



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Region One

Northern Region
200 East Broadway
Missoula, MT 59802

File Code: 1950/2320

Date:

OCT 04 2007

Sandra Mitchell
Public Lands Director
Idaho Snowmobile Association
P.O. Box 70001
Boise, ID 83707

Dear Ms. Mitchell:

Thank you for taking time to meet with us in Missoula last month. I appreciate having the opportunity to share my thoughts on management of recommended wilderness and hear your concerns on how snowmobilers would be affected.

In our meeting you asked to see, in writing, the guidance that has been provided to the field on management of recommended wilderness. Enclosed is a paper that has been developed to provide consistency across the Region. I also am enclosing an explanation of the methodology and process that the forests and grasslands are using to determine which of the roadless areas should be considered for recommendation for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. I hope you will see that the process is very rigorous and intended to eliminate from consideration those areas that are really best suited for uses that are not compatible with wilderness designation. The final decision on which areas to recommend is done through a thorough and open public involvement process.

My hope is that you and your constituents are active players in these discussions.

Sincerely,

THOMAS L. TIDWELL
Regional Forester

Enclosure



Consistency in Land and Resource Management Plans

Topic: Management of recommended wilderness

Purpose: During plan revision, the national forests and grasslands will be evaluating the areas that were recommended for wilderness designation in the first round of planning to determine if they should still be recommended. They also will be evaluating all other inventoried roadless areas to determine if they should also be recommended. For all of these areas, the forest needs to determine, through public involvement and the wilderness evaluation process, the best use of each area.

Guidance: If it is determined that the area is best suited to motorized or mechanized recreation, the area should not be recommended for wilderness. If it is determined that the best future use is inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, the desired condition (dc) should reflect that. If there are established uses that are incompatible with that dc, such as motorized or mechanized recreation, forests should choose to implement one of the following actions:

1. Pursue a non-motorized/non-mechanized approach to management of the area through travel planning
2. Adjust management area boundary to eliminate the area with established uses,
3. Not recommend the area for wilderness designation.

Administrative use of motorized equipment for maintenance (chain saws, rock drills, limited use of helicopters) will continue to be allowed.

Background: Through the first round of planning, approximately 1.3 million acres of inventoried roadless was recommended for wilderness designation. The plan standards for most of those areas allowed for existing uses to continue as long as they did not degrade wilderness character. These standards are vague and have resulted in problems:

- **Lack of understanding of wilderness characteristics.** There has been some confusion over how wilderness characteristics are defined and what activities or what level of use would result in degradation of wilderness characteristics. In some areas, uses have changed or certain types of use have increased significantly, possibly degrading wilderness characteristics. In most cases, use has not been monitored closely enough, if at all, to make a call on how use has changed over the years.
- **Inconsistent management of recommended wilderness across the region.** Some areas are managed by more than one unit and the units have different management approaches, particularly for motorized recreation. This results in public confusion and can result in encroachments of illegal activities on to the adjacent forest.

Wilderness Characteristics

National Wilderness Monitoring Committee

Untrammeled—Lack of evidence of human control or manipulation.

- Prescribed fire
- Fire suppression
- Rehab with non-native species
- Mechanical fuel reduction

Undeveloped or “Does not Occupy”—Lack of evidence of modern human presence, occupation, modification.

- Signs
- Structures
- Road and trails
- Special provisions; livestock grazing, electronic sites, etc.

Natural—Ecological systems are substantially free from effects of modern civilization.

- Exotic species
- Changes to air quality
- Changes to water quality
- Effects of past timber harvest

Opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation—Remoteness, solitude, freedom, risk, challenge.

- Human noise
- Sights of human civilization
- Number of people/parties
- Types of use; motorized, mechanized

KIPZ FOREST PLAN REVISION
IRA EVALUATION FOR WILDERNESS
EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS
Version 7/26/05

METHODOLOGY

The 85 Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA)¹ on the Kootenai and Idaho Panhandle National Forests revision zone (KIPZ) will be evaluated for suitability for wilderness recommendation. The three tests of capability, availability, and need will be used to determine suitability as set forth in Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.12, Chapter 72.² In addition to the inherent wilderness quality an IRA might possess, the area must provide opportunities and experiences that are dependent upon and enhanced by a wilderness environment. The area and boundaries must allow the area to be managed as wilderness.

