

Wildlands Recovery Plan for the Northern Swan Range

Swan View Coalition and Friends of the Wild Swan

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Wildlands Recovery Plan Overview

Wildlands recovery in the Swan Range north of the Bob Marshall Wilderness will be accomplished by decommissioning roads that penetrate deeply into the Swan Range and by disallowing mechanized uses of trails in the Wildlands Recovery Area.

This will restore the connectivity of currently fragmented Grizzly Bear Security Core areas and provide similar habitat security for elk and other wildlife. It will also greatly reduce the potential for targeted roads to bleed sediment into streams, a number of which are key to native fish, including Critical Habitat for threatened bull trout.

The one-time investment in decommissioning roads will also save taxpayers money by eliminating the costly maintenance of those roads in perpetuity. (Rowley 1998). The Flathead receives only about one-sixth of the funds it needs to maintain its road system. (USFS 2004). The Flathead, like all other National Forests, is currently in the process of determining which roads it can afford to keep economically and environmentally, which “points to a smaller road system.” (Holtrop 2010).

This Recovery Plan will retain road access to popular trailheads on the western slope of the Swan Range. Some roads on the eastern slope would convert to and extend trails below current trailheads to increase hiking and horseback opportunities while protecting core wildlife habitats from high levels of use.

This Recovery Plan will be submitted to the Flathead National Forest for consideration in revision of the Flathead Forest Plan. Those who endorse this Recovery Plan urge the Flathead to recommend all roadless lands be designated Wilderness, to remove all mechanized use from the Recovery Area, and to recommend the remaining portions of the Recovery Area be designated Wilderness as selected roads are decommissioned.

Wildlands Recovery Area Map

The Wildlands Recovery Area Map on page 2 shows the Recovery Area on a Google Earth base, along with Flathead National Forest overlays of Inventoried Roadless Areas, Forest Service Roads, already Decommissioned Forest Service Roads, Other Roads (State, County, Private), and Forest Service Trails both motorized and non-motorized. The Recovery Plan would restore the included roaded areas to a “roadless” condition by decommissioning selected roads, which are detailed in the Northern Swan Range Road Decommissioning Proposals spreadsheet beginning on page 9.

Wildlands Recovery Area Northern Swan Range

- Wildlands Recovery Area
- Inventoried Roadless Areas
- Forest Service Roads
- Decommissioned Forest Service Roads
- Other Roads
- Forest Service Trails

Compiled by Swan View Coalition
Using Forest Service Data
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Grizzly Bear Security Core Map

