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Idaho City Ranger District Recreation Events Project

Proposed Action Report

Boise National Forest
Boise County, Idaho



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Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit such comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR 215. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request that a submission be withheld from public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that such confidentiality is granted in only very limited circumstances. The Forest Service will inform the requester of its decision regarding a request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the submission will be returned and the requester notified that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address.

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Where is this project in the Forest Service Planning Process?

The Forest Service decision-making process provides the opportunity for interested parties to give their ideas and opinions about management proposals. This input is important in helping the Forest Service identify resource needs, which will shape the alternatives evaluated and lead to a final decision. The following explains the basic steps of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) planning process, and where the attached proposal is in that process.

☒ **Step 1 – Need for the project.** The Forest Service or some other entity may identify the need for a project. YOU may bring the need for a project to the attention of the Forest Service.

☒ **Step 2 – Develop project proposal.** The Forest Service or a project proponent develops a detailed, site-specific proposal. YOU may be a proponent who helps to develop a proposal or YOU can share input and ideas.



☒ **Step 3 – Public involvement.** The Forest Service solicits formal public comment on the site-specific proposal. YOU provide site-specific and timely comments on the proposed activities.

☐ **Step 4 – Environmental Analysis (EA).** The Forest Service evaluates and documents your comments, identifies issues and reasonable alternatives, and completes analysis of environmental effects for each alternative in an EA.

☐ **Step 5 – Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and Decision.** The responsible official issues a FONSI on an alternative course of action and approves the selected alternative in a Decision Notice.

☐ **Step 6 – Appeal (36 CFR 215).** The Forest Service allows the public 45 days following a legal notice of decision to file an appeal. YOU can review the Forest Service decision. YOU can appeal the decision if you submitted comments during the formal public comment period.

☐ **Step 7 – Implementation.** The Forest Service implements the project following the decision.

☐ **Step 8 – Monitor and Evaluate.** The Forest Service monitors project implementation. YOU provide feedback on the project to the Forest Service.

Introduction

The Idaho City Ranger District (District) is proposing the permitting of commercial and non-commercial recreation events, including large group camping and road and trail recreation activities. The proposal also includes installation of eight permanent stream crossing structures on the designated trail system. Camping events for scouting organizations, adventure groups, military factions, and others would be permitted in locations having existing ground disturbance. Road and trail events would be permitted on a specified system of designated National Forest System roads and trails and could include motorcycle, horse, mountain biking, running, handcart, and other similar road and trail activities that are of short duration (up to 3 day events) and high intensity. This would include commercial events of any size and non-commercial events involving more than 75 people. Applications for individual recreation event special use permits would be evaluated against screening questions before an application is accepted. This assessment would cover permits meeting the proposed criteria for up to a five year period.

This project complies with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA, 36 CFR Part 220) and NEPA-implementing regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ, 40 CFR 1500-1508), the National Forest Management Act (36 CFR Part 219), the 2003 Boise National Forest Land and Resources Management Plan, as amended (Forest Plan), and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations.

Project Location

The proposed Idaho City Ranger District Recreation Events Project is located northeast of Boise, Idaho on the Idaho City Ranger District in Boise County. The project area encompasses approximately 141,442 acres of land around the Idaho City area. The project area includes a mix of National Forest System (NFS) lands, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands, state lands, and privately owned lands (see Proposed Action Map).

Purpose and Need for the Project

The Forest Service manages more than 72,000 permits, leases, and easements that authorize more than 180 types of special uses on National Forest System (NFS) lands. Some of the more common types of special use permits are communication facilities, road rights-of-way, telephone, power and fiber optic lines, resorts, ski areas, outfitting and guiding activities, and recreation residences. The Forest Service annually process applications and issues authorizations for thousands of new or recurring special uses. Included in this mix are special uses that authorize recreation events.

The Idaho City Ranger District is traditionally a popular choice for proponents seeking locations for organized summer recreation events. The cooler summer temperatures, forested setting, varied terrain, and proximity to the greater Boise, Idaho metropolitan area provide an ideal location for recreation enthusiasts. The selected project area is used almost exclusively for motorized events due to the easy accessibility to Idaho City, the moderate topography imparted by past mining, and the extensive road and trail systems historically open to motorized use.

