changes to forest conditions would continue and that these changes would have a dynamic effect on the scenery of the Forest.

### 3.21.4 Best available scientific information used

Currently both the 1986 Helena and the Lewis and Clark Forest Plans use the visual management system to describe and determine the effects of management practices to scenery. The visual management system was a systematic approach to inventory, analyze, and monitor scenic resources, but it did not recognize or incorporate natural disturbance processes such as fire, insects and disease, or valued cultural attributes of

FS landscapes. Due to these deficiencies, the visual management system was replaced in 1995 by the scenery management system outlined in *Landscape Aesthetics: A Handbook for Scenery Management*, Agriculture Handbook 701. Handbook 701 describes the most current FS direction for the management of scenery resources on NFS lands, and provides the process used for this analysis.

### ***3.21.5 Affected environment***

#### **Scenic character descriptions**

Scenic character is defined as a combination of the physical, biological, and cultural images that give an area its scenic identity and contribute to its sense of place. The scenic character provides a frame of reference from which to determine the scenic attractiveness of a landscape and to measure changes to the scenic integrity of the scenery described.

Additionally, scenic character is often enhanced by cultural elements found on the landscape. Many of these include old barns and historic structures, remaining evidence of past mining activity, and unique features on the landscape such as historic fences and signs.

Many of the scenic qualities that contribute to or make up the scenic character across these landscapes are outlined and discussed in the “distinctive roles and contributions” segment for each of the GAs.

Full landscape character descriptions for each of the GAs are described in appendix J of the Draft Plan; this constitutes the bulk of the affected environment description.

#### **Scenic attractiveness**

Scenic attractiveness is the primary indicator of the intrinsic beauty of a landscape. Scenic attractiveness helps to determine the level of importance of scenic beauty based on perceptions of landform, vegetation patterns, composition, water, and land use patterns and cultural features. Landscape elements are rated at various levels of scenic values, or attractiveness, and the forest scenic character descriptions serve as the frame of reference for determining scenic attractiveness.

#### **Landscape visibility**

Landscape visibility addresses the relative importance and sensitivity of what is seen and/or perceived in a given landscape. Landscape visibility is measured from what is seen from main travelways and use areas and from the distance the viewer is from the landscape being viewed. Additionally, individual members of the public may place a higher degree of importance to the viewing of scenery from unique travelways, use areas, or viewpoints. Landscape visibility is mapped with a GIS and is determined by distance zones, or the distance at which the landscape is being viewed.

The affected environment for landscape visibility is displayed in appendix F.

#### **Scenic integrity and scenic integrity objectives**

Scenic integrity is defined as a measure of the degree to which a landscape is visually perceived to be complete, when compared to the landscape character described for that area. The highest scenic integrity ratings are given to those landscapes which have little or no deviation from the identified scenic character.

Scenic integrity objectives (SIOs) are developed in coordination with the recreational setting, management direction, and the scenic class that were developed from the scenic inventory. Scenic integrity objectives are incorporated based on the 2012 planning rule, as defined in the glossary. These objectives are mapped using a GIS modeling process. These desired SIOs, combined with the scenic character descriptions, provide direction for the management of scenery on the forest. Individual desired SIO maps were developed for each of the GAs on the Forest for each alternative.

Table 143 describes each of the SIOs.

**Table 143. SIOs and descriptions**

<b>SIO</b>	<b>Description</b>
Very High	The valued scenery appears natural or unaltered. Only minute visual disturbances to the valued scenery, if any, are present.
High	The valued scenery appears natural or unaltered, yet visual disturbances are present; however, they remain unnoticed because they repeat the form, line, color, texture, pattern and scale of the valued scenery
Moderate	The valued scenery appears slightly altered. Noticeable disturbances are minor and visually subordinate to the valued scenery because they repeat its form, line, color, texture, pattern and scale.
Low	The valued scenery appears moderately altered. Visual disturbances are co-dominant with the valued scenery, and may create a focal point of moderate contrast. Disturbances may reflect, introduce or “borrow” valued scenery attributes from outside the landscape being viewed.
Very Low	The valued scenery appears heavily altered. Disturbances dominate the valued scenery being viewed; and they may only slightly borrow from, or reflect, valued scenery attributes within or beyond the viewed landscape.

