

**Next Delegates Meeting, Saturday, October 12, 10 am.
in Bozeman, at the Kounty Korner Cafe at Four Corners
(81820 Gallatin Road). Trail ride planned to follow.
EVERYONE IS WELCOME TO ATTEND!**



Have A Frightfully Good October!

Good Luck This Season to All Hunters!



Montana 4x4 Association

October 2013

4XFORUM

GAO Finds Forest Service Trail Improvements Could Reduce Maintenance Backlog, Enhance Sustainability

In June, 2013, the US Government Accountability Office found that the Forest Service has more miles of trail than it has been able to maintain, resulting in a persistent maintenance backlog with a range of negative effects. In fiscal year 2012, the agency reported that it accomplished at least some maintenance on about 37 percent of its 158,000 trail miles and that about one-quarter of its trail miles met the agency's standards. The Forest Service estimated the value of its trail maintenance backlog to be \$314 million in fiscal year 2012, with an additional \$210 million for annual maintenance, capital improvement, and operations. Trails not maintained to quality standards have a range of negative effects, such as inhibiting trail use and harming natural resources, and deferring maintenance can add to maintenance costs.

The Forest Service relies on a combination of internal and external resources to help maintain its trail system. Internal resources include about \$80 million allocated annually for trail maintenance activities plus funding for other agency programs that in-

clude trails, (2) some agency policies and procedures, and (3) factors associated with the management of volunteers and other external resources. For example, many trails were created for purposes other than recreation, such as access for timber harvesting or fire-

fighting, and some were built on steep slopes, leaving unsustainable, erosion-prone trails that require continual maintenance. In addition, certain agency policies and procedures complicate trail maintenance efforts, such as the agency's lack of standardized training in trails field skills, which limits agency expertise. Further, while volunteers are important to the agency's trail maintenance efforts, managing volunteers can

decrease the time officials can spend performing on-the-ground maintenance. Agency officials and stakeholders GAO interviewed collectively identified numerous options to improve Forest Service trail maintenance, including (1) assessing the sustainability of the trail system, (2) improving agency policies and procedures, and (3) improving management of volunteers and other external resources. In a 2010 document titled A Framework for Sustainable Recreation, the Forest Service noted the importance of analyzing recreation program needs and available resources and assessing potential ways to narrow the gap between them, which the agency has not yet done for its trails. Many officials and stakeholders suggested that the agency systematically assess its trail system to

GAO Continued on page 8

**To read the complete 62-page report,
visit <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-13-618>
(The pdf document is 1.9 MB)**

volve trails. External resources include volunteer labor, which the Forest Service valued at \$26 million in fiscal year 2012, and funding from federal programs, states, and other sources.

Collectively, agency officials and stakeholders GAO spoke with identified a number of factors complicating the Forest Service's trail maintenance efforts, including (1) factors associated with the origin and location of

fighting, and some were built on steep slopes, leaving unsustainable, erosion-prone trails that require continual maintenance. In addition, certain agency policies and procedures complicate trail maintenance efforts, such as the agency's lack of standardized training in trails field skills, which limits agency expertise. Further, while volunteers are important to the agency's trail maintenance efforts, managing volunteers can

Montana/Dakotas BLM Releases Its Economic Impact

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) manages and facilitates recreational activities across more than 245 million acres of public land under its jurisdiction. About 58 million visits are made annually to

BLM-managed lands and waters, supporting 59,000 jobs nationwide and contributing \$7 billion in economic activity.

In Montana and the Dakotas, BLM-managed lands and waters supported nearly 4,000 jobs and contributed \$317 million to the region's economy in 2011. Also during 2011, more than 4 million recorded visits were made to lands and waters managed by BLM-Montana/Dakotas. The 32 recreational fee sites in Montana/Dakotas collected nearly \$400,000 in 2012.

In 2012, the five top visitor



activities on BLM-managed land were Camping and Picnicking, 1,370,675 visitor days, Hunting 598,593 visitor days, Nonmotorized travel (hiking, biking, etc) 452,781 visitor days, Interpretation, education and nature study 413,943 visitor days, and off-highway vehicle

travel 267,787 visitor days.

At the recreational fee sites, the money collected is reinvested at the site. In 2011, fees collected at the Shepherd Ah Nei Recreation Area were used to fund the removal of obsolete and hazardous grazing facilities along its off-highway area boundaries. At the Pompeys Pillar National Monument, fees were used to support interpretation and education programs for more than 500 youth from Montana and northern Wyoming. The Garnet Ghost Town uses its fees to employ a historian.

Club Contact Info

Region 1 - RVP Vern Ball

Magic City 4x4

PO Box 21241, Billings, MT 59104, mc4w.com — Meet first Monday of each month, 6:30 pm., at El Corral Restaurant, 4907 Southgate Drive, Billings

Rimrock 4x4

PO Box 361, Billings, MT 59103
Meet third Wednesday of each month, 7:30 pm., at the Rod and Gun Club, on Saddleback Trail, Billings

Region 4 - RVP

Region 5 - RVP Alex Tyhurst

Frontier 4-Wheelers

PO Box 7011
Helena, MT 59604
www.m4x4a.org/frontier
Meet first Wednesday of each month, 7 pm., in the meeting room at The Staggering Ox Restaurant, 400 Euclid Ave., in Helena

Region 7 - RVP Jim Young

Continental 4 Wheel

Drive Association

Meets last Monday of each month, 7 pm., at Legion Oasis Recreation Hall, 2400 Hill Ave., Butte.