Capability is defined in FSH 1909.12, Chapter 72 as the degree to which the area contains the basic characteristics that make it suitable for wilderness designation without regard to its availability for or need as wilderness. **Availability** determination is conditioned on the value of and need for the wilderness resource compared to the value of and need of the area for other resources. **Need** is the determination that the area should be designated as wilderness through an analysis of the degree that the area contributes to the local and national distribution of wilderness.

Capability

There are five basic characteristics identified to evaluate the capability of an IRA: environment, challenge, outdoor recreation opportunities, special features, and manageability.

The environment provides the person the opportunity to feel or experience solitude and serenity, a spirit of adventure and awareness, and a sense of self-reliance. The area needs to appear natural and free from disturbance and where the normal activities and life cycles of biotic species take place. A range of geological, biological, and ecological variability exists and is identified. Any scientific, educational, or historical values are identified and considered. Social and economic factors must blend with the environment and natural features to make the area desirable and manageable as wilderness.

1. There are 48 IRAs on the Idaho Panhandle NF and 43 IRAs on the Kootenai NF. Six of the IRAs are located on both forests. They are counted separate for each forest but only once for the planning zone.

2. This chapter of FSH 1909.12 was reissued in March 2005. Changes in the new issue included using new chapter numbers and the use of some new terminology. It did not alter the direction for analysis or the evaluation process. The methodology and process used to evaluate the IRAs in KIPZ meet the March 2005 handbook direction. Chapter numbers used in this document reference the March 2005 handbook.

Challenge considers the degree that the area offers people the opportunity to experience adventure, excitement, challenge, initiative, or self-reliance.

Outdoor recreation opportunities that are primitive and unconfined include hiking, backpacking, stock riding, hunting, fishing, skiing, snowshoeing, and rafting. These may or may not currently exist within an individual area. Other outdoor recreational activities may currently exist but are not compatible with a wilderness setting or other wilderness characteristics.

Special features recognize scientific, educational, historical, and scenic values found in the area. The abundance and variety of wildlife and fish, including threaten and endangered species, will be considered. Other special features that are unique or are outstanding will be identified.

Manageability considers the ability to manage the area as wilderness as required by the 1964 Wilderness Act. Such factors as size, shape, and juxtaposition to external situations are considered. Boundary location and the ability to easily identify the boundary on the ground are critical in meeting this characteristic.

The combinations of basic natural characteristics are of infinite variety. No two areas possess any of these characteristics in the same measure. The process, then, is to analyze the quality and quantity of these characteristics and determine if they can be provided by establishing management, protective, mitigation, or enhancement measures.

In order to evaluate the five basic characteristics, they will be broken down into elements, activities, or features that describe the basic characteristics and provide a basis for rating. At least two criteria will be established for each element, activity, or feature with three criteria considered optimal. While there is no limit on the number of criteria that can be established, the number of criteria must be kept to a number that can reasonably provide for evaluation of the characteristics. Since criteria will probably not be of equal importance, criterion will be listed in order of priority for each element, activity, or feature. Criteria will be established to consider existing as well as future conditions both inside and adjacent to the IRA.

Forest and district resource specialists and managers will rate the criterion as high, medium, or low depending on how well the criterion is or can be met in the IRA. For IRAs that crossed forest boundaries, the criteria will be evaluated only for the portion that lies within the Kootenai or Idaho Panhandle Forest boundary. Final evaluation of these IRAs will not be completed until reconciliation with the adjoining forest can be made.

Three specialists from each of the two forests in the zone will then evaluate the elements, activities, or features based on the criteria rating given in the first evaluation. The IRA will then be given a summary rating of high, moderate, or low in capability. Methodology will use three Forest Service specialists who are familiar with the IRA along with three that generally do not know the IRA and will be limited to the criteria ratings and comments provided by the districts during the first evaluation.

Availability

Availability of an IRA for wilderness management must be evaluated against other resource needs, demands, and uses of the area. To be available for wilderness, the wilderness value, both tangible and intangible, should offset the value of the other resources. The predominant value does not necessarily reflect the use or combination of uses that would yield the greatest dollar return or the greatest unit output. In evaluating other resources, current uses, trends, and potential future uses and outputs need to be considered.

Wilderness designation and management of an area can have an effect on the management of adjacent lands. Therefore, evaluation of other resource needs may need to be considered in the area adjacent to an IRA. FSH 1909.12, Chapter 72.21 provides some examples and guidance in evaluating the development and management for sustained yield production of resources other than the wilderness resource.

