

**Helena and Lewis & Clark National Forests
Forest Plan Assessment**

Appendix C, Scenery

2015

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Appendix C. Scenery

Introduction

The plan area covers a vast area that is made up of a broad variety of ecological regions. This area is further divided into a series of distinctive “island” mountain ranges. These individual mountain ranges were identified and labeled as geographic areas.

Scenery is important to visitors overall experience when visiting the Forest. Research has shown (Ryan 2005) that people prefer natural settings when visiting public lands. Statistics from the National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) project show that the second highest activity visitors participate in nationally is viewing scenery, with 25 percent of visitors participating in this activity. This high percentage emphasizes the importance of maintaining natural appearing landscapes so the expectations of these visitors can be met by the Forests.

Scenic Character

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. It 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. Scenic character for the plan area was assessed by individual geographic areas and includes the encompassing view sheds of both National Forest System forested and nonforested lands. Ecoregion descriptions describe the biophysical aspects of the scenic character of the forest landscape (Refer to chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems, for more information.). These ecoregion descriptions served as the frame of reference for assessing scenic character and the scenery attributes within these landscapes.

The Scenery Management System (SMS) is a systematic approach to inventory, analyze, and monitor the scenic resources. This system recognizes natural disturbance processes such as fire, insects, and disease to be part of the natural landscape that is dynamic and also important in maintaining healthy, sustainable, and scenic landscapes. The primary components of the SMS are: scenic character, scenic attractiveness, landscape visibility, existing scenic integrity, and scenic classes. This system for managing scenery is used in the context of ecosystem management to determine the relative value, stability, resiliency and importance of scenery; assist in establishing overall resource objectives, and ensure high-quality scenery for future generations.

Currently both the Helena and the Lewis and Clark Forest Plans use the Visual Management System (VMS) to describe and determine the effects of management practices to scenery. The VMS is no longer considered to be best available scientific information as it does not consider natural disturbance regimes or valued cultural attributes of Forest Service landscapes. VMS was replaced by the SMS and all future planning for the scenery resource should use this new system.

Existing Scenic Integrity

Existing scenic integrity objects are developed in coordination with the recreational setting, management direction, and the scenic class that were developed from the scenic inventory. 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 character valued by constituents for its aesthetic appeal.

Landscape-level drivers that affect scenic integrity include human-caused visual disturbances such as timber harvesting, road construction, mining, utility corridors, recreation facilities, ski areas, and other

special uses. Naturally-caused visual disturbances include wildfires, insect and disease outbreaks, and wind and ice storms. Population is expected to increase demand for energy and communication infrastructure, which could result in a loss of scenery on HLC NFs lands, impacting recreation experiences and sense of place.

There are areas across the forests 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. These include past vegetation treatments, ski corridors, built utilities corridors, and road corridors. Identification of these areas with low scenic integrity should be analyzed for potential improvement, particularly in areas that have growth in population and in recreation use.

The scenic character and existing scenic integrity for each individual geographic area is described below. Maps of the scenic integrity for each geographic area can be found in appendix A of the assessment.

Big Belts Geographic Area



Figure A.1 Looking east at Mount Baldy from the Missouri River valley

Location

The Big Belt Mountains are an island range primarily in Broadwater, Lewis and Clark, and Meagher Counties with small portions in Gallatin and Cascade Counties. This includes the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness, the outlying Dry Range, and the small communities of York and Nelson. The nearest population center is Helena. Many other smaller communities also have intimate relationships with the

geographic area such as Lakeside, Canyon Ferry, Townsend, Toston, and White Sulphur Springs. The range is located between the predominantly treeless Smith and Missouri river valleys.

Scenic Character

The Big Belts Geographic Area has a rich history of occupation beginning with prehistoric peoples. Many cliff faces and rock shelters bear their signature in the form of pictographs and petroglyphs. Artifacts such as projectile points and associated flakes are commonly encountered. The Flathead Trail, a historic travel corridor, traverses the southern Big Belt Mountains.

The presence of valuable minerals has endowed the Big Belts with a robust mining history. Relics of historic mining infrastructure and tools are frequent. Many small communities have come and gone, such as Whites City, Diamond City, Watson, Vista, Manger, Duck Creek, Blackwell, Cement Gulch City, and Trout Creek to name a few. Many of their structures have long disappeared but remnants still exist on the landscape. Thompson Guard Station and Meriwether Guard Station stand as reminders of the US Forest Service history.

The Mann Gulch Smokejumper Memorial commemorates the tragedy of the Mann Gulch Fire, a sacred landscape for wildland firefighters. Many make pilgrimages here to pay their respects, strengthen internal relationships, and revisit lessons learned.

The Big Belt Mountains make up a long arc, approximately 75 miles long, on a northwest to southeast axis. Proportionally, it is narrow west to east, bulging wider in the north. The Missouri River clips the northwest boundary. This section of the river was named the Gates of the Mountains by the Lewis and Clark expedition because here the river is constricted through tall, picturesque limestone cliffs. An area of canyons adjacent to this stretch of river shares similar geology and has been designated wilderness. The tallest mountains are found in the south central part of the range, Mount Baldy at 9,472 and Mount Edith 9,507, just north of Deep Creek River Canyon. The lowest elevations are along the Missouri River and are around 3,600 feet. Many other mountains are also landmarks, such as Cap, Willow, Hogback, Hedges, and Grassy. Slopes are typically steep and rugged. Some of the highest elevations have evidence of localized glaciation, such as the cirque on Mount Edith.

The mountains are characterized by many steep sided gulches and canyons that drain the mountains to the west, with over 140 named. A few are very narrow at the entrance to the mountains and then open up into broader bottoms once within, such as Hellgate, Little Hellgate, and Avalanche gulches. Other prominent gulches are Magpie, Cave, White, Confederate, Duck Creek, Cabin, and Dry Creek. Another prominent local landform feature is the bar, which is a deposition of material by a stream body over time. It is similar to a sand bar or point bar in a stream, but on a larger scale. Many have been productive sources for valuable minerals for placer miners.

The Dry Range is a distinct geologic unit to the east of the Big Belt Mountains and is included in the Big Belts Geographic Area because of its close proximity. This landform can be described as foothills to low mountains with elevations ranging between 4500-6500 feet. Ellis Canyon is a prominent, branching drainage network that runs south to north through the range.

The geology of this GA is predominantly sedimentary limestone. There are some pockets of rock from metamorphic and volcanic activity in the Big Belt Mountains that are rich with minerals.

Most of the outlying Dry Range, northeast Big Belts, and area of the Big Belts along the Missouri River can be characterized as partially forested foothills with large grassland openings. The area of the Dry Range that borders the Smith River is more heavily forested.

The forest in the Big Belt Mountains is predominantly Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine at lower elevations, with subalpine fir at higher elevations. Whitebark pine is also encountered at higher elevations. Valley bottoms alongside drainages have narrow riparian areas with dogwood, willow, patches of cottonwood and other wet-loving plants. South and southwest aspects grow dry grassland. Fire is the primary sculptor of plant communities and occurs frequently. The majority of the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness burned in 2007 and the famous Mann Gulch fire, in the same vicinity, burned in 1949. Please see chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems, for more details.

Both the Big Belts and the Dry Range lack much water and are characteristically dry. They are in the rain shadow of the continental divide to the west. The underlying geology is porous and many of the streams are intermittent. Most of the west-facing gulches and canyons have small constrained streams associated with them, such as Beaver Creek, Trout Creek, and Deep Creek. High elevation lakes are in basins east of Mount Baldy and Boulder Baldy. Discharge from these lakes flows east into the Smith River via Camas and Big Birch Creek. Rock Creek also flows into the Smith and connects with Ellis Canyon in the Dry Range. Gipsy Lake, a manmade reservoir, is also on the east side.



Figure A.2 Dry prairie, looking east towards Ellis Canyon in the Dry Range



Figure A.3 Dry Range from the Lingshire Road



Figure A.4 Avalanche Gulch



Figure A.5 Hellgate Gulch



Figure A.6 Glacial cirque on Mount Edith



Figure A.7 High elevation ridge between Mount Baldy and Mount Edith



Figure A.8 Meriwether Canyon in Gates of the Mountains Wilderness



Figure A.9 Looking north at bluffs along a short, free-flowing section of the Missouri River between Hauser and Upper Holter Lakes

Scenic Integrity

Much mining has occurred and still takes place in certain gulches of the Big Belt Mountains, mostly in the form of placer mining. This has resulted in large waste piles in drainage bottoms. Confederate Gulch is an example of the effects of this activity. One can expect to see effects of mining throughout the geographic area. A large percentage of the Forest Proclamation Area has been conveyed into private land. The two ownerships have rendered some areas with a checkerboard appearance from contrasting land uses.

