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Environmental Assessment

WINTER TRAVEL PLAN

"SNOW SEASON"

AMENDMENT

of the

Targhee Revised Forest Plan

Caribou-Targhee National Forest
Clark, Lemhi, Fremont, Madison, Bonneville, and Teton Counties, Idaho

For Information Contact: Lisa Klinger
Caribou-Targhee National Forest
1405 Hollipark Drive
Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401
(208) 557-5760

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CHAPTER ONE: Purpose and Need for Action

1.1 Background

The Revised Forest Plan for the Targhee National Forest was implemented in April 1997. It contained travel management direction in the form of winter and summer Transportation Plans (open and closed motorized roads and trails) and management prescription direction for road density and cross-country travel. Implementation dates were developed for Forest-wide standards and management prescription areas to respond to local resource and travel conditions.

A single date was established for the Forest standard to trigger the change from the Snow Free Season to Snow Season. Thanksgiving Day, triggers the change to Snow Season travel plan regulations. As of Thanksgiving Day cross-country snow machine travel is permitted except where specifically prohibited by individual management prescription. Several years of operation under this direction has daylighted a need to change the single date for this Forest standard.

1.2 Purpose and Need

The current standard 4.B. on page III-25 reads:

> "B. Snow Season – The snow season direction takes effect yearly on Thanksgiving Day. Where legally permitted, snow machine travel is allowed consistent with the travel plan map. Cross-country snow machine travel is permitted from Thanksgiving Day through June 1 except on the Palisades Ranger District which permits said usage from December 15 through June 1 except in (inventoried) winter range as shown on Forest Plan map #24. Cross-country snow machine travel is allowed in Prescription area 5.1.4 (Big Bend Ridge) from January 1 until April 30. (S)"

The current standard in the RFP states that the snow season takes effect yearly on Thanksgiving Day over much of the Forest and on December 15 on Palisades Ranger District. This later date on the Palisades District is, in part, a reflection of the lower elevation across much of this District. The intention was to provide a consistent date near the time when snows made the Forest impassable for wheeled vehicles such and trucks and made the Forest passable for tracked vehicles. It was thought that Thanksgiving Day was uniform across the Forest, practical to manage, and provided the most opportunity to the Forest users while minimizing the impacts to resources, including wildlife.

After a few years of administration under this standard, it became apparent that there were several physical factors that worked against this uniform season date. The first is the variation in elevation across the Forest. The elevation of trailheads and roads varies from below 5000 feet to over 8000 feet. There are mountain valleys over 9000 feet and peaks over 10,000 feet. Winter starts much earlier in the high country and it stays much later. Another factor is the variability of the average winter snow level across the Forest. Sites with similar elevations can, and do, have widely differing precipitation levels. A site in the Birch Creek drainage, for example, will have

less average precipitation than a site with similar elevation in the Teton Mountains or a site on the Ashton/Island Park RD. The third factor is the season-to-season variation in snow depth. It is common for the arrival of winter to vary by as much as a month from one year to the next.

When these factors are combined, the arrival of winter can vary by several weeks between sites. This variation in the actual arrival of winter prompted this analysis of the effects of a more flexible winter season date. Specifically, according to District personnel[1], the single date standard does not coincide with weather patterns and snow conditions on the majority of the Forest. In the past ten years:

- On the Teton Basin and Dubois Ranger Districts snow season has not occurred before Thanksgiving Day. There has not been enough snow to permit winter travel at that time.
- In Ashton/Island Park, snowmobiles could have been used on this District about 50% of the time before Thanksgiving, but only by taking advantage of the existing road prisms. Cross-country travel has seldom been possible before this date.
- On the Palisades District, snow season has occurred by December 15th only half of the time. This is only in the higher elevations. Very seldom is there enough snow to travel safely anywhere else on the District.

The variable timing and non-uniform conditions of snow across the entire Forest create public confusion and enforcement problems. For example, late snow arrival may allow vehicular traffic on roads after Thanksgiving Day for normal seasonal activities, such as hunting and Christmas tree cutting. In other years, or other parts of the Forest in the same year, early snow conditions may trigger the need for winter access direction before the Thanksgiving Day date. In these cases, which are more typical than exceptional, a Thanksgiving Day date does not allow effective management direction to protect resources and unreasonably prohibits acceptable public access that causes no harm to forest resources. The intent of establishing the date, described in the first paragraph of Standard 4, is "to respond to local resources and travel conditions." The current Standard responds to neither.

The purpose of the amendment is to allow annual flexibility, with consideration of local conditions, to establish the timing of change from summer travel direction to winter travel direction. The purpose of such language is also to focus and improve enforcement of the travel plan, and foster public understanding and acceptance of the travel plan.

There is a need to correct this deficiency through a forest plan amendment. There is a need for reasonable interpretation and judgment of local snow conditions and the appropriate use of vehicles by Forest users, rather than a "one-size-fits-all" approach that has proven fundamentally unworkable. The amendment needs to also provide the intent of the original Standard for protection of forest resources, such as wildlife habitat, soils and water, and capital improvements, such as roads and trail heads.

[1] Dubois RD—Jeri Tavenner, Ashton/Island Park RD—Bill Davis, Palisades RD—Brent Porter, Teton Basin RD—J.C. Stimpson

1.3 Proposed Action

The Forest proposes to modify Standard 4.B of the RFP (page III-25) to say:

> "B. Snow Season – The snow season takes effect yearly in the fall/winter when local conditions prevent travel on roads and trails by wheeled vehicles. If wheeled or snow machine vehicles cause unacceptable impacts to forest resources, a Special Order may be issued to eliminate the conflict. Where winter trail grooming has begun on winter-designated routes, wheeled vehicles will be restricted to plowed routes. Cross-country snow machine travel is permitted from the beginning of the snow season through June 1, except where specifically prohibited by Management Prescription."

The following language would be deleted from this standard because it is redundant to Management Prescription 5.1.4(c) access table, RFP page III-141.

> "Cross-country snow machine travel is allowed in Prescription area 5.1.4 (Big Bend Ridge) from January 1 until April 30."

1.4 Decision to be Made

After reviewing this EA and comments from the public, Forest Supervisor Jerry Reese will decide whether or not to amend Standard 4.B on page III-25 of the Revised Forest Plan as proposed, or choose some other way to address the purpose and need.

1.5 Public Involvement

The Forest sent a request for comments to the public on August 8, 2001. The scoping letter was sent to the combined Caribou-Targhee Travel Plan mailing list, which contains approximately 1,000 parties interested in Forest Travel Plan management. Sixteen comments were received in response to the solicitation. In addition, the scoping statement was routed to Forest personnel directly involved with resource management.

After the scoping period was over, the comments were compiled and used to develop issues specific to this proposal. This comment analysis is summarized below and located in the project file. Using comments from this scoping request, the Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) has analyzed and disclosed the effects of this proposal on resources of concern. The effects of motorized travel and access management on the Caribou-Targhee have been analyzed in several NEPA documents prepared by the Forest Service, including the Targhee 1997 Revised Forest Plan, 1999 Open Road and Open Motorized Trail Analysis for the Targhee NF (Travel Plan EIS), and several site-specific NEPA documents. To avoid duplication, the IDT incorporated by reference the analysis contained in these documents, where appropriate.

1.6 Issues and Concerns

Based on the scoping process and the appeal decision direction, the ID Team sorted the comments into several categories. Some of the comments were out of the scope of this proposal for reasons explained in Appendix A. The other comments received were resource concerns and the effects on these resources are disclosed in this EA.

According to the National Environmental Policy Act, issues that "have been covered by prior environmental reviews" can be eliminated from detailed study (40 CFR 1501.7(a)(3)). Further, the Agency must make judgments about which issues are significant and which are not (CEQ Scoping Guidance; FSH 1909.15, 65.13). The effects of the Revised Forest Plan for the Targhee National Forest have been disclosed by the Final Environmental Impact Statement. After review, the ID Team found that the effects analysis disclosed in the RFP documents were substantially the same as for this current proposal. Therefore, the effects analyses from the RFP FEIS are incorporated by reference in this EA (40 CFR 1502.21).

After analyzing the public comments and the available information, the IDT determined that there were no significant issues to drive the formulation of additional alternatives. All of the resource concerns are mitigated by the proposed action; addressed in the proposed action; out of the scope of the analysis; and/or outside of the decision authority of the Forest Service. Appendix A shows the comments received in scoping and how they were categorized and addressed.

Although there are no significant issues, as defined in NEPA, there are specific resource concerns identified by the public and Forest Service specialists. The resource concerns that will be analyzed in this EA are listed below.

WILDLIFE ISSUES

Effects of snow machine travel on wildlife during the fall and early winter. Effects of a varied opening date for winter travel on the disturbance/displacement of big game.

Some years there may be enough snowfall to implement the snow season while hunting seasons are still in effect possibly contributing to wildlife disturbance. Premature displacement of big game animals onto winter range may damage winter habitat. Some commenters said that snow machine travel might put stress on wildlife in the spring from a late spring closure date of June 1st. This is outside the scope of this proposal and the impacts are the same as described in the 1997 RFP FEIS and 1999 Travel Plan FEIS.

RECREATION

The standard date does not allow recreational access to the Forest in most years between Thanksgiving and when enough snow is on the ground to allow snowmachine travel.

As the RFP currently reads, wheeled vehicles are not allowed on roads after Thanksgiving (or December 15th on the Palisades District). In most years, however, wheeled vehicle travel is more practical at that time than snowmachine travel. The standard date reduces the availability of the Forest for recreational activities.

PUBLIC CONFUSION AND ENFORCEMENT

Effects of variable dates causing confusion by the public particularly where districts implement the snow season at different times.

It is anticipated that snowfall will vary from district to district resulting in confusion for the public as to when and where the snow season has been implemented. Motorized use is very difficult to monitor and to police making enforcement a challenge.

RESOURCE DAMAGE

Cross country motorized travel at the wrong time of year could impact resources.

To protect forest resources and capital improvements consideration must be given to the widespread and increasing damage caused by motorized recreation. If there is not enough snow on the ground to safely operate snowmachines, cross country travel could disturb soil and vegetation. Likewise, travel on roads when conditions are not appropriate can damage the road surface, cause rutting and erosion.