Other resources to be evaluated will be determined from resource specialists' knowledge of the areas and public comments. Once the resources have been identified, criteria will be established for evaluation. Forest and District resource specialists will rate the criteria as high, medium, or low. Two to six forest program managers will then evaluate each IRA's availability for wilderness designation.

Need

The need for an area to be designated as wilderness will be through an analysis to determine the degree the area can contribute to the local and national distribution of wilderness. There should be clear evidence of current or future public need for additional designated wilderness in the general vicinity of the area being considered. This evidence will include public involvement. Need analysis will use such factors as the geographic distribution of areas, representations of landforms and ecosystems, and the presence of wildlife expected to be visible in a wilderness environment.

To best analyze the need for additional wilderness in the Northern Region, the Regional Forester decided the needs assessment would be completed at the Regional level. Once that assessment is completed, two to six program managers will use the assessment to rate the IRAs for need of additional wilderness designations. A rating of high, moderate, or low will be assigned to each IRA.

Suitability of an IRA for potential wilderness designation will be based on the inherent wilderness quality determined in the capability, availability and needs assessment. In addition to the inherent quality, the area must provide opportunities and experiences that are dependent upon and enhanced by a wilderness environment. The size and shape of the area must allow the area to be managed as wilderness. Forest Land Managers will review the evaluation and determine which IRAs are suitable for wilderness designation.

Proposed wilderness boundaries and mapping will be completed following the guidelines in FSH 1909.12, Chapter 72.5 for each IRA determined to be suitable. Boundaries must

be easy to define, locatable on the ground, and must be manageable. Priority of boundary in descending order of desirability is:

1. Use natural features locatable on both a map and on the ground, such as a ridge top, mountain peak, or lake shore.
2. Use semipermanent human-made features such as roads and powerlines. The boundary may be set back a given distance from these features.
3. Use previously surveyed lines or legally determined lines such as section and township lines, property lines, or State boundaries.
4. Use a straight line from one locatable, visible point to another, such as between two mountain peaks.
5. Use a series of bearings and distances between locatable points that are not visible.

PROCESS

Evaluation of the 85 IRAs for wilderness suitability and recommendation was based on the methodology established above. IRAs that crossed the Kootenai and Idaho Panhandle National Forests boundaries but remained totally within the KIPZ revision boundary were rated first for the respective forest, then given a consolidated rating for the zone. IRAs that crossed the KIPZ boundary on to the Flathead, Lolo, Clearwater, or Colville National Forests were not given an overall rating until the adjacent forest had provided evaluation comments. Coordination of IRA evaluation with adjacent forests was completed in December 2004.

The results of each step or test established in FSH 1909.12, Chapter 72 are provided below.

Capability

Methodology required identifying elements, activities, or features that described the basic characteristics and provided a base for rating. This was completed by the two Forest Recreation Program Managers and assisted by a NEPA Specialist and the Forest Planners. The format was adapted from the White River National Forest in Colorado. Work began in September 2002 and was completed in early June 2003.

The five basic characteristics were broken down into 19 elements, activities, or features. A total of 47 criteria were established and used to rate each of the 85 IRAs. Generally each criterion listed first for an element, activity, or feature received a heavier weighting in evaluation than the following criteria. Criteria were established to consider existing as well as future conditions both inside and adjacent to the IRA.

Evaluation of the criteria was performed by District Recreation Managers, Forest Fishery and Wildlife Biologists, and Forest Hydrologists. Each criterion was rated as high, medium, or low. For IRA's that crossed forest boundaries, the evaluation was only for the portion that lies within the Kootenai or Idaho Panhandle Forest boundary. This evaluation was completed in June 2003.

In December 2003, three specialists from each of the two forests in the zone rated the 19 elements, activities, or features as high, medium, or low based on the rating given in the first step. The IRA was then rated as high, moderate/high, moderate, moderate/low, or low in capability. The moderate/high and moderate/low ratings were used only when an IRA did not clearly fit in one of the ratings established in methodology and was consider in a transition area between two established ratings. Specialists for each forest consisted of the Forest Recreation and Wilderness Program Manager and two District Resource Managers.

Table IRA-1 shows the 19 elements, activities and features and the 47 criteria used to rate the 85 IRAs.