A large range program is active in the geographic area. This has necessitated the building of fence and water developments. It has also simplified plant communities and impacted scarce riparian and wetland areas. Many roads have been constructed for resource extraction and now fragment the geographic area. The road network now serves as the primary platform from which visitors experience the area. The cutting of timber is evident and imposes strong geometric patterns on otherwise natural appearing assemblages of vegetation. Communication towers have been constructed on high points. Utilities and transmission corridors transect the geographic area. One transmission corridor clips the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness.

Less obvious impacts to scenic integrity have also occurred. The exclusion of fire has changed vegetation composition and patterns, such as causing higher densities of trees than historic norms. It has also allowed for trees to encroach into areas that were historically mostly herbaceous vegetation. Please see chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems, for more details.

Table A.1 Percentage of existing scenic integrity values within the Big Belts Geographic Area

Existing Scenic Integrity	Percent of geographic area	Acres ¹
Low	15%	46,947
Moderate	1%	3,130
High	75%	234,737
Very High	9%	28,169
Total Forest Service Acres in geographic area		312,983

¹ Acres are approximate.

Castles Geographic Area



Figure A.10 View of Whetstone Ridge from the south

Location

The Castles Geographic Area is an island mountain range east of White Sulphur Springs in Meagher County. The Castle's treed higher elevations are surrounded by lower elevations that are predominantly treeless, instilling an island appearance. The range has its own geologic story- unique from the other island ranges.

Scenic Character

This geographic area has a long history of occupation. Its mineral deposits were used as quarries for first people's needs such as projectile points and scrapers. They left behind cultural artifacts, many of which lay undisturbed. Euro-American settlement began with the discovery of some of the same mineral deposits, causing it to be one of the first areas in Montana to be settled. The small towns of Lennep and

Checkerboard are remnants of this era, as are the ghost towns of Castletown and Blackhawk. Some remnants of their structures can still be found.

The Castles are a combination of landforms that appear as one. Western slopes culminate in a gentle rising, flat-topped dome of volcanic origin that is comprised of a group of mountains, of which the forested slopes of Beartrap Peak, Woodchuck Mountain, and Willow Peak are punctuated by castle-like outcrops of granite. Elk Peak is the highest point in the geographic area at 8,566 feet. Wapiti and Castle mountains are also prominent features. The eastern section is characterized by plateaus of sedimentary origin, such as the Limestone and Whetstone Ridges. Here, the lowest elevations are down to 5,100. Vantages throughout the geographic area provide impressive views of the Little Belts to the north, the Crazies to the south, the Big Belts to the west, the Bridgers to the southwest, and a vast expanse of prairie to the east.

North and northwestern aspects are cloaked with a dense canopy of conifers. At higher elevations and on sun exposed aspects, forest intergrades with grassland meadows, or *parks* such as Manger Park, Smith Meadows, and Elk Park. Aspen stands grow in moist areas. On the drier, eastern sections, plant communities are dominated by grassy parks interspersed with patches of Douglas-fir, Engelmann spruce, lodgepole, limber, and, ponderosa pine. The entire geographic area is surrounded by sagebrush grasslands. Historically, fire was the primary shaper of plant communities. Please see chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems, for more information.

The Castles Geographic Area is surrounded in the lower grassland elevations by the North and South Forks of the Smith River on the west and the North and South Forks of the Musselshell River on the east. Many spring fed streams drain from the mountains into these forks, some cutting deep gorges and some sinking underground. Major drainages are Warm Springs, Checkerboard, Flagstaff, Beartrap, Fourmile, Richardson, Grasshopper, Bonanza, and Cottonwood creeks. Willow Creek is the municipal water source for White Sulphur Springs. The western slopes are wetter than the porous eastern limestone slopes.



Figure A.11 View of the granite, castle-like outcrops that extend above a coniferous canopy, looking southeast towards Woodchuck Mountain



Figure A.12 Granite outcrop

Scenic Integrity

When the mining excitement fizzled out, ranchers replaced the miners. The land ownership pattern reflects the mining exploration and is noticeable on the ground. Large ranches now occupy the lower elevations around the mountains and use the geographic area for summer pasture. Today’s primary land uses are logging, mining, wildlife habitat, recreation, and grazing.

Range allotments have necessitated the building of fences and water developments. Grazing has affected the patterns and compositions of vegetation. A couple of transmission lines cut through the geographic area. Some areas of past timber harvests are evident, mostly in the east. A few communication sites occupy high points in the topography.

Less obvious impacts to scenic integrity have also occurred. The exclusion of fire has changed vegetation composition and patterns, such as causing higher densities of trees than historic norms. It has also allowed for trees to encroach into areas that were historically mostly herbaceous vegetation. Please see chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems, for more details.

Table A.2 Percentage of existing scenic integrity values within the Castles Geographic Area

Existing Scenic Integrity	Percent of geographic area	Acres ¹
Low	6%	4,177
Moderate	0%	0
High	94%	65,433
Very High	0%	0
Total Forest Service Acres in geographic area		69,610

¹ Acres are approximate.

Crazies Geographic Area



Figure A.13 Looking towards Virginia Peak, elevation 8,769 feet

Location

The Crazies Geographic Area encompasses the northern portion of the Crazy Mountains that are administered by the Lewis and Clark National Forest. The southern portion is administered by the Gallatin National Forest. The geographic area is at the junction of Meagher, Wheatland, Sweet Grass, and Park Counties. White Sulphur Springs is the nearest population center with an estimated 970 inhabitants (United States Census Bureau 2013).

Scenic Character

The Crazy Mountains make up an island range that abruptly rises from the surrounding Shield, Musselshell, and Yellowstone River valleys. The rugged and awe-inspiring range has captivated people over time. The Mountain Crow visited its tall peaks and special areas for vision quests. Chief Many Coups had one of his most prophetic dreams here. Euro- American settlement has lightly affected the area with only a few signs of habitation, such as the Hereim Homestead on Comb Creek. Forest Lake Guard Station still stands as a sentry for Forest Service administration. Today people still seek spiritual experiences through various recreational and other means.

This island range is a discrete geologic unit, unique from the adjacent ranges (Castles, Little Belts, Snowies, Beartooths, Absarokas, and Gallatins). The form of the Crazies is bold and craggy. They are of volcanic origin and enriched with granitic geology. Talus, scree, and boulder areas dot steep and moderate slopes. Broad valleys and long finger ridges radiate outward from its center. Many ridge tops and summits

lack vegetation residing in the alpine area. Glaciation has imparted many of these landforms with sharp, scoured edges. The highest point in the geographic area is Loco Mountain at 9,242 feet. The summits of Target Rock, Virginia Peak, Mt Elmo, and Lebo Peak are also distinctive landmarks. Lower elevations along stream bottoms are roughly at 6,100 feet.

All of the geographic areas streams drain into the Musselshell River on their way to the Gulf of Mexico via the Missouri River. The most prominent drainages are the American, Bozeman, Musselshell Forks, Cottonwood, and Little and Big Elk Creeks. Riparian forests of aspen, willow, dogwood and cottonwood grow along their courses. Grasslands occupy much of the lower elevations and intergrade with coniferous forest at higher elevations. Small patches of deciduous trees punctuate the dense canopy of evergreen trees. At the highest elevations, conifer forests give way to alpine habitats. Historically, fire would have been a major influence on plant communities. Please see chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems, for more detailed information.



Figure A.14 Patterns of vegetation on a long ridge ascending to Loco Mountain



Figure A.15 Foreground view showing encroachment of Douglas-fir into sagebrush grassland

Scenic Integrity

While its scenic qualities are mostly intact, some departure has occurred. Today’s predominant land uses are logging, grazing, wildlife habitat, and recreation. Ownership patterns are evident, for instance Forest Lake is on private land. Past timber harvests can be discerned. The northwest end of the geographic area is traversed by a transmission corridor. Several roads dissect the landscape and are now the primary viewing platform for forest visitors.