The HLC NF has a wide range of existing scenic integrity, as displayed for Alternative A in the environmental consequences section. Areas designated for very high scenic integrity are often located in remote and pristine areas. There are areas across the forest that have low to moderate existing scenic integrity. Some of these lands include areas that show contrast in shape, form and texture with the surrounding natural appearing environment.

### Scenic classes

Scenic classes represent the relative landscape value by combining visibility mapping inventories and scenic attractiveness inventories.

### 3.21.6 Environmental consequences

Scenery is affected by activities that may alter the appearance of the landscape. These activities can be either natural processes, such as wildfire and insect and disease processes, or human management activities.

### Effects common to all alternatives

Scenery is an important component of forest management and would continue to be planned for and managed in all alternatives. Scenic values would be managed at the highest level for all wilderness areas.

### Effects common to all action alternatives

All action alternatives include the same desired conditions, guidelines, standards, and monitoring for scenery. Table 144 summarizes the expected effects of each plan component for scenery.

**Table 144. Summary of proposed plan components for scenery, all action alternatives**

<b>Plan component</b>	<b>Expected effects</b>
FW-SCENERY-DC-01	This desired condition bases scenery on the natural form, lines, colors, and textures found in the inherent scenic character of the Forest and would ensure projects meet the natural scenic characteristics in landscapes. Scenic character descriptions have been developed for each GA across the Forest.

<b>Plan component</b>	<b>Expected effects</b>
FW-SCENERY-DC-02	SIOs would provide direction to future projects for scenery and would support the valued connections that communities feel with the landscapes that surround them.
FW-SCENERY-DC-03	This desired condition connects the importance of scenery to recreation users, recreation settings, and opportunities at recreation facilities.
FW-SCENERY-GDL-01	This guideline provides direction for meeting SIOs in vegetative management and facility construction and development projects. These guidelines should ensure that scenery is managed to maintain or enhance the identified scenic character of the GAs across the Forest.

*Effects from forest plan components associated with:*

**Aquatic ecosystems and soil management**

Activities related to watershed, soil, riparian, or aquatic habitat improvements would have little to no effect related to the overall management of scenic quality on the Forest.

**Fire and fuels management**

Wildfire can have a notable impact on both the aesthetics of an area and the amount and distribution of recreation uses across the landscapes they affect. Unplanned and prescribed fires would continue to affect the long-term ecological processes across the Forest. These fire effects would include a temporary loss of vegetation, reduction in water quality due to sedimentation, and air pollution. The changes to vegetation caused by fires can also change the scenic character and the recreational uses of parts of the Forest for long periods of time; however, these effects often tend to mimic naturally occurring topography and vegetation patterns in the area.

**Timber and vegetation management**

Timber harvesting and road building can sometimes create obvious and long lasting effects to the scenery of an area. Since scenery is measured from viewpoints within and across the forest, placement of these types of management activities is critical to overall effects to scenery. Additionally, final silviculture prescriptions and the design of the units themselves should mimic naturally occurring landscape and forest vegetation patterns. All action alternatives include plan components that consider the management of scenery as an integral part of timber and vegetative management.

**Livestock grazing and management**

Activities related to livestock grazing and management would have little to no effects related to the overall management of scenic quality on the Forest.

**Wildlife management**

Activities related to wildlife management would have little to no effects related to the overall management of scenic quality on the Forest.

**Cultural, historic, and tribal resource management**

Often cultural and historic features on a landscape contribute in a positive way to the overall landscape character of an area. As outlined in the landscape character descriptions for each GA found in appendix J of the Draft Plan, the remnants of historic architecture and other features of past human occupation often provide the area in which they are located with a sense of place or identity. All action alternatives include plan components that tie cultural and historic features to landscape character.

**Road access and infrastructure**

Management of road access and infrastructure would have little to no effects related to the overall management of scenic quality on the Forest.

**Alternative A, no action**

In alternative A, the HLC NF would continue to manage scenery under direction provided in the 1986 Helena and Lewis and Clark Forest Plans. Projects would continue to use the visual management system and visual quality objectives to analyze and measure effects to the visual quality on the Forest.

