

Jammed in Reverse:

Flathead National Forest Now Increasing Its Road and Trail Systems, After Decreasing Them to Help Protect Grizzly Bear and Bull Trout

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January 27, 2020

The 1986 Flathead Forest Plan initially intended to build 75 miles of new logging roads each year until its already abundant 4,000 miles of road system was increased to 6,000 [1]. In order to protect and recover threatened grizzly bears and bull trout, however, Amendment 19 was issued to the Forest Plan in 1995 to decrease the road system through road decommissioning. This required that culverts be removed from streams and that the roads no longer function as a road or trail, motorized or non-motorized [2].

With the 2015 release of its revised Forest Plan Proposed Action [3], the Flathead reversed course. Roads no longer had to be decommissioned, culverts no longer needed to be removed, and roads could be retained to function as roads and trails without being subject to limits on Total Road Density. According to the revised Forest Plan FEIS, “road decommissioning [removed from] the system 787 miles of classified roads from 1995-2015. Road management shifted to decommissioning roads in the late 1990s, with attention to maintaining grizzly security core area and the corresponding need to reduce watershed effects.” An additional 518 miles of road would need to be reclaimed or decommissioned to finish implementing Amendment 19 [4]. A companion planning document found that only 3.2 miles of new system road was built from 1996-2010 in grizzly bear habitat (these were largely road relocations with a similar mileage of road decommissioned to not increase TRD or the road system).[5]

The attached table of Flathead National Forest projects shows that, since 2015, the Flathead has or is currently planning to: a) reconstruct 37 miles of previously decommissioned roads and retain them in the system, b) construct 68 miles of new system roads, c) construct 24 miles of temporary roads, d) construct 80 miles of new system trails, and e) renege on 60 miles of previously scheduled road-specific decommissioning (in addition to the 518 miles of unscheduled decommissioning required to finish implementing Amendment 19). All this is occurring in grizzly bear habitat and largely in bull trout habitat. It demonstrates a clear reversal and abandonment of prior limits on development found necessary to protect these and other wildlife species.

Endnotes are located on the following page.

Endnotes

1. Flathead Forest Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement, 1985, p. II-130.
2. See http://www.swanview.org/articles/whats-new/supplement_issued_to_roads_to_ruin_report/248.
3. See https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprd3831341.pdf.
4. See https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd603491.pdf, FEIS p. 96 and 117.
The 2018 revised Forest Plan is at https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd603490.pdf.
5. See http://www.swanview.org/reports/00246_FlatheadNationalForestWildlifeViabilityDiversity2017.pdf, p. 92.

This document is available in PDF format with live links at:
http://www.swanview.org/reports/Jammed_in_Reverse_200127.pdf

Flathead NF Road and Trail Construction Since Release of 2015 Revised Forest Plan Proposed Action (Miles)

Project Name and Controlling Forest Plan (Year)	NEPA Status	Historic to System	New System	Re-Route	Total System	Reneg on Previous Deccommissioning	New DN Temp	Temp on Old	Total Temp	New Trails
Trail Creek Salvage (1986)	FDN	3.3			3.3		0.3	1.3	1.6	0
Hungry Lion (1986)	FDN	4.8		1.4	6.2				3.8	12
Total 1986 Forest Plan		8.1	0.0	1.4	9.5	0.0	0.3	1.3	5.4	12.0
Taylor Hellroaring (2018)	FDN	3.2	0.8		4.0		0.2	0.3	0.5	28
Crystal Cedar (2018)	DDN		0.9	0.2	1.1				6.0	25
Hellroaring Basin (2018)	DDN		1.3		1.3					
Bug Creek (2018)	Scoping	12.2	4.9		17.1	59.8	3.2	2.2	5.4	15
Mid-Swan Landscape (2018)	Scoping		60		60.0					0
Frozen Moose (2018)	Scoping	13.0			13.0		3.3	3.8	7.1	
Total 2018 Forest Plan		28.4	67.9	0.2	96.5	59.8	6.7	6.3	19.0	68.0
Total Decided and Proposed		36.5	67.9	1.6	106.0	59.8	7.0	7.6	24.4	80.0

See notes below and next page:

"Historic" road are those previously decommissioned/removed from the road "system."

The 2016 Trail Creek decision was the first to reconstruct previously decommissioned roads and claim this did not violate Amendment 19's prohibition against increasing Total Road Density - by claiming roads simply stored as "impassable" to motor vehicles need not be included in TRD.

The Flathead doesn't consider Hellroaring Basin's 1.3 miles of service roads on FS land to be "system" because they are under a ski area Special Use Permit.

Bug Creek renegs on the remainder of the 1996 Crane Mtn. Salvage decision to decommission 84 miles of road. The Flathead's 3/23/15 Road Decommissioning Spreadsheet, however, shows 107 miles were to be decommissioned, with 72 miles left to do.

FDN = Final Decision, DDN = Draft Decision, Scoping = Proposed Action.

Flathead NF Road and Trail Construction Since Release of 2015 Revised Forest Plan Proposed Action (Miles)

Project Name and Controlling Forest Plan (Year)	NEPA Status	NEPA Doc Page #	Link to NEPA Document
Trail Creek Salvage (1986)	FDN	6	https://www.fs.usda.gov/nfs/11558/www/nepa/103424_FSPLT3_3903675.pdf
Hungry Lion (1986)	FDN	10	https://www.fs.usda.gov/nfs/11558/www/nepa/105009_FSPLT3_4403701.pdf
Taylor Hellroaring (2018)	FDN	2	https://www.fs.usda.gov/nfs/11558/www/nepa/105405_FSPLT3_5006582.pdf
Crystal Cedar (2018)	DDN	2	https://www.fs.usda.gov/nfs/11558/www/nepa/108009_FSPLT3_4955137.pdf
Hellroaring Basin (2018)	DDN	A-6	https://www.fs.usda.gov/nfs/11558/www/nepa/110358_FSPLT3_5058080.pdf
Bug Creek (2018)	Scoping	5, 6, 9	https://www.fs.usda.gov/nfs/11558/www/nepa/102048_FSPLT3_4136686.pdf
Mid-Swan Landscape (2018)	Scoping	21	https://www.fs.usda.gov/nfs/11558/www/nepa/110188_FSPLT3_4470833.pdf
Frozen Moose (2018)	Scoping	7	https://www.fs.usda.gov/nfs/11558/www/nepa/112776_FSPLT3_5178463.pdf