For the past 28 years Boise Ridge Runners (BRR) has been submitting an annual application to conduct a portion of the Idaho City 100 Motorcycle Endurance Event (Enduro) on NFS roads and trails around Idaho City, Idaho. The event involves approximately 300 participants in a two day motorcycle challenge that is sanctioned as a national qualifier for selection of riders to represent the United States in the international motorcycle enduro competition. Each year, an approximate 100 mile course traverses Boise National Forest, Idaho Department of Lands, and privately owned properties.

The Idaho City Ranger District receives similar interest for road and trail activities such as other motorized vehicles, horse, mountain bike, running, and handcarts; and group camping events sponsored by military, adventure, and scouting -type groups. Each of these recreation events necessitates environmental analysis required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) before the event can be authorized.

The District's motorized trails were designated in 2009 through the Idaho City Ranger District Motorized Wheeled Vehicle Travel Management Project decision that addressed Forest Plan compliance with the Travel Management Rule (36 CFR 212.51). Prior to the 2009 decision, off-highway vehicle cross country travel in "E" management areas was permitted on existing unauthorized routes. Based on the 2009 analysis, it was estimated that 200 to 300 miles of unauthorized routes existed in those "E" management areas. Historic recreation events on the District (prior to 2009) primarily occurred in the proposed project area within "E" areas, and thus were permitted to use unauthorized routes for the events.

Within the project area, there is an extensive authorized road system that includes NFS roads as well as state, county, privately owned, and other roads authorized by the Forest Service on NFS lands. There are approximately 357 miles of authorized roads within the project area. The existing authorized trail system in the project area consists of approximately 180 miles of motorized trails, including trails open to vehicles less than 50 inches in width, and motorcycle only trails. There are no designated non-motorized trails in the project area.

The following project objectives respond to Forest Plan objectives, which reflect the desired condition for the project.

1. Effectively respond to demonstrated needs and demand for commercial and non-commercial recreation events (FP Goals REGO02, REGO05; FP Objectives REOB11, REOB07)
2. Meet established Forest Plan standards and provide consistency in permit administration (FP Goals REGO02)
3. Mitigate degrading effects to natural resources (FP Goal REGO04; FP Objectives FROB04, FROB12, REOB01)
4. Mitigate conflicts with other uses and resources (FP Goals REGO03, REGO05; FP Objectives REOB07)
5. Increase cost effectiveness and efficiency in permit administration (FP Goal REGO02; FP Objectives REOB11, REOB07)
6. Provide economic support to local communities (FP Objective REOB11)

Idaho City Ranger District staff process between three and seven recreation event permits every year. The majority of the recreation and camping event applications requested are for the same general area around Idaho City. Many of the applications processed are annual events, requiring

NEPA analysis each year. The needed analysis requires that an interdisciplinary team of resource managers analyze event activities in regard to hydrology, soils, fisheries, wildlife, botany, recreation, and other resources.

The opportunity exists to complete one NEPA analysis to cover similar events utilizing the same areas, roads, and trails. This analysis would provide consistent recreation event standards that meet Forest Plan direction and objectives, and increase cost effectiveness and efficiency in permit administration.

Proposed Action

Development of the proposed action began with the initiation of environmental analysis following the screening and acceptance of a proposal for the 2012 Idaho City 100 Motorcycle Enduro Event. Forest staff recognized the opportunity to improve efficiency in analyzing and permitting future Enduro events, and to incorporate analysis for permitting similar future recreation event activities. Resource managers reviewed existing conditions, considered desired conditions, and identified strategies to bridge the two. The following proposed action is the result of the inter-disciplinary planning effort, and is designed to meet public needs, and address resource concerns and Forest Plan goals and objectives.

- Permit commercial and non-commercial concentrated group camping events for scouting, military, outdoor education, adventure, and other groups and organizations. Group camping areas would be designated in locations having existing ground disturbance.
- Permit commercial and non-commercial, short-duration, high-intensity road and trail special use recreation events, including but not limited to motorcycle, ATV, horse, mountain bike, running, and hand cart events. Activities would be permitted on 537 miles of specified, designated NFS roads and motorized trails. (see Proposed Action Map)
 - Events would be considered for occurrence during seasonal closures by individual permit. No permanent change to the seasonal closures for the Boise National Forest Motor Vehicle Use Map is proposed.
 - Authorize 8 designated fueling areas for motorized events
 - Authorize permittees to conduct pre- and post-event trail maintenance
 - No new routes (roads or trails) would be constructed or approved
- Install permanent stream crossing structures on the following designated motorized trails. High use events would be required to place temporary structures at the water crossings until project funding becomes available to install permanent stream crossing structures.
 - #578 - 1 Bridge
 - #579 - 2 Bridges
 - #584 - 1 Bridge
 - #585 - 1 Bridge
 - #683 - 1 Bridge
 - #684 - 1 Bridge
 - #669 - 1 Bridge