Table IRA-1: AREA CAPABILITY ASSESSMENT ELEMENT AND CRITERIA

| ENVIRONMENTAL ELEMENTS | | |
|--|---|--|
| Opportunity for Solitude | | |
| High | Medium | Low |
| Feeling of being alone or remote from civilization. | Feeling of being alone is possible but signs of civilization are likely. | Little opportunity of feeling alone. |
| The possibility of meeting another party is remote. | The possibility of meeting or not meeting another party is about equal. | It would be rare to not meet another party. |
| Recreation use is light. | Recreation use is moderate. | Recreation use is high. |
| | | |
| Natural and Free from Disturbance | | |
| High | Medium | Low |
| IRA appears free of human disturbance. Any disturbance appears to be natural, such as a small wildfire. | IRA appears mostly free of human disturbance. Natural disturbance evident, but does not dominate the landscape. | IRA shows signs of human disturbance. Natural disturbance dominates the landscape, such as a stand replacing wildfire. |
| Area visible in surrounding foreground (outside the IRA) may show some human disturbance but does not dominate the view. | Area visible in surrounding foreground has signs of human activity such as a road or farmhouse. | Area visible in surrounding foreground shows obvious human activity such as clearcuts or a town. |
| Has only a minor improvement, such as a trail. | Has several minor improvements. | Has a major improvement such as a power line, dam, or road. |
| Noxious weeds not evident. | Noxious weeds evident in isolated spots. | Noxious weeds common or scattered throughout the area. |
| High water quality. Fully supports beneficial uses. | Good water quality. Partially supports beneficial uses. | Poor water quality. Does not support beneficial uses. |
| | | |
| Provides Challenge and Adventure | | |
| High | Medium | Low |
| Terrain generally rugged. | Terrain typical for general forest area. | Terrain more gentle and rolling. |
| Requires above average physical ability, knowledge, | Requires similar physical ability, knowledge, or skill | Area easily accessible; requires average physical |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| or skill to safely recreate in the area. | as the general forested area. | ability, limited knowledge and skill as compared to the abilities required in the general forest area. |
| Nonhunting outfitting permitted within area. | Nonhunting outfitting permitted but rarely used. | Nonhunting outfitting not permitted within area. |
| Manageable | | |
| High | Medium | Low |
| Size and shape of area allows for effective management. | Size or shape will affect manageability but can be mitigated by boundary changes. | Size is small or has irregular shape that makes management difficult. |
| Minimum activity in surrounding area that effects manageability | Activity is evident and ongoing in surrounding area but will not keep the area from being managed | Activity in surrounding area will effect the manageability of the IRA |
| Located adjacent to existing Wilderness or other IRAs | Located near existing Wilderness or other IRAs. May be difficult to access. | Isolated, small parcel of land |
| | | |
| SPECIAL FEATURES | | |
| Scientific, Educational, or Historical Values | | |
| High | Medium | Low |
| Several significant scientific, educational, or historical values have been identified in the IRA | At least one significant or several minor scientific, educational, or historical values have been identified in the IRA | No scientific, educational, or historical value has been identified in the IRA |
| Identified values are unique to the northern Rockies. | Identified values are common in northwestern US but is uncommon on KIPZ | Any identified values are common through out KIPZ and northwest US. |
| Scenic Features | | |
| High | Medium | Low |
| Area has peaks or rocky formations considered spectacular from the rest of the Forest and/or special vegetative features that are considered very scenic. | Area has a peak or formation that stands out from surrounding terrain and/or vegetative features considered scenic. | Terrain is typical of the forest or surrounding area and the vegetation is common to the surrounding area. |
| Area has alpine lakes, creeks in alpine meadows, or waterfalls. | Area may have bodies of water but are typical for the Forest. | Area has no permanent lakes but may have perennial creeks or ponds. |
| | | |

