

Ravalli County Off Road User Association

www.ravallioffroad.org

JUNE 2016

Calendar of 2016 Upcoming events:

NOTICE: THE BOARD MEETINGS WILL BE THE 1ST MONDAY OF THE MONTH AND THE GENERAL MEETINGS WILL BE THE 2ND MONDAY OF THE MONTH, all meetings to be held at the BRR Groomer Shed, 663 Grantsdale Road Hamilton.

2016 MEMBERSHIP DUES CAN BE PAID ANYTIME, get yours in early!

June 6th Board Meeting

June 13th General Meeting: Lisa has arranged a Life Flight Representative to give us info on the membership program they have. Also Dan will give us updates on the Darby Lumber Project (contracts signed and work starting soon), Overwhich (contract signed and Trail Maintenance starting mid July) and "The Quiet Use Plan", oh, I think the Forest Service calls it a "Travel Plan".

June 25th Veteran's & Fun Ride: If you would like to help contact Brent Nelson 821-4844. Brent is still looking for Sponsors to provide a machine & accompany the Military / Veterans riders. **Please RSVP to Brett or Marsha 363-2292 if you plan on participating, so we can have enough supplies on hand.**

July 29-30 Salmon Ride: Hosted by Don Miller along with the WMTR (Missoula ATV Club).

July ? Board Meeting

July 11th General Meeting: Lisa is looking for a speaker-- if you know of someone or a topic that might interest the membership-- give Lisa a call

Several of our members are going thru a rough time, chemo or other treatments, our thoughts and prayers are with them and their families.

Veteran Ride / Fun Run Update:

Brent has several Military or Veterans signed up for the ride, more would like to go but need a sponsor, if you have a side by side or an extra machine call Brent 821-4844

Please RSVP if you plan on attending the ride and potluck, Riblets and Hot Dogs are on the menu and some of the members have signed up to bring side dishes, Marsha (363-2292) has the sign up sheet - it will be available at the June 13th meeting.

Correction: The mileage is wrong on the flyer (page 7 of last months newsletter): the correct mileage approximately 14.2 miles from Highway 93 turnoff. Signs will be placed along the route!

Rae Ann Doll has placed jars around town to help Effie Kemp with a kidney transplant. If you would like to help give Rae Ann a call 360-2299.

WHERE DID ALL THOSE TRAILS GO?

by Dan Thompson

Long, long ago when we were all much younger, the Bitterroot National Forest initiated their Travel Management Plan. Those of us who still retain some fragment of our memory of this event will recall being contacted by the Forest Service asking RCORA members to tell them where we pursue our interests in the Forest. After many late night group sessions we produced a map as requested with color-coded motorcycle and ATV routes showing the approximate locations of routes that have been historically used by RCORUA's membership. This map was delivered as requested to the Forest Service. We still have a copy of this map somewhere. Many of these routes were subsequently included, directly or indirectly, in RCORUA's Scoping comments and again in RCORUA's comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and still again in RCORUA's comments on the Draft of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). So what ever happened to these user-identified routes? For most of us, they seem to have gone into a black hole, never to be seen again. For sure, most of these routes are not shown on the maps for the FEIS.

In order to attempt to answer the often-asked question "Where did all those trails go?" I turned to Appendix L of the FEIS. This appendix lists all of the non-system roads and trails identified by public comment and BNF Districts throughout the Travel Management process. Considering only trails identified by the public, the result is shown in the following table.

	# Trails	# Miles	Mile-months
Total user identified routes (open yearlong)	134	208	2,495
Trails closed by FEIS	112	181	0
Trails open by FEIS yearlong	2	2	21.5
Trails open by FEIS seasonally	17	18	125
Trails identified by FEIS yet to be constructed	3	7	27

Altogether, 134 trails totaling 208 miles were identified by the public to the Agency as trails existing on the ground and in use. Most of these trails were identified by RCORUA through their mapping exercise and subsequent comments. Most of these trails were rejected during the Scoping process without justification. Most of the remaining trails that were considered and rejected in the DEIS were closed for a wide variety of reasons including resource and wildlife concerns, soil or water issues, user conflict, and the Agency's perceived need to provide more space for quiet users. Out of the 134 user identified trails, only 18 trails totaling 20 miles will appear on the MVUM (Motor Vehicle Use Map) maps.