The exclusion of fire has changed vegetation composition and patterns, such as causing higher densities of trees than historic norms. It has also allowed for trees to encroach into areas that were historically mostly herbaceous vegetation. Please see chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems, for more details.

A long history of cattle grazing has also subtly affected the scenery. Evidence of grazing exists particularly in lower elevations and wetter areas.

Table A.3 Percentage of existing scenic integrity values within the Crazies Geographic Area

Existing Scenic Integrity	Percent of geographic area	Acres ¹
Low	3%	1,729
Moderate	0%	0
High	97%	55,889
Very High	0%	0
Total Forest Service Acres in geographic area		57,618

¹ Acres are approximate.

Divide Geographic Area



Figure A.16 Chessman Reservoir from the summit of Red Mountain

Location

This geographic area is the scenic backdrop and primary recreational resource for Montana's capital city, Helena, with a population 29,596 (United States Census Bureau 2013). It also includes the smaller communities of Austin, Rimini, and Unionville. Portions of the geographic area are in the political geographies of Lewis and Clark, Powell, and Jefferson Counties. For ease of comprehension, the area has been broken out into four smaller subareas: northwest, southwest, northeast, and southeast. U.S. Highway 12 divides the subareas south to north and the Continental Divide separates them east to west. The spine of the divide is higher, cooler, wetter, and more exposed, imbuing it with a unique microclimate. The Continental Divide National Scenic Trail follows the crest of the divide.

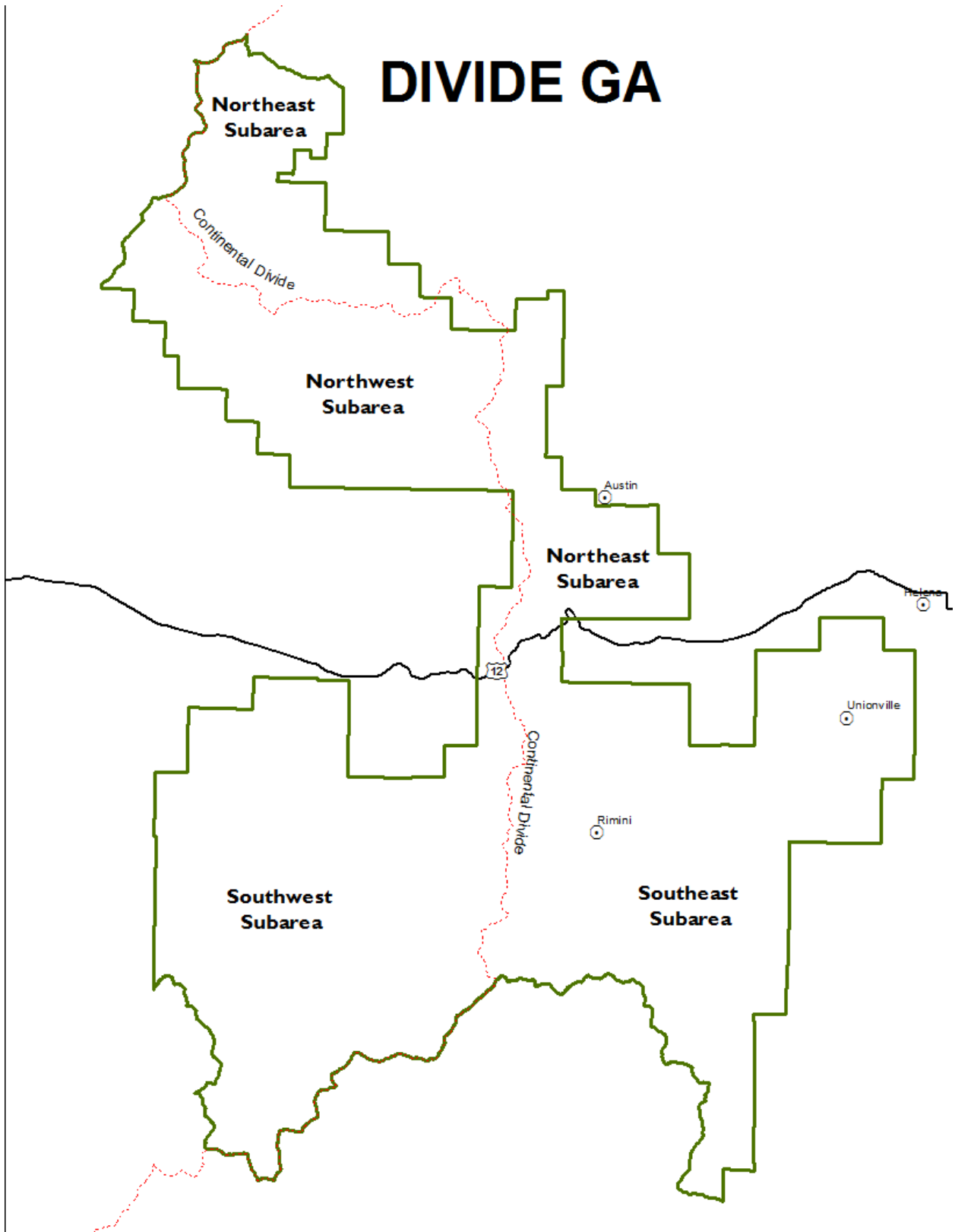


Figure A.17 Divide Geographic Area and subarea context map



Figure A.18 Wet bog along the Continental Divide



Figure A.19 Granite boulder outcrop and fall color along the Continental Divide



Figure A.20 Wet forest and fall color along the Continental Divide

Scenic Character

While the geographic area has a rich history of prehistoric occupation, its signature on the landscape is not obvious. A legacy of mining has left behind a rich suite of structures, such as cabins and kilns, and over 139 named mines. Many former mining communities were settled and have since vacated, leaving behind interesting clues of their heyday. Some riparian benches have been converted to pasture on private property, adding a rural setting in areas. A major west/ east railroad passes over the divide at Mullan Pass. Historically, fire was the primary disturbance throughout the geographic area and would determine composition and patterns of vegetation. Parks are distributed throughout, such as Bullion Parks, Blackfoot Meadows, and Thompson Flats. Please see chapter 2 Terrestrial Ecosystem for more information.

Divide Northwest

This subarea is a combination of ecoregions and displays a diversity of characteristics. Mountains are mostly nonglaciaded and therefore rounded in form, lacking jagged edges. Most ridges and peaks are heavily forested, obscuring high points. This subarea's highest peak is Black Mountain at 8,297 feet. Lower elevations go down to roughly 5,500 feet. Its geology is mainly composed of carbonate rich sedimentary rock.

Forests are characterized by Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine. Open grasslands occupy south and southwesterly aspects, especially at sun-exposed elevations. The ecoregion to the west is predominantly devoid of trees, creating a stark contrast. Water is scarce here with only small drainages, Dog Creek being the largest.

Divide Southwest

This subarea is exclusively in the Elkhorn Mountain-Boulder Batholith ecoregion. The landform is partially glaciaded so there is some evidence of glacial activity (terrain features and soil). The geology is of

volcanic origin and rich in mineral deposits. Locally, boulder strewn areas of erosion-prone, granitic rocks occur. The highest point is Jack Mountain at 8,727 feet. Lower elevations are approximately 5,350 feet.

Landforms are heavily covered in forests of subalpine fir and Douglas-fir habitat types, mostly dominated by seral lodgepole at higher elevations. Talus slopes create openings in the closed canopy of coniferous trees. The most prominent drainage, the Little Blackfoot River, is the largest in the entire geographic area. It has carved a broad valley bottom and is buffered by robust willow complexes.



Figure A.21 Pasture in the Little Blackfoot Valley (southwest subarea)



Figure A.22 The Little Blackfoot River at base flow in August (southwest subarea)



Figure A.23 Aspen and granite boulders create an opening in a closed canopy of conifers (southwest subarea)

Divide Northeast

This subarea is a combination of ecoregions and therefore shares attributes of all. Mountains have a rolling form and are heavily forested with grassy openings on sun-exposed ridgelines. Ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir are the dominant tree species. A mostly treeless ecoregion extends directly to the subarea's east, creating contrast.

The geology is composed of rocks of both volcanic and sedimentary origin. Highest points are along the Continental Divide, Meyer's Hill at 7,129 feet and Roundtop Mountain at 6,916 feet. The lowest elevations are roughly 5,160 feet. Water is scarce, and streams are infrequent. Little Prickly Pear Creek's headwaters and canyon begin here.