The visual management system is an older, outdated method to analyze effects to visual quality. This system was replaced by the scenery management system (Landscape Aesthetics: A Handbook for Scenery Management, Agriculture Handbook 701) in 1995 which is now required for all future analysis of scenery. To enable better understanding of the comparison between the alternatives, a cross-walk of the terminologies between the visual management system and the scenery management system is displayed in Table 145.

**Table 145. Cross-walk between visual quality objective and scenery management system terms**

Visual Management System Visual Quality Objectives	Scenery Management System SIOs
Preservation	Very High
Retention	High
Partial retention	Moderate
Modification	Low
Maximum modification	Very Low

Table 146 describes the expected effects of the plan components in the 1986 Helena and Lewis and Clark Forest Plans that provide the current direction for visual quality.

**Table 146. Summary of existing 1986 plan components for visual quality**

Plan component	Expected effects
1986 Helena NF Plan Goal 9, Page II/1.	“Provide Forest visitors with visually appearing scenery.”
1986 Helena NF Plan Objective, Resource Activity/ Summaries, Visual Page II/3.	This objective states that visual landscape management practices would have special emphasis in areas seen from identified visually sensitive roads and trails and that mitigation measure would be applies to resource activities that may affect the visual settings.
1986 Helena NF Plan Forest-wide Standards, Visual, Page II/15.	This forest-wide standard establishes that visual quality objectives would be applied to each management area and would provide the guidance for altering landscapes. Some portions of each management area may have more or less restrictive visual quality objectives and these are determined by sensitive viewpoints or viewing areas. This standard also states that visual quality along the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail would be the same as the management area through which it passes.
1986 Helena NF Plan, Management Areas, Pages III/3 through III/97.	A visual quality objective(s) is established for each of the management areas on the Forest.
1986 Helena NF Plan, appendix B, Sensitive Viewing Areas, Pages B/1-B/2.	This table establishes the visual quality objectives along a listing of heavily used roads or popular recreation areas.
1986 Lewis and Clark NF Plan Long Range Goal 1, Page 2-2.	This goal aims to coordinate resource development and use activities so as to protect and improve land and resource quality and productivity, including natural beauty and quality air, water, and soil.
1986 Lewis and Clark NF Plan Forest-wide Objective,	This objective states that visual landscape management would be emphasized in areas that are seen from identified visually sensitive roads

Plan component	Expected effects
Visual Resources, Page 2-4.	and trails and that mitigation measure would be applies to resource activities that may affect the visual settings.
1986 Lewis and Clark NF Plan Forest-wide Standard A-8 Pages 2-28 and 2-29.	This standard directs the forest to use the NF Landscape Management System for visual resource management. It further states that a visual quality objective would be established for each management area which would provide the guidance for altering landscapes. Some portions of each management area may have more or less restrictive visual quality objectives and these are determined by sensitive viewpoints or viewing areas. Sensitive viewing roads, trails, and viewing areas are listed.
1986 Lewis and Clark NF Plan Management Areas, Pages III/3 - III/97.	A visual quality objective(s) is established for each of the management areas on the Forest.
1986 Lewis and Clark NF Plan appendix N, Existing Visual Condition, Pages N-1 and N-2.	This appendix provides direction for evaluating the existing visual condition of landscapes.

Table 147 displays the existing acres and percent of the forest assigned to each visual quality objective in alternative A. Table 148 shows the percent visual quality objective by GA.

**Table 147. Acres and percentage of visual quality objectives in alternative A**

Visual Quality Objectives	Acres	Percent of Forest
Preservation	598,474	21
Retention	265,211	9
Partial Retention	647,433	22
Modification	1,372,287	48
Maximum Modification	0	0

**Table 148. Percent of visual quality objectives by GA (alternative A)**

GA	Preservation	Retention	Partial Retention	Modification	Maximum Modification
Big Belts	15	5	49	31	0
Castles	0	22	23	55	0
Crazies	0	15	1	84	0
Divide	8	2	21	69	0
Elkhorns	0	7	31	62	0
Highwoods	0	12	18	70	0
Little Belt Mountains	0	14	22	64	0
Rocky Mountain Range	58	9	15	18	0
Snowies	0	11	6	83	0
Upper Blackfoot	25	2	24	49	0

### Alternative B

Alternative B establishes desired SIOs for each GA using the scenery management system as per the direction provided in the 2012 Planning Rule. These desired SIOs were mapped using the process outlined in the Scenery Management System, and provide direction for managing the scenic quality on the

Forest. Table 149 and Table 150 depict the acreages and percent total of the desired SIOs in alternative B. Individual maps of the SIOs are found by GA in appendix A.