The Agency has apparently digitized these user-identified trails, assigned a Route ID and description, and in every case arbitrarily labeled them as "unauthorized" routes (MVUM code -1). That means that none of these trails appear on the Existing Condition (Alternative 2) maps nor are they included in the Alternative 2 statistics. If a given user-identified trail is accepted through the process, it shows up as an addition to the trail system in the Preferred Alternative: If a given user-identified trail is rejected, it shows up as nothing; it never existed; it will be closed for use by the Travel Plan, quietly and without public awareness.

But we know – and the Agency knows – that most of the user-identified trails are currently authorized for use under the 2001 Tri-State Agreement. So they are not "unauthorized" at all. By arbitrarily listing these user-identified trails as "unauthorized" trails, the Agency has not accurately described the Existing Condition and severely compromised the FEIS analysis.

If you have any rides planned for this year and don't mind sharing the fun, you can email the information to mwaliser2292@gmail.com.

Also looking for pictures, articles or ideas of places to ride for the newsletter (send to same email before the end of the month).

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In April's issue of RCORUA's newsletter, we described how the Forest Service has planted a red herring in their Travel Plan by calling a bunch of mostly useless old logging roads "ATV trails". The net result of which was to avoid disclosing that the Bitterroot National Forest only has 30 miles of ATV trails to serve the needs of several thousand ATV visitors and to avoid justifying their decision to close half of those 30 miles by their Travel Plan.

But the "red herring" of ATV roads isn't the only hidden closure in the Travel Plan. As it turns out, the Travel Plan also contains very significant seasonal closures that are not revealed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), and those closures will be the subject of this article.

The FEIS tabulates data in basically two categories: Roads and trails that are open yearlong and those that are open seasonally. The Travel Plan also introduces two new seasons for road and trail access. One of these new seasons will close roads and trails on August 31 and reopen the route on December 2 (9 months of use) and the other will close roads and trails on August 31 and reopen the route on June 16 (2.5 months of use). Both of these closures are justified in the FEIS either to "reduce conflicts between motorized and non-motorized bow hunters" or to "reduce conflicts between rifle and bow hunters". The FEIS fails to disclose any quantitative factual information that these conflicts actually occur to any significant extent nor do they consider the impacts of these early closure dates on other visitors who might like to use the route for a longer period of time. But these changes in the season of use of roads and trails are significant. For example, if a road currently closed for rifle season is now closed from September 1 to June 15, the public has just lost 6 ½ months of access to that road. But the road is still closed "seasonally" and the change of seasons is not disclosed in the statistics presented in the FEIS.

RCORUA has conducted an analysis of the actual data presented in the FEIS 80-page Appendix I that lists all the roads and trails and seasons of closure. We converted Appendix I to an Excel spreadsheet and used the sorting and mathematical capabilities of Excel to tabulate and consolidate the data. Additionally, we have invented a new measure of access that accounts for not only how many miles are available for use, but also accounts for how many months out of the year it is available. This new parameter is called a mile-month, and simply computes how many miles are open for how many months of the year (miles X open season months). This was a tedious and intensive exercise, but -- to make a long story short -- the results are presented in the following table:

	Alternative 2 (Existing Condition) open		Alternative 1 (FEIS Preferred Alternative) open		Percent Change	
	miles	mile-months	miles	mile-months	miles	mile-months
Roads ¹	2,263	21,272	1,975	17,180	-12.7%	-19.2%
Trails ²	447	5,074	226	2,116	-49.4%	-58.3%
Total	2,710	26,346	2,201	19,296	-18.8%	-26.8%