| Variety and Abundance of Wildlife | | |
|---|---|---|
| High | Medium | Low |
| There is a diverse community of native mammals, birds, and fish. | There is a moderate variety of native mammals, birds, and fish. | The community of native mammals, birds, and fish is not diverse. |
| There is a known high variety of TE&S Species within the IRA. | There is a known moderate variety of TE&S Species within the IRA. | There is a known low variety of TE&S Species within the IRA. |
| Overall wildlife habitat integrity rating of high | Overall wildlife habitat integrity rating of moderate | Overall wildlife habitat integrity rating of low |
| Provides critical linkage between wildlife areas or habitats | Provides linkage between wildlife areas or habitats | Does not provide linkage between wildlife areas or habitats |
| | | |
| Other Special Features | | |
| High | Medium | Low |
| Area has at least one major other special feature, such as a grove of western red cedars, high mountain meadow, bog, etc. | Area has several minor other special features, such as old growth stand, flat creek bottom, or small water falls. | Area has no major or very few minor other special features |
| Contains a designated special area such as a W+S River or SIA, etc. | Contains a candidate or eligible special area. | Does not contain an established, candidate, or eligible special area. |
| | | |
| PRIMITIVE AND UNCONFINED RECREATION | | |
| Hiking Opportunities | | |
| High | Medium | Low |
| Two or more trails, class 3 or higher, that are routinely maintained | At least one trail, class 2 or higher, that is routinely maintained | No system trails that are maintained |
| Terrain is gentle and vegetation open to allow easy cross-country travel | Terrain is moderate or vegetation brushy that impedes cross-country travel | Terrain is steep or vegetation too dense (including down material) that cross-country travel is difficult |
| | | |
| Backpacking Opportunities | | |
| High | Medium | Low |
| Two or more trails, class 3 or higher, that are routinely maintained | At least one trail, class 2 or higher, that is routinely maintained | No system trails that are maintained |
| Area has several dispersed camping sites that are routinely used | Area has at least one dispersed camping site that is occasionally used | Area does not have dispersed camping sites that are used but progressive |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| | | camping may occur |
| Saddle Stock Opportunities | | |
| High | Medium | Low |
| At least one trail, class 3 or higher, designed for saddle stock and routinely maintained | At least one trail, class 2 or higher, that is suitable for saddle stock and routinely maintained | No system trails that are maintained |
| Trailhead has stock facilities, such as unloading ramp | Trailhead has room to turn around stock truck or stock trailer | Trailhead does not support use of stock |
| Hunting Opportunities | | |
| High | Medium | Low |
| Good populations of the big game animals or fair population of permitted animals, such as sheep or goats | Has fair populations of game animals | Has scattered small herds of big game animals |
| Terrain is gentle and vegetation open to allow easy hunting access off trails and ridges | Terrain is moderately steep or vegetation brushy that limits hunting on much of the area | Terrain is steep or vegetation too dense that hunting is limited to trails or ridges |
| Fishing Opportunities | | |
| High | Medium | Low |
| Good populations of native game fish | Has fair populations of native game fish | Has low populations of native game fish |
| Stream bottoms are generally gentle with minor brush allowing access to water | Stream channel has enough brush to limit access; channel bottom or side slopes not overly steep | Stream channel steep, or steep rocky side slopes, or brush along channel makes access difficult |
| Skiing and Snowshoeing Opportunities | | |
| High | Medium | Low |
| Terrain is gentle and vegetation open to allow easy cross-country travel | Terrain is moderate or vegetation brushy that impedes cross-country travel | Terrain is steep or vegetation too dense that cross-country travel is difficult |
| Area is easily accessible in winter by motorized wheel vehicles | Snow keeps wheeled vehicles several miles from area but access is possible by snowmobile | Area is difficult or rarely accessed by snowmobile |

| Snowmobiling Opportunities | | |
|---|--|---|
| High | Medium | Low |
| Terrain is steep or vegetation too dense that cross-country travel is difficult | Terrain is moderate or vegetation brushy that impedes cross-country travel | Terrain is gentle and vegetation open to allow easy cross-country travel |
| Snowmobile use prohibited, or if allowed, rarely used | Snowmobile use restricted to two months or less, or on half or less of the area | Snowmobile use permitted. |
| | | |
| MANAGEABILITY – THE EXTENT THAT | | |
| Area Boundaries are Recognizable | | |
| High | Medium | Low |
| The vast majority of the boundary follows features that can be easily found and identified on the ground, such as a dominate ridge, creek, road, or trail | More than half of the boundary follows a feature that can be easily found and identified on the ground | Boundary generally lies across the hill side and can rarely be located without equipment, such as a gps unit |
| Boundary can be easily adjusted to follow locatable and identifiable features without significantly modifying the area boundaries | Boundary can be adjusted to follow locatable and identifiable features but will modify the general size and shape of the IRA. Boundary may be identified with minimal signing. | Boundary can not be adjusted to follow locatable and identifiable features, or requires extensive signing. |
| | | |
| Area Boundaries promote Remoteness | | |
| High | Medium | Low |
| Area accessed by trail or closed and revegetated road; adjacent area has natural setting | May be accessed by narrow or two track open road that is lightly traveled; minimal human presence evident | Boundary adjacent to heavily used road or along area showing high human presence, such as a number of farm houses with outbuildings, pasture land, etc. |
| No active disturbance near boundary | May have disturbance near boundary but is short term such as a logging operation. | Boundary adjacent to long term disturbance like farmland or mining operations |
| Natural processes take place undisturbed and unmanipulated. | Minimal disturbance of natural processes. | Natural processes cannot occur without human intervention. |
| | | |

