

Bitterroot Quiet Use Coalition Travel Management Citizens' Alternative

Bitterroot Quiet Use Coalition: Who We Are

The Bitterroot Quiet Use Coalition represents hundreds of Bitterrooters who hunt and fish, enjoy recreational stock use, backpack, camp, hike, and generally enjoy the Outdoors. The Coalition includes the Selway-Pintler Backcountry Horsemen, the Montana Wilderness Association, Friends of the Bitterroot, Sierra Club and Wildlands CPR as well as members of the Burnt Ridge Homeowners Association.

Why We Care

The Bitterroot Quiet Use Coalition (BQUC) formed to protect our quiet, natural places from the continued expansion of off-road vehicle impacts in the valley. BQUC believes that everyone can enjoy the Bitterroot National Forest through responsible recreation, but that no one has the right to abuse it or ruin other people's experiences.

Impacts from off-road vehicles are well documented and include trail erosion, the spread of weeds, increased stress to elk and other wildlife, as well as damage to fisheries and watersheds. In addition, off road vehicle use displaces quiet recreationists.

In recent years, we have seen an increase in illegal and damaging off-road vehicle use. The Forest Service is unable to prevent some of the damage and conflicts due to a lack of adequate law enforcement and the spread of user-created routes. However, many of the impacts can be prevented if designated routes are well-planned and adequately monitored.

Currently, a system of poorly maintained roads and trails creates problems for people and wildlife. BQUC believes in keeping a properly maintained system of roads for motorized use and preserving traditional and historic trails for quiet uses. This will reduce conflicts, improve watersheds and fisheries, and increase opportunities to view and hunt wildlife. We believe roads are for motors, and trails are for quiet users.

What's at Stake

The Bitterroot National Forest has begun a process where they will officially designate roads and trails for all types of motorized recreation. For those of us that seek out peace and quiet in our forests, this is the time to speak out for our favorite places if we wish to protect them from off-road vehicle impacts. Even more, though the ecological impacts from off-road vehicles have been known for years, the Forest Service still allows these machines in wilderness study areas and roadless areas. In fact, there are few protections from motorized use in these special places, and we could lose our chance to protect them in the future if the current use is allowed to continue and grow.

OUR VISION

The Bitterroot Quiet Use Coalition envisions a day when our roadless lands, wilderness study areas and backyards are protected from motorized use.

- We envision motorized recreation on roads where they cause less damage to our streams and wildlife or disturb our neighbors.
- We envision quiet recreation opportunities close to home where the din of motors does not ruin the peace and solitude many of us seek.
- We envision protecting critical wildlife habitat from off-road vehicle impacts for our hunting and fishing heritage.
- We envision a properly maintained road and trail system with adequate monitoring and law enforcement.

In short, the Bitterroot Quiet Use Coalition supports proper management of off-road vehicle use and non-motorized recreation in a manner that protects forest resources, promotes safety, and minimizes conflicts among the various multiple-uses on the Bitterroot National Forest.

In order to realize this Vision, we have put forth a number of recommendations to the Forest Service to develop as an official alternative:

- Secure our Roadless and Wilderness Study Areas for quiet recreation and wildlife habitat.
- Identify the minimum road system necessary to meet forest resource needs and opportunities to decommission the excess roads.
- Properly evaluate the year-round impacts of motorized travel on existing roads, trails, and areas with the goal of minimizing conflicts among people and forest resources.
- Designate off-road vehicles use in a manner that can ensure adequate monitoring, enforcement and maintenance.

Roadless and Wilderness Study Areas

The Bitterroot National Forest has nine roadless areas and two Montana Wilderness Study Areas (see table 1). Currently all are available for motorized route designation with limited or no restrictions. The Bitterroot Quiet Use Coalition encourages the Forest Service to protect trails in all these areas from motorized use, and especially in six high priority areas.

BLUE JOINT WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

The Blue Joint Wilderness Study Area, located about 25 miles south of Darby along Montana's western border, is adjacent to the Frank-Church River of No Return Wilderness in Idaho. At over

65,000 acres, special features include Castle Rock (the remnant of a volcanic plug), and a natural rock arch, east of the confluence of Jack the Ripper and Blue Joint Creeks. Parts of the Southern Nez Perce Indian Trail traverse the Montana/Idaho ridge, and Bare Cone Lookout in the northern portion of the area. Unfortunately, the Bitterroot National Forest plans to keep a significant portion of this area open to motorized use which will reduce its potential for Wilderness designation.

SAPPHIRE WILDERNESS STUDY AREA

The Sapphires Wilderness Study Area is a key link in the chain of wild lands stretching from the Welcome Creek Wilderness along the Sapphires Crest to the lofty Anaconda-Pintlers and south to the Big Hole Valley. The southern Sapphire Range and Anaconda-Pintlers are the fourth largest contiguous wild land region in Montana, comprising over 350,000 wild acres. Maintaining the integrity of this wild region is one of our primary goals.

Sixty percent of the roadless area is above 7,000 feet in altitude. Prominent landmarks include Bare Hill, Kent, and Congdon Peaks, Signal Rock and Rooster Comb. Elevations range from 5,000 feet at some points along the lower boundary, to 9,000 feet at Kent Peak. The Sapphire Mountain Crest divides the area into nearly equal parts. Drainages flowing to the east are Copper Creek, the Ross Fork, and the West Fork of Rock Creek which is a nationally known Blue Ribbon trout fishery. Moose, Martin, and Skalkaho Creeks flow to the west and are tributaries of the Bitterroot River.