1 Includes "OHV Roads"

2 Does not include " OHV roads". Does not include user identified trails authorized under the 2001 Tri-State Agreement

The above table demonstrates the magnitude of the reduction of motorized access that is included in the Travel Plan. The "percent change" in the above table is a measure of the amount of reduction in public access that will be implemented by the Travel Plan compared to the Existing Condition. According to this analysis, there will be a reduction of nearly 13% of public access to roads in terms of miles, but when seasonal closures are accounted for, that number climbs to about 19%. In terms of mile-months, trail access is being reduced by a whopping 58%! Over all, public access to the Bitterroot National Forest by road or trail will be reduced by about 27%, and a good deal of that reduction is the result of the Agency's systematic reduction in the season of use of roads and trails -- an impact to the public's ability to access the Forest that is not revealed in the FEIS for the Travel Plan.

An example of the impacts of these additional seasonal closures is provided by Trail 104 that extends from above Sleeping Child to the Crystal mine. This is arguably the most popular motorcycle trail in the Bitterroot National Forest. The first 2 miles of this trail lie within an area identified on the Forest map as a spring elk calving area and is closed until June 15, but the remaining 10.5 miles of the trail opens for travel on December 2. A convenient connection to an open road allows spring season motorcyclists to go around the 2-mile closure and enjoy riding the remainder of the trail. The Travel Plan proposes to close the entire trail until June 15 "for elk security" in spite of the fact that most of the trail lies outside the elk calving closure. The net impact of this arbitrary choice is to deny access to motorcycles from a sustainable trail that they have enjoyed for spring recreation for at least three decades.

The point is that seasonal closures matter, and that the impacts of these seasonal closures are not adequately revealed by the Travel Plan documentation.

Mail to Ravalli County Off-Road User Association, P.O. Box 72, Hamilton, MT 59840

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Do you want emails sent to you : **all** _____ , **only meeting notices** _____ or **none** _____ ?

Do you want the newsletter **emailed** to you (colored) _____ or a printed version **mailed** (Black & White) _____

Use the above form to renew your **2016 membership** or get your friends or family to become members. With the "Travel Plan" coming out we need all your support.

Don't forget to check how you want the newsletters and what (if any) emails.

NUMBERS DUE COUNT!

Our web site at www.ravallioffroad.org has photos, a calendar of events, ride info, the newsletters and much more. You can email your photos, ride info or other items to: kathy.transue@gmail.com Log on often to see what is happening!

Business Sponsorship is only \$100.00 per year!

A great value as it reaches hundreds of individuals each month. Your business is listed each month in the newsletter and on the web and once a year your business card or your ad (if provided with your sponsorship dues) is included in the newsletter! Please send a card to the club or email Marsha with a scanned card or colored layout at: mwaliser2292@gmail.com . If you want your web address listed in the newsletter and on our web site you can email Marsha or Kathy T. kathy.transue@gmail.com

www.ravallioffroa



Our mission is to bring together on and off highway enthusiasts to enjoy, promote and protect responsible Off Highway Vehicle Use and other recreational

A big THANK YOU goes to all the sponsors, your continued support and involvement helps the association in its effort to keep the trails open.

If you have not stopped by the Forest Service to pick up your copy of the MVUM (Motor Vehicle Use Map) I urge you to do so soon, it contains many errors and many closures of popular trails to motorized use. If you see errors you are suppose to do the Forest Service job for them and report them on the form they have available. The MVUM does not even resemble the FEIS maps of any of the options, it is more of a QUIET USE MAP as large sections of the forest are now closed to motorized or even bicycle use.

Clearly those in charge have never spent time in the Forest on the trails on a motorized vehicle as they would see first hand that motorized use does not scare the game (most of the animals do not even get up (if you stay on your machine and keep it running)) and does far less damage to the land than some of the uses that are now allowed on the former motorized trails.

Dan Thompson, Mike Jeffords, Dave Doll and a few others have spent countless hours so far going over the Record of Decision, the Final Impact Statement and the MVUM, if you have questions or comments please contact one of the above.

Good Luck finding a trail open for riding, Marsha Waliser