Region 6 - RVP

Mountaineers

PO Box 951,
Bozeman, MT 59718,
bozemanmountaineers.org
Meet second Wednesday of each month, 7:30 pm.,
Korner Klub in 4-Corners,
8191 Huffine Ln., Bozeman

Region 8 - RVP Dick Riebe

Region 9 - RVP Nancy Hines

Big Sky 4-Wheelers

Meet first Monday of each month, 7 pm., at the old Lasalle School, on the corner of Pioneer Road and Helena Flats, Kalispell

Skyliners 4 Wheel Drive Club

PO Box 1416, Polson, MT 59860, skyliners4x4.com
Meets first Tuesday of each month, 7 pm., at the VFW in Polson, at 423 Main St.

2013 M4x4A Event Dates

Please include contact information and phone numbers for any event added.

All dates and times subject to change.

Contact the hosting organization if you have questions.

October 12 — M4x4A Delegates Meeting, 10 am., Bozeman, at the Kountry Korner Cafe at Four Corners, trail ride follows

January 25, 2014 — Big Sky Four Wheelers Snow Bash 2014

Non-M4x4A Club Event Dates (all dates are subject to change)

October 5 — Montana Off Road Extreme Racing event, short course race, racing starts 12 noon, on Story Road (take I-90 MT, for more information contact Jeff MacGill 850-8028 or 252-7317 (non M4x4A club event)

CLASSIFIED ADS

NEEDED!

I'm looking for a Dana 20 transfer case ---for a 1975 Jeep CJ-5 with a V8 and four speed. Also looking for four 245/75/16" tires (at least a 6PLY rating). Jerry Gran, Phone 1-406-860-9732

Conservation Projects Need To Be Advertised

Clubs must give thirty days advance notice for conservation projects to earn a patch! Send your project information to the M4x4A Secretary - email spidycats@q.com, with 30 days advance notice so she can get information about your project sent to members, and so it will qualify as a State or Regional conservation project! Regional Conservation projects are those done by one club. State Conservation Projects are those done by two or more clubs.

Following your conservation projects, you must send a report to the M4X4A Secretary. It should include: When and Where, who participated (please state what club the member belongs to). Include what was done during the project. You can send photos too! Some projects will not qualify as a conservation project, such as, highway cleanup projects or other civic duty projects, such as park cleanups.

No Conservation reports have been submitted for 2013. Get your reports turned in by Jan. 1, 2014 please! (See above)

Montana 4x4 Association Board of Directors Contact Information

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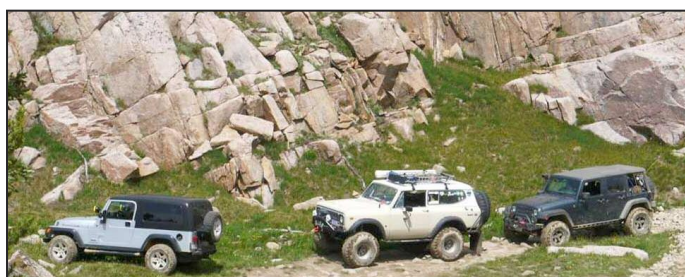


Photos by Karen Grunenfelder

Magic City 4x4 Caravans Up To Independence

The Magic City 4x4 club took a trail ride up to Independence south of Big Timber on Sept. 7.

Mike Grunenfelder reported that it was a good run, but it was a long day, as they got home about 11 pm.



The Rimrock 4x4 club went on a run to Goose Lake out of Cooke City the end of August.

Photos courtesy of their facebook page

Rimrock on the trails

The Rimrock club went on a run the end of August. Their Sept. highway cleanup got postponed to a later date. And the end of Sept. they helped with the Baja in Columbus.



The Continental 4 Wheel Drive Association participated in a show at Pro Build on Sept. 7 in Butte.

Photos courtesy of their facebook page



Continental Participates in Show at Pro Build, Butte

The Continental 4 Wheel Drive Association participated in a show at Pro Build on Sept.

7 in Butte. On Sept. 8 they held a trail ride to Bowman Lake outside Racetrack.



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The Skyliners did their annual float drip on the Flathead River in August. *Photo courtesy of their facebook page*

Skyliners Busy Floating, BBQing and Trail Riding

The Skyliners have been meeting every month for activities. In July we went on a trail ride to Blue Bay in the Mission Mountains. Our Canadian friends joined us.

In August we did our annual float trip on the Flathead River. There were floating vessels of every type. We had an awesome time! We also participated in the Mission Valley Cruisers Car Show. It was a great way to meet people and have the club be more visible to the public.

In September we had a potluck bbq at Finley Point State Park. The was great food and awesome fellowship! We

had a ladder golf competition and Heinz Bridge is the grand champion. Congratulations to John and Kayleen Wall on their marriage. Welcome to the Skyliner family, Kayleen.

A few of the Skyliners have been meeting with the Forest Service and other user groups to establish a collaborative charter. We've completed the charter and have now moved into the implementation stage to begin expansion of trail miles on Blacktail Mountain.

Nancy Hines
Skyliner Secretary
RVP, Region 9



Chris (left) and Tim (right) Kleppen with a poster of their Bronco playing in the mud at the Mountaineers 2013 Mud Bog. Chris also won first at the Hardin Extreme days mud bog this year! *Photo courtesy of Montana Off Road Magazine (mt4x4.com)*

Mountaineers Have Blast at Top/Trail Truck Challenge

We had our Top/Trail Truck Challenge this last month, and it was a blast! The course was set up so that all vehicles ran the same obstacles with cutouts for the smaller tire class where appropriate. It was a pretty last minute and low key affair, but we had 20+ trucks and a couple hundred spectators anyway. A good time was had by all and Tom Pionke was the winner of the large tire (37" and up) class and tt(yeah I bet I spelled that wrong!) won the small tire (36" and under) class. Good driving and congratulations! We had some rigs on their sides, some

big air in the log and rock crawls, broken parts and pieces scattered randomly and some real comraderie amongst the competitors. Thanks to all of the drivers, spotters, volunteers and spectators for a great time!