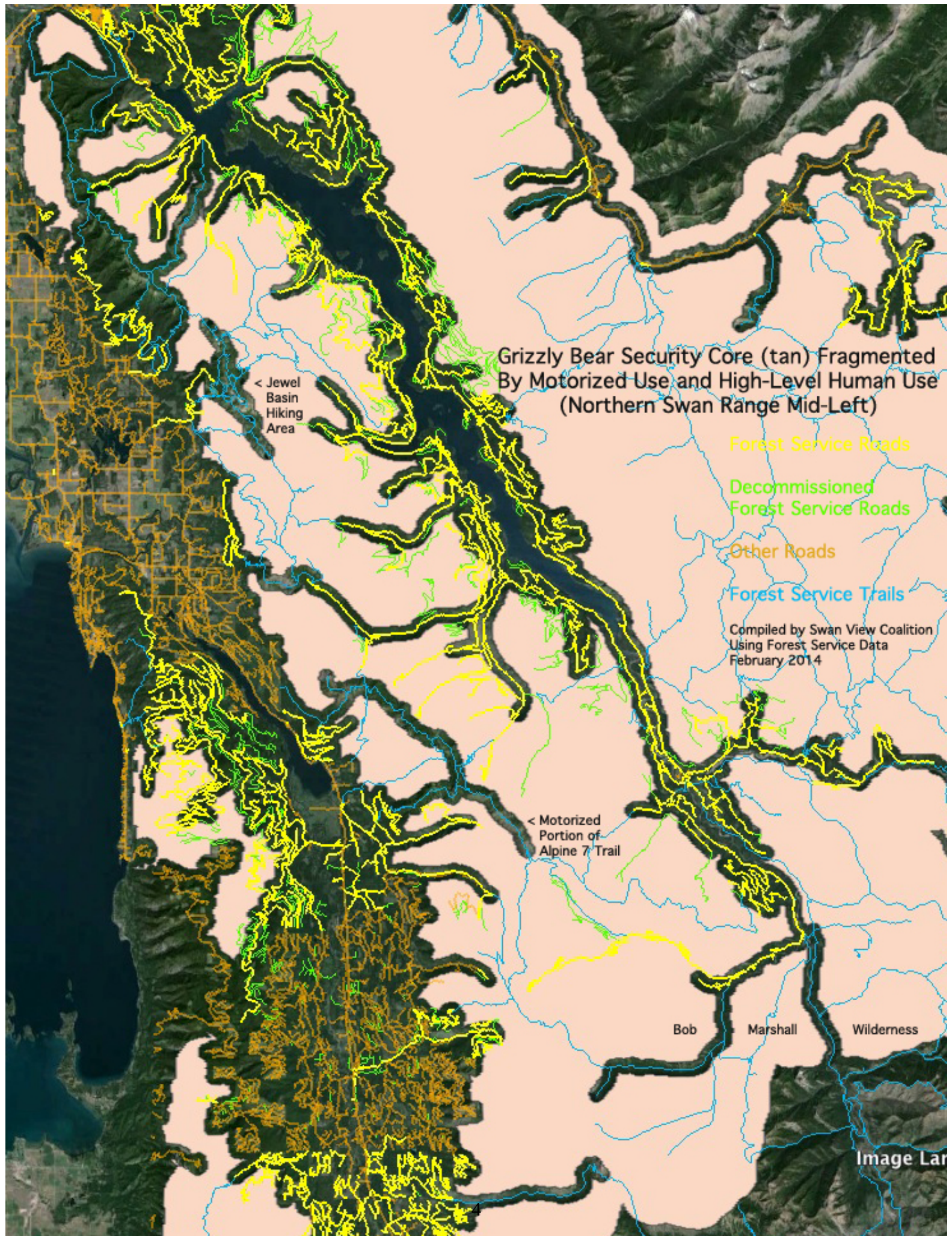
The Grizzly Bear Security Core Map on page 4 shows how Security Core habitat is currently fragmented by motorized use of roads and trails, as well as by high levels of non-motorized human use. Flathead Forest Plan Amendment 19 defines Security Core as areas at least 2500 acres in size and more than 0.3 miles from roads and trails open to motorized use or receiving 20 or greater parties of people per week not using motorized vehicles (such as hikers or horseback riders). Roads must be legally and physically closed or decommissioned to remain in Security Core and cannot simply be gated. (USFS 1995).

The Grizzly Bear Security Core Map is labeled to include three instructive examples of how Security Core is fragmented. From south to north on the map:

1. High levels of hiking, horseback riding, and river corridor use impact 0.6 mile wide corridors entering the Bob Marshall Wilderness from the Meadow Creek and Gorge Creek trailheads, disqualifying them as Security Core. (Note that Security Core is mapped only a short distance into the Bob Marshall Wilderness because most impact assessments that use Security Core occur outside Wilderness areas. Security Core continues further into the Bob Marshall than the Forest Service map overlay shows).
2. A motorized portion of Alpine 7 Trail, from Thunderbolt Mountain to Sixmile Mountain is similarly “buffered” 0.3 miles on each side and disqualified as Security Core, along with the Wire and Sixmile trails descending toward Swan Lake. In contrast, the Bond Creek and Hall Lake trails do not reduce Security Core as they descend toward Swan Lake because they are closed to motorized use.
3. Because Jewel Basin Hiking Area has easy, high-elevation road access via Camp Misery and is close to human populations, it regularly receives high levels of hiking use during the summer. Hence, the most popular parts of Jewel Basin do not serve as Security Core habitat for grizzly bear and other wildlife.

These examples help illustrate why this Recovery Plan will remove all mechanized uses within the Recovery Area and pull roads back from a number of high-elevation trailheads, primarily on the eastern slopes of the Swan Range. This in part because the South Fork Grizzly Bear Study found the northern Swan Range population of grizzly bear to be declining at over 2% per year, enough to halve the population in about 30 years, while being an important population “source” to offset the population “sink” of bears dying in the more densely developed Swan and Flathead valleys. (Mace and Waller 1997).

The goal is to restore Security Core habitats for wildlife and to restore opportunities for un-crowded, non-mechanized recreation.