Figure A.24 Historic structure (northeast subarea)



Figure A.25 Looking at northeast subarea from foothills of Black Mountain in the southeast subarea

Divide Southeast

Divide southeast is a combination of ecoregions and characteristics. It is also the closest subarea to the population center of Helena and therefore most visited. Mountains are rolling and rounded with little evidence of glaciation. The geology is diverse with mineral rich deposits of volcanic origin and sedimentary rocks. Patches of granite boulders and talus slopes are intermittent.

Thick forests of subalpine fir and Douglas-fir climax habitat types, most of which are dominated by seral lodgepole pine, cloak higher elevations. An exception to this is the iconic Red Mountain, at 8,143 feet; its upper slopes are conspicuously barren, exposing red, rocky soil. A stunted forest of wind-swept whitebark pine clings to its round, flat ridge top. Forests are punctuated by wet, boggy habitat, such as Sure Thing Swamp, which harbors unique communities of wet-loving vegetation. Aspen stands are distributed throughout and give contrast to the expanses of conifers. Lower elevations, down to roughly 4,500 feet, have ponderosa pine that intergrade into grassland, mainly on south and southwesterly ridges.

Overall water is scarce, but Helena's primary water source, Tenmile Creek, is found here. Some waterways have been impounded to capture water for utility and recreation, such as Chessman Reservoir and Park Lake. Drainages are characterized as being heavily incised with constrained riparian areas such as Lump Gulch and Orofino Gulch. Some gulches have remnants of historic mining, such as kilns, that recall an era of fine craftsmanship.



Figure A.26 Lime Kiln Remnants in Grizzly Gulch (southeast subarea)



Figure A.27 Iconic Red Mountain from the Continental Divide (southeast subarea)

Scenic Integrity

The Divide Geographic Area has been fragmented since Euro-American settlement, starting with the discovery of its rich mineral deposits. Now, one can expect to find evidence of mining anywhere in the geographic area. Many drainage bottoms have the rock-pile evidence of placer mining. High color contrasts of cut slopes, the effects of mining operations and road building, stand out from vegetation. Patented mining claims have created contrasting ownership patterns within the forest. Former timber harvests, utility corridors, and road building have imposed strong geometries on otherwise seemingly natural patterns of vegetation. Communication towers have been erected on prominent high points, such as those at MacDonald Pass and Priest Pass.

Less obvious impacts to scenic integrity have also occurred. The exclusion of fire has changed vegetation composition and patterns, such as causing higher densities of trees than historic norms. It has also allowed for trees to encroach into areas that were historically mostly herbaceous vegetation. Large swaths of forest have recently succumbed to insect caused mortality. Please see chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems, for more information.

Range allotments have necessitated the building of fences and water developments. The effects of grazing have simplified vegetation communities and impacted riparian areas. Most of the range allotments are concentrated in the northwest and northeast subareas. Many trails have been constructed for recreation and are concentrated in the southeast sub-area.

Today, the predominant land uses are grazing, logging, mining (copper, zinc, lead, silver, and gold), and recreation.

Table A.4 Percentage of existing scenic integrity values within the Divide Geographic Area

Existing Scenic Integrity	Percent of geographic area	Acres ¹
Low	21%	45,541
Moderate	1%	2,026
High	78%	158,010
Very High	0%	0
Total Forest Service Acres in geographic area		205,577

¹ Acres are approximate.

Elkhorns Geographic Area



Figure A.28 Crow and Elkhorn Peaks from the Boulder River Valley, looking north

Location

The Elkhorns Geographic Area encompasses the Elkhorn Mountains in Broadwater and Jefferson Counties and includes the small mining town of Elkhorn. The nearest population center is Helena, Montana. Many smaller communities also have intimate relationships with the geographic area: Montana City, Clancy, Alhambra, Jefferson City, Boulder, Radersburg, Townsend, Winston, and East Helena. The Elkhorns are surrounded by the Divide Mountains and Boulder Batholith on the west, and the Missouri and Boulder River valleys on the north, east, and south. Many other island ranges and Canyon Ferry Reservoir can be viewed from its vantages.

Scenic Character

The Elkhorn Geographic Area has been occupied by human inhabitants for thousands of years. Rock art and other subtle clues of their settlement can still be found on the landscape. However, prehistoric occupation is less evident than the more recent Euro-American settlement. After the discovery of valuable mineral deposits, mines and associated settlements sprang up in portions of the geographic area. The ghost town of Elkhorn is a good example of this era. Other communities have all but disappeared, such as Queen, Eagle City, Gold Dust, and Sourdough. Remnant tools and infrastructure of the mining era are found throughout the geographic area. Eagle and Tizer Guard stations are living reminders of Forest Service administration. Fire has historically has been a major influence to plant communities.

The form of the Elkhorn Mountains is rounded and furrowed from extensive weathering. From a bird's-eye view, the island range is oval shaped on a southwest-northeast axis. High points are prominent from background northwest, west, and southwest perspectives but cryptic from other vantages. Drainages have carved steep gulches and canyons.

The Elkhorn Mountains can be divided into west and east sections by the predominant underlying geology. The majority of the Elkhorns (north, west, southwest) is a part of a batholith, an igneous bulge that formed when magma upwelled from deep within the earth's crust and then cooled. This geologic history has left the area rich in minerals. Evidence of glaciation is localized as boulder strewn areas of granitic rocks. The geographic area's highest points are Crow Peak at 9,415 feet and Elkhorn Peak at 9,410 feet. Other prominent landmarks are High Peak, Casey Peak, and Strawberry Butte. The lowest elevations in the geographic area are roughly 4,500 feet in the northwest corner. The remaining approximate quarter (southwest) of the geographic area is underlain by sedimentary rock that lacks the same mineralization as the batholith but is rich in calcareous rock. The landforms are rugged, low mountains with hogback ridges and dry valleys. Prominent landforms are Glendale Butte and Giant Hill.

The plant communities on the batholith portion are mostly forested with ponderosa pine, subalpine fir, Douglas-fir, lodgepole pine, and whitebark pine at higher elevations. Aspen stands and water-loving plants take advantage of riparian areas and wet seeps. Parks, rich with grasses and forbs, are frequent at lower elevations and break up the forest in montane elevations. A large expanse of this GA burned in 1988. Its effects are still evident. The sedimentary geologic area in the east is a gradient of foothill prairie and partially forested low mountains. Grassland is a major component. Limber pine and juniper woodland ebb and flow with the prairie relative to disturbances. Douglas-fir is the predominant forest tree species. Please see chapter 2, *Terrestrial Ecosystems*, for more details.

The western side of the geographic area is generally wetter than the eastern side. The entire landmass is drained by many perennial and intermittent creeks. All flow to the Missouri River, some via the Boulder and Jefferson Rivers, such as Elkhorn and Dry Creeks. Other major creeks are McClellan, Prickly Pear, Warm Springs, Crow Indian, and Beaver. The basins around Elkhorn and Crow Peaks harbor high elevation lakes such as Hidden Lake, Tizer Lakes, Leslie Lake, and Glenwood Lake. The Crow Lakes are found in the upper headwaters of Crow Creek. Crow Creek plummets over an impressive falls. Springs are important water features in the more arid eastern sections.



Figure A.29 Wet meadow emanating from a spring in the drier east sedimentary geologic area



Figure A.30 Eagle Guard Station



Figure A.31 Looking towards Crow and Elkhorn Peaks from the southeast



Figure A.32 Boulder strewn area on the western batholith side



Figure A.33 Bitterroot, *Lewisia rediviva*, a seasonally conspicuous component of grasslands



Figure A.34 Grassland and sagebrush indicative of east side and lower elevations



Figure A.35 Looking north down Weasel Creek towards Canyon Ferry Reservoir and Big Belt Mountains

Scenic Integrity

Today’s predominant land uses in the geographic area are mining, logging, recreation, and grazing. Due to its rich deposits of valuable minerals, the geographic area has a deep mining legacy, with most major impacts located in the west. Yet, one can expect to find remnants of the mining era throughout the geographic area. High color contrasts of cut slopes and placer piles clue the visitor into this history as does land ownership patterns resulting from patented mining claims.

A couple of utility corridors transect the southwest corner. A large grazing program has necessitated spring developments and fencing, as well as impacted native plant communities. The limited resource of water has concentrated grazing impact in riparian and wet areas.