We hope to do it again next year and keep the old school feel to it while speeding up the whole event.

We haven't scheduled the October trail ride yet, but I will send an update as soon as I hear.

Respectfully submitted,
Blair Howze
Region 6 RVP

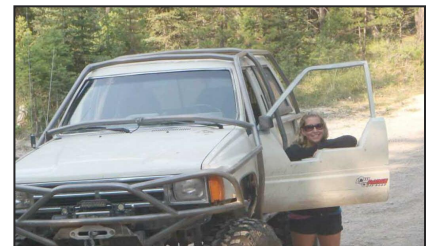
Big Sky Four Wheelers Set Snow Bash Date

The Big Sky Four Wheelers have been busy on the trails. Their Powder Puff/Barbie Run was fun for those who participated, they hope to have more next year. The Labor Day Run had six rigs participating.

Jeff Carlson completed their trail rating signs, which Tony volunteered to paint.

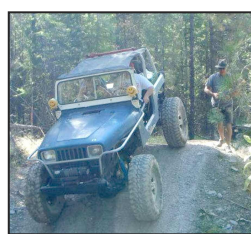
The club will be teaming up with the Forest Service for RAC Grant money for weed spraying.

The Snow Bash 2014 date has been set, mark your calendars for January 25, 2014.



Big Sky Four Wheeler's Powder Puff/ Barbie Run (above and below).

Photo courtesy of BSFW newsletter

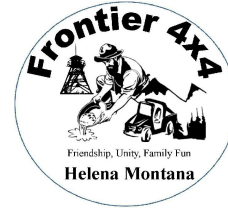


Big Sky Four Wheeler's Labor Day Run.

Photo courtesy of BSFW newsletter



Frontier 4x4 Club PO Box 7011 Helena MT 59604



Frontier 4X4's Monthly club run was September 14th to Hay Canyon. We had 7 rigs and 13 people. This was most definitely a family affair. We had a great time playing on the rocks and some great obstacles but it was not without some excitement. A clutch linkage broke and we worked for some time to repair it. A little trail side welding using jumper cables and the power of two rigs. It did not really work as desired in the end but it was a great learning moment. And quite honestly, it was fun trying. The folks in the broken rig were kind enough to jump into another vehicle and allow the club to continue the ride. I really appreciate that. We would get them back to their vehicle on the way back and

everyone made it home under their own power.

We found a rock on the trail which makes a wonderful RTI ramp. It was a lot of fun playing on it until we thought David J. was going over. Of course he did not but there was a momentary lack of oxygen in the area from the collective gasp of the club as he started to teeter on two wheels.

We stopped for lunch in a nice shady pocket just across the creek on the Pipestone side. We had hamburgers left over from the club picnic and everyone seemed to relax by the creek.



After lunch, we turned around and went back over the trail again on the way home. Everyone seemed to have a good time. I know I did. And I got to visit the Rock.

Members participated in several non-club runs to Berrys Meadows and Skyline Mine/Radersburg Pass trails. Members also did a trail cleanup on the main Tizer Road all the way to the lakes.

Frontier 4x4 is currently working with the Forest Service on a project to repair an area damaged by ATVs. We will repair the area as best we can and then place obstacles and pole fences to try to protect the area in the future.

License Plate Supports Multiple Use

A reminder to anyone needing to purchase a new license plate or renew an old one, the CFBU plate supports Multiple Use. Purchasing this license plate is another way for you and your family can help preserve access. You can purchase this plate at your local county treasurer office under CFBU. The best part is that you don't have



to wait until your current plates expire!

Since January 2008, this license plate has been available

for motor homes, trailers, cars and trucks. It is only a onetime fee for these permanent plate in which a substantial amount of the purchase helps fund the fight to maintain access.

This plate has been sponsored and supported by the following groups.

- Families for Outdoor Recreation

- Citizens for Balanced Use
- MT 4x4 Association (M4x4A)
- Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Association

With your support in buying the plate, we will be able to maintain public access so future generations will be able to experience the great outdoors.

Montana National Forests Latest News

Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest

• **Rawhide Trail in Elkhorn Mountains Closed for Trail Work** — Rawhide Trail No. 7073 located in the Elkhorn Ranger District will be closed to all public entry starting the week of Sept. 16. Work on the trail will include re-routes and drainage work along four miles of existing trail. This work will also include the construction of four timber bridges to replace existing fords or old deteriorating bridges.

It is expected that the work continue throughout the fall construction season. For more information contact the Jefferson Ranger District at (406) 287-3223, or the Butte Ranger District at (406) 494-2147.

• **Road Work and Hazard Tree Removal to Begin on Pioneer Mountains Scenic Byway** — The Pioneer Mountains Scenic Byway will be undergoing road work to repair severe frost heaves in the Moose Park area beginning Sept. 16. Beaverhead County will temporarily close the Byway from the Grasshopper Overlook (Mile Marker 13.4) to the Mono Creek cattle guard (Mile Marker 20.4) which will close through access north to south. Time to complete the project should take about six weeks while the repairs are being made.

Additionally, the Beaverhead-Deerlodge NF is advising travelers that there will be heavy truck traffic and logging machinery along the Pioneer Mountains Scenic Byway south of Wise River beginning Sept. 16. Work will be taking place between Sheep Creek Trailhead and the Lupine Shelter area. To provide for safety of the workers and public while this work is occurring Beaverhead County has issued an emergency speed limit ordinance of 35 mph from mile marker 20.75 to mile marker 38.08 until work on this

project is completed.