Grizzly Bear Security Core (tan) Fragmented
By Motorized Use and High-Level Human Use
(Northern Swan Range Mid-Left)

< Jewel
Basin
Hiking
Area

Forest Service Roads

Decommissioned
Forest Service Roads

Other Roads

Forest Service Trails

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< Motorized
Portion of
Alpine 7 Trail

Bob

Marshall

Wilderness

Image Lar

Interactive Versions of the Maps

The maps included on pages 2 and 4 show that roads and trails can exist in Security Core, provided they are legally and physically closed to motor vehicles. Flathead Forest Plan Amendment 19, however, prefers that the roads be fully decommissioned to simultaneously protect fish and water quality through the preemptive removal of all stream-crossing culverts and bridges before they fail. (USFS 1995). Fish and Wildlife Service concurs. (USFWS 1993, 1998a and 1998b).

The maps show quite a number of roads exist in Security Core that have not been decommissioned and that culverts and bridges remain at risk of plugging, collapsing and/or “blowing out” with dire consequences to fish and water quality. Viewing these map layers on Google Earth allows one to zoom in and see where culverts and bridges have or have not been removed - and clicking on individual Forest Service Roads displays pertinent road data including which roads are receiving what levels of maintenance when such funds are available.

Toggling various map layers on and off in Google Earth also allows one to discern greater detail and access more data than viewing the static maps we have included here. To view Google Earth versions of these maps:

1. Install Google Earth on your computer if you haven't already. It's free at:

<http://www.google.com/earth/download/ge/agree.html>

2. Download the necessary Google Earth KML or KMZ map overlay files from the Flathead National Forest web site at:

http://www.fs.usda.gov/detailfull/flathead/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fsm9_042517&width=full

The files you'll need to download from the Flathead National Forest web site are: Inventoried Roadless Areas, National Forest System Roads, Other Roads, Historical (Decommissioned) Roads, Trail Routes, and Grizzly Bear Security Core Areas.

Click on the desired .kml or .kmz link in the right-hand column and it should automatically download to your computer. When you double-click on that file on your computer, it should automatically start up and display that map layer in Google Earth, while also placing that file/map layer in your Temporary Places folder. When you Quit Google Earth, select the option to save your Temporary Places if you don't want to have to rebuild all the map layers again.

3. Download our Northern Swan Wildlands Recovery Area KML map overlay file at:

http://www.swanview.org/home/articles/reports-documents/kml_files_for_use_with_google_earth/183

As above, double-click on our .kml file to load and display it in Google Earth.

Northern Swan Range Road Decommissioning Proposals

The specific roads that must be decommissioned to accomplish the Wildlands Recovery Plan are detailed in the spreadsheet beginning on page 9. Road listings begin at the north end of the Swan Range, proceed south along the eastern slopes, and return from south to north along the western slopes.

The spreadsheet provides information on such matters as whether the road is currently open to motorized use, what level of maintenance it is intended to receive when such funding is available, whether it accesses land considered suitable for scheduled logging, whether the area has burned recently, whether the area currently qualifies as Grizzly Bear Security Core habitat, whether it is in Lynx Critical Habitat, whether it is upstream from a Bull Trout Critical Habitat stream, and whether others have also recommended the road be decommissioned.

In sum, the above-mentioned columns in the spreadsheet help determine to what relative degree an area accessed by a particular road is important habitat for fish and wildlife and/or could provide commercial timber in the near future. We'll firstly describe each spreadsheet column in detail then conclude with an example of what the information can tell us.

Data for many columns are taken from .kml and .kmz files provided on the Flathead National Forest (FNF) web site via the process describe in the Interactive Maps section above, and will be so noted. Sources of other data and maps will also be noted for each column:

Road Name and Road Number: The Road Name and Number are taken from the Google Earth map layers enabled by FNF's "National Forest System Roads" .kmz file (yellow roads) or "Historical Roads" .kml file (green roads) by clicking on the road in question.

Weaver 2011: This column indicates whether Dr. John L. Weaver recommended in his April 2011 roadless area report that a given road should be decommissioned and/or similarly shows it as a recommended Wildland Restoration Zone (WRZ). Weaver's "Conservation Value of Roadless Areas for Vulnerable Fish and Wildlife Species in the Crown of the Continent Ecosystem, Montana" (Weaver 2011) can be found at: http://s3.amazonaws.com/WCSResources/file_no40-april27-condensed_FCXYK.pdf

SVC/FOWS Notes: Includes our recommendation of whether or not to decommission the road, sometimes including notes regarding our knowledge of whether the road is largely overgrown with vegetation or perhaps needed to provide continued access to other land ownership.