| Area Boundaries are Manageable | | |
|--|--|--|
| High | Medium | Low |
| Boundary total on National Forest and not adjacent to private property | Boundary follows property line forming irregular shape. | Boundary crosses private property so there are inholdings along the boundary. |
| No inholdings. | Few small inholdings may be present. | Several small or a large inholding. |
| | | |
| Area Boundaries Constitute Barrier to Prohibited Use | | |
| High | Medium | Low |
| Topographic feature provides a natural barrier, such as major stream or steep hill side | Topography generally makes it difficult to participate in prohibited use | Topography not a deterrent to prohibited use |
| Human improvement is significant to physically provide a barrier, such as a road cut slope | Human improvement places user on notice of prohibited use, such as a sign. | Human improvement not a deterrent; may provide point of access of prohibited use |
| | | |

Table IRA-2 shows the rating for each criteria and element and the overall rating for each IRA.

Add the table.

Availability

While Capability evaluated the wilderness characteristics of an IRA, Availability considered other resources needs. FSH 1909.12, Chapter 72.2 and internal and external comments were used to identify other resources for evaluation and establish the criteria. Eight criteria were established by the two Forest Recreation and Wilderness Program Managers in August 2004. The two managers selected resource specialists from each forest to rate the criteria using a high, medium, or low rating system. Specialists included recreation managers, wildlife and fishery biologists, hydrologists, ecologists, geologists, fuels and wildfire specialists, land specialists (special use permits), and Silviculturists. These ratings were completed by October 2004.

Individual district and forest specialists rating and resource needs were summarized for each IRA. An overall availability rating was then established by the two forest program managers. This was completed in December 2004.

Table IRA-3 lists the eight resources and criteria. The availability for an area for proposed wilderness designation will be the opposite of the rating for other resource requirements. For example, a rating of high mineral value will mean a low rating for wilderness designation.

Table IRA-3: AREA AVAILABILITY RESOURCE ASSESSMENT AND CRITERIA

| RESOURCES |
|---|
| 1. Areas that are of high value for water yield or on-site storage where installation and maintenance of improvements may be required. |
| 2. Areas needing management for wildlife or aquatic animals that MIGHT conflict with Wilderness management. |
| 3. Area needing active aquatic restoration activities. |
| 4. Area needing active vegetative restoration activity due to specific species survival, or identifiable fuel reduction activity to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, or known areas of severe insect infestation that will lead to heavy tree mortality. |
| 5. Areas of high value mineral deposits of economic or strategic importance. |
| 6. Areas having such unique characteristics or natural phenomena that general public access should be developed to facilitate public use and enjoyment including winter sports sites. |
| 7. Lands committed through contracts, permits, or agreements that would be in conflict with Wilderness management (some minor permitted uses may still be allowed.) |
| 8. Forest Service does not have sufficient control to prevent development or irresolvable, incompatible uses that would lessen wilderness character and potential. |
| |
| RATING |
| HIGH = Areas having an evidence and high priority need for treatment in the category addressed in the question. Availability would equate to Low. |
| MEDIUM = Areas having a need for treatment in the category addressed in the question. Availability would equate to Moderate. |

LOW = Areas have no to little need of treatments or management addressed in the question. Availability would equate to High.

Table IRA-4 shows the ratings determined for each resource and the overall rating for each IRA.

Add table.