CHAPTER TWO: Alternatives, Including the Proposed Action

2.1 Process Used to Formulate Alternatives

According to NEPA, Federal agencies must "rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives," even if they are not within the jurisdiction of the lead agency (40 CFR 1502.14.). Case law has determined that alternatives must be developed if they are needed to address a significant issue. A reasonable range of alternatives need only include those that meet the purpose and need, respond adequately to the issues, and meet law and regulation. The proposed action adequately meets the purpose and need and was designed to allow annual flexibility, with consideration of local conditions, to establish the timing of change from summer travel direction to winter travel direction. As explained in Section 1.6 of Chapter One, several previous documents had analyzed the Revised Forest Plan and with those mitigation measures already in place, no significant issues were identified during scoping for this project. Thus, the IDT did not develop additional mitigation measures or alternatives to the proposed action.

2.2 No Action Alternative

According to the CEQ Guidelines, the No Action alternative can either be "no change from current management direction" or no action taken on the proposed activity. The No Action alternative must be evaluated even if it is contrary to law, regulation, and policy (CEQ's 40 Most-Asked Questions #3; FSH 1909.15,65.12).

In the No Action alternative, the Targhee National Forest would retain the existing Standard 4.B. in the Revised Forest Plan. Snow season would continue to be implemented on all Districts on Thanksgiving Day. This results in no change from current management.

2.3 Proposed Action

The Forest proposes to modify Standard 4.B of the RFP (page III-25) to say:

> "B. Snow Season – The snow season takes effect yearly in the fall/winter when local conditions prevent travel on roads and trails by wheeled vehicles. If wheeled or snow machine vehicles cause unacceptable impacts to forest resources, a Special Order may be issued to eliminate the conflict. Where winter trail grooming has begun on winter-designated routes, wheeled vehicles will be restricted to plowed routes. Cross-country snow machine travel is permitted from the beginning of the snow season through June 1, except where specifically prohibited by Management Prescription."

The following language would be deleted from this standard because it is redundant to Management Prescription 5.1.4(c) access table, RFP page III-141.

> "Cross-country snow machine travel is allowed in Prescription area 5.1.4 (Big Bend Ridge) from January 1 until April 30."

2.4 Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Further Analysis

As described in Section 1.6, there were no issues that would drive the formulation of alternatives. Thus, no alternatives to the proposed action were developed for detailed analysis. The alternatives listed below came from public scoping or internal review (Scoping Comment Analysis, Project File).

Adoption of a different set closure date

This alternative was considered and dismissed because it does not address the need to allow for flexible management based on local snow conditions from District to District. This would not respond to local resources and travel conditions and does not meet the purpose of the amendment to allow annual flexibility.

Adoption of snow machine travel based on a snow depth of 24"

This alternative was considered and dismissed because the elevational differences across the Forest would result in a wide variety of snow depths from District to District. The one snow depth fits all approach would not address the need for management flexibility based on local conditions and would further compound enforcement by varying snow depths and weather conditions.

2.5 Comparison of Alternatives

Table 1 summarizes the effects of the alternatives on the objectives and resources of concern and displays them in a comparative format.

Resource Concern	No Action Alternative	Proposed Action
Effects of snow machine travel on wildlife during hunting season	Both alternatives will have no effect on T & E species and no impact on sensitive species. Potential impacts to MIS are minimal and immeasurable.	
Effects of a varied opening date of winter travel on the disturbance/displacement of big game	The alternatives will not alter open motorized road and trail densities and hiding cover (EV and EHE components). There will be no changes in winter range designation, open motorized road/trail densities or vegetation.	
Impacts to recreationists using the National Forest	On the majority of Forest in most years snow levels are not adequate to allow snowmachine travel by Thanksgiving. At that time, however, wheeled vehicle use on roads is not allowed. This prevents access to the Forest.	The most appropriate vehicle for the conditions could be used. This will allow continued access to the Forest for Christmas tree cutting, late hunts, etc.

Potential for confusion caused by variable dates	Standard dates does not cause confusion	Variable dates will require that the public check local conditions to determine which travel methods are legal.
Potential for impacts to resources from cross-country motorized vehicles	Impacts could occur in the majority of the years due to low snow at Thanksgiving.	Impacts are less likely with the variable dates.

*: Worst case scenario numbers used
NE: No Effect
NLAA: Not Likely to Adversely Affect
NI: No Impact
MIIH: May Impact Individuals or Habitat, But Will Not Likely Contribute to a Trend Towards Federal Listing or Loss of Viability to the Population or Species.

CHAPTER THREE: Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

This Chapter includes the current environmental conditions and the predicted direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the two alternatives on that environment. Direct and indirect effects are combined and discussed by indicator. For cumulative effects, we combined the indicator and predicted the effects on each resource concern. As discussed previously, travel management on the Targhee NF has been analyzed previously in the Targhee 1997 Revised Forest Plan and the 1999 Open Road and Open Motorized Trail Analysis for the Targhee NF (Travel Plan EIS). This description and analysis will reference and tier to the previous documents.

Direct effects are those effects occurring at the same time and place, and **indirect effects**, those effects that occur at a later time or at a different place. Since this is amendment is programmatic in nature, there are no direct effects from changing the wording in the Revised Forest Plan. There are no direct environmental consequences of the amendment; therefore, the analysis in this EA discusses only indirect and cumulative effects.

Cumulative effects are those impacts or effects on the environment that result from incremental impact of an action when added to other past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency or person undertakes the action. Cumulative effects or impacts can result from individually minor, but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time. The cumulative actions, which are being considered in this effects analysis, are in the next section.

Irretrievable effects apply to losses of production or commitment of renewable natural resources. For example, some or all of the forage production from an area is irretrievably lost during the time the area is used for a summer recreation event. If the use is changed, forage production can resume. The production loss is irretrievable, but the action is not irreversible.

Irreversible effects apply primarily to the use of non-renewable resources, such as minerals or cultural resources, or to those factors that are renewable over long periods of time, such as soil productivity. Irreversible effects also include the loss of future options.

3.1 Wildlife Issues[2]

In general, the onset of winter is one of the least critical times for most animals with regards to motorized travel and human presence. That is not to say that it is not an important time of year, but it is not the time of year when disturbance will cause stress and mortality to most species. Big game is an exception to this statement.

[2] The following information is an excerpt from the Wildlife Specialist Report dated February 2004 which can be found in the project record.

By late fall and early winter, all birds have fledged and most have flown south or at least moved to lower elevations. The birds that remain in the mountains are fully grown, independent of their parents and they are very mobile. They can easily fly off to a secure area.

By this time of year most predators, both birds and mammals, are in fine shape. The young are big, mobile and often independent. Some larger species such as the cats and the canines keep their young with them for a year or more but these young animals are fast and can easily keep up with their parents. The prey base for these animals is near their highest point and the low snow depth early in the season assures that the access to these animals is still good. There is limited snow and it is still soft. Motorized disturbance will have a minimal effect on these species

The bears are an exception to the rest of the predators. The sows keep their young with them for two years and the cubs are very dependent on their mothers during the first year. If snows come early and cross-county snowmobile travel begins well before Thanksgiving, these animals may be caught between fall range and their den area.

As discussed in Chapter One, Section 1.2, the onset of winter varies across the Forest. There are several physical factors that cause this. The first is the variation in elevation across the Forest. Winter starts much earlier in the high country and it stays much later. Another factor is the variability of the average winter snow level across the Forest. Sites with similar elevations can, and do, have widely differing precipitation levels. A site in the Birch Creek drainage, for example, will have less average precipitation than a site with similar elevation in the Teton Mountains or a site on the Ashton/Island Park RD. The third factor is the season-to-season variation in snow depth. It is common for the arrival of winter to vary by as much as a month from one year to the next.

When these factors are combined, the arrival of winter can vary by several weeks between sites. Specifically, according to District personnel, the single date standard does not coincide with weather patterns and snow conditions on the majority of the Forest (Wildlife Specialist Report). In the past ten years:

- On the Teton Basin and Dubois Ranger Districts snow season has not occurred before Thanksgiving Day. There has not been enough snow to permit winter travel at that time.
- In Ashton/Island Park, snowmobiles could have been used on this District about 50% of the time before Thanksgiving, but only by taking advantage of the existing road prisms. Cross-country travel has seldom been possible before this date.
- On the Palisades District, snow season has occurred by December 15th only half of the time. This is only in the higher elevations. Very seldom is there enough snow to travel safely anywhere else on the District.

The Ashton/Island Park District routinely receives more snow than any other Ranger District and routinely receives the first big snows as well. Snow levels have been recorded by date at the Island Park District office since 1973 (Caribou-Targhee National Forest, Ashton/Island Park Ranger District. Snow depth measurements recorded at Island Park District Office: 1973 - 2001). This data was used to analyze the date at which enough snow was on the ground to allow

snow machine travel. It takes about 18 inches of new snow to make snowmobile travel practical on existing road prisms and about 24 inches to make cross-country travel practical (Ovard, pers. comm.).

Thanksgiving Day varies from year to year from the 22nd to the 28th. November 25th will be used as the average date for this analysis. Given this, there were nine out of the last 28 years that there was 18 inches or more snow by November 25th in Island Park. This is 32 percent of the years. During the same time period, there were three years with 24 inches of snow on November 25th, 11 percent of the years. If the next 28 years resemble the last 28 years, we can expect there to be enough snow on Thanksgiving Day to snowmobile on the roads about one out of three years and enough snow to facilitate limited cross-country travel on about one out of nine years. This District has the most snow on the Forest. The remainder of the Forest will have less chance of early season snowmobiling.

An analysis of the effects of this proposed amendment will be given for each federally listed species, for each Forest sensitive species, Management Indicator Species (MIS) and for other species of concern. Tables summarizing the determination of effects or impacts are presented first and the narratives follow. The narrative addresses the effects of the current program in the event of an early or late winter, and the effects of the variable winter travel date found in the proposed action.