Many roads have been constructed for resource extraction and now fragment the geographic area. The road network now serves as the primary platform from which visitors experience the area.

Less obvious impacts to scenic integrity have also occurred. The exclusion of fire has changed vegetation composition and patterns, such as causing higher densities of trees than historic norms. It has also allowed for trees to encroach into areas that were historically mostly herbaceous vegetation. Please see chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems, for more details.

Table A.5 Percentage of existing scenic integrity values within the Elkhorns Geographic Area

Existing Scenic Integrity	Percent of geographic area	Acres ¹
Low	19%	30,514
Moderate	0%	0
High	81%	130,085
Very High	0%	0
Total Forest Service Acres in geographic area		160,599

¹ Acres are approximate.

Highwoods Geographic Area



Figure A.36 Looking west from ridge on Windy Mountain, view of North Peak (left) and Highwood Baldy (right)

Location

The Highwoods Geographic Area is the smallest of all the geographic areas within the plan area and encompasses the Highwood Mountains. This isolated island range is located within Cascade, Chouteau, and Judith Basin Counties. This geographic area is the closest National Forest System Land to Great Falls, population, 59,351 (United States Census Bureau 2013). The landmass rises up from the confluence of multiple grassland types: foothill grasslands, semi-arid prairie, Missouri Breaks, and unglaciated high plains. All of these types share basic common traits but are slightly different and collectively set the stage for the Highwood's unique setting.

Scenic Character

The Highwoods have a long history of grazing. It provides an abundance of grass and reliable sources of water. Historic Highwood and Shonkin Cow Camps are reminders of this heritage. Highwood Guard Station continues to greet visitors as they enter the forest at the North Fork of Highwood Creek.

Although small, the geographic area is diverse and robust in content. The mountain range is of volcanic origin and contains geologic formations that are a mix of igneous and sedimentary rocks. The mountains have been weathered over time by natural processes, rendering them rolling and furrowed in form. The high point and centerpiece of the range is Highwood Baldy at 7,657 feet. The mountains are bisected by Highwood Creek. Highwood Baldy, Pinewood, North, South and Middle Peaks are found to its west. Mount Kennon, Windy Mountain, East, Lava, Prospect, and Arrow Peaks are located to its east. Slopes are

moderately steep. North facing aspects are considerably wetter than less vegetated and rocky south facing aspects. Lowest elevations go down to 4300 feet.

Here, a characterizing landform is the coulee, which is from the French word meaning “to flow”. It is used interchangeably for various terrain features but all have a drainage element in common. Some are predominantly grassy and others harbor woody plants. Some are intermittent and others have perennial flows. Some examples in the Highwood Geographic Area are Grouse and Big Coulees.

A dense stream network has dissected the mountains, creating numerous folds in the topography. The most prominent drainages are Arrow, Shonkin, Highwood, and the North Fork of Little Belt Creeks. Riparian areas are rich with willow, dogwood, water birch, cottonwood, and other water-loving plants. Some headwaters provide for pure and geographically unique populations of westslope cutthroat trout.

The land cover of this GA is a mosaic of conifers, deciduous trees, grass, and rock. Large aspen stands intergrade with rich prairie and dense pine forest. Orderly stands of mature lodgepole pine contrast with more diverse plant assemblages. Open grown Douglas-fir and windswept limber pines add to the diverse character. Woodland, forest, and prairie ebb and flow into one another. Fire was historically the main determinant of vegetative cover. Please see chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems, for more details.

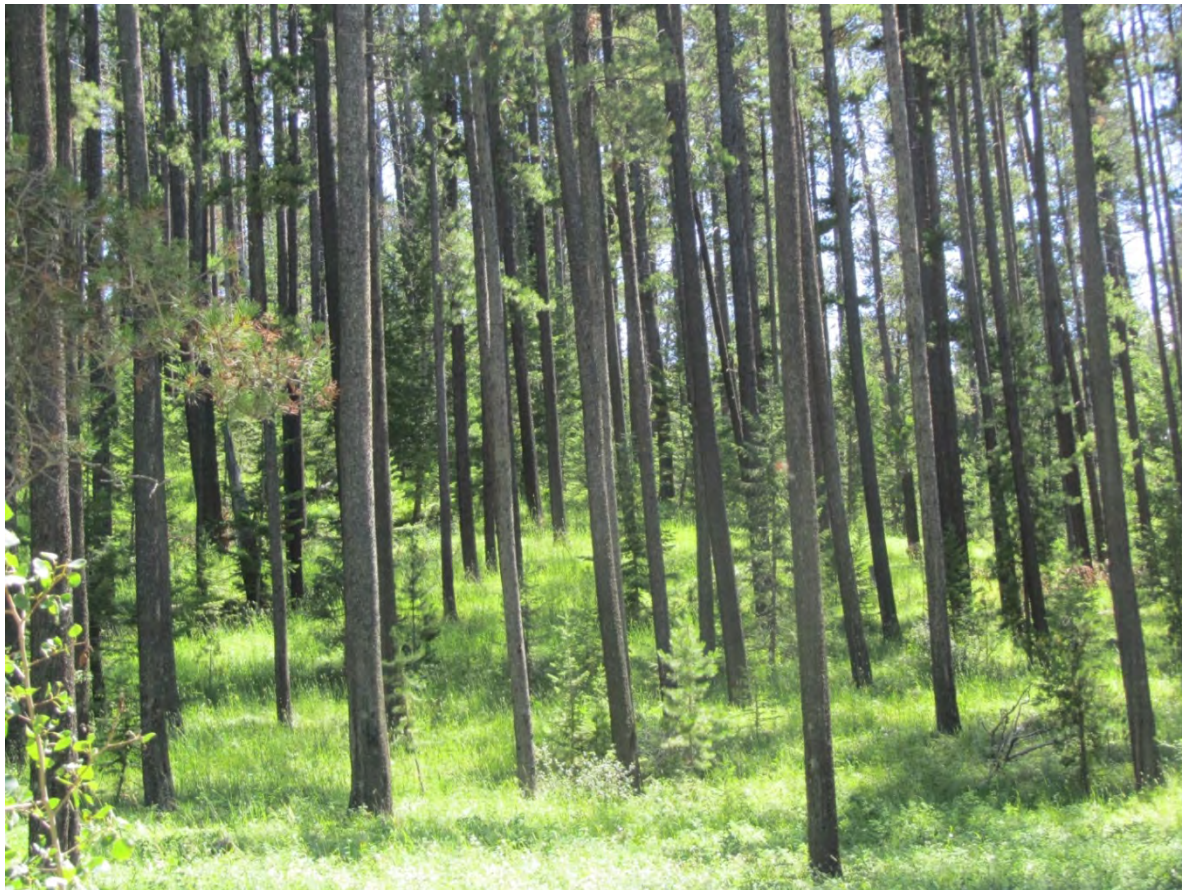


Figure A.37 Lodgepole pine stand



Figure A.38 Windswept limber pine



Figure A.39 Aspen intergrading with grass



Figure A.40 Highwood Creek

Scenic Integrity

The Highwoods Geographic Area is mostly natural in appearance. A communication site is visible on Highwood Baldy. Some roads have been constructed along creek bottoms and are now the major viewing platform for most visitors. Grazing has been a subtle but widespread cause of departure from scenic integrity, including fences, water developments, and impacts to plant communities along wet areas. Today's major land uses in the ecoregion are grazing, logging, and recreation.

Other less obvious impacts to scenic integrity have also occurred. The exclusion of fire has changed vegetation composition and patterns, causing higher densities of trees than historic norms. It has also allowed for trees to encroach into areas that were historically mostly herbaceous vegetation. Please see chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems, for more details.

Table A.6 Percentage of existing scenic integrity values within the Highwoods Geographic Area

Existing Scenic Integrity	Percent of geographic area	Acres ¹
Low	.1%	42
Moderate	0%	0
High	99.9%	42,273
Very High	0%	0
Total Forest Service Acres in geographic area		42,315

¹ Acres are approximate.

Little Belts Geographic Area



Figure A.41 Pierce Park as seen from the slopes of Daisy Mountain with Big Baldy in the background (credit: Steve Wyatt)

Location

Portions of this sprawling range are located in the political geographies of Meagher, Judith Basin, Cascade, and Wheatland Counties. It is surrounded by predominantly treeless foothills of prairie and sagebrush steppe. The city of Great Falls is 50 miles to its northwest and the town of White Sulphur Springs is on its southern edge. The Little Belts Geographic Area is bisected north-south by the Kings Hill scenic byway (US Highway 89) along which the small communities of Niehart and Monarch reside. Most of the Little Belts can be described as remote but accessible by a well distributed transportation network.