Travelers are advised to drive with extra caution and to expect up to 15 minute delays as heavy machinery will be operating within close proximity to the paved road. Travelers are also advised that they may not be seen by the heavy machine operators and to drive slow and expect debris on the paved road. Favorite campsites may not be available as logging work progresses.

The trees being removed are considered hazardous as they have been affected by the mountain pine beetle. The hazard tree removal project is being conducted to improve public safety. Logging truck traffic will increase and travelers can expect to see significant traffic starting early morning and continuing throughout daylight hours. Work along the Byway will continue through mid-December. For additional information contact the Wise River Ranger District at (406) 832-3178.

Bitterroot National Forest

• **Logging Closures at Lost Trail Ski Area** — Logging operations have been underway since July at the Lost Trail Powder Mountain Ski Area on the Bitterroot National Forest. The 225-acre thinning operation began last fall. Starting this week, Forest Road #5734 will be closed as crews are yarding logs on the road. Heavy logging equipment is also parked on the road and there will be log truck traffic in the area and at the base of chairlift #2. The road which provides access to Saddle Mountain and the Divide Trail is popular with mountain bikers, hikers, and bow hunters. Forest officials hope to have the road re-opened in early October.

Crews are thinning and removing beetle killed and infested trees in the ski area near chairlifts 1,2,3, and 5. Removing the trees is necessary because they present a hazard to the public

and ski area operations. The project will keep dead trees from falling onto cables and into ski runs and will help protect area aesthetics, by reducing red and gray trees and emphasizing green, live trees.

Sun Mountain Lumber of Deer Lodge is the subcontractor on the project which will provide nearly 900,000 board feet of timber (330 truckloads) to Montana sawmills. Along with the timber harvest, the work will also reduce hazardous fuels and fire hazards created by the dead, dying and diseased trees.

This is one of more than a dozen timber salvage projects undertaken by the Forest in the past two years in an effort to protect popular recreations areas, campgrounds, and trailheads from increasing pine beetle attacks. Lost Trail Ski Area is one of the most popular areas on the Bitterroot National Forest visited by more than 45,000 people annually.

For more information contact the Sula Ranger District at (406) 821-3201.

Custer and Gallatin National Forests

• **Custer and Gallatin N.F.'s Extending and Accepting Project Proposals for Gallatin and Southern Montana RAC's through September 30** — The Custer and Gallatin National Forests Resource Advisory Committees, which include Gallatin County and the Southern Montana Resource Advisory Committees (RAC's) are extending a call for project proposals through September 30 at midnight. Project proposals are being accepted for possible funding from federal dollars through Title II of the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program, in anticipation of renewed funding and the reauthorization or extension of the act through 2013/2014.

Acceptable project proposals aim to enhance forest ecosystems and restore and improve land health or water quality on

the Custer and Gallatin National Forests and/or adjacent nearby lands. Past projects have included Hyalite Snowplowing, OHV and trail enhancements, and road improvements leading to on National Forest System lands, along with trail and watershed projects.

Project Submission Forms are available on the Custer and Gallatin National Forest websites at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/custer> or www.fs.usda.gov/gallatin and clicking on the Resource Advisory Committee link to the right. Forms must be submitted by September 30 to the address noted on the application, electronic submissions are preferred. To learn more about the National RAC program visit: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/pts>.

Each RAC will begin reviewing project proposals for possible funding at the September meetings (location, date and time is still to be determined and will be posted on Custer and Gallatin websites). When RAC meetings are held project proponents are welcome and asked to attend, but usually only have a brief moment to discuss their project or provide clarifying questions before the RAC makes its final decisions. The public is welcome to attend any and all RAC meetings. For additional information on the RAC or to learn more about proposing projects, please contact Mariah Leuschen, 406-255-1411.

Flathead National Forests

• **Open House Will Recap Recent Field Trips Including the Final Trip on September 26th** — The Flathead National Forest is hosting an open house on Thursday, October 3, 2013, at the Supervisor's Office (650 Wolfpack Way, Kalispell, MT) from 5 PM to 8 PM. The event will provide an opportunity for the public to meet with Forest Service specialists working on an assessment of the Flathead

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Forests

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National Forest, the first phase of forest plan revision.

The Flathead National Forest is embarking on a multi-year process to update its forest plan, the document that guides management of your public lands. The forest plan provides direction for managing resources and activities such as recreation, fish and wildlife habitat, vegetation and timber production. Forest plan revision is achieved in a three-phase process: assessment, revision, and monitoring. The assessment evaluates existing information about relevant ecological, economic, and social conditions and trends. It also looks at the land management plan within the context of the broader landscape. The 2012 National Forest System land management planning rule calls for an enhanced commitment to collaboration and public engagement throughout the revision process.

As part of the assessment

phase, the forest has been hosting a series of public field trips focusing on subject matter important to the forest plan revision effort. The final trip is scheduled for September 26, 2013, and will look at inventoried roadless areas, recommended wilderness, and wild and scenic rivers. The trip will take participants up the North Fork Road on the Glacier View Ranger District. Transportation is provided for the field trips. A bus will depart the Flathead County Fairgrounds at 8:00 AM near the entrance at the North Meridian and Two Mile intersection with a second pick-up at 8:30 AM at the north-west corner of the Columbia Falls Super 1 parking lot off of Highway 2. We will have people back to Super 1 around 4:00 PM and to the Flathead County Fairgrounds at 4:30 PM. We'll have a lunch stop at the Polebridge Mercantile. They have limited lunch items so you may want to bring your own food.

The information shared and the feedback received during

the field trip and open house will be used to develop and finalize the assessment, determine needs for change, and to draft a proposed plan. There will be additional opportunities to engage in the collaborative process as the plan is developed over the next few years.