3.1.1 Species Listed with the USFWS

BALD EAGLE

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Forest-wide population information (Caribou-Targhee Monitoring and Evaluation Reports: 1997 – 1999 and Draft Targhee Five-year Evaluation, 12-15-2003)

The Targhee NF is within the Greater Yellowstone (GY) bald eagle management zone as outlined in the Pacific States Bald Eagle Recovery Plan. According to the Recovery Plan, the habitat management goal for the portion of the GY zone that includes the Targhee NF is to have twenty-three nesting territories. The population has continued to increase, and in 2002, approximately fifty-four nesting territories were documented in this area. Out of the fifty-four nesting territories, twenty have nest sites on the Forest, and another eleven have a portion of the territory on the Forest.

Nesting success has been highly variable between years. The highest number of advanced young (23) from Targhee NF nests occurred in 1991. Years with the second highest number of advanced young (18) from Targhee NF nests occurred in 1992, 1994, and 2001. Monitoring reports have documented that nesting success is lower when cold wet springs occur, particularly in the higher elevations (1999 Bald Eagle Report). Also, consecutive years of drought affect water levels in lakes and reservoirs. Even though nesting success has been variable, the net results indicate an increasing population. Because adult bald eagles are long-lived and have low mortality, the annual variability in nesting success is not a negative factor (Mark Orme, personal communication).

The standards and guidelines in the RFP limit human disturbance around nesting zones and do not allow forest activities that could damage habitat. It is apparent from this data that bald eagle management direction on the Targhee NF has contributed to the recovery of the bald eagle. The number of territories in the Greater Yellowstone management zone and on the Forest continues to increase. Productivity has fluctuated over the past two decades, but the net result is still an increasing population. The critical factors in bald eagle production appear to be spring weather and water levels in the nesting season. The annual variability in bald eagle production also may be due, in part, to the saturation of available habitat by adult bald eagles as the overall nesting population continues to grow" (1998 Bald Eagle Report).

Snake River population information

Eagles are found along the South and North (Henry's) Fork of the Snake River during this transition time between fall and winter. These birds are drawn to the open water. They fish this open water all winter. In addition to the fish, the raptors can hunt water foul and take advantage of carrion when it becomes available. These rivers are important wintering habitat for these threatened eagles.

Much of the South Fork, between Palisades Reservoir and Table Rock, borders the Palisades Ranger District. This amendment will not change management along this river. There is currently no winter motorized cross-country travel allowed along the river and this amendment will not change this. The proposed action will have no effect on bald eagles on this river.

The North or Henry's Fork of the Snake River runs through the Island Park and Ashton Ranger Districts from Big Springs in the north to the confluence with Warm River in the south. Most of this distance is National Forest System lands but there are a few miles of state and private ownership. The segment of the river that is on the Forest is open to winter cross-country travel except for the five or six miles between Island Park Reservoir and Harriman State Park. In this area the east side of the river is open to winter cross-county travel while the west side of the river restricts winter travel to designated routes.

EFFECTS OF THE NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

During the late fall and early winter, the time that the current program changes from summer to winter travel regulations, the eagles are in good shape. The adults and young are full size, independent and able to fend for themselves. As described previously, these birds can move away from disturbances. A fixed date that may miss the conditions in the field by a few weeks will have no effect on these eagles.

EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

During the late fall and early winter, the time that the proposed action may be different from the current program, the eagles are in good shape. The adults and young are full size, independent and able to fend for themselves. As described previously, these birds can move away from disturbances. A small change in the beginning of the winter season will have no effect on these eagles.

GRIZZLY BEAR (THREATENED AND MANAGEMENT INDICATOR SPECIES)

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Greater Yellowstone Area population information

The Recovery Plan established three demographic (population) recovery targets that must be achieved for a recovered grizzly bear population, and defined a recovered grizzly bear population as one that could sustain a defined level of mortality and is well distributed throughout the PCA. The three demographic (population) recovery targets include:

Comment [spd1]: This is in Chapter 1 - repeat?

- Maintain a minimum of 15 unduplicated females with cubs-of-the-year (COY) over a six-year average both inside the PCA and within a 10-mile area immediately surrounding the PCA.
- Sixteen of 18 BMUs within the PCA must be occupied by females with young, including COY, yearlings, or two-year olds, as confirmed by the IGBST from a six-year sum of observations. No two adjacent BMUs may be unoccupied during the same six-year period. This is equivalent to verified evidence of a least one female grizzly bear with young at least once in each BMU over a six-year period.
- The running six-year average of total known, human-caused grizzly bear mortality as confirmed by the IGBST is not to exceed 4% of the minimum population estimate. The running-six-year average known, human-caused female grizzly bear mortality is not to exceed 30% of the 4% total mortality limit over the most recent three-year period. These mortality limits cannot be exceeded in any two consecutive years. Beginning in 2000, probable mortalities were included in the calculation of mortality thresholds; COY orphaned as a result of human causes will be designated as probably mortalities.

At the end of 2002, the number of unduplicated females with COY over a six-year average both inside the PCA and within a 10-mile area immediately surrounding the PCA was 38, more than doubling the Recovery Plan target of 15. In fact, the Recovery Plan target for the number of unduplicated females with COY (15) has been exceeded since 1988 (Interagency Conservation Strategy Team 2003). In 2002, 50 unduplicated females with COY were documented inside the PCA and within a 10-mile area immediately surrounding the PCA, which is the highest number recorded for a single year (Interagency Conservation Strategy Team 2003).

Comment [spd2]: Name of document.

Comment [spd3]: Name of document.

At the end of 2002, the distribution of females with young, based on the most recent six years of observations in the ecosystem, was 18 out of 18 BMUs. The recovery criterion of having 16 of 18 BMUs occupied with no two adjacent units vacant has been met. This criterion is important as it ensures that females occupy the majority of the PCA and that successful reproductive females are not concentrated in one portion of the ecosystem.

At the end of 2002, the minimum population estimate was 416 bears (personal communication with the IGBST 2003). At the end of 2002, the running six-year average of total known, human-caused grizzly bear mortality as confirmed by the IGBST was 10.5, and the running-six-year

average known, human-caused female grizzly bear mortality was 4.3. The total mortality and the female mortality are under the mortality thresholds set in the Recovery Plan.

Table 2. The status of the Recovery Plan demographic (population) recovery parameters at the end of 2002.*

Recovery Plan Demographic (Population) Recovery Parameters	Recovery Plan Target	Existing Number
Maintain a minimum of 15 unduplicated females with cubs-of-the-year (COY) over a six-year average both inside the PCA and within a 10-mile area immediately surrounding the PCA	≥15	38
Sixteen of 18 BMUs within the PCA must be occupied by females with young, including COY, yearlings, or two-year olds, as confirmed by the IGBST from a six-year sum of observations. No two adjacent BMUs may be unoccupied during the same six-year period.	≥16	18
Human-caused mortality: The running six-year average of total known, human-caused mortality[1] as confirmed by the IGBST is not to exceed 4% of the minimum population estimate.[2] The running-six-year average of known, human-caused female grizzly bear mortality[2] is not to exceed 30% of the 4% total mortality limit over the most recent three-year period.	≤16.6 ≤5.0	10.5 4.3

*Data for this table came from personal communication with the IGBST (2003) and Interagency Conservation Strategy Team (2003).

[1] Beginning in 2000, probable mortalities were included in the calculation of mortality thresholds, and COY orphaned as a result of human causes will be designated as probably mortalities (Interagency Conservation Strategy Team 2003).

[2] At the end of 2002, the minimum population estimate was 416 bears (personal communication with the IGBST 2003).

Comment [spd4]: Document name.

The most current information indicates that this population of grizzly bears is growing at approximately 3 to 4% or more annually (Eberhardt et al. 1994, Boyce 1995, Boyce et al. 2001, Interagency Conservation Strategy Team 2003). Schwartz et al. (2002) documented the distribution of grizzly bears in the GYA from 1990 to 2000. They state: "A comparison of our results from the 1990s to previously published distribution maps shows an approximate increase in occupied habitat of 48% and 34% from the 1970s and 1980s respectively." While there is some debate related to the actual level of increase since the bear was listed in 1975, all of the current information (i.e. number of unduplicated females, distribution of reproducing females, distribution of bears, informal sightings by agency personnel, and areas where nuisance bears are being managed) indicate this population has increased in both numbers of bears and the geographic area they occupy (Interagency Conservation Strategy Team 2003).

Comment [spd5]: Name of document.

Comment [spd6]: Name of document.

Caribou-Targhee population information

The grizzly bear is found across three of the four Districts on the Targhee National Forest. The bear is found across the Centennial Mountains as far west as Interstate 15 near Dubois Idaho, east to Yellowstone National Park, and south through Ashton/Island Park Ranger District and the Teton Mountains to State Highway 22. The grizzly's population has continued to increase and their range has continued to expand beyond the designated Bear Management Units.

EFFECTS COMMON TO ALL ALTERNATIVES

The following information is from the "Biological Assessment (BA) of the Effects of Snowmobile Use on Grizzly Bears for the Gallatin, Beaverhead-Deerlodge, Custer, Bridger-Teton and Shoshone National Forests and the Greater Yellowstone Area". This BA found that:

"Monitoring data indicates that grizzly bears in the Yellowstone are nearing recovery. Grizzlies are surpassing the recovery criteria for number of sows with cubs of the year (ICST 2000). There is no indication that any human activity is seriously affecting grizzly bear reproduction...Because snowmobiles may disturb or displace an individual grizzly bear, the determination for the effect of snowmobiles on grizzly bears must be "may effect-likely to adversely effect". This determination is believed to be more appropriate in the case of sow with cubs of the year upon emergence from the den than for grizzly bears in their dens during winter…The action of continued snowmobiling is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the grizzly bear or adversely modify or destroy its habitat. Although the determination of this Biological Assessment on the grizzly bear was 'may effect-likely to adversely affect' for snowmobiling, this is extremely conservative and based more upon the potential impact of snowmobiling on sows with cubs of the year."