**Table 149. Desired SIOs for alternative B**

SIO	Acres	Percent of Forest
Very High	867,285	30
High	1,564,128	54
Moderate	228,769	8
Low	223,702	8

**Table 150. Percent of SIOs by GA (alternative B)**

GA	Very High	High	Moderate	Low	Very Low
Big Belts	15	61	11	13	0
Castles	0	64	20	16	0
Crazies	0	89	4	7	0
Divide	16	55	19	10	0
Elkhorns	0	88	3	9	0
Highwoods	0	97	2	1	0
Little Belt Mountains	12	62	12	14	0
Rocky Mountain Range	58	42	<1	<1	0
Snowies	81	3	4	12	0
Upper Blackfoot	42	45	10	3	0

### Alternative C

Similar to alternative B, alternative C would establish desired SIOs for each GA as per the direction provided in the 2012 Planning Rule. The desired SIOs in alternative C reflect changes to ROS classes in the center of the Elkhorns and in the Cellar Creek area in the north end of the Divide GA that resulted from public comment. Table 151 and Table 152 depict the acreages and percent total of the desired SIOs in alternative B. Individual maps of the SIOs are found by GA in appendix A.

**Table 151. Desired SIOs for alternative C**

SIO	Acres	Percent of Forest
Very High	867,348	30
High	1,415,719	49
Moderate	376,944	13
Low	223,480	8

**Table 152. Percent of SIOs by GA (alternative C)**

GA	Very High	High	Moderate	Low	Very Low
Big Belts	15	56	16	13	0
Castles	0	54	30	16	0
Crazies	0	82	11	7	0
Divide	16	44	30	10	0

GA	Very High	High	Moderate	Low	Very Low
Elkhorns	0	70	22	8	0
Highwoods	0	97	2	1	0
Little Belt Mountains	12	58	16	14	0
Rocky Mountain Range	58	40	2	<1	0
Snowies	81	3	4	12	0
Upper Blackfoot	42	40	15	3	0

## Alternative D

Alternative D responds to comments received during public scoping asking the Forest to consider an alternative that increases the amounts of RWAs and primitive recreation opportunities on the Forest. This increase of the number and acres of RWAs and the emphasis on undeveloped areas created a shift in the SIOs, increasing the amount of very high and high SIOs. Table 153 and Table 154 depict the acreages and percent total of the desired SIOs for alternative D. Individual maps of the SIOs are found by GA in appendix A.

**Table 153. Desired SIOs for alternative D**

SIO	Acres	Percent of Forest
Very High	1,254,192	44
High	1,183,038	41
Moderate	224,266	8
Low	222,402	8

**Table 154. Percent of SIOs by GA (Alternative D)**

GA	Very High	High	Moderate	Low	Very Low
Big Belts	22	54	11	13	0
Castles	44	20	20	16	0
Crazies	43	47	4	6	0
Divide	30	42	18	10	0
Elkhorns	31	58	3	8	0
Highwoods	20	77	2	1	0
Little Belt Mountains	24	51	11	14	0
Rocky Mountain Range	75	25	<1	<1	0
Snowies	81	3	4	12	0
Upper Blackfoot	42	45	10	3	0

## Alternative E

Alternative E responds to comments received during public scoping asking the Forest to consider an alternative that does not identify RWAs and that increases the amount of forest lands available for timber harvest. In response to these comments, alternative E does not include any RWAs. Additional areas for timber harvest are also identified in alternative E. The SIOs shift as a result of these changes resulting in a decrease in the amount of area with very high SIOs. Table 155 and Table 156 depict the acreages and percent total of the desired SIOs the SIO classes for alternative E. Individual maps of the SIOs are found by GA in appendix A.