Scenic Character

First peoples used the area ever since immigrating into this part of North America. They utilized quarries for tools and weapons, such as projectile points. They created art on rock shelters and overhangs for cultural reasons. They left rings of rock used to secure tepees for shelter. Their signature is light on the land but can still be found.

The Little Belts Geographic Area was quickly inhabited by Euro-Americans after Missouri river travel was established and rich deposits of minerals were discovered. Approximately 144 named mines have been constructed within the area. Mining infrastructure and tools are frequently encountered throughout. Many

communities also sprang up quickly and then disappeared. Some remnants of civic buildings and dwellings stand witnesses to their story. A few former community names are Galena, Summit, Silver Dyke, Carbonate, and Hughesville. Homesteading also occurred in the geographic area, mostly along the lower elevation fringes. A history of timber cutting is evident and relics such as splash dams and log chutes can be encountered. Forest Service guard stations and fire lookouts remain in various locations and conditions.

This is Charlie Russell country. The cowboy artist lived at times in these mountains and worked the neighboring ranches. Many spots were visited by him and became inspirations for his art. It is not uncommon for local families to recall first-hand accounts of the charismatic man.

The adjective “little” to describe this geographic area is misleading, as this range is the largest of the isolated island ranges in central Montana. It measures approximately 60 miles southeast to northeast and is 30 miles across. The landmass of the Little Belts Mountains generally has a rolling curvature that lacks much sharpness. Evidence of glaciation is infrequent and patchy, such as on the upper slopes of Big Baldy Mountain. The mountain range’s form and its fairly uniform cover of trees create geographic confusion. Visitors seldom realize the range’s immensity and spectrum of elevation. The highest points are Big Baldy at 9,175 feet and Yogo Peak at 8,812 feet. Elevations range as low as 4,000, in the Smith River Canyon. A few other prominent landmarks are Kings Hill pass, with nearby Porphyry Peak and Showdown ski area, Old Baldy Mountain, Black Butte, Monument Ridge and Peak, Wolf Butte, Granite Mountain, Peterson Mountain, Bandbox Mountain, Sand Point Mountain, Mount High, Lost Fork Ridge, Smoky Mountain, Daisy Peak, and Coxcombe Butte.

The geology of the Little Belts is rich in limestone with pockets of metamorphic and igneous rock. Bands of limestone bluffs break up uniform expanses of evergreen forest. Stream courses have carved beautiful exposed escarpments and palisades, such as on the Smith River, Tenderfoot Creek, Belt Creek, Haymaker Narrows Creek, Antelope Creek, and, the Middle Fork of the Judith River.

The many streams of the Little Belts are picturesque and ecologically rich. Drainages typically flow outward, radially from the center of the range. Those in the west drain to the Smith River, such as the North Fork of the Smith, Newlan Creek, Sheep Creek, and Ming Coulee. Those to the south and southeast drain into the Musselshell River, such as the North Fork of the Musselshell, Haymaker Creek, both forks of Hopley Creek, and Roberts Creek. Those to the east drain to the Judith River, such as Lone Tree Creek, Willow Creek, Dry Wolf Creek, Running Wolf Creek, Surprise Creek, and Sage Creek. Those to the north drain into the Missouri, such as Sand Coulee Creek, Belt Creek, and Big Otter Creek.

The Little Belt’s vegetation reflects the gradient of moisture and elevation. Grasslands, sagebrush steppe and open woodland circle the outer fringes with trees clinging to drainage bottoms. Ponderosa pine stands are more common on the drier east side. Thick stands of Douglas-fir and lodgepole pine cloak the interior. Whitebark pine and subalpine fir are found in the higher elevations. Engelmann spruce and aspen occupy wet sites. Some mountain summits lack vegetation, revealing gentle sloping, broad ridges that appear to be composed of mostly dark loose rock. The geographic area is also characterized by its many parks that punctuate the forests. They are rich assemblages of predominantly herbaceous plants. Onion, Harley, O’Brien, Pierce, and Lucy parks are a select few. Please see chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems, for more information.



Figure A.42 Limestone outcrops (foreground) and Granite Mountain (background), a gentle sloping, broad ridge of exposed rock



Figure A.43 Evidence of glaciation on the east side of Big Baldy Mountain



Figure A.44 A dry park on the flat top of Green Mountain



Figure A.45 Smith River Canyon on the northwest boundary (credit: Lewis and Clark NF Little Belt Mountains Gallery Flickr.com)



Figure A.46 South Fork of the Judith River (credit: Lewis and Clark NF Little Belt Mountains Gallery Flickr.com)

Scenic Integrity

Generally, past management activities blend with the surrounding landscape but some departures from natural appearing scenery have occurred. Today's major land uses are logging, mining, and recreation.

Conveyance from federally owned to privately owned land has left distinct patterns on the landscape. Due to patchy, rich deposits of minerals, the geographic area has a deep mining history- most of which is centered in the Niehart, Hughesville, and Yogo Peak areas. Cut slopes and mine wastes have created high color contrasts that attract attention.

Old clearcuts and other intensive logging techniques have left strong geometric patterns on the landscape. Many roads were constructed and now visually fragment the geographic area and function as the primary platform from which visitors experience the range. Showdown ski area is located at Kings Hill Pass. Its ski runs fragment the forest here in linear stripes.

The geographic area has a robust grazing program. Many ranches flank the lower foothills and use the Little Belts as summer pasture. The effects of grazing livestock are apparent throughout much of the area, such as fences and water developments and some impacts to plant communities in some riparian areas.

A transmission line corridor bisects the geographic area north to south. Some communication towers have been erected on high points. Recent insect and disease outbreaks are evident across much of the landscape, the effects being a large number of red-needled and standing dead trees.

Less obvious impacts to scenic integrity have also occurred. The exclusion of fire has changed vegetation composition and patterns, such as causing higher densities of trees than historic norms. It has also allowed for trees to encroach into areas that were historically mostly herbaceous vegetation. Please see chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems, for more details.

Table A.7 Percentage of existing scenic integrity values within the Little Belts Geographic Area

Existing Scenic Integrity	Percent of geographic area	Acres ¹
Low	9%	72,244
Moderate	1%	8,027
High	90%	722,440
Very High	0%	0
Total Forest Service Acres in geographic area		802,711

¹ Acres are approximate.

Rocky Mountain Range Geographic Area



Figure A.47 Looking north; west to east: North Fork of the Sun River valley, Gibson Reservoir and the Sun River (wikipedia.com)

Location

The Rocky Mountain Range Geographic Area is located in portions of Teton, Pondera, Glacier, and Lewis and Clark Counties. The closest communities are Augusta, Choteau, Bynum, Dupuyer, and Heart Butte. Great Falls is the nearest population center, about an hour drive to the southeast. The geographic area is bordered by U.S. Highway 2 and Glacier National Park to the north. The Blackfeet Nation lands are to the northeast. The east and southeast are bordered by state, private, and BLM lands. The Upper Blackfoot

Geographic Area is to the south. The continental divide and Flathead National Forest are to the west. A large portion of the Rocky Mountain Range Geographic Area is designated wilderness and includes parts of the Scapegoat and Bob Marshall Wilderness Areas. These two wilderness areas are components of a greater wilderness complex that totals over 1.5 million acres, the 5th largest wilderness area in the lower 48 states. The geographic area's proximity to this wilderness complex, Glacier National Park, and adjacent wild areas of Canada make it a critical component of the North Continental Divide Ecosystem.

Scenic Character

This geographic area is a part of the larger Rocky Mountain front, which is the abrupt geologic uplift of the first range on the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains. It is an area of stark contrast- the collision of the Northwest Glaciated Plains and the Canadian Rockies ecoregions, where the prairie meets the mountains.

The Northwest Glaciated Plains are characterized by large open expanses of what was historically short grass prairie. It has been predominantly converted to wheat and barley production or rangeland. Limber pine, woodland, and prairie occupy rocky and hilly areas that have not already been converted to agriculture. Kettle ponds seasonally dot the rolling foothills.