The Fish and Wildlife Service issued a Biological Opinion on this BA Stating that "after reviewing the current status of the grizzly bear, …it is the Service's opinion that the current authorized snowmobile activity …is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the grizzly bear (USFWS Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (Snowmobile use consultation), 2002).

The RFP and the Travel Plan have analyzed the effects to grizzly bear, including the effects of fall and winter travel. The RFP provides standards for management of this, or other grizzly bear-human conflicts. For prescriptions within the BMUs, the standard states "site specific restrictions on winter recreation activity (such as area closures, timing restrictions, etc.) will be imposed to resolve human-grizzly bear conflicts." This will include changes to winter dates if conflicts are encountered.

EFFECTS OF THE NO ACTION

The current program of a fixed date for switching from the summer to winter travel plan has worked well for the grizzly bear. As stated above, the bear has done quite well under the current program.

EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

Winter use has gone through consultation with the FWS. There are standards within the RFP that protect grizzly bears if there are grizzly-human conflicts. As part of the Caribou-Targhee monitoring program, known human-caused grizzly bear mortalities are documented each year throughout the recovery area and within ten miles outside of the recovery area. In the fall of 2002, a sow and cub were killed by a hunter in the Two Top area on the Ashton-Island Park District. Prior to that, the last human-caused grizzly bear mortality on the Targhee occurred in

1984. From 1985 through 2002 (a span of fifteen years), no human-caused grizzly bear mortalities have been documented on the Forest. The 2002 mortality was not related to Forest management practices (Targhee National Forest, Process Paper D, 1997; Craighead, et al. 1988; Caribou-Targhee Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Reports: 1997-1999 and Draft Targhee Five-year Evaluation, 12-15-03).

This project will not change road densities or change prescriptions. It may decrease the likelihood of human-grizzly bear interactions prior to denning. This is because human access will be restricted to open motorized routes until enough snow allows cross-country motorized travel. By that time, the bears will likely have denned already. In the Greater Yellowstone Area 90 percent of the females den by the fourth week of November and 90 percent of the males den by the second week of December (Haroldson et al. 2002, Judd et al. 1986). Thus, this change to the RFP will have no effect on grizzly bears.

The only effect to the bear if the action alternative is implemented will be from the rare occasion when cross-country travel will be permitted before Thanksgiving Day for the northern portions of the Forest, or December 15 on Palisades District. The grizzly bear has learned where our travel corridors are and how to avoid them. If snowmobiles are permitted to travel cross-country, late migrating bears may be encountered. This disturbance would result in a spooked bear and a short delay in migration for the individual grizzly bear involved. As displayed previously, however, the likelihood of there being enough snow to snowmobile prior to Thanksgiving or December 15 in Palisades, is very low.

The RFP provides standards for management of this, or other grizzly bear-human conflicts. For prescriptions within the BMUs, the standard states “site specific restrictions on winter recreation activity (such as area closures, timing restrictions, etc.) will be imposed to resolve human-grizzly bear conflicts.” This will include changes to winter dates if conflicts are encountered.

GRAY WOLF (EXPERIMENTAL POPULATION AND MANAGEMENT INDICATOR SPECIES)

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

General Population Information

Grey wolves were reintroduced into the Greater Yellowstone Area in late winter of 1995. Wolves east of Interstate 15 are part of the Yellowstone Nonessential Experimental Population Area, and those west of Interstate 15 are part of the Central Idaho Nonessential Experimental Population Area (USFWS 1994a and b). When grey wolves were reintroduced, the USFWS stated that the reintroduction would not conflict with existing or anticipated federal agency actions or traditional public uses of parkland, wilderness areas, or surrounding lands. The intent of the experimental rule is that land-use restrictions not be routinely used solely to enhance wolf recovery. However, restrictions to control intrusive human disturbance could be used around active den sites between April 1 and June 30, when there are five or fewer breeding pairs of wolves in a recovery area. After six or more breeding pairs become established in a recovery area, land-use restrictions would not be needed (USFWS 1994a). In the Yellowstone area at the end of 2002, there was a minimum wolf population of 271, with 23 breeding pairs. In the Central Idaho area at the end of 2002, there was a minimum population of 284, with nine

breeding pairs (USFWS et al. 2003). Thus, there is no need for management restrictions near active dens.

Targhee Population Information
Confirmed and probable wolf activity has been reported across the Forest in the last few years. Pack activity was confirmed in the fall of 2002 on the Ashton District but no denning activity has been reported on the Forest at this time.

EFFECTS OF THE NO ACTION

The effect of a fixed date for switching from the summer to winter travel restrictions has no effect on wolves. The wolves, both young and mature, are large, strong and mobile. The current program, even when the set date misses the actual onset of winter by a few weeks, has no effect on the wolves. There will be no impact to denning wolves due to timing.

EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

There is a possibility that a wolf or a wolf pack could be disturbed by cross-country snowmobile travel on the rare occasion that this activity would be allowed before Thanksgiving but this disturbance will not harm these animals. This proposed change in the beginning of winter travel season is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of this experimental population.

CANADA LYNX (THREATENED AND MANAGEMENT INDICATOR SPECIES)

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

General Population Information

McKelvey et al. (1999) documented the distribution of Canada lynx in the contiguous United States from the mid-1800's to 1998. In the past 150 years, there have been about 40 lynx sightings in and around the Caribou-Targhee National Forest (Caribou-Targhee Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Reports: 1997-1999; Mark Orme, personal comm.). Between 1997 and 2000, possible lynx sightings/observations have been recorded in the following ecological subsections: Lemhi/Medicine Lodge, Centennial Mountains, Teton Mountain Range, and the Big Hole Mountains.

Caribou-Targhee Population Information

In the summer/fall of 1999, the Forest began participating in a national survey effort to document the presence of Canada lynx. This national survey effort consisted of establishing 25 sampling points over about 64 square miles of area (called a "sampling grid"). At each sampling point, five hair snare pads scented with a lynx attractant were placed at 100-meter intervals (for a total of 125 hair snare pads per sampling grid). Forest biologists have completed three years of sampling on the grids across the Forest. Hairs collected on the hair snare pads were sent to a lab for species identification. As of February 2004, all but one of the sample pad sets has been analyzed. No lynx hair has been found (Caribou-Targhee Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Reports: 1997-1999; Mark Orme, personal comm.). There are currently no resident lynx on the

Forest. The Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy (LCAS) standards and guidelines are in affect whether a Lynx Analysis Unit (LAU) is active or not. This will assure a place for the lynx, should they return in the future.

EFFECTS OF THE NO ACTION

Lynx activity is governed by the action of its prey and the actions of its prey are governed by the habitat conditions, including the weather. The effects of the set date missing the actuall onset of winter by up to a few weeks hinder use by humans, not the wildlife. There are no effects to the lynx from the current program.

EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The two factors that affect lynx most are changes in habitat quality and quantity and snow compaction that can reduce the cat's competitive advantage. This proposal will not change habitat in any way. There will be no changes in denning habitat, no changes in foraging habitat and no increases in unsuitable habitat.

This proposal may increase the number of snowmobiles on the Forest during the early winter. As stated above, this will be a rare occurrence on most Districts. In general, early season snowmobile riding will be on roads, not cross-country. There are too many stumps, rocks, logs and holes to allow much travel off of the maintained roads. Because of these safety and comfort concerns, this activity will occur within existing disturbance corridors along the same roads that have been used all summer and fall. This will greatly reduce the disturbance to the lynx. They have learned to avoid these areas and the change in use from a truck to a snowmobile will have no effect on their lives. The exception to this will be the roads that are closed or restricted on the summer plan. These roads will be open when winter cross-country travel is allowed.

This change does not violate any standards or guidelines found in the Canada Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy (Ruediger, 2000). The standards and guidelines restrict increases in groomed trails and restrict increases in designated play areas. This proposed change has the potential to lengthen the snowmobile season but it will not change or reduce any restrictions currently in place. This proposal will not increase the amount of groomed trails on the Forest.

This proposal will have no effect on Canada lynx.

YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO (THREATENED)

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Yellow-billed cuckoos are migratory and are only present in Idaho during the breeding, nesting and brood rearing seasons (late spring to early fall). They require large blocks (25 acres or larger) of riparian habitat (particularly woodlands with overstory cottonwoods and understory shrubs) for nesting (USFWS 2001). In Idaho, this species is considered a rare and local summer resident. The USFWS has stated that available information for Idaho is inadequate to judge population or distributional trends, and the breeding population is likely limited to a few breeding pairs, at most (USFWS 2001).

Yellow-billed cuckoos have been documented on the South Fork Snake River (TREC, Inc. 2003, Saab 1996 and 1998; Idaho Department of Fish and Game CDC database; USFWS 2001).

EFFECTS OF THE NO ACTION

This project will not affect the bird's habitat and these birds have migrated long before the effects of the current program can have an effect.

EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

This project will not affect this bird's habitat. The snowmobiles will not arrive, even on the earliest winter, until the Cuckoo is far to the south. This proposal will have no effect on the yellow-billed cuckoo.

UTE LADIES'-TRESSES

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

All known populations of this orchid are located along the South Fork of the Snake River. This area is closed to all human entry except on designated routes, in this case, FR 208. There is no legal cross-country travel permitted in the Snake River corridor.

EFFECTS OF THE NO ACTION

There is no cross country travel permitted in the areas where this plant has been found or habitat where it could be found in the future. The current program has no effect on this plant.

EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

If unknown populations of this plant exist where cross-country travel will be permitted, the snow will protect the plants from the snowmobiles. There will be no effect to this plant if the proposal is implemented.

Table 3: Threatened, Endangered & Proposed Species Biological Assessment Summary Of Conclusion Of Effects.

Species	No Effect	Not Likely to Adversely Affect (NLAA) 1/	Not Likely to Jeopardize the Continued Existence 2/	Likely to Adversely Affect (LAA)
Bald Eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus)	For Both Alternatives			
Grizzly Bear (Ursus arctos horribilis)	For Both Alternatives			
Gray Wolf (Canis lupus)			For Both Alternatives	
Canada Lynx (Lynx canadensis)	For Both Alternatives			
Yellow-billed cuckoo (Coccyzus americanus)	For Both Alternatives			
Ute ladies'-tresses (Spiranthes diluvialis)	For Both Alternatives			

1/ This determination can include the following: 'may affect, not likely to adversely affect' or 'beneficial effect, not likely to adversely affect.' It would be appropriate to indicate in the table which determination it is, i.e. use 'MA' for may affect or 'BE' for beneficial effect.
2/ This determination is only appropriate for nonessential experimental populations, such as the gray wolf.