FNF 2013 Status: Maintenance, closure and/or decommissioning status taken from the Google Earth map layers enabled by FNF's "National Forest System Roads" .kmz file (yellow roads) or "Historical Roads" .kml file (green roads) by clicking on the road in question.

MA 2006: Management Areas the road accesses, as shown on hard-copy maps in Flathead National Forest's 2006 Proposed Land Management Plan, which was not finalized and is still being revised. (USFS 2006). Pertinent MAs are:

- MA 2.1a: Eligible or suitable for Wild and Scenic River designation.
- MA 2.2: Backcountry not suitable for regularly scheduled timber production.
- MA 3.3: General Forest Low Intensity Management not suitable for regularly scheduled timber production.
- MA 4.1: General Forest Moderate Intensity Management suitable for regularly scheduled timber production.

Modified MA 2006: Management Areas modified since 2006 and being considered in current Flathead Forest Plan Revision. Taken from the Google Earth map layer enabled by FNF's "Management Areas 2006 Modified Plan for Use in Collaboration" .kml file by clicking on the MA in question. Pertinent MA's are:

- MA 2.1a: Eligible or suitable for Wild and Scenic River designation.
- MA 2.2: Backcountry not suitable for regularly scheduled timber production.
- MA 3.3: General Forest/Mixed-Use Low Intensity not suitable for regularly scheduled timber production.
- MA 4.1a: General Forest/ Active Management Low Intensity Management suitable for regularly scheduled timber production.
- MA 4.1b: General Forest/ Active Management Moderate Intensity Management suitable for regularly scheduled timber production.

These MA's are further described in revised portions of the Modified 2006 Plan (USFS 2013), which can be found at:

https://fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5443713.pdf

Fire Year: What is the burn year of the wildfire burned area the road accesses, if any, as indicated on the Google Earth map layer enabled by FNF's "Fire History" .kml file? This data is for fires that occurred between 1980 and 2013.

Griz Core: Is the road located in Grizzly Bear Security Core, as indicated on the Google Earth map layer enabled by FNF's "Grizzly Bear Security Core Areas" .kml file? Note that this column may appear counterintuitive. "No" means the road is not currently included in Security Core, but after decommissioning would likely then be included in Security Core. "Yes" means the road is already included in Security Core, but may be only physically closed/blocked off, rather than fully decommissioned to better protect wildlife habitat, fish and water quality.

Lynx CH: Is the area accessed by the road in Lynx Critical Habitat, as depicted on the Flathead National Forest Critical Lynx Habitat map that can be found at:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/detailfull/flathead/landmanagement/planning/?cid=stelprdb5446142&width=full>

Bull Tr CH Str: Does the road access part of a watershed including or upstream from a Bull Trout Critical Habitat Stream? This information is gleaned from the Google Earth map layer enabled by FNF's "BT_FCH_Streams_2010" .kml file.

Example of Data Use

Here we provide an example of the discussion that can be informed by use of this Wildlands Recovery Plan when viewed on Google Earth. We've provided a .kml placemark to point to this example at:

http://www.swanview.org/home/articles/reports-documents/kml_files_for_use_with_google_earth/183

The Quintonkin - Sullivan Example placemark (follow the instructions given in Interactive Map, above) identifies an area in these two watersheds that was burned in the Ball Creek Fire in 2003 and subsequently salvage-logged in the 2005 West Side Reservoir Post-Fire Project. In spite of the dearth of commercial timber remaining in the area, the Flathead National Forest has recently proposed to return parts of the area to its Suitable Timber Base by modifying its 2006 Proposed Forest Plan, which would have removed the area from the Suitable Timber Base.

This can be seen by using FNF's "Management Areas 2006 Modified" .kml file map overlay, which shows large portions of MA 3.3 (not suitable for regularly scheduled timber production) being re-designated MA 4.1a (suitable for regularly scheduled timber production). We find this proposal contrary to FNF's duty to reduce its road system and be realistic about where commercial timber is likely to be available during the life of the next Forest Plan. We instead recommend that the Quintonkin, South Quintonkin, Ball, Branch, Branch Conner, North Conner, South Conner, and Sullivan Creek roads be decommissioned to protect the outstanding fish and wildlife habitats in this area. These include key habitats for grizzly bear, elk, wolverine, westslope cutthroat trout and Bull Trout Critical Habitat in both Sullivan and Quintonkin creeks.