Need

After evaluating an area's capability for providing wilderness characteristics and availability for wilderness designation, the last step of the evaluation process is to determine if the area is needed as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. A Wilderness Needs Assessment was completed in 2003 by an interdisciplinary team at the regional level. This allowed the assessment to cover Montana, northern Idaho, and parts of the Dakotas – a much larger area than the KIPZ. The assessment focused on social and ecological factors. The social factors included current levels of use in designated wilderness in the Northern Region, national and local trends in outdoor activities, and population statistics. Ecological factors included representative-ness of vegetative cover types and ecological sections, fisheries, and wildlife. A copy of the Northern Region Wilderness Needs Assessment is attached as Appendix A.

Since the regional needs assessment covers a large and diverse area, it could not address individual IRA's. The two Forest Recreation and Wilderness Program Managers met in December 2004 to apply the regional needs assessment to the 85 IRAs in the KIPZ. The assessment was broken down into six questions and each IRA rated high, moderate, or low. Maps created for the regional assessment were available and used to determine the significance of the resource being addressed by each question to every individual IRA. Table IRA-5 shows the six questions and the rating criteria used to determine need.

Diversity within KIPZ and application of the broad regional needs assessment required that ratings be established for individual IRA's, for individual forests, for portions of a forest, or for the zone. Ratings for questions 1 and 2 were determined for each IRA based on the presence or absence of the species being addressed. Question 3 was split based on whether the IRA was located adjacent to an existing wilderness boundary or located near another IRA. A rating was determined for either 3a or 3b, but not both. A rating for Question 4 was determined for the entire forest or section of forest. It was split for the Idaho Panhandle between the north and south halves but only one rating was used for the Kootenai Forest. A single population center was selected for each forest from the list in the regional needs assessment for question 5. Couer d'Alene, Idaho was selected for the population center for the Idaho Panhandle Forest. Kalispell, Montana was selected as the population center for the Kootenai. For Question 6, each forest produced a map that showed the four selected under-represented plant communities that are typically available in the KIPZ. The four selected were Vegetation Response Units (VRU) 2 (ponderosa pine), 5 (western red cedar and western hemlock), and 8 (western red cedar and western hemlock – wet) and Aquatic Response Unit (ARU) types representing forest-dominated riparian areas. Other under-represented communities were not considered because they do not exist or are only found in small quantities within the IRAs.

An overall rating was then applied for the IRA based on the following parameters:

The overall rating would be high if:

- Three or more questions were rated high, or
- Two questions were rated high and at least two of the remaining four questions were rated moderate.

The overall rating would be moderate if:

- Two questions were rated high and not more than one of the remaining four questions was rated moderate, or
- One question was rated high and at least one of the remaining five was rated moderate, or
- No question was rated high but two or more were rated moderate.

The overall rating would be low if:

- Five of the questions rated low, or
- No question was rated high and no more than two were rated moderate.

Table IRA-5: AREA NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND CRITERIA

| Questions | High | Moderate | Low |
|--|--|--|--|
| 1. Areas having the presence of Westslope cutthroat, Yellowstone cutthroat, or bull trout. | Presence of 2 fish | Presence of 1 fish | None of the species present |
| 2. Presence of sensitive plant species. | Sensitive plant(s) identified in IRA are globally rare | Sensitive plants identified in IRA would benefit from wilderness designation = moderate/high Sensitive plants present in IRA = moderate/low | No sensitive plants identified in IRA. |
| 3a. Areas adjacent to existing Wilderness (larger reserved size beneficial for wildlife conservation.) | IRA is adjacent to existing Wilderness boundary | IRA adjacent but separated by corridor | Not applicable |
| 3b. IRAs could be combined to form large habitat patches. | Two or more IRAs adjacent and separated only by a narrow corridor, such as a road. | Two or more IRAs could be connected by a wildlife travel corridor. | IRA not adjacent or close to another IRA |
| 4. Ecological Sections represented in Wilderness. | Ecological Section represented by not more than 10,000 acres. | Ecological Section represented by 10,001 to 100,000 acres. | Ecological Section represented by more than 100,000 acres. |
| 5. Number of | Wilderness acres of | Wilderness acres of | Wilderness acres of |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| Wilderness acres within 100 miles of Kalispell or Couer d'Alene. | approximately 100,000 acres. | approximately 500,000 acres. | approximately 1,000,000 acres. |
| 6. Under-represented plant communities. | VRU 2, 5, or 8 and ARU forest-dominated riparian covers more than 2/3 of the IRA. | VRU 2, 5, or 8 and ARU forest-dominated riparian covers 1/3 to 2/3 of the IRA. | VRU 2, 5, or 8 and ARU forest-dominated riparian covers less than 1/3 of the IRA. |
| | | | |

Table IRA-6 shows the ratings and overall ratings for the IRAs.