The Supervisor's Office is located at 650 Wolfpack Way in Kalispell. RSVP to Wade Muehlhof (ewmuehlhof@fs.fed.us or 406-758-5252) if you plan to attend either the open house or the field trip. For additional details please visit the Flathead National Forest Plan Revision page .

• Temporary Closure on Big Creek Road to Replace Culvert

– The Flathead National Forest will be removing a barrier culvert on Langford Creek and replacing it with a stream simulated culvert to help improve the passage of native cut-throat trout and other aquatic species. The culvert replacement will result in a temporary closure on the east end of Na-

tional Forest System Road 316 (Big Creek Road.)

Schlegel Enterprises (a local Kalispell contractor) will replace the existing culvert on Langford creek with an Aquatic Organism Passage (AOP) culvert. Work is scheduled to begin Monday, September 30, 2013. The road will be closed to public traffic for no more than two weeks during the installation of the new culvert.

Langford Creek is on the Glacier View Ranger District, Flathead National Forest, near Mile Post 1.14 on Big Creek Road. The road provides accesses to Moose Lake, Werner Peak Divide, Werner Peak Lookout, and the back side of Big Mountain. All of those areas will remain accessible from the west side of the divide from the Stillwater State Forest.

For additional information please contact Flathead National Forest Civil Engineer Patrick Siers at 406-758-5347.

GAO

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identify ways to reduce the gap and improve trail system sustainability. They also identified other options for improving management of volunteers. For example, while the agency's goal in the Forest Service Manual is to use volunteers, the agency has not established collaboration with and management of volunteers who help maintain trails as clear expectations for trails staff responsible for working with volunteers, and training in this area is limited. Some agency officials and stakeholders stated that training on how to collaborate with and manage volunteers would enhance the agency's ability to capitalize on this resource.

Why GAO Did This Study

The Forest Service manages more than 158,000 miles of recreational trails offering hikers, horseback riders, cyclists, off-highway-vehicle drivers, and others access to national forests. To remain safe and usable, these

trails need regular maintenance, such as removal of downed trees or bridge repairs. GAO was asked to review the agency's trail maintenance activities. This report examines (1) the extent to which the Forest Service is meeting trail maintenance needs, and effects associated with any maintenance not done; (2) resources, including funding and labor, that the agency employs to maintain its trails; (3) factors, if any, complicating agency efforts to maintain its trails; and (4) options, if any, that could improve the agency's trail maintenance efforts. GAO reviewed laws and agency documents; analyzed Forest Service budget data for fiscal years 2006-2012 and trails data for fiscal years 2008-2012; and interviewed agency officials and representatives of 16 stakeholder groups selected to represent trail users, conservation, and industry. Their views are not generalizable.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends, among other actions, that the Forest Service (1) analyze trails program

needs and available resources and develop options for narrowing the gap between them and take steps to assess and improve the sustainability of its trails and (2) take steps to enhance training on collaborating with and managing volunteers who help maintain trails. In commenting on a draft of this report, the Forest Service generally agreed with GAO's findings and recommendations.

For more information, contact Anne-Marie Fennell at (202) 512-3841 or fennella@gao.gov.

Travel Management Planning Process

The Forest Service has undertaken a large planning effort regarding the use of recreational motor vehicles in national forests and grasslands. Each national forest is to identify the minimum road system needed for safe and efficient travel and for administration, use, and protection of the National Forest System; roads that are no longer needed are to be decommissioned or considered for other uses, such as for trails. In addition, in 2005, the

Forest Service promulgated a regulation known as the travel management rule, which, among other things, requires each national forest and grassland to identify and designate the roads, trails, and areas open to motor vehicles. In deciding whether to designate trails for motor vehicle use, the rule directs the Forest Service to consider, among other criteria, the need for and availability of resources to maintain and administer the trail if it were designated.

More Trails Exist Than Are Being Maintained, Leading to a Persistent Backlog in the Hundreds of Millions of Dollars (Page 10 of report)

The Forest Service is unable to regularly maintain many of its 158,000 miles of trails. According to Forest Service data, over the last 5 years the agency performed at least some maintenance on an average of about one-third of its trail miles annually, with officials telling us that some trails had not received any maintenance in the

Continued on page 10

CBU Announced New Process for Challenging Forest Service Projects Earlier This Year

By publication in the March 27 Federal Register, the Forest Service has put into effect two new processes for administrative challenges to project decisions that implement land management plans. One applies to projects done under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA), and the other applies to non-HFRA projects. This new regulation replaces the appeal process.

All project challenges will now be “pre-decisional,” i.e. one must “object” to a proposed project, rather than appeal an already approved project. Previously, pre-decisional challenges were only allowed for HFRA projects.

Activists familiar with appeals or HFRA objections should not have difficulty learning and using the new processes, which are found at 36 CFR Part 218. However, there are a few key changes with which activists might be unfamiliar, described below. You can download the CFR directly from the web.

Applicability

The new processes apply to all projects documented in either an EA or EIS that implement a national forest or grassland land management plan. Projects documented with a categorical exclusion can still be challenged under the old appeals process (36 CFR 215).

The new processes do not apply to plan amendments, as these challenges are addressed separately under the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219 subpart B). The new processes do not apply to forest plan amendments except when an amendment applies only to a project which is subject to objection.

Notices of Comment and Objection Periods

The newspaper(s) of record is (are) the official means of notification of the start of comment and objection periods. However, within four calendar

days, the agency must also post this notice and its publication date on a website, making it easy to determine deadlines for comments and objections.

Establishing Standing/Comment Content

To be able to object to a proposed project or activity (i.e. to have “standing”), one must first comment during an official comment period, which runs for 30 days beginning the day after the official notice for projects documented in an EA, and at least 45 days for projects documented with an EIS. The 30-day comment period for an EA cannot be extended.