This example is intended to demonstrate how the maps and spreadsheet in this PDF can also be viewed in conjunction with Google Earth to provide a user-controlled review of the data that provides the basis for this Wildlands Recovery Plan.

Northern Swan Range Road Decommissioning Proposals										
Road Name	Rd No.	Weaver 2011	SVC/FOWS Notes	FNF 2013 Status	MA 2006	Modified MA 2006	Fire Year	Griz Core	Lynx CH	Bull Tr CH Str
Aurora Basin	895H	Not mentioned	Decommission all	Maint 2 high-clear	4.1	4.1b	2003	no	yes	no
Endor Creek Head	9676	Not mentioned	Decommissioned	Decommissioned	3.3		na	yes	yes	no
Silver Run	895A	Decommission	Decommissioned	Decommissioned	3.3	3.3		yes	yes	no
Doris Creek	895A	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 3 cars	3.3, 4.1	3.3, 4.1b	na	no	yes	no
Lost Johnny Ridge	2860	Not mentioned	Overgrown; decomm	Maint 1 closed	4.1	4.1b	na	yes	yes	no
Lost Johnny	895B	Decommission upper	Decommission	Maint 3 cars	3.3, 4.1	4.1a, b	na	no	yes	no
Otila Basin	9831	Mapped RW	Overgrown; decomm	Maint 1 closed	3.3	4.1a	na	yes	yes	no
Jimmy Ridge	11024	Not mentioned	Overgrown; decomm	Maint 1 closed	3.3	4.1a	2003	yes	yes	no
Wounded Buck	895C	Not mentioned (upper)	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	3.3	3.3, 4.1b	2003	yes	yes	yes
Wonded Buck	895C	Not mentioned (lower)	Decommission	Maint 3 cars, summer	4.1	4.1a, b	2003	no	no	yes
Wildcat Creek	5339	Decomm mid, upper	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	3.3	3.3	2003	yes	y/n	yes
Graves Creek	897	Mapped WRZ	Decom above campground	Maint 3 cars, summer	3.3	3.3	na	no	no	no
Aeneas Creek	9797	Decommission	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	2.1a	2.1a	na	no	no	no
Baker Creek	1607	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	3.3	3.3, 4.1b	na	yes	yes	no

						Modified	Fire	Griz	Lynx	Bull Tr
Road Name	Rd No.	Weaver 2011	SVC/FOWS Notes	FNF 2013 Status	MA 2006	MA 2006	Year	Core	CH	CH Str
Forest Creek	895E	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 2 hi-clr, summer	4.1	4.1b	na	no	yes	no
Wheeler Forest	1609	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	3.3	4.1a	na	yes	yes	no
Wheeler Creek	895F	Decommission upper	Decommission all	Maint 3 cars, summer	3.3	3.3, 4.1a	na	no	y/n	yes
Martin Trapper	1611	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	3.3	4.1a	na	no	yes	yes
Trapper Biglow	1666	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	3.3	3.3, 4.1a	na	yes	yes	yes
Upper Heinrude	1606	Not Mentioned	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	3.3	4.1a, b	na	y/n	yes	no
Battery Mtn	1634	Not Mentioned	Decommission	Maia nt 1 closed	3.3	3.3	na	yes	yes	no
Quintonkin	381	Decommission upper	Decommission above 1634	Maint 2 hi-cl and 3 cars	3.3	3.3, 4.1a	na	yes	y/n	yes
Posey	5345	Decommission	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	3.3	3.3, 4.1a	na	yes	yes	yes
South Quintonkin	2806	Not mentioned	Decommission	Decom/Maint 1 closed	3.3	4.1a	2003	yes	y/n	yes
Ball	2816	Decommission upper	Decommission all, spur	Maint 1 closed	3.3	3.3, 4.1a	2003	y/n	yes	yes
Branch	975	Decommission upper	Decommission all, spurs	Maint 1 closed	3.3	3.3, 4.1a	2003	yes	yes	yes
Branch Connor	10349	Not mentioned	Decommission all	Maint 1 closed	3.3	3.3	2003	yes	yes	yes
North Connor	2804	Decommission upper	Decommission all	Maint 1 closed	3.3	3.3	na	yes	yes	yes