Forest Plan Compliance

Management Direction

Boise National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan

Management direction for the project area is provided in the 2003 Boise National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended in 2010, (Forest Plan). Chapter III of the Forest Plan describes management direction to guide forest personnel to achieve desired outcomes and conditions for both land stewardship and public service. This direction is presented as Forest-wide management direction and management area description and direction. The Forest-wide management direction provides general direction for all Forest resources and the foundation for more specific direction at the management area level. The management area description and direction describes these areas in detail, highlights resource areas of importance or concern, and prescribes specific management direction to address these concerns. Activities within the various management areas are further directed by management prescription categories (MPCs). MPCs are broad categories of management prescriptions that indicate the general emphasis and intensity of management practices prescribed for a given area.

The project area incorporates the following Forest Plan MAs and MPCs:

- MA 03 – Arrowrock Reservoir (Forest Plan p. III-120 – III-131)
 - MPC 3.1 – Active Restoration and Maintenance of Aquatic, Terrestrial, and Hydrologic Resources
- MA 04 -- Boise Front Bogus Basin (Forest Plan p. III-132 – III-143)
 - MPC 3.1 – Active Restoration and Maintenance of Aquatic, Terrestrial, and Hydrologic Resources
- MA 07 -- North Fork Boise River (Forest Plan p. III-166 – III-177)
 - MPC 3.1 – Active Restoration and Maintenance of Aquatic, Terrestrial, and Hydrologic Resources
- MA 08 -- Mores Creek (Forest Plan p. III-178 – III-191)
 - MPC 2.4 – Boise Basin Experimental Forest
 - MPC 3.1 – Active Restoration and Maintenance of Aquatic, Terrestrial, and Hydrologic Resources
 - MPC 5.1 – Restoration and Maintenance Emphasis within Forested Landscapes

The Idaho City Ranger District Recreation Events Project proposal is designed to move the Forest toward the desired condition described in the Forest Plan. It responds to Forest Plan goals and objectives and is consistent with MA and MPC direction.

The Recreation Events Project also incorporates the Idaho City Motorized Wheeled Vehicle Travel Management Project decision (2009). This decision designated motorized wheeled vehicle use on Forest roads and trails, and off road use for access to dispersed campsites.

Design Features and Monitoring

Forest Plan standards and guidelines apply to all projects implemented on NFS lands. Additional site specific project design features are incorporated into the project proposal to mitigate or reduce adverse impacts and achieve desired outcomes. These measures are guided by direction in the Forest Plan, project-specific objectives, and concerns identified by resource specialists and public comments. Design features specific to the Idaho City Ranger District Recreation Events Project and incorporated into the proposed action include the following:

DF-1: Roads and trails authorized for use in the permitted event will be restored to pre-event conditions by the permittee. The post-event maintenance will decrease the potential for accelerated surface erosion and sediment delivery to nearby streams and provide for a sustainable route system under normal use levels.

DF-2: Temporary bridges will be installed at perennial stream crossing where no bridge or culvert exists.

DF-3: To minimize detrimental soil disturbance and decrease the potential for the spread of invasive species and noxious weeds, group camping areas for authorized events will be designated through the permit process.

DF-4: If existing or newly discovered rare plant populations that may be impacted by permitted activities are identified, additional mitigation measures will be developed by the Forest Service in order to protect the plants and supporting habitat.

DF-5: Pre-event resource damage protection measures and post-event mitigation activities will be implemented so as not to disturb existing vegetation.

DF-6: Potentially ecologically vulnerable points (RCAs, low points, steep slopes or any areas that would otherwise be subjected to long-term or irreparable resource damage relative to the permitted event) will be identified in the analysis process and necessary mitigations will be developed and implemented as part of pre-event planning.

DF-7: Plant materials for post-disturbance restoration activities will be selected or reviewed by the Forest or District Botanist to ensure that additional undesirable species are not introduced into the project area. (Boise NF LMP 2003-2010 Integration, Botanical Resources, III-36, BTST05).