Here, the Canadian Rockies are represented by the Sawtooth and Lewis & Clark Ranges. The Sawtooth Range is the eastern edge that abuts the prairie. Large bands of exposed limestone are the essence of their visual character. An icon of this phenomenon is the Chinese Wall, a limestone escarpment that averages 1,000 feet high and extends for approximately 22 miles. The distinct ridges are locally known as reefs, recalling the geologic processes that created them. However, it was the mountain building processes that give them their current upthrust form. The range is the first north-south running chain of mountains in a series of parallel chains. The highest elevations are approximately in the 9,000 foot zone, a difference of over 5,000 feet from the eastward plains. The highest point in the Sawtooth Range is Rocky Mountain at 9,392 feet. The highest points in the Lewis & Clark Range inside the geographic area are Scapegoat Mountain at 9,202 feet and Flint Mountain at 9,079 feet (note: this mountain range spans multiple geographic areas).

Water drains from the mountains eastward cutting perpendicular through the parallel ridges. Roads follow stream corridors providing access to interior valleys. Many of the streams and rivers are noted for their ecological and scenic value, such as Badger Creek, Birch Creek, North and South Forks of the Sun River, Straight Creek, and the Dearborn River. While topographically constrained, their riparian areas are robust and their water is cold and clear. Upon exiting the forest boundary, the majority of water is quickly captured in reservoirs for agricultural use. Most precipitation comes in the form of snow. Fierce Chinook winds frequently create extremely windy days.

Vegetation is influenced by relatively natural processes. Recently, fire has been allowed to burn inside the wilderness areas for ecological benefits. Prairie, limber pine woodland, and aspens cover lower foothills. Prairie vegetation extends into the front ridges and gives way to western forests. Douglas-fir and lodgepole pine are the major tree species in montane areas. Engelmann spruce grow in wetter soils. Whitebark pine and subalpine fir occupy higher elevations. Much exposed rock, aspen stands and open grassland break up forest. Please see chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems, for more information.

The Rocky Mountain Range Geographic Area is a destination for Montanans as well as visitors from all over. People are drawn to the area because of its remoteness, stunning landscape, recreational opportunities, and because it is one of the few remaining wild places in the lower 48 states. Grizzly bears and the complete suite of native fauna, excluding free range bison, still roam here. Many intact large ranches occupy the foothill prairie to the east and function as vital parts of the geographic area's ecosystem. The region is a last true vestige of the American West and Old Montana. Many lodges, resorts,

camps, cabins, and ranches have intimate relationships with the area. Guard stations, work centers, and lookouts help the Forest Service steward the vast country.

The geographic area is a distant backdrop for many locations. The inaccessibility of its western reaches dictates that the majority of visitors approach from the east through the ranches, limber pine woodland, and intact remnants of prairie. In places, it seems to undergo a magnification effect due to the mountains location on the horizon.

Portions of the Old North Trail, an ice free corridor for southward immigration of North America's first peoples, are found here. More recent indigenous cultures revere the area as a sacred landscape with religious importance such as a place for dream quests. The use of its cultural and spiritual resources has initiated the Badger-Two Medicine area to be designated as a Traditional Cultural District. Archeological sites, such as pictographs, dot the entire geographic area.



Figure A.48 Looking east; Over thrust of carbonate rocks (reef) Sawtooth Range in Blackleaf Canyon



Figure A.49 Looking west; Vegetative patterns (prairie, woodland, forest), Ear Mountain area



Figure A.50 Looking west; Rocky Mountain Range on horizon at sundown



Figure A.51 Looking west towards a vast expanse of prairie, Clary Coulee area



Figure A.52 Historic handprint pictographs

Scenic Integrity

The portions of the geographic area that are designated wilderness have very high existing scenic integrity values, and much of the geographic area outside the wilderness is still mostly natural appearing. Yet some departures have occurred. Oil and gas exploration have pioneered roads. Some high points have communication towers built on top of them. Roads parallel many major stream corridors and are now the predominant viewing platform for visitors. Some timber cutting is evident. Grazing is evidenced through erected fences and some impacts to native plant communities. An impoundment of the Sun River has created a large reservoir. Transmission lines and irrigation canals are present. A backcountry air strip is located in the popular Benchmark area.

Table A.8 Percentage of existing scenic integrity values within the Rocky Mountain Range Geographic Area

Existing Scenic Integrity	Percent of geographic area	Acres ¹
Low	1%	7,780
Moderate	0%	0
High	42%	326,744
Very High	57%	443,439
Total Forest Service Acres in geographic area		777,963

¹ Acres are approximate.

Snowies Geographic Area



Figure A.53 Steep-walled, amphitheater-like basin (credit: Drew Sovilla and Bailey Campbell)

Location

The Snowies is the farthest east geographic area within the HLC NFs plan area. It is primarily in the political geography of Fergus County with smaller portions in Golden Valley County. Lewistown is the largest nearby population center, with approximately 5,900 inhabitants (United States Census Bureau 2013). The geographic area includes both the Big and Little Snowy Mountain ranges. Both are mountain islands in close proximity to one another but are slightly different in character. The Little Snowies are directly east of the Big Snowies. Along with the Judith and Moccasin Mountains, the Snowies are prominent changes in elevation accentuated by surrounding grassland, high plains, and foothill savanna.

Scenic Character

Big Snowy Mountains

The Big Snowy Mountains have long been a unique and revered destination. Early first people visited its basins and summits for various reasons. Their artifacts and art still sporadically adorn the range. Lower slopes and foothills were homesteaded and have become large, iconic ranches. Unique, biophysical phenomena, such as ice caves, continue to attract intrepid visitors. Crystal Lake Guard station still actively facilitates Forest Service stewardship, whereas other structures are fading or completely disappeared, such as the Bercail School and Blake Creek Forest Station.

The Big Snowies are higher in elevation and larger in size than the Little Snowies range. The spine of the dominant landform runs east-west for approximately 25 miles, and 10 miles north-south. This orientation is unique for Montana mountain ranges east of the continental divide. The lowest elevations range to approximately 5,200 feet. Middle elevations are clad with coniferous trees, with Engelmann spruce and Douglas-fir being the dominant species. At the highest elevations the forest transitions into a tree-less plateau of alpine that is characterized by rock and tundra. Slopes vary from steep rocky canyons to gentle benches. The tops of Mt Harlow, Tepee Point, and Lost Peak are connected by a flat-topped ridge that culminates with the summit of Greathouse Peak at 8,655 feet and Old Baldy at 8,678 feet, which are separated by Half Moon Pass. In sections, the ridge constricts to a narrow edge, such as Knife Blade Ridge at 8,590 feet.

Streams flowing out of the north side of the Big Snowies, such as Ross Fork Creek, Big Rock Creek, Cottonwood Creek, and the East Fork of Big Spring Creek, flow into the Judith River. Those flowing out of the south side, such as Galloway Creek, Half Moon Creek, and Merrills Spring Creek, flow into the Musselshell River. Many streams, such as Careless Creek and Swimming Woman Creek, originate in steep-walled, amphitheater-like basins and emerge out through canyons. Most of the precipitation falls during winter in the form of snow, so streams are heavily dependent on snowmelt. The climate and porous limestone imbues a dry character to the range.

Crystal Lake is one of the Big Snowies' crown jewels. It is a shallow lake of natural origin, roughly 15 feet at its deepest and underlain by a bed of limestone. The geographic areas karst topography conceals many caves. Floristically, the Big Snowies are unique with many vegetation types compressed into the same area. Greathouse Peak and Old Baldy Research Natural Areas are recognized exemplary examples of dry, alpine plant communities that have been shaped without glaciation but through frost patterning. Fire was the historic driver of plant communities. Please see chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems, for more details.



Figure A.54 Looking west from the ridge of West Peak



Figure A.55 Approaching the flat-topped range from the north



Figure A.56 Limestone and wildflowers (cedit: Drew Sovilla and Bailey Campbell)



Figure A.57 Upper slopes approaching ridgeline



Figure A.58 Flat-topped ridge characterized by rock and alpine (credit: Drew Sovilla and Bailey Campbell)



Figure A.59 Fossil (credit: Drew Sovilla and Bailey Campbell)



Figure A.60 Ridge top (credit: Drew Sovilla and Bailey Campbell)

Little Snowy Mountains

This smaller island range also has a rich cultural history, beginning with first peoples then homesteading. Today, large ranches maintain the open character of the area. Pine Grove Cemetery continues to be the final resting place for early Euro-American occupants.