3.1.2 Sensitive Species

These sensitive species fall into two categories. There are those species that will not come in contact with snowmobiles and those that may come into contact but can easily evade if disturbed. Some of the species migrate away from the Targhee NF before winter sets in. These include the flammulated owl, common loon, harlequin duck and the peregrine falcon[3]. There will be no change to habitat or food sources as a result of this amendment and, consequently, cannot have any impacts to these species. These species will not be discussed further.

Other species will remain on the forest but will not come into contact with the snowmobiles. Three of these species will be hibernating before the onset of winter. These are the Townsend's big-eared bat, the spotted bat, and the spotted frog. Thus, there will be no effect on these species and they will not be discussed further.

[3] These are also Management Indicator Species (MIS) according to the Targhee RFP.

SENSITIVE BIRDS

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Six species of sensitive birds remain on the Forest through winter. These are the northern goshawk, the great gray and boreal owl, the trumpeter swan the three-toed woodpecker and the sharp-tailed grouse. The habitat thy prefer varies from the low shrub and grass lands of the grouse, the open rivers of the swan to the forested environment of the goshawk, owls and the woodpecker.

EFFECTS OF THE NO ACTION

The effects of the current program on these six bird species are very small. There is a change in disturbance and in disturbance corridors when trucks and ATVs are replaced by snowmobiles. As stated above, the animals of the forest are in good shape this time of year. The young have left the nests and are large and independent. These birds can easily fly a short distance and be secure from any disturbance. This is the case even when the snowmobiles can travel cross country easily. The birds are also able to fly up and move away from ground disturbance. The current program of a fixed date for the switch from summer to winter travel restrictions will have no impact on these birds.

EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The effects of the proposed action are much the same as for the no action alternative. The animals of the forest are in good shape this time of year. The young have left the nests and are large and independent. These birds can easily fly a short distance and be secure from any disturbance. This is the case even when the snowmobiles can travel cross country easily. The birds are also able to fly up and move away from ground disturbance. This proposed action will have no impact on these birds.

SENSITIVE FURBEARERS

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Two sensitive fur bearers, the fisher and the wolverine, remain on the Forest and on the surface of the snow throughout the winter. The early season snowmobiling has very little impact to these animals. The wolverine enjoys steep and remote habitat, places that snowmobiles cannot reach early in the season. The fisher enjoys dense, lowland forests and moist spruce/fir habitat, often along streams. These are places the snowmobiles avoid all season and cannot utilize at all in the early season. Because of the separation in desired areas of use by snowmobiles and the desired areas of use by these mustelids, early season snowmobile use will have no impact on these animals.

IMPACTS OF THE NO ACTION

The behavior of fur bearers on the Forest are governed by the habitat, including the weather. The current program, even when the set date misses the onset of winter by several weeks will not impact these species. They will be frequenting areas unreachable by most vehicles, both tracked and wheeled, at this time of year. The current program will have no impact on these animals.

IMPACTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

This will be much the same as the impacts for the current program. The behavior of fur bearers on the Forest are governed by the habitat, including the weather. The proposed action will not impact these species. They will be frequenting areas unreachable by most vehicles, both tracked and wheeled, at this time of year. The proposed action will not impact these species.

Table 4: Summary of Determination of Effects on Sensitive Species

Species	No Impact	May Impact Individuals Or Habitat, But Will Not Likely Contribute To A Trend Towards Federal Listing Or Loss Of Viability To The Population Or Species	Will Impact Individuals Or Habitat With A Consequence That The Action May Contribute To A Trend Towards Federal Listing Or Cause A Loss of Viability To The Population Or Species	Beneficial Impact
Northern Goshawk	x			
Flammulated Owl	x			
Boreal Owl	x			
Great Gray Owl	x			
Trumpeter Swan	x			
Spotted Frog	x			
Common Loon	x			
Harlequin Duck	x			
Spotted Bat	x			
Townsend's Big-eared Bat	x			
Fisher	x			
Wolverine	x			
Three-toed Woodpecker	x			
Peregrine Falcon	x			
Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse	x			

3.1.3 Other Species of Concern

CAVITY NESTERS (MANAGEMENT INDICATOR SPECIES)

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The eight woodpecker species identified by the Targhee RFP FEIS as management indicator species are highly dependent on snags. They nest in cavities and eat insects in dead and dying trees. On the Forest, habitat for cavity nesting species has increased as a result of insect and disease activity. Bark beetles generally attack and kill larger, mature trees, thereby creating suitable snag habitat for cavity nesting species. From 1992-1999, bark beetles affected thousands of acres, and 104,200 trees killed (Caribou-Targhee Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report: 1997-1999).

EFFECTS OF THE NO ACTION

The current program will not change snag management on the Forest. There will be no cutting or removal of snags or down wood associated with this proposal. Thus there will be no impact to these species and they will not be further discussed.

EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

This amendment will not change snag management on the Forest. There will be no cutting or removal of snags or down wood associated with this proposal. Thus there will be no impact to these species and they will not be further discussed.

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Migratory birds will have migrated by the time winter sets in. There will be no direct impacts to these birds as a result of this amendment. There will be no alteration to habitat associated with this amendment that could affect the birds the following year. This proposal will not impact migratory birds and they will not be discussed further.

BIG GAME (DEER, MOOSE AND ELK)

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

The primary factor over which the Forest Service has control in elk vulnerability (EV) and elk habitat effectiveness (EHE) is motorized access (Targhee National Forest 1997, Process Paper D). Monitoring for EV and EHE focuses on the progress the Forest has made in achieving the new motorized access density standards that were established in the 1997 Revised Forest Plan (RFP) and the 1999 Open Road and Open Motorized Trail Analysis (Motorized Road and Trail Travel Plan).

The Forest was appealed on motorized access decisions following the 1997 RFP and 1999 Travel Plan FEIS. Those appeals have resulted in the following on-the-ground situation:

The decision on motorized cross-country travel in the 1997 RFP has been upheld. Work has progressed at getting adequate on-the-ground signing in place. New travel plan maps, which display motorized cross-country travel restrictions, were printed and distributed to the public in fall of 2000. Violations of the cross-country travel restrictions are occurring, but the Forest has no way of quantifying these violations. Forest decisions have been upheld on which roads and trails will be open to motorized use and which ones will not be open for motorized use. Forest employees have been working to sign all of the roads and trails. The following signing has been accomplished (reported by District Rangers):

- On the Dubois Ranger District, 95% of the roads and 75% of the trails have been signed. Approximately 25% of the signs have been vandalized, especially in Birch Creek, but the District has been putting up round two of signing.
- On the Island Park zone of the Ashton/Island Park Ranger District, 65% of the roads and 100% of the trails have been signed. Some vandalism has occurred, but there is no estimate of the percent vandalized.
- On the Ashton zone of the Ashton/Island Park Ranger District, 99% of the roads and 100% of the trails have been signed. Most of the road signs remaining to be installed are along the scenic byway (Highway 47), which is currently being repaved. When the paving work is finished, the Federal Highways Administration will install the signs. Some vandalism has occurred, but there is no estimate of the percent vandalized.
- On the Palisades Ranger District, 80% of the roads and none of the trails have been signed. Some vandalism has occurred, but there is no estimate of the percent vandalized.
- On the Teton Basin Ranger District, 100% of the roads and 30% of the trails have been signed. Approximately 50% of the road signs have been vandalized.

The Forest began decommissioning roads identified in the 1997 RFP in 1998. The decommissioning work began in the grizzly bear management units (BMUs), the highest priority identified in the 1997 RFP. Decommissioning work has been completed in the Henry's Lake BMU (Watersheds 008, 009A, and part of 010) and the Plateau BMU (Watersheds 012, 013, and part of 010). The Forest began decommissioning roads in the Bechler/Teton BMU, but appeals by various user groups, litigation and actions by Teton County Idaho Commissioners stopped the decommissioning work. To resolve these issues, the Forest was directed to complete site-specific analysis of the effects of the decommissioning methods before any ground disturbing activity can occur. The previous decommissioning work accomplished in the Henry's Lake BMU and the Plateau BMU must also be re-evaluated for site-specific effects. In 2003, the Henry's Lake Travel Plan Implementation EA was completed.

For EV and EHE, motorized access is measured by the density of open roads and open motorized trails and motorized cross-country travel within defined watersheds (Targhee National Forest 1997, Process Paper D). The 1997 – 1999 Caribou-Targhee Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report lists the watersheds on the Forest and displays the motorized access density

prior to the RFP; the density that the Forest is trying to achieve as a result of the RFP and 1999 FEIS Travel Plan; and the density at the end of 1999. Motorized access density standards have been achieved in only five watersheds, which include the Henry's Lake and Plateau BMUs (watersheds 008, 009A, 010, 012, and 013). In all other watersheds, progress has been made primarily through cross-country travel restrictions. The standards have been achieved administratively, however, full achievement of the motorized access standards has not occurred on the ground because not all roads not designated as open have been decommissioned and the public does not always comply with the Travel Plan (Caribou-Targhee Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Reports: 1997 – 1999).

EFFECTS OF THE NO ACTION

The fixed date will impact hunters and population objectives set by the IDFG. If winter arrives early the hunters will not have motorized access to the game animals. It will be illegal to use tracked vehicles. If winter arrives late, the hunters will not be able to use the open roads legally even if they are dry. The effects from this problem have been minimal in the past and will likely continue to be minimal if the current program continues.

EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed amendment will not change Forest Service management of big game habitat. There will be no changes in winter range designation, open motorized roads and trail densities or changes in vegetation.

The two components of elk vulnerability and elk habitat effectiveness that the Forest Service has control over are open motorized roads and trail densities and hiding cover. This amendment will not alter either one and, consequently, will have no effect on these two monitoring items.