Commenting during any official comment period is sufficient to establish standing to later file an objection. However, late comments will not be accepted. See section 218.9 for specific filing requirements.

It is the commenter’s responsibility to ensure timeliness, which is determined by: postmark for postal mail; shipping date for delivery by private carrier; date and time stamp for faxed comments; or date and time of receipt for electronically filed comments. For electronically filed comments, you should receive a receipt by e-mail indicating the agency has received your comments. But if not, you may also want to file your comments by another medium such as certified postal mail, return receipt requested.

For projects documented with an EA, the only official opportunity for comment is often at the scoping stage. This is a significant and highly problematic change, because it does not require the Forest Service to accept comments on a proposed project’s EA prior to the start of the objection period. For projects documented in an EIS, there will be two opportunities to comment – scoping and the draft EIS.

Comments must be specific and detailed enough to explain your concerns with the pro-

posed project or activity. Oral comments (made to, say, the project leader) will no longer qualify you for a subsequent objection.

It is very important to raise all issues of concern in your comment letter(s), because you can object based only on those issues you raise during the official comment period. Comments should be as specific as possible, and should cover all issues of interest.

For this reason, all comments, general and specific, should include any potential issues of non-compliance with laws, regulations, and policies, and any contradiction with credible science or failure to use such science.

The only exception to the requirement to raise specific issues applies when the agency alters a proposed action or preferred alternative after the close of the last comment period and, therefore, comments could not have been submitted prior to the objection opportunity. These changes could then be challenged for the first time in an objection, but be prepared to make the argument in your objection that the issue could not have been raised previously.

When the agency makes changes in response to an objection, there is no provision in the regulation for how the agency will deal with these situations. The agency could re-issue a new proposed decision, along with a new opportunity to object. However, this seems unlikely in most cases, and if the agency moves forward and implements the modified decision with no new objection period, the only way to challenge the new decision will be through litigation.

Filing Objections

Objections for HFRA projects must be filed within 30 days of the notice of the proposed project decision, and within 45 days for non-HFRA projects. As with comments, it

is the objector’s responsibility to ensure timely submission. See “Establishing Standing” above.

Objections must include basic information found at 218.8(d), and also describe the problems with the proposed project, including any violations of law regulation, and policy, if applicable. “Supporting reasons” for your contentions must be provided, i.e. you need to support your arguments with relevant facts, and could also include scientific papers or photographs of the area supporting your assertions. One important difference from the old appeal regulations is that objectors must also suggest remedies that would resolve the objection issues. These can be simple.

Examples:

- “postpone project until preparation and public comment on a more complete cumulative effects analysis such economic impact of closures or action
- “evidence of historic and traditional use”
- “cultural importance and significance of continued use”
- “importance of access for recreation, energy resource development, emergency rescue, fire management and fuel reduction”
- “Any scientific studies or information which contradicts studies used by the agency in the decision”
- “Any adverse effects on private property in holdings or rights (water, mineral, grazing, etc)

You also must show that issues in your objection are ones you previously raised in comments. Do this by putting a statement somewhere in each objection argument that states: “We addressed this issue in section ____ (or p. ____) in our comments dated ____.” If the issue was not raised in previous comments, make the argument as to

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Recreational Trails Program Update

As the next Recreational Trails Program application cycle nears, I would like to update all of you regarding important topics: upcoming application deadline for fiscal year 2014; 2013 funding update; Transportation Alternatives Program; and, RTP training sessions. Since we have had three consecutive RTP grant cycles where the federal funds have not come through in a single (or timely) allocation, we need to adjust our timelines.

2014 Application Process and Deadline

The next application cycle will occur early next year due to the delays in receiving the federal funds for the entire program. The next application deadline will be March 1, 2014. A delay in the next grant cycle would provide certainty for our internal decision-making and especially for our sponsors in planning their projects. We will post all of the application materials in the WebGrants online system sometime in December so you can begin working on your applications. In the meantime, you can still work on your grant application documents by accessing updated documents

on the RTP Web page at: <http://stateparks.mt.gov/recreation/rtpGrants.html>.

The application narrative questions and scoring criteria will remain nearly the same. You can also initiate your letters of support and complete your environmental review documents for your project. We will only accept applications through the online system for the upcoming 2014 cycle.

MAP-21

MAP-21 establishes a new program to provide for a variety of alternative transportation projects that were previously eligible activities under separately funded programs. Funding is derived from various programs, encompassing most activities funded under the Transportation Enhancements (a.k.a. CTEP), Recreational Trails, and Safe Routes to School programs previously funded under SAFETEA-LU (previous transportation legislation). The proposed delayed RTP application due date would allow project sponsors that also apply for Transportation Alternative Program (TAP) funds through MDT to receive notification of their success or failure prior to

applying for RTP funds. TAP applicants will be notified by MDT in the November timeframe, which will allow enough time for those who are unsuccessful to prepare an RTP application to be due 2-3 months later. In an effort to better assist communities, we have coordinated the TAP and RTP application cycles. You can reference the Montana Department of Transportation's website at: http://www.mdt.mt.gov/mdt/ta_application.shtml for up-to-date information about the TAP application process and timelines.

Transition to WebGrants System

The Recreational Trails Program was the first program to implement WebGrants, with the Off-Highway Vehicle Program scheduled to be implemented by June 15. One hundred percent of the grant management processes are now automated online, which has led to streamlining and efficiency in the grant application and management processes. The system also allows on-going grant management, financial tracking, and reporting. We have successfully transitioned the entire reim-

bursement/claims process to the WebGrants system this spring.

RTP Training Sessions

Hands-on trainings will be offered for all prospective applicants and current project sponsors most likely in December and January. If you need training session information sent to you, feel free to contact me and I will send you the training session information directly. We also posted training session information on the RTP website.