The Little Snowies are separated from the Big Snowies by a subtle break in topography. It is entirely located in one ecoregion, which is characterized by foothills that are partially forested with mostly ponderosa pine. In general, the country is semi-arid and dominated by grassy vegetation. Landforms are rolling with slopes that are gentle to flat, except where creeks have dissected them. The area lacks prominent high points and is entirely vegetated. The highest elevation is 5,624 feet at Bold Butte.

Creeks within the Little Snowies are small and often run dry during the summer months. The major drainages are Willow Creek and the North Fork of Pole Creek, both of which drain south to the Musselshell River.

Scenic Integrity

Generally speaking, the scenic integrity is higher in the Big Snowies than the Little Snowies. More of the forest proclamation area of the Big Snowies is still owned by the federal government which helps reduce the contrast of land ownership patterns. Additionally, most of the Big Snowies is administered as a wilderness study area giving it management objectives with high scenic importance. Some areas have been cut for timber and planted in linear patterns. Some mining has occurred.

The Little Snowies lack wilderness consideration and have more ownership diversity. Grazing has simplified plant communities and past timber harvests are evident. The predominant land uses for the

entire geographic area, including both mountain ranges, are logging, recreation, gravel quarrying, and grazing.

Less obvious impacts to scenic integrity have also occurred in both ranges. The exclusion of fire has changed vegetation composition and patterns, such as causing higher densities of trees than historic norms. It has also allowed for trees to encroach into areas that were historically mostly herbaceous vegetation. Please see chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems, for more details.

Table A.9 Percentage of existing scenic integrity values within the Snowies Geographic Area

Existing Scenic Integrity	Percent of geographic area	Acres ¹
Low	2%	2,360
Moderate	1%	1,180
High	97%	114,449
Very High	0%	0
Total Forest Service Acres in geographic area		117,989

¹ Acres are approximate.

Upper Blackfoot Geographic Area



Figure A.61 The Upper Blackfoot River

Location

The Upper Blackfoot Geographic Area spans Lewis and Clark and Powell Counties. The towns of Lincoln and Helmville are the nearest communities. The majority of the area is west of the continental divide. The Rocky Mountain Range Geographic Area and Flathead National Forest are directly north and the Divide Geographic Area is to the south. To the east, mountains become grassy foothills with isolated buttes. The city of Great Falls is approximately 70 miles away. MT Highway 200 cuts east-west through the center of the geographic area, crossing over Rogers Pass to follow the Blackfoot River. Missoula is approximately 70 miles to the west. The northwest corner of the geographic area is a part of the Scapegoat Wilderness and the greater Bob Marshall Wilderness complex. This geographic area is a critical component of the Southern Crown of the Continent ecosystem and greater Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem.

Scenic Character

Evidence of prehistoric settlement is present on the landscape but inconspicuous. Artifacts, such as tepee rings, can be encountered but are infrequent. Culturally modified trees, such as scars on ponderosa pine from the collection of inner bark, are to be expected. Many western Montana tribes used the Blackfoot as a corridor as they traveled over to the plains area to the east to hunt for buffalo. Faint travois tracks, all which remain of this prehistoric trail, can still be seen in some location in the Landers Fork and Alice Creek drainages.

Euro-American settlement is more apparent but many elements are also fading to time. Portions of the Lewis and Clark Trail traverse the Blackfoot River and Alice Creek. The trail passes over the Continental Divide at Lewis and Clark Pass. Remnant buildings of former communities are in various states of disrepair, if not gone completely, such as the post offices and dwellings of McClellan Gulch, Rochester, Gould, Stemple Pass, and Mike Horse to name a few. Relics of historic mining infrastructure and tools are frequent. Two historic buildings, Webb Lake Guard Station and Granite Butte Lookout, stand testament to the Forest Service's administration. Other sites, such as Alice Creek Ranger Station, have succumbed to time.

The river that runs through it, the Blackfoot, finds its headwaters here in the geographic area. The highly valued recreational and scenic river clips other portions of the geographic area. The Continental Divide National Scenic Trail transects the geographic area, north to south.

The geographic area is predominantly in two ecoregions separated by the continental divide. The first, west of the divide, is characterized by mostly rolling hills and mountains that are underlain by various types of rock. High peaks are topped with volcanic rocks with areas of exposed rock. The effects of glaciation are present, such as glacial terrain features and soil types. The second is characterized by rounded mountains that are underlain by volcanic rocks and sedimentary rocks that have changed through geologic processes. Summits lack much exposed rock. The effects of glaciation are absent. The highest point in the geographic area and the Lewis & Clark Range is Red Mountain at 9,411 feet. The lowest points are at approximately 4,300 feet along the Blackfoot River. Some other prominent mountains are Ogden, Dalton, Stonewall, Olson, Crater, Nevada, Greer, and Lone Mountains.

Another characterizing landform that helps define the geographic area is the mountain pass. There are a few notable passes, some allowing for easy automotive travel over the continental divide: Roger, Stemple, Windy, and Flesher.

Most of the area is heavily forested with conifers. Ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir are the prominent components, with subalpine fir at higher elevations. Engelmann spruce grow in wet areas. Whitebark pine occurs at high elevations. Aspen stands are intermittent. Grasslands are frequent, especially along valley bottoms and sun exposed aspects, turning from verdant green to khaki brown throughout the growing

season. Wetland complexes, fens, and other groundwater dependent ecosystems harbor rich assemblages of plants, such as Indian Meadows. Western and subalpine larches are found sporadically. These species are absent in other geographic areas. Fire is a major driver in the structure and composition of plant communities including lodgepole pine. Please see chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems, for more details.

This geographic area has many important headwater streams emanating from the high country's snow melt. Some prominent streams north of the Blackfoot River are Stonewall Creek, Arrastra Creek, Snowbank Creek, Cadotte Creek, Alice Creek, and the Landers Fork. Some prominent streams to the south of the river are Poorman Creek, Washington Creek, Hogum Creek, and Nevada Creek. All streams west of the divide feed into the Blackfoot River on its way to the Clark Fork of the Columbia River. Major drainages east of the divide, flowing towards the Missouri River, are the Middle and South Forks of the Dearborn River and Canyon Creek. Cottonwoods and other riparian species mark the stream courses. Many natural lakes occur throughout. The quality and number of lakes help to differentiate this geographic area from others.



Figure A.62 Beargrass blooms under a conifer canopy at Flesher Pass



Figure A.63 Large ponderosa pine



Figure A.64 Looking north into the Scapegoat Wilderness from the slopes of Red Mountain



Figure A.65 Red Mountain



Figure A.66 Looking north between Black and Nevada Mountains



Figure A.67 Looking west near Granite Butte



Figure A.68 Looking northwest near Snowbank Creek in a burned area

Scenic Integrity

Most departures from scenic integrity have happened since euro-American settlement. Today's predominant land uses are logging, recreation, and grazing. A history of mining has heavily modified portions of the geographic area. Large expanses of land have been disturbed for mining purposes, creating contrast in types of land cover. Activities have also constructed mine related facilities, such as the tailing pond and water treatment plant at Mike Horse Creek. Patented mining claims have withdrawn land from federal ownership creating rectilinear land use patterns.

Many roads have been constructed for resource extraction and now fragment the geographic area. The road network now serves as the primary platform from which visitors experience the area. The cutting of timber is evident and imposes strong geometric patterns on otherwise natural appearing assemblages of vegetation. Utilities, such as transmission lines, transect the geographic area. One is noticeable at Rogers Pass.

Range allotments are present and have necessitated the building of fences and water developments. Grazing has affected the patterns and compositions of vegetation. Riparian and wet areas have been impacted by trampling.

Less obvious impacts to scenic integrity have also occurred. The exclusion of fire has changed vegetation composition and patterns, such as causing higher densities of trees than historic norms. It has also allowed for trees to encroach into areas that were historically mostly herbaceous vegetation. Please see chapter 2, Terrestrial Ecosystems, for more details.

Table A.10 Percentage of existing scenic integrity values within the Upper Blackfoot Geographic Area

Existing Scenic Integrity	Percent of geographic area	Acres ¹
Low	12%	39,986
Moderate	2%	6,664
High	60%	199,929
Very High	26%	86,636
Total Forest Service Acres in geographic area		333,215

¹ Acres are approximate.

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