Add the table.

DETERMINATION OF SUITABILITY AND PROPOSAL

Each individual IRA received a rating from the three tests of capability, availability, and need as described above. To be determined suitable for wilderness designation, the three ratings must indicate the IRA has an inherent wilderness quality. In addition to the three ratings, the area must provide opportunities and experiences that are dependent upon and enhanced by a wilderness environment. The size and shape of the area and the area boundaries must allow the area to be managed as wilderness. Suitability must also consider adjacent land, whether public or private, so that the entire national forest can be managed in accordance to public laws, including the protection and management of a variety of resources, both inside and outside the IRA.

The evaluation process described in FSH 1909.12, Chapter 72 is to determine the mix of land and resource uses that best meet public needs. This process may recommend management of an IRA through a theme different than proposed wilderness designation. Some management themes provide protection of existing wilderness characteristics while providing for resource management that is not compatible with a wilderness management theme. IRAs determined not to be suitable for wilderness designation will be evaluated for management under one of the other themes.

The three ratings of capability, availability, and needs provided the beginning determination of suitability. Other considerations such as size and shape, wilderness opportunities, and the ability to manage the area as wilderness were then applied. For areas determined to be suitable, proposed wilderness boundaries were mapped that supported wilderness management of the included land while providing protection of other resources and public safety.

An IRA's inherent wilderness quality could be demonstrated if the capability rating was high or moderate/high. Availability and need for wilderness designation could be demonstrated if at least one of these ratings was high and the other moderate or high. A rating of low for any of the three tests indicated the IRA did not meet the suitability determination. Applying the other considerations either confirmed or modified the beginning determination and completed the suitability determination for each IRA.

Determination of suitability included the Forest Supervisor, District Rangers, Forest Staff Officer, and Forest Wilderness Program Manager.

Parameters for mapping proposed wilderness for those IRAs determine to be suitable are, in order of priority:

1. Boundaries must be identifiable on the ground. Major ridges and roads provide the best topography or human development feature that can identify a boundary. Minor or broad ridges are often hard to identify on the ground and should not be used. Major creeks or rivers are suitable for boundaries but small creeks should not be used. Contour lines are difficult to locate even with the proper equipment

and generally will not be used except for short distances. Meandering lines are impossible to locate and may not be used.

Points and connecting straight lines using the Global Position System (GPS) may provide adequate boundary identification in the near future. Small handheld GPS units can locate boundaries to within a few feet. This system was allowed when other, better boundary locations did not exist.

2. Boundaries must allow for wildfire protection by providing a wildland fire interface zone near private property, along state and federal highways and county roads and along major utility corridors. The boundary was to be at least ½ mile from these features. Shorter distances were allowed in cases where management of private property was not conducive for human occupancy, such as high elevation corporation timber lands, where existing proclaimed wilderness boundary abuts against private land, or where remoteness of the area allowed for a shorter interface zone. These boundaries may not correlate to the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) boundaries developed under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003. It is possible to have proposed wilderness boundaries inside a WUI boundary.
3. Boundaries must allow for maintenance of existing roads. The boundary was set 300 feet (horizontal distance) on either side of the road centerline to provide adequate area to maintain clearing limits, provide fuel breaks, handle slumps and slides, maintain water drainage structures, and allow for improvements necessary for safe travel. Along major arterial roads where traffic is normally heavy and the road provides the main access to the national forest, the distance was increased to ¼ mile.
4. Boundaries could allow motorized travel corridors through the proposed wilderness area. When two or more IRAs were separated by an open road, the IRAs could be proposed as a single wilderness but a 600 foot (300 foot either side of the road) motorized travel corridor could be maintained.
5. Old harvest units and the access roads could be included within the proposed wilderness boundary provided the evaluation process indicated wilderness management was the highest resource value for the treated lands, adequate mitigating measures had been taken to reduce erosion and other watershed issues on the access roads, and the inclusion of the treated lands eliminated intrusion corridors within the proposed wilderness.

Boundary mapping was completed in April 2005.

IRAs proposed for wilderness designation and the recommended boundaries are shown in the Forest Plan Revision documents and on the accompanying maps.