DF-8: Information/educational materials on preventing the introduction/spread of weeds should be incorporated into the permit package. Guidelines are documented in "USDA Forest Service Guide to Noxious Weed Prevention Practices" (2001) and management direction from the Forest Plan (Boise NF LMP 2003-2010 Integration, Non-Native Plants, III-37-39).

DF-9: For permitted events, in order to prevent the spread of noxious weeds, only certified weed free hay, straw or certified forage cubes are allowed on National Forest System lands. Each individual bale or container must be tagged or marked as weed free, or have original and current evidence of weed free certification documentation present. All markings must meet the State and/or County standards for certification as weed free. USDA FS, Intermountain Region Order Number: 04-00-097

DF-10: For permitted events, stock animals (hooves, coat) and vehicles associated with permitted activity must be free of soil, seeds, vegetative matter, or other debris that could contain or hold weed seeds/propagules when entering onto National Forest System lands.

DF-11: All fueling will be completed in a fuel containment area. A fuel spill kit will be onsite.

DF-12: All people transporting hazardous materials should have hazard communication standards training and be familiar with the material safety data sheets.

DF-13: Coordinate with North Zone Range Specialist to determine the potential for conflicts between proposed events/event participants and permitted livestock grazing activities. Permitted livestock grazing activities that could be impacted include the trailing of sheep bands that intersect proposed event road and trail routes and the use of gathering and shipping facilities located in the Project Area within the time frames of the proposed event activities. Potential impacts to grazing activities include disturbances to sheep bands by event activities and adverse interactions between event participants and herding dogs associated with the sheep bands. Adverse interaction between event and event participants and gathering and shipping activities is also of concern. If potential conflicts are identified, work with the North Zone Range Specialist, livestock permittee, Recreation Specialists, and the event SUP proponent to identify alternatives to alleviate the conflict. Where potential conflicts cannot be mitigated or resolved, priority will go to the livestock grazing permit.

DF-14: Flammable/combustible liquids shall be carried in approved safety containers as defended by DOT. Such containers shall comply with the following requirements:

- Department of Transportation approved
- Clearly labeled to identify contents
- No more than 90 percent full
- Free from leaks or other damage
- Treated as dangerous even when empty
- Positioned upright and secured from movement

DF-15: An approved sanitation plan will be required for any overnight event held on National Forest System lands or events that have areas of high impact use. The permittee would be responsible for sanitation facility rental and proper disposal of all waste.

DF-16: In accordance with the record of consultation between the Forest Service and Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), designated routes will be inventoried for historic properties. Should adverse effects or the potential for adverse effects be identified to historic properties on those routes, the Forest Service will consult with SHPO on measures to resolve those effects. These measures may include removal of the designated route for use (see Idaho City Ranger District (ICRD) Motorized Wheeled Vehicle Travel Management: Report# BS-09-2528).

How You can Participate

This is your opportunity to provide meaning participation on the Idaho City Ranger District Recreation Events Project proposal before a decision is made by the Responsible Official. Additional information regarding this action can be obtained from the Recreation Planner, Megan Impson, at P.O. Box 129, Idaho City, Idaho 83631, or by calling (208) 392-3733.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) is being prepared and is expected to be completed in March 2012. The EA will be available on the forest web site or by request.

How to Comment and Timeframe

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of the legal notice of opportunity to comment on the proposed action in the Idaho Statesman. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this analysis. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period.

Written comments must be submitted to: Ruth Esperance, District Ranger, Idaho City Ranger District, P.O. Box 129, Idaho City, Idaho 83631; or facsimiles sent to 208- 392-6684. Hand-deliver comments to Hwy 21, Milepost 38.5, Idaho City, Idaho. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours via telephone 208-392-6681, or in person, or at an official agency function (i.e. public meeting) that is designed to elicit public comments. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to comments-intermtn-boise-idaho-city@fs.fed.us. Comments must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification.

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Only those provide comments or otherwise express interest during this comment period will have eligibility to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR 215. Each individual or representative from each organization that provides comment or otherwise expresses interest in the project must either sign the comments or otherwise verify identity in order to attain appeal eligibility.

I look forward to your contribution to this project.



Megan Impson

For

RUTH ESPERANCE
District Ranger