The change that could have a negative effect to big game would be the early legal use of snowmobiles for cross-country travel. There are several hunting seasons in progress across the Forest on, and around, Thanksgiving Day.

The most obvious negative result would be harassment of the game. There will likely be an increase in the number of hunters that use their machines to follow tracks and, possibly, pursue these animals. This will add to stress, increase their caloric expenditure and reduce the condition of these animals at a time when they cannot replace this loss.

If spooked, and possibly perused, these animals may be chased onto winter range earlier than if there was no cross-country travel. There will be less snow on the winter range and the machines will not be able to follow. This will increase the time spent on these limited ranges, increasing the chance of starvation. This increase in browsing pressure could increase the stress on the browse plants. This could result in a plant community that is less productive the following season, compounding the problem.

If the game is forced onto the winter range there could be an over-harvest. These winter range areas are usually more open and easier for people to access. This could result in a game kill above the management objectives.

In some instances the result of this cross-country disturbance may be a game kill below the objective. The animals may be chased into the trees where the machines cannot follow, into the thick brush where hunters cannot get a shot or chased through migration routes without giving the hunters a chance to harvest the number of animals needed to achieve the management objectives.

The hunting seasons are set by the Idaho Department of Fish and Game to achieve population objectives. There are many variables that make this difficult for game managers during average years. An early cross-country season has the potential to make this job even harder.

There could be many of the same negative results discussed above during years when deep snows come later but the RFP allows for cross-country travel after Thanksgiving Day. In fact, the RFP currently makes use of wheeled vehicles illegal after Thanksgiving Day. On years when travel on the Forest can still be accomplished with four-wheel drive vehicles, some people may choose to take advantage of this technicality and cause much the same problems that an early change to winter travel restriction may cause. This amendment will give the District Rangers the ability to delay cross-country travel until winter actually arrives.

As stated above, the chances that the winter regulations will be in effect earlier than Thanksgiving Day, or December 15th on Palisades RD, is unlikely. If the next ten years are similar to the last ten years, Dubois RD and Teton Basin RD will not be able to change to winter regulations on an early date. This amendment will make no difference on these Districts. The use that could occur on the Palisades Ranger District will only happen in the high country. The game will have left these areas for lower elevations and lower snow levels before the snowmobiles can travel cross-country.

If there is an area that has the potential to have conflicts, it will be the Ashton/Island Park Ranger District. Even here, the ability to travel cross-country before Thanksgiving will happen no more than a third of the time and probably much less often. This is an area that has important late hunts. Because of this and the other concerns listed above, the District Ranger has indicated that an early date, even if allowed by this amendment, may not be implemented.

3.2 Recreation

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Straddling the borders of southeastern Idaho, western Wyoming, and northern Utah, the Caribou-Targhee National Forest encompasses close to 3 million acres. It borders Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks on the east, with its northern boundary along the Continental Divide and its southern boundary dipping into Utah. The Forest's landscape is dissected with several north-south mountain ranges of the Overthrust Belt, with peaks reaching over 10,000 feet.

Peaks, rolling hills of sage, lush river valleys and grasslands add to the diverse physical character of the Forest's land base and create unique habitats for world-renowned big game species, upland birds, and a blue ribbon fishery.

The Caribou-Targhee National Forest recreation experience is highlighted by developed recreation opportunities for visitors to the Greater Yellowstone Area; winter sports opportunities due to the abundance and quality of snow for snowmobiling, and downhill, cross-country and backcountry skiing; and unlimited dispersed recreation opportunities for backcountry and dispersed opportunities including motorized and non-motorized trail use. The Forest is known for:

- Winter Recreation
- Highly Developed Recreation facilities
- Extensive motorized and non-motorized trail system

According to the Targhee RFP FEIS, the Forest is used by recreationists year round for a variety of pastimes. There are many opportunities for hiking, biking, camping, fishing, hunting, four wheeling, snow machining, etc. The Wilderness and proposed Wilderness Areas on the Forest are heavily used by hikers, back packers, and horsemen. Overall recreation use on the Forest is moderate and increasing despite the limitations on motorized travel. One of the most important and widespread uses of the Forest is hunting.

In 2000, the Caribou-Targhee National Forest completed the National Visitor Use Monitoring survey, a system of measuring trends in user satisfaction and user levels to be able to improve public service. The top five recreation activities of visitors were viewing scenery, viewing wildlife, snowmobiling, general relaxation and hunting. The top primary activities were snowmobiling, hunting, fishing, OHV travel and viewing nature. Twenty six percent of survey participants identified snowmobile travel as their primary activity when visiting this National Forest (National Visitor Use Monitoring Results, August 2001, Caribou-Targhee National Forest; Caribou-Targhee Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Reports: 1997-1999, Draft Targhee Five-year Evaluation, 12-15-2003).

In 1997, the Targhee Revised Forest Plan (RFP) closed most of the Forest to cross-country motorized travel during the snow free season. During the snow season, the majority of the Forest is open to cross-country motorized travel (1997 RFP). In 1999, the Forest completed a Travel Plan, which designated open motorized routes for the snow free season. The Travel Plan established snowmobile routes through big game winter range and closed some areas to motorized use in the winter. The Forest has subsequently begun decommissioning roads and trails not designated as open on the Travel Plan.

In 1998, approximately 410 miles of road were decommissioned in the grizzly bear management units (BMUs); since then an additional 95 miles have been decommissioned elsewhere on the Forest. Decommissioned roads in the BMUs are effectively closed to full size vehicles; however ATVs and motorcycles are driving around the road barriers. Some areas are not experiencing any motorized access due to the decommissioning. In areas outside of the BMUs, where roads were decommissioned, closure effectiveness is variable and largely dependent on terrain, location of the closures, and methods used. Approximately 420 miles of road were identified for

decommissioning in RFP that have not been decommissioned yet. The travel plan implementation analyses address these roads at the site-specific level.

Forest managers continue to wrestle with the question of how to make road and trail closures more effective. Forest Service and private organizations recognize that there is some illegal motorized travel on the Forest (Caribou-Targhee Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Reports: 1997 – 1999 and Draft Targhee Five-year Evaluation, 12-15-03; Shonkwiler and Hoyt 2002; Blau and Hoyt 2003). Many suggestions have been developed and are being considered in the site-specific analyses of travel plan implementation and in the Targhee Five-year Evaluation of the Forest Plan (Draft 12-15-03). In response to the illegal motorized use, the Forest has made several management changes; some of these are detailed below.

In 2001, the Forest partnered with Idaho Fish and Game in making a concerted effort to enforce the Targhee travel plan. Air and ground patrols were utilized as travel plan enforcement methods as well as educational efforts. The Forest Service wrote violation notices for travel plan infractions and Fish and Game wrote citations for game violations (September 20, 2001 Leadership Team (LT) Notes). Travel plan enforcement remains a Regional Forester and Caribou-Targhee National Forest priority (USDA-Forest Service 2003 Intermountain Region Program Goals; CTNF Emphasis Item FY 2004 and 2005). The Caribou-Targhee National Forest is continuing to explore ways to have an increased presence to enforce travel plan regulations and plans to continue the enforcement program started in 2001. Idaho Fish and Game and the Forest will continue to do patrols. The patrols are intended to educate recreationists regarding the proper use of off road vehicles and as a deterrent to illegal motorized use. Both agencies are trying to make sure that off highway vehicle use does not have a detrimental effect on other sportsmen, wildlife or the environment (August 28, 2002 Press Release 02-33).

EFFECTS OF THE NO ACTION

Some activities, such as hunting and Christmas tree gathering, are restricted with the no action alternative. After Thanksgiving, driving on designated summer routes with wheeled vehicles is not permitted, regardless of snow conditions. This requires people to walk great distances to reach the Forest. Essentially, motorized access on the Forest is eliminated between Thanksgiving and the time enough snow accumulates to allow snow machine travel.

EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

This alternative would not change the types of recreation that can occur in specific areas on the Forest because it does not change access definitions. Only the timing would change. The amendment would allow the public to continue to access the Forest with the most appropriate type of motorized vehicle. If roads are snow-free, wheeled vehicles can be used to access the forest for hunting, Christmas tree gathering and other activities. When the roads are snow covered, the public can access the Forest via snow machine or nonmotorized methods.

3.3 Enforcement and Public Confusion

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Despite the enforcement effort, the existing travel plan standard, the no action alternative, establishing a single date for change to winter travel plan direction has proven unworkable. The public understands that on Thanksgiving Day travel plan regulations change regardless of actual conditions. Confusion is then created if it is physically impossible to actually use the type of vehicle dictated by the travel plan regulations.

Early snow arrival in one portion of the Targhee Forest may prohibit wheeled access when snowmobile travel is not permitted by the travel plan. In another portion of the forest late snow arrival may allow for wheeled access when access is only permitted by snowmobile. Under the current direction when Thanksgiving Day arrives snow season is in effect regardless of whether or not local environmental conditions allow for it. Land managers and the public are caught in a limbo period because the actual conditions on the ground may not match the Forest travel plan direction. There is a period of time where a variety of transportation methods are used regardless of travel plan direction.

Regardless of the exact requirement of the travel plan there will always be a period during that relatively short time frame, depending on weather, when wheeled access or snowmobile access is borderline because of snowfall accumulation. This exists with the current direction and will continue to exist because of the varied terrain, elevation, geography, and snowfall. It will be minimized by allowing flexibility for each district to make a judgment based on local conditions.

EFFECTS OF THE NO ACTION

With the no action alternative management flexibility is eliminated. The Forest is striving to allow the greatest access to National Forest land as is possible. With the no action alternative weather conditions in local areas dictates which user segment, those using wheeled access versus those using snowmobile access, is unable to access National Forest land. The no action alternative does insure that, depending on weather conditions, there may be a period when the only reasonable access available is by pedestrian travel.

Under the no action alternative, enforcement efforts will continue into the future with the same type of activities and efforts as in the past. Media efforts to educate the public have been partially successful in presenting the message that snow season travel regulations are in effect. When there is not enough snow to properly implement snow season on Thanksgiving day confusion will still exist over the change in travel regulations that may not make sense in on the ground implementation.

EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

Enforcement efforts will continue into the future with the same type of activities and efforts as in the past. Media efforts to educate the public would be critical to inform forest users when snow

season travel regulations are in effect and would logically correspond with environmental conditions. This would allow the public to continue to access the Forest with the most appropriate type of motorized vehicle. If roads are snow-free, wheeled vehicles can be used to access the forest for hunting, Christmas tree gathering and other activities. When the roads are snow covered, the public can access the Forest via snow machine or nonmotorized methods.

COMPARISON OF EFFECTS

The effects between the two alternatives will essentially be the same. The difference in the effects will be the specific time they occur. The effects of the current Forest Plan standard have occurred on and near Thanksgiving Day because that is when the change to snow season occurred. The effects under the proposed activity will occur when snowfall dictates.
Effects may be minimized with the proposed alternative because the local manager will have the discretion to make the change to the snow season standard when it best meets the local environmental conditions. Currently, use of an inappropriate vehicle type may cause vegetation damage, soil erosion, and/or damage to roads. By allowing travel access by the most appropriate vehicle type these negative impacts can be minimized while allowing the greatest access of National Forest land for the public.

3.4 Resource Damage

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Forest Service personnel and the public are very concerned about the presumed widespread and increasing damage caused by motorized resources. The 1999 Open Road and Open Motorized Trail Analysis for the Targhee NF (Travel Plan EIS) considered impacts of motorized recreation. Since this decision will not change road or trail designations on the Travel Plan, it will not alter the findings in the Travel Plan EIS.

EFFECTS OF THE NO ACTION

Under the no action alternative the existing conditions will continue. If it is Thanksgiving Day snowmobile travel is allowed whether there is enough snow or not. This creates two situations depending on the weather. Some areas of the Forest may have enough snow and some areas may not. Under one management direction access is limited to some segment of the public depending on their access means. Resource impacts may occur because of a lack of flexibility. Rutting of Forest roads may occur when enough snow doesn't exist because individuals may drive to snow in wheeled vehicles. Wheeled access may occur where it is technically not allowed because there is not enough snow. Pedestrian travel can continue in both scenarios. During some years it is highly likely that there will be a period of time when pedestrian travel is the only travel type allowed by the travel regulations. This allows the pedestrian traveler to have a non-motorized experience at any location on the forest.

When snowfall occurs earlier than Thanksgiving Day wheeled vehicles may be physically prevented from accessing National Forest land because of snow depths. Snowmobile access is also not allowed before Thanksgiving Day even though conditions may allow for it. Conversely,

when snowfall occurs later than Thanksgiving Day wheeled vehicles are prohibited from using Forest roads that may appropriately be used based on their physical condition. Snowmobile access is allowed but there is no snow or not enough snow to use a snowmobile properly.

EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed alternative, allowing a change to winter travel regulations based on local conditions determined by the local District Ranger, would allow individual managers the flexibility to change to the snow season travel plan requirements based on snowfall on their districts. The most appropriate access would be allowed (continued summer travel regulations or a change to winter travel regulations or wheeled versus snowmobile access) for the largest portion of land area. The proposed alternative would accommodate the appropriate vehicle type; whether that be wheeled vehicles when there is no snow or snowmobiles when there is snow. The proposed alternative allows access to the most appropriate vehicle type based on local conditions. If there is not enough snowfall on Thanksgiving Day wheeled vehicles may continue to access National Forest land on open roads until there is enough snowfall. If snow accumulates earlier than Thanksgiving Day and wheeled vehicles are no longer appropriate the local District Ranger may make the decision to implement winter travel regulations and allow snowmobile travel. Pedestrian travel is allowed at all times but will not have that window of time when non-motorized summer or winter travel occurs. Pedestrian travel seeking a non-motorized experience will be confined to areas of the forest closed to motorized use.

District Rangers will be relied on to use their judgment and natural resources knowledge to determine the time the change from summer travel regulations to winter travel regulations should be implemented. This will primarily be a snow depth question with primary consideration being to minimize damage to natural resources. This includes minimizing soil erosion and water quality impacts, wildlife disturbance, rutting of roads or trail surfaces by any type of vehicle that may cause deterioration of those surfaces, and increased road maintenance costs.

3.5 Cumulative Effects

The analysis area considered for recreation and wildlife will be the entire Targhee section of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. The actions considered will be all past actions, current actions and reasonably foreseeable actions. Reasonably foreseeable actions will include actions that are currently listed in the NEPA Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions.

Cumulative impacts of forest management activities on resources of concern are thoroughly discussed in Process Paper D of the RFP and the FEIS for the RFP. These documents contain the most complete analyses for a myriad of forest management activities and are located in the project file.

The cumulative effects of all travel management activities have been analyzed in the Targhee 1997 Revised Forest Plan and the 1999 Open Road and Open Motorized Trail Analysis for the Targhee NF (Travel Plan EIS). These effects have been incorporated by reference into the discussion of effects in this EA. For instance, the previous sections disclose effects of travel management based on current issues. The previous discussions cross administrative boundaries;

look at entire populations; and analyze the synergistic interactions of actions other than the Proposed Action. All of these factors are primary principles of cumulative effects analysis, according to the Council of Environmental Quality "Considering Cumulative Effects Under the NEPA" (CEQ 1997).

In addition to tiering to the previous analyses, the IDT met to collaboratively assess other potential cumulative effects on the resources of concern. The team combined several cumulative effects analysis methods described by CEQ (1997), to identify important human activities and potentially impacted resources. Since there are no direct effects and the indirect effects and risks from the Proposed Action are very minor, there is little possibility that they would contribute a measurable amount to cumulative impacts of forest management activities. Thus, this cumulative effects analysis is largely qualitative and "necessarily involves assumptions and uncertainties" (CEQ 1997). In general, the potential effects balance each other out and result in no net changes. Overall, the incremental effect of the Proposed Action, when combined with past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions, would not have significant cumulative effects on wildlife or humans. The potential effects are largely immeasurable and are expressed as potential interactions that could have a very minor effect on populations or human uses.

Table 5: Past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions considered and cumulative impacts of this project on wildlife and recreation.

Project or activity	Changes, trends, conditions	Cumulative effects of the project on the resources
Logging/vegetation	There have been 1641 acres of timber harvest from 2000 to 2004. There is about 5,500 acres of timber treatment currently in the SOPA.	This project will not change fragmentation, created openings or the seral stage in the area. This project will not have a cumulative effect on the vegetation in this watershed.
Forest Travel Plan	Prior to 1997 there were few travel restrictions across the Targhee. This increased the vulnerability of game animals and reduced the size of security areas for all wildlife. In 1997, the RFP was implemented, reducing the total motorized routes in the area. In 1999 the Motorized Roads and Trails Travel Plan EIS was implemented. This clarified which roads and trails will be open and which uses will be allowed. In the future there will be small changes to the Travel Plan.	This project will not create or improve any roads or trails. No new routes will be created. This project will make no changes to designated use or seasons of use. This amendment will allow the line officers to use judgment when declaring the change from summer to winter travel restrictions. This project will not add to the cumulative effects on wildlife from travel except for the possible exception of big game animals. This amendment may contribute to early season cross-country travel problems including harassment, difficulties in achieving harvest

		goals and early use of winter range.
Recreation Use	Recreation use has increased dramatically in the past two decades.[4] This recreation use will likely continue to increase. The effect of this recreation has been, and will be, a loss of habitat to dispersed camping, an increase in disturbance to wildlife from increased numbers of visitors and a corresponding reduction in security for wildlife. In addition, forest visitors are more likely to encounter other visitors while on the Forest.	This project will not increase the recreation use across the Forest. This amendment will just help to match the recreation use to the conditions. With the possible exception of big game, there will be no addition to cumulative effects from this project.
Changes to Adjacent Private Land	The private land has been divided and altered to range and farmland since settlement a century ago. This alteration and fragmentation has been detrimental to most wildlife species. In some areas, recreation access to the Forest has been limited due to private land restrictions and development.	This project will not affect adjacent private land. This project will not add cumulatively to fragmentation or alteration of private land adjacent to the Forest.
Range Management	The Forest has grazing over much of the suitable acres. The Forest has closed 8 grazing allotments since 2000. These have been for bighorn sheep and for the grizzly bear. The SOPA lists 13 allotment management plan analyses across the Targhee. The changes in grazing practices over the last 4 years, and for the foreseeable future, will reduce the cumulative effects of grazing on wildlife.	This project will result in no changes to grazing. The proposed amendment will occur later than any grazing season of use. This amendment will have no effect on grazing or on the cumulative effects of grazing on wildlife.

[4] National Visitor Use Monitoring Report; 2001 and Caribou-Targhee Monitoring and Evaluation Report: Draft Targhee Five-year Evaluation, 2-15-04.

Fire Suppression	The mission of wild fire management during the last century has been that of suppression of all wild fires. The fire fighters have been very successful. There have been few fires in the area and no large fires. The effect of this on wildlife habitat has been the reduction of early seral stage habitats across the watershed. The beneficial effects of fire in the forest have received more attention as of late. This has and will have an effect of increasing the amount of habitat work done by fire. On the other hand, the recent loss of several fire fighter lives has made manager less inclined to use fire as a tool. The risks have had a slowing effect on the use of fire as a habitat tool.	This amendment will not affect fire, fire suppression or the use of fire as a habitat tool. The fire season is over before this amendment can come into use.
Noxious Weeds	There are two major factors that have contributed to the increase in noxious weeds and their threat to natural plant communities. They are increases in disturbance such as roads, trails, logging, grazing and dispersed camping and in increase in the transportation of weed seeds in stock feed, on adjacent lands and on vehicles that are crossing the Forest in ever increasing numbers. The Forest has an aggressive weed program and this program will continue into the foreseeable future.	This amendment will not increase the amount of motorized cross-country use until the snow season when the seeds are covered and cannot be carried to new locations.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS ON WILDLIFE

Grizzly Bear

This species is associated with pristine areas, wilderness and large security areas. The fragmentation from logging, farming and ranching has reduced the suitable habitat for this large predator. This project will not create openings across the Forest.