The Bitterroot National Forest plans to designate a major four-wheel ORV route on trail #39 connecting to trail #313 which ends at the Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness. Protecting these trails is one of our highest priorities.

ALAN MOUNTAIN

The Alan Mountain Roadless Area provides a critical wildland biological corridor link between the Continental Divide and the Greater Salmon Selway ecosystem wildland core habitat. Wildfires have created a mosaic of meadows and forest in the Alan Mountain IRA, which provides diverse habitat for elk and other wildlife. Over 160 miles of trails provide recreational opportunities for hikers and horseback riders. However, if the Bitterroot National Forest designates these trails for off-road vehicles allowing continued use to increase, its future of providing these opportunities is questionable. Currently, the agency plans to keep nearly all the trails open to motorized use which would not only ruin hiking and horseback riding but also sever the wildlife corridor.

SLEEPING CHILD

The Sleeping Child IRA is roughly a 21,400 acre wildland gem surrounded by roads and clearcuts. As such it provides much needed habitat for elk, moose, black bear, mule deer, grouse and pine marten. Only 15 miles from town, it also serves as Hamilton's backyard wildland quiet recreation area where a person can go for a peaceful hike after a day of work. The area is also gaining popularity for skilled mountain bikers. However, it is also another area dominated by

off-road vehicles and will stay that way if the Bitterroot National Forest moves ahead with its proposed travel plan.

STONY MOUNTIAN

The Stony Mountain roadless area is located on the Bitterroot, Lolo, and Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forests, approximately 50 miles southeast of Missoula, in the Sapphire Mountains. The Sapphire Wilderness Study Act area, across Skalkaho Pass Road, is adjacent to the south, providing continuity along the Sapphire Crest, which provides an important biological corridor for wildlife. In addition, some of the best and most extensive elk summer habitat on the Bitterroot National Forest occurs in the upper Daly Creek/Burnt Fork Basin.

The Divide and several ridges are at an elevation of about 8,000 feet with some prominent landmarks including Domed-Shaped, Eagle Point, Skalkaho and Palisade Mountains, along with Stony, and Little Burnt Fork Lakes. Major drainage includes the headwaters of the Burnt Fork Bitterroot River and practically the entire length of Stony, Lyman, Hutsinpillar Creeks (tributaries of Rock Creek, a blue ribbon trout stream).

The Bitterroot National Forest proposed travel plan protects most of the northern portion of Stony Mountain from motorized use, but in the southern area it permits motorized use on the Palisade National Recreation Trail (#44 and #86), which connects with the Easthouse National Recreation Trail (#313).

SELWAY-BITTERROOT

Bordering the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness are roughly 115,000 acres of roadless lands that contain numerous trails leading into the heart of the Wilderness area. Famous trails like Trapper Peak Tr., St. Mary's Peak Tr. and Ward Mt. are but a few of the great recreational opportunities found in the area. Many of these trails receive little motorized use and the Bitterroot National Forest, under its current travel plan proposal, will protect a majority of them. Still the remaining few need our attention if we are to prevent obstacles to law enforcement and gain the level of protection the rest of the area enjoys.

Table 1: Wilderness Study and Roadless Areas: Unprotected Trails in the Current Bitterroot National Forest Travel Plan Proposal

IRA/WSA	Total Acres* (Bitterroot NF acres)**	Unprotected Summer Trails	Unprotected Winter Trails
Allen Mt.	153,267 (102,300)	55, 56, 103, 177, 178, 181, 182, 184, 205, 248, 400, 601, 606, 650, 674, 675, 676, tr-ohv-40, tr-ohv-64	55, 95, 103, 177, 178, 182, 184, 205, 218, 248, 400, 404, 601, 606, 650, 673, 674, 675, 676
Blue Joint WSA	65,860 (65,400)	106, 138, 139, 223, 602	106, 138, 139, 223, 602
Lolo Creek	587	N/A***	NA***
Needle Creek	1,100	Protected	Protected
North Big Hole	3,700	171, 172	171, 172
Sapphire WSA	116,530 (44,100)	39, 40, 83, 87, 102, 168, 313.5, 313.6, 332, 503	39, 40, 77, 83, 87, 102, 156, 168, 313, 332, 503
Selway-Bitterroot	115,100	208, 125	135 to Nelson Lk., 208 to Ward Mt. 82 along Sheafman Cr.
Sleeping Child	21,400	84, 105, 159, 160, 161, 500,	84, 105, 159, 160, 161, 500, 504
Stony Mt	103,266 (43,700)	44, 86 National Recreation Trails	44, 86 National Recreation Trails
Swift Creek	700	170	Protected
Tolan Creek	7,100	78, 175,	78, 175, 203
Totals	588,633 (405,187)	49	53

* These are the total acres that include ownership from across forest boundaries as identified in the 1986 Bitterroot Forest Plan FEIS

**These approximate acres are from the 2006 Bitterroot Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation report, and represent what the agency recognizes for official inventoried roadless areas.

*** The majority of this IRA is on the Lolo NF and no trails are in the Bitterroot Nation Forest's portion.