						Modified	Fire	Griz	Lynx	Bull Tr
Road Name	Rd No.	Weaver 2011	SVC/FOWS Notes	FNF 2013 Status	MA 2006	MA 2006	Year	Core	CH	CH Str
South Connor	2801	Decommission upper	Decommission all, spur	Maint 1 closed	3.3	3.3	na	yes	yes	yes
Sullivan Creek	547	Not mentioned	Decommission all	Maint 1 closed	3.3	4.1a	2003	no	no	yes
Sullivan - Slide	547C	Decommission upper	Decommission upper end	Decommissioned	2.2	2.2	na	yes	yes	yes
Elam Kah	2831	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 2 high clearance	4.1	4.1b	na	no	yes	no
Kah Soldier	2831B	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	4.1	4.1a, b	na	no	yes	no
Addition Bruce	2827	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	4.1	4.1a, b	na	no	y/n	yes
Addition Creek	2828	Mapped WRZ	Decommission	Decommissioned	2.2, 3.3	3.3, 4.1a	na	yes	yes	yes
Larch Creek	10103	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	4.1	4.1b	na	no	y/n	yes
Cedar Creek	2829	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 2 hi-cl, 1 closed	4.1	4.1a, b	na	no	y/n	yes
North Bunker	549	Decommission	Decommission	Decommissioned	2.2	2.2	na	yes	yes	yes
Lower Bunder	549	Not mentioned	Decommission above 10113	Maint 1 closed, Tr 101	2.2	3.3	2000	yes	yes	yes
Middle Bunker	2820	Decommission	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	2.2	2.2	na	yes	yes	yes
Razzle Creek	10113	Not mentioned	Decomm above trailhead	Maint 1 closed	3.3	3.3	na	no	yes	yes
Goat Creek	9530	WRZ for Bethal 10502	Decomm above DNRC, spurs	Maint 3 cars, 1 closed	3.3	4.1a	na	no	yes	yes
Soup Creek	10510	WRZ above DNRC	Decomm above DNRC	Maint 1 closed	3.3	4.1a	na	no	yes	yes

						Modified	Fire	Griz	Lynx	Bull Tr
Road Name	Rd No.	Weaver 2011	SVC/FOWS Notes	FNF 2013 Status	MA 2006	MA 2006	Year	Core	CH	CH Str
Fire Basin	9821	Mapped WRZ	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	3.3	4.1a	2011	yes	yes	yes
South Fk Lost	680	WRZ upper end	Needed for DNRC access?	Maint 3 car, 1 closed	3.3	3.3, 4.1a	na	yes	yes	yes
North Fk Lost	5206	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	3.3	4.1a	na	yes	yes	yes
Bond Lost	9514	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 3 cars, seasonal	3.3	3.3, 4.1a	na	no	yes	no
Sixmile	9508	Not mentioned	Decomm above trailhead	Maint 3 cars	3.3, 4.1	3.3, 4.1's	na	no	yes	no
Swan View	10528	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	4.1	4.1b	na	no	yes	no
Elderberry	10529	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	3.3, 4.1	3.3, 4.1b	na	no	yes	no
Weed Lake	10526	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	4.1	4.1b	na	no	yes	no
Bear Creek, -A	5398, A	Not mentioned	Decom above rock trailhead	Maint 1 closed	4.1	4.1b	na	no	yes	no
Wolf Creek	10319	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	3.3, 4.1	3.3, 4.1b	na	no	yes	no
Jewel Basin Y	5392Y	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	4.1	4.1b	na	y/n	yes	no
Krause Ridge Spur	10724A	Not mentioned	Decommisssion	Maint 1 closed	3.3	3.3	na	no	yes	no
Krause Ridge	10724	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	3.3	3.3	na	no	yes	no
Krause Creek	5389	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	3.3	3.3	na	no	yes	no
Peters Ridge X	5388X	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	3.3	3.3	na	no	yes	no

						Modified	Fire	Griz	Lynx	Bull Tr
Road Name	Rd No.	Weaver 2011	SVC/FOWS Notes	FNF 2013 Status	MA 2006	MA 2006	Year	Core	CH	CH Str
Peters Ridge Y	5388Y	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	3.3	3.3	na	no	yes	no
Brown's Gulch	5387	Not mentioned	Decommission	Maint 1 closed	3.3	3.3	na	no	yes	no
Trail Creek	5385	Not mentioned	Decom above rock trailhead	Maint 1 closed	3.3	3.3	na	no	yes	no

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