The use of snowmobiles is an existing impact. There have been very few encounters between the grizzly and snowmobilers. There are protections currently in place that will favor the bear in any human/grizzly conflicts. This amendment will not contribute to cumulative impacts on the grizzly bear.

Gray Wolf

Soon after settlement by farmers and ranchers, the gray wolf was hunted and trapped to extinction. The settlers relied on the same source of natural food as the wolves, large ungulates such as deer and elk. The wolves were a threat to the settler's domestic stock as well. The wolves were considered a threat to the settler's existence and were systematically eliminated.

People are no longer dependent on big game for survival. The game animals are enjoyed by wildlife watchers and hunters as recreation rather than as a critical source of food. As a result, game numbers have increased. This has allowed the public attitude toward the wolf to change and an experimental population is enjoying an expansion from the reintroduction site of Yellowstone National Park.

These predators are dependent on ungulate numbers and on security, especially during the time when the pups are young. If there are changes in ungulate movement or numbers there could be an impact on wolves. This amendment's potential to impact big game is very limited, however. It is unclear what effect these changes would have on wolves. This amendment may actually reduce potential cumulative effects on the wolf. In addition, land-use restrictions have not been necessary to allow expansion of the wolves in both nonessential experimental population areas.

Canada Lynx

The critical habitat requirements for this medium sized forest predator are food and security. The primary food source for the lynx is the snowshoe hare. This project will not alter vegetation in a way. The other critical element for lynx survival is security of the kittens during the denning portion of their life. Any effects this amendment will have will happen after denning is completed.

The LCAS guidelines and standards were designed to address all cumulative effects on the lynx. This project meets all guidelines and standards found in the LCAS. Thus, this project would not contribute to any cumulative impacts on the lynx.

Forest Hawks and Owls

Fragmentation of forested habitat from development and timber harvest has eliminated habitat or reduced the value of habitat for forest raptors such as goshawks, great gray owls, red tailed hawks and long eared owls. Disturbance from roads and motorized trails has reduced the value of some forested sites for these birds.

This amendment will not add to fragmentation of the forested habitat. This amendment will not change any vegetation or reduce the productivity of any sites. The disturbance that early cross-country snowmobile use could produce would be to strong, mobile and healthy birds with their

prey base accessible and at near seasonal highs. This amendment will not add to cumulative effects for the forest birds of prey.

Primary and Secondary Cavity Nesters

This amendment will not remove or alter any habitat. There will be no reduction in the productivity of any habitat as a result of this amendment. The disturbance that early cross-country snowmobile use could produce would be to strong, mobile and healthy birds. Many of these birds are migratory and will not be on the forest at the time that any early snowmobile use could occur. These birds will have migrated south by the beginning of the winter season. This amendment will not contribute to cumulative effects to primary or secondary cavity nesters.

Furbearers

The fisher and wolverine are animals that require pristine habitat to thrive. These animals have suffered from the fragmentation and increased use of the Forest. This project will not add to fragmentation of habitat or to changes in habitat.

The bobcat and the coyote have adapted to the heavy use of the forest much better than the large members of the weasel family such as the fisher and wolverine. The population of these animals is more dependants on hunting and trapping pressure than on forest fragmentation and disturbance from motorized routes. The potential early start to the winter season and the use of snowmobiles to travel cross-country could increase the vulnerability of the furbearers that are hunted. There could be a slight increase in the cumulative effect of motorized travel on these species but it is not likely or measurable.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS ON RECREATION

The cumulative impacts of the proposed action and other activities on the Forest are not significant and do not change from alternative to alternative except in the time they occur. As stated previously, there are few tangible effects and the risks from the Proposed Action are low. Cumulative effects to recreation would be very minor and based on individuals rather than a sector of the population. Some people may consider snow season travel to be obtrusive. If such a recreationist encounters those practices, it could cause him/her to abandon recreation on the Forest.

The cumulative effects of each alternative will be the same, however, the timing of these effects will vary. The no action alternative will continue to have the effects occurring on Thanksgiving Day. The effects of the proposed action will occur at such time that snowfall allows the change to winter travel regulations. This could be Thanksgiving Day or it could be before or after Thanksgiving Day. The effects are expected to last the same period of time as in either alternative.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS ON RESOURCE DAMAGE

The proposed action would reduce potential resource damage by matching the most appropriate method of motorized travel to the conditions on the land. Thus, the amendment would not contribute to cumulative resource damage on the Forest.

3.6 Required Disclosures and Compliance with Law, Regulation and Policy

The following are relevant to the proposed activities and require specific coordination with regulating agencies. Coordination with other government agencies was also determined to be necessary and is described below. A section on federal licenses and permits that are needed to implement the project is also provided.

FEDERAL TRIBAL TRUST RESPONSIBILITIES

The Shoshone-Bannock Tribe has ancestral Treaty Rights to uses of the Forest. The relationship of the United States government with American Indian tribes is based on legal agreements between sovereign nations. The Fort Bridger Treaty of July 3, 1868 provided for the establishment of the Fort Hall Indian Reservation. It also granted hunting and fishing rights to tribal members on "all unoccupied lands of the United States." This right applies to all public domain lands reserved for National Forest purposes that are presently administered by the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. These rights are still in effect, and management actions recognize these rights. Consultation with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Council is required on land management activities and land allocations that could affect these rights. This amendment will not impact tribal trust responsibilities and will enhance the ability of tribal members to exercise their treaty rights.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT (ESA)

This act provides for the protection, conservation and recovery of threatened and endangered wildlife, fish, and plant species. Contact with the United States Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) was initiated through the scoping process and annual meetings. The Forest has habitat for the grizzly bear, gray wolf, Canada lynx, and bald eagle. One threatened plant species for the Caribou-Targhee National Forest Ute ladies'-tresses (*Spiranthes diluvialis*) has been identified. A biological assessment was prepared for listed species. As previously displayed, there will be no effect to threatened and endangered species from this project.

NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT

This Act establishes a requirement for consideration of potential impacts to historic properties. Because there are no ground disturbing activities with this amendment, there will be no impacts to historic properties.

MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT

This act provides for the protection of migratory birds. Many migratory bird species utilize the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. The project meets the requirements of the act because it does not involve "take" of migratory birds nor will it modify habitat. Migratory birds will not be present on the Forest during the time period covered by this amendment.

NONPOINT SOURCE WATER QUALITY PROGRAM FOR THE STATE OF IDAHO

This program provides for the protection of Idaho's waters from nonpoint source pollutants. A Federal Consistency Checklist provides for compliance with the nonpoint source water quality provisions of the Federal Clean Water Act for the State of Idaho as agreed to in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the responsible State of Idaho and Federal land management agencies. This project will not impact water quality because no ground disturbing activities are associated with it.

CLEAN AIR ACT

This act defines National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for various sources of pollutants, which must be met to protect human health, visibility and welfare. This project complies with these air quality standards.

NATIONAL FOREST MANAGEMENT ACT

This proposal will amend one standard of the 1997 Targhee Revised Forest Plan. It is consistent with all other direction in the RFP. The significance of the amendment will be displayed in the Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact.

PRIME RANGELAND, FARMLAND, AND FOREST LAND

No prime rangeland or farmland is contained within the area. Federal land would be managed with sensitivity to the effects on adjacent lands.

ENERGY REQUIREMENTS AND CONSERVATION POTENTIAL OF ALTERNATIVES

In relation to national and global petroleum reserves, the energy consumption associated with the alternatives is insignificant.

WETLANDS AND FLOODPLAINS

No significant effects would result on wetlands and floodplains from any alternative. Stream protection zones (aquatic influence zones) in the RFP comply with Executive Order 11990.

Effects of Alternatives on Social Groups

The alternatives do not differ with one another in their affects on minorities, Native American Indians, women, or Civil Liberties of any American Citizen. This is in accordance with Executive Order 12898, Environmental Justice.

Roadless Areas

No inventoried roadless areas or unroaded areas would be affected by this proposal. This proposal does not change motorized route locations, only time of use. Thus, it is consistent with the Roadless Area analysis in the Targhee RFP FEIS and Targhee Travel Plan FEIS. It is in compliance with the Final Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

CHAPTER FOUR: List of Preparers

4.1 Core Interdisciplinary Team

IDT Co leader, Planner, Writer/Editor	Cheryl F. Probert
	NEPA, Appeals, and Litigation Coordinator
IDT Co leader, Writer/Editor, Recreation	Lisa Klinger
	Recreation Program Manager
Wildlife	David Ovard
	Teton Basin Wildlife Biologist

4.2 Public Involvement for the Environmental Assessment

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.3(a), this proposal is subject to legal notice and opportunity to comment. Comments on the proposed action will be accepted for 30-days following publication of this legal notice (36 CFR 215.5(b)(1)(iv)). You may submit comments by letter, telephone, facsimile, electronically (in Word or .rtf format) or office visit (during the hours of 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.). In order to be eligible for appeal, comments must be substantive and timely. Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.2, substantive comments are within the scope of the proposed action, specific to the proposed action, and have a direct relationship to the proposed action and would include supporting reasons for the Responsible Official to consider.

Please direct comments on the proposed action to:

Jerry B. Reese
C/o Lisa Klinger
Caribou-Targhee National Forest
1405 Hollipark Dr.
Idaho Falls, ID 83404
Telephone: (208) 557-5760
Facsimile: (208) 557-5728
E-mail: comments-intermtn-caribou-targhee@fs.fed.us

For additional information on the project, contact Lisa Klinger, Recreation Program Manager, (208) 557-5790.

4.3 Persons and Agencies Receiving the Environmental Assessment

Harry Taylor
Penny Pinson
Ron Hoodenpyle
William Roberts
Charlie Sperry
Kathryn Snyder, Backcountry Horesemen
Bruce Jones
Thane Smith
Jerry Jayne
Chi Melville
Ted Scherff
Blue Ribbon Coalition
Ted Chu
Greater Yellowstone Coalition
Idaho Fish and Game

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