Conclusion

Montana State Parks appreciates your patience as it relates to the upcoming and previous grant cycles. Many of have expressed concerns regarding planning and the upcoming construction season. Unfortunately, the incremental funding situation and the delays in receiving the funds have forced us to delay the application deadline.

If you have any questions or need additional information regarding this information, please feel free to contact me at 444-4585 or bshumate@mt.gov. We also encourage you to access the RTP Web page at: <http://stateparks.mt.gov/recreation/rtpGrants.html> for the most up-to-date information.

Process

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why that was impossible such as the pre-decision ROD included additional closures or information not provided to the public during the comment period.

Incorporation by Reference is Mostly Prohibited

The rule prohibits incorporating documents by reference in objections, except for the following: all or any part of a Federal law or regulation, Forest Service directives and land management plans, documents referenced by the Forest Service in the EA or EIS for the proposed project, and official comments previously submitted by the objector(s). If you want the Forest Service to consider a sci-

entific paper before ruling on your objection, you must include the paper with the objection. An internet citation is not sufficient.

Meetings to Resolve Objections

Another change from the appeal regulations is that the Forest Service does not have to offer a resolution meeting. The reviewing officer (the one who decides the objection) may hold a meeting with objectors to try to settle objections. Objectors can request such meetings, but the reviewing officer does not have to grant the request. Similarly, objectors are not obligated to attend meetings requested by the reviewing officer, but it may be worthwhile if you think you have a chance of resolving all or part of your objection. Typi-

cally, though, such meetings are fruitless because the Forest Service has no incentive to negotiate.

Emergency Situations

The Chief of the Forest Service may declare that an emergency situation exists. In these cases, there is no objection process for such projects. However, the agency must still accept comments.

Objection Decisions

If you do not resolve your objection, the reviewing officer must issue a decision within 30 days of the close of the objection period for HFRA projects, or 45 days for non-HFRA projects. The reviewing officer can extend the time for a decision by an additional 30 days.

Effective Dates

The new rule is effective immediately for projects with scoping initiated on or after March 27, 2013. For projects whose public involvement processes commenced earlier, applicability of the new rule depends on various factors. See 36 CFR 218.16. These new rules are significantly different from the former appeals process — concerned citizens must learn new tools and methods for challenging bad projects.

This new process will not affect anyone's ability to litigate a bad decision after the final ROD but in order to litigate you MUST have standing by submitting a comment on the proposed action. No court actions can be filed by anyone who did not submit a comment.

GAO

From page 7

last 10 years. For fiscal year 2012, the agency reported that it accomplished at least some maintenance on about 37 percent of its trail miles, or 59,274 miles of trail, exceeding its fiscal year 2012 target of 46,580 miles. Maintenance conducted ranged from minimal maintenance, such as pruning brush, to more extensive maintenance, such as repairing a bridge. In addition to maintenance, the agency improved about 1 percent of its trail miles each year over the last 5 years. Improvements could include, for example, adding platforms or upgrading trail surfaces. According to an agency official, the agency focuses more on conducting needed maintenance than on improving existing trails or constructing new ones. Over the past 5 years, from 17 to 41 percent of overall trail miles met Forest Service standards each year, with 26 percent (or about one-quarter) of trail miles meeting standards in fiscal year 2012.

Unmaintained Trails Inhibit Trail Use, Harm Natural Resources, and Add to Agency Costs (From page 13 of report)

Trails not maintained to the Forest Service's standards have a range of negative effects, including inhibiting trail use and posing potential safety hazards, harming natural resources, and adding to agency costs. Among the 18 national forests included in our review, officials at 15 forests cited various negative effects on visitors; officials from 10 forests specifically cited potential safety hazards as a consequence of deferred maintenance. For example, fallen logs across trails can impede hikers or block horseback, mountain bike, or OHV riders entirely. Officials from one forest noted that a safety hazard could arise from their inability to remove standing dead trees along a trail. Officials from another forest said that trail bridges needing replacement could be hazardous, and officials at two other ranger districts cited concerns that users could get lost attempting to follow overgrown trails. Most forests we visited did not have

trails that were closed because of deferred maintenance, but officials from a number of forests noted that they had some trails that were "functionally closed" because they were so overgrown or crowded with downed trees. Officials from several forests indicated that they had installed signs at trailheads warning of potential hazards. Outside the agency, nearly all the stakeholders we interviewed said they were concerned with the condition of the Forest Service's trail system and the agency's inability to maintain it adequately.

Unmaintained trails can also harm natural resources. For example, according to officials we interviewed at several forests, erosion resulting from unmaintained trails can create ecological damage. Trails with poor or unmaintained drainage features can deposit sediment into streams, degrading water quality and potentially affecting species, such as cutthroat trout. Officials at one forest stated that deferred maintenance had prevented them from conducting trout recovery activities in their forest. Officials from three other forests added that waterlogged or obstructed trails, which force visitors to create alternate routes around obstacles, have negative effects on the visitors, as well as on resources. For example, on one trail, OHV riders created trenches in a meadow to avoid water on the trail, and, according to an agency official, at \$100,000 per mile of trail, fixing the rutting by installing boardwalks to raise the trail above the surrounding meadow would be cost prohibitive. Another official gave an example of horseback riders' creating new stream crossings to avoid unsafe bridges.

Figure 4: Example of a Failing Bridge, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, Montana



Image from page 14 of GAO report.

Forest Service image

Figure 5: Visitor-Created Alternate Route to Avoid a Wet, Muddy Trail, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, Montana



Image from page 15 of GAO report.