**Table 155. Desired SIOs for alternative E**

SIO	Acres	Percent of Forest
Very High	745,764	26
High	1,680,821	58
Moderate	231,842	8
Low	225,064	8

**Table 156. Percent of SIOs by GA (alternative E)**

GA	Very High	High	Moderate	Low	Very Low
Big Belts	10	66	11	13	0
Castles	0	64	20	16	0
Crazies	0	89	4	7	0
Divide	0	70	20	10	0
Elkhorns	0	88	3	9	0
Highwoods	0	97	2	1	0
Little Belt Mountains	11	64	12	13	0
Rocky Mountain Range	58	42	<1	<1	0
Snowies	75	9	4	12	0
Upper Blackfoot	26	61	10	3	0

**Conclusions**

Alternative A would not meet the purpose and need because it continues to use the visual management system, which is not the most current process nor the best available science for managing the scenic values on Forest landscapes.

All of the action alternatives would meet the purpose and need because they use the scenery management system to establish desired SIOs for the management of the scenery on the Forest. By using the scenery management system, the FS would be able to protect the valued scenic attributes found within the individual GAs on the forest and would be able to design projects that borrow strongly from the natural features on these landscapes.

Table 157 provides a comparison of the desired SIOs by alternative. For comparison purposes, SIOs were also identified for alternative A, even though visual quality objectives would continue to be used in this alternative. The visual quality objectives are placed in parenthesis behind their SIO equivalents in the table in alternative A. A cross-walk of the terminologies between the visual management system and the scenery management system is displayed in Table 145.

**Table 157. Comparison of the desired SIOs by alternative**

SIO	Alt. A Acres	Alt. B % of Forest	Alt. B Acres	Alt. B % of Forest	Alt. C Acres	Alt. C % of Forest	Alt. D Acres	Alt. D % of Forest	Alt. E Acres	Alt. E % of Forest
Very High (Preservation)	598,474	21	867,285	30	867,348	30	1,254,192	44	745,764	26
High (Retention)	265,211	9	1,564,128	54	1,415,719	49	1,183,038	41	1,680,821	58

SIO Visual quality objective	Alt. A Acres	Alt. B % of Forest	Alt. B Acres	Alt. B % of Forest	Alt. C Acres	Alt. C % of Forest	Alt. D Acres	Alt. D % of Forest	Alt. E Acres	Alt. E % of Forest
Moderate (Partial Retention)	647,433	22	228,769	8	376,944	13	224,266	8	231,842	8
Low (Modification)	1,372,287	48	223,702	8	223,480	8	222,402	8	225,064	8
Very Low (Maximum Modification)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

## 3.22 Administratively Designated Areas

### 3.22.1 Introduction

Designated areas are specific areas within a forest that have been given permanent designation to maintain their unique special character or purpose. Some designated areas may be established by statute or law while others may be established through other administrative processes. Certain purposes and restrictions are usually established for designated areas, particularly for those areas that have been designated by law.

Land management plans may include recommendations to establish additional or modify existing previously designated areas. Some administrative designations, such as RNAs, may be designated or established concurrent with a plan decision. Once a designated areas is established by the plan decision, the designation continues until a subsequent decision by the appropriate authority removes, or adds to, the designation.

This section analyzes the effects of the draft revised forest plan to the areas that are administratively designated on the Forest. It also analyzes the recommendation of four additional areas for potential future administrative designations (\*). The following areas will be covered in this section:

- IRAs
- National Recreation Trails
- RNAs
- Tenderfoot Creek Experimental Forest
- Missouri River Corridor \*
- Smith River Corridor \*
- South Hills Recreation Area \*
- Elkhorn Wildlife Management Unit
- Kings Hill Scenic Byway
- Badger Two Medicine \*

### Issues

A number of issues surfaced during the scoping period for the proposed action. Some of these issues arose from within the FS and some were brought forward by the public. The issues that drove alternatives for administratively designated areas in this analysis were:

- Mountain bike use in the core area of the Elkhorns GA
- Mountain bike use in portions of the South Hills Recreation Area.