

APPENDIX III

EFFECTS OF CHANGES FROM PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The changes in the decision from the EA preferred Alternative C have been explained in the Decision Notice. This appendix provides additional analysis on the environmental and social effects of these changes.

Group Size

The group limit changed to 12 people and 12 head of stock from any combination of 16. This change is within the scope of the analysis, falling between Alternative A (15 people and 20 head of stock) and Alternative D (any combination of people and stock up to 12). One effect of this change is to allow more flexibility for stock users compared to the preferred alternative. It will allow larger groups of day riders and slightly larger groups of overnight stock users than would have been possible with the limit of any combination of 16 people and stock as proposed in the preferred alternative. With the limit of 12 people and 12 head of stock, a group of 12 day-riders is possible. On overnight trips the number of stock and number of people will vary, depending on how many people ride, how long the trip is, how much feed and is packed, etc., but neither people nor stock numbers can exceed 12. Because the total number of horses cannot exceed 12, the effects on campsites, vegetation, and trails will still be less severe than with the existing stock limit of 20 head. Impacts will probably be greater than if the combination of people and stock had been limited to 16.

The new limit decreases, from existing group limit, the group size for both hikers and stock users. Both groups are affected. In the preferred alternative the number of hikers actually increased by one from the existing limit of 15. This increase over the existing limit appeared to discriminate in favor of hikers since day riders were being cut from 15 to 8. Limiting people to 12 will decrease social impacts as well as the impacts on campsite conditions. Allowing fewer people and livestock will minimize the proliferation of large campsites and encounters with large groups along the trail.

Public comments emphasized that outfitters and the non-outfitted public should be subject to the same regulations. The group limit will apply to outfitters as well as the non-outfitted public. This decrease of the total number of people affects both outfitters and non-outfitted groups such as scouts, church groups, and clubs. If it is not possible for groups (outfitted or non-outfitted) to contain group size to 12, they may be displaced to areas other than the A-P. Opportunities for recreation in wild places exist throughout Montana and in adjacent states. The maximum number of clients possible for the backpacking outfitter will decrease slightly, from 15 currently to 12. The group size used by backpacking outfitter is usually 12 or 13 so this may have a slight economic impact on his operation. He received but did not comment on the EA.

Use Days for Existing Outfitters

The use days for existing outfitters will be capped at the 10-year high without an additional 50 use days. Additional use days will be available through a pool of unused days if any given outfitter does not use their allotted days. The decision will not permit growth in a given outfitting operation beyond the 10-year high but it will allow some flexibility on a yearly basis. This does not financially change current outfitting operations except as noted above in the case of the backpacking outfitter where group size restrictions may have a slight effect on his operation. Because outfitter operations will not grow, the effects of these operations on the bio-physical and social aspects of wilderness (campsite impacts, social effects of outfitted groups, etc.) will also hold steady.

Use Days for Institutional Outfitters

The total number of use days available to institutional outfitters has been reduced from 400 to 200 on a Wilderness-wide basis. This will minimize institutional use in the A-P as was strongly requested by the public. The effect will be to limit use of the Wilderness by these organized groups. This could mean that these types of users take shorter trips, travel in smaller groups, or simply use the Wilderness less often for their group outings. Limiting the use days will decrease the bio-physical impacts to wilderness below those predicted for Alternatives A-E in the EA. It will also increase the opportunity for solitude compared to all alternatives. This decision, like Alternatives B-E, will reduce the current ambiguity that exists around institutional outfitting and will provide consistent guidelines for managing this use.

Mandatory Self-Issued Registration

The preferred alternative required a self-issued permit on which users would have to disclose their names and addresses. This decision requires a mandatory self-issued registration, rather than a permit. It will still be available at the trailhead, will not limit the number of people, will not assign campsites, and will be free. However, names and street addresses will be optional. Lock boxes will provide security. The registration will still provide an avenue to share information with the public on new regulations and “Leave No Trace” practices. It will give wilderness managers a better idea of use trends. The change to “registration” rather than “permit,” dropping the requirement for names and street addresses, and the lock box for security all respond to public concerns. These changes will make people feel more comfortable using the registration system and will minimize the feeling of government infringement on their recreation experience. The benefits of this system for information sharing will not be changed.

Fish Stocking Guidelines

Changes from the preferred alternative clearly recognize the statutory role of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. Setting up a working group between the two agencies will create an opportunity to jointly discuss and, in some cases, resolve concerns related to fish stocking. This change is within the scope of the analysis. The minor wording changes in the goals and objectives for fish do not change the effects discussed in the EA for Alternatives B-E.

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Supplemental Analysis for Noxious Weeds

Direction regarding noxious weeds did not change in the Decision Notice, but the public comments indicated a need to provide additional information on chemical and biological control of weeds. Noxious weed direction in this document is programmatic and the effects were covered in the EA. The decision does not address site-specific use of herbicide or biological controls in the A-P. Neither will be used unless site-specific NEPA analysis has been done. These measures will be used only after an interdisciplinary consideration of alternatives clearly demonstrates that such use is essential to meet management goals. Site-specific actions are based on analysis of effectiveness, specificity, environmental impacts, and benefits. A full range of alternatives for site-specific actions will be considered.

Many respondents to the EA were opposed to the use of chemicals within the Wilderness, and some questioned the compatibility of chemical use with wilderness values. The Wilderness Act (P.L. 88-577) mandates that the Wilderness be managed so its community of life is untrammelled by man, its primeval character is retained, and its natural conditions are preserved. Forest Service policy direction is to maintain wilderness in such a manner that ecosystems are unaffected by human manipulation and influences so that plants and animals develop and respond to natural forces (FSM 2320.2). In order to preserve natural conditions in the A-P, it will at times be necessary to remove non-native vegetation. Since chemicals are one of the primary tools for accomplishing this, it is important that they be available as an option for future managers to consider using. Prohibiting the use of chemicals could interfere with preservation of natural conditions in the future. The Wilderness Act and manual direction will be taken into account in any site-specific noxious weed NEPA analysis.