Forest Service image

Sources

This performance audit from June 2012 to June 2013. The organizations GAO interviewed were Back Country Horseman of America, BlueRibbon Coalition, Friends of Northern Arizona Forests, International Mountain Bicycling Association, National Association of Forest Service Retirees, National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council, Oregon Equestrian Trails, Panhandle Trail Riders Association, The

Partnership for the National Trails System, Professionals for Managed Recreation, Professional Trailbuilders Association, Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association, Washington Trails Association, Western Environmental Law Center, and (of course) The Wilderness Society.

The National Forests in Montana included in the Review were Beaverhead-Deerlodge, Bitterroot and Gallatin National Forests.

Table 4: Forest Service's National Forest System Trail Inventory and Estimated Number of Visitors, as of May 2013

Region number ^a	Region	Total trail miles	Wilderness miles	Miles open to motorized vehicles	Miles closed to motorized vehicles	Estimated number of visitors ^b
1	Northern	28,151	5,466	12,405	15,746	9,378,000
2	Rocky Mountain	19,011	4,549	7,035	11,976	27,962,000
3	Southwestern	9,993	3,398	1,324	8,669	18,185,000
4	Intermountain	29,348	5,233	13,370	15,978	22,422,000
5	Pacific Southwest	15,374	4,997	4,689	10,685	26,673,000
6	Pacific Northwest	25,326	6,105	10,338	14,988	15,428,000
8	Southern	11,133	904	1,908	9,225	28,993,000
9	Eastern	16,737	1,268	7,632	9,105	15,701,000
10	Alaska	1,439	92	577	862	1,138,000
Total		156,512^c	32,014	59,278	97,234	165,880,000

Image from page 50 of GAO report.

Source: Forest Service

WEBSITE DIRECTORY

Montana 4x4 Association (M4x4A) — www.m4x4a.org
 Divide Ride — www.montanadivideride.com
 Blue Ribbon Coalition — www.sharetrails.org
 Bureau of Land Management (BLM) — www.blm.gov/mt www.facebook.com/BLMMontana
 Citizens for Balanced Use (CFBU) — www.balanceduse.org
 Families for Outdoor Recreation (FFOR) — www.ffor.org
 Leave No Trace — <http://lnt.org>
 Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks — fwp.mt.gov
 Montanas for Multiple Use — www.mtmultipleuse.org
 Montana National Forests — www.fs.fed.us/recreation/map/state_list.shtml#Montana
 Montana Off Road Extreme Racing (MORE) — www.montanaoffroadextreme.com
 Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Association — www.mtvra.com
 National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council (NOHVCC) — www.nohvcc.org
 Northwest Wyoming OHV Alliance — <http://www.nwwyohva.org>
 Ravalli County Off Road User Association — <http://www.rcorua.org>
 Recreational Trails Program — <http://stateparks.mt.gov/recreation/recTrailsProgram.html>
 Trails in Trouble — www.trailsintrouble.org
 Tread Lightly — treadlightly.org
 Treasure State ATV Association — <http://www.tsatv.org>
 Treasure State Resource Industry Association (formerly WETA) — www.tsria.org
 United Four Wheel Drive Associations (UFWDA) — www.ufwda.org
 Yellowstone Off Road Racing (YORR) — www.yorracing.com

Montana 4x4 Association Clubs

Big Sky 4 Wheelers (KalisPELL) — www.facebook.com/pages/Big-Sky-4-Wheelers/165148236890316/
 Continental 4 Wheel Drive Association (Butte) — www.facebook.com/pages/Continental-4-Wheel-Drive-Association/114850405209799
 Frontier 4-Wheelers (Helena) — www.facebook.com/Frontier4Wheelers
 Magic City 4x4 (Billings) — www.mc4w.com
 Magic City 4x4 (Billings) — www.facebook.com/groups/102015127323
 Mountaineers (Bozeman) — <http://bozemanmountaineers.org>
 Mountaineers (Bozeman) — www.facebook.com/Mountaineers
 Rimrock 4x4 (Billings) — www.facebook.com/groups/252774264811991
 Skyliner 4x4 Club (Polson) — www.skyliners4x4.com
 Skyliner 4x4 Club (Polson) — <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Skyliners-4-Wheel-Drive-Club/127378030787187>

Other 4x4 Clubs

Beaverhead Backcountry Pioneers (Dillon) — <https://www.facebook.com/BeaverheadBackcountryPioneers>
 Cascade County 4-Wheelers (Great Falls) — www.facebook.com/groups/180129495357107
 Five Valley Off Roaders (Missoula) — www.facebook.com/fivevalleyoffroaders?group_id=0
 Montana Back Roads 4x4 (Missoula) — www.montanabackroads.org
 Montana Back Roads 4x4 (Missoula) — www.facebook.com/pages/Montana-Back-Roads-4x4-Club/170805969642153
 Powell Valley 4-Wheelers — (Powell, WY) powellvalley4wheelers.com www.facebook.com/pv4wheelers?ref=ts&fref=ts

Be Aware of this anti-ORV website!
www.wildlandscpr.org
THIS should alarm you!

M4x4A Decals \$1 ea.
M4x4A Patches \$3 ea.
M4x4A Directories \$1 ea.
 Contact Stacey Osborne,
 M4x4A Sec., see page 1

How to contact your Congressman

- **Senator Max Baucus** (D-MT), 511 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington DC 20510, (202) 224-2651 or online www.baucus.senate.gov/contact/emailForm.cfm?subj=issue
- **Senator Jon Tester** (D-MT), 706 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington DC 20510, (202) 224-2644 or online www.testersenate.gov/Contact/index.cfm
- **Congressman Steve Daines**, (R-MT), 206 Cannon House Office Building, Washington DC 20510, (202) 225-3211 or online <http://daines.house.gov>



*"Thanks for coming out to give me a tow.
However, do you have a bigger vehicle."*



"That was awesome! Let's do it again!"