

1.0 PURPOSE AND NEED

1.1 SKI AREA BACKGROUND

The Bridger Bowl ski area (Bridger Bowl) is located in Bridger Canyon, approximately 15 miles northeast of Bozeman, Montana (see Figure 1-1). Bridger Bowl, Inc., a non-profit Montana enterprise operates the ski area. Bridger Bowl, Inc. currently owns approximately 480 acres on the lower mountain and has a Special Use Permit (SUP) from the Gallatin National Forest (GNF) for use of approximately 1,042 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands. The Study Area for this analysis includes the current SUP area, those NFS lands proposed for SUP area expansion, and the private lands within and adjacent to the Bridger Bowl; it totals approximately 2,574 acres.

Local Bozeman skiing enthusiasts began using the area in the mid-1940s. The State of Montana negotiated with the local landowner and purchased 120 acres near the base of the Bridger Mountains for access to the national forest and for the proposed State Park and ski area in 1949. Although the plans for a State Park fell through, the local ski enthusiasts organized themselves as the Bozeman State Park Recreational Association (BSPRA) and continued with plans to develop a winter sports area beyond the State land. In 1954, the Forest Service issued the BSPRA a SUP to operate a rope tow and construct a parking area on NFS lands. For the past 50 years, Bridger Bowl, Inc. has pursued acquiring lands in the base area and has used this property to construct parking lots, base lodges, a ski patrol building, and ski terrain for beginners and novice skiers. The area has grown from one rope tow to eight lifts (including one surface lift reserved for ski patrol access to the ridge), 69 developed skiing trails, and two day lodges, with another lodge under construction in 2003 that is scheduled to open in 2004.

1.2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

A draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Bridger Bowl Special Use Permit Renewal and Master Development Plan Update was prepared by the Forest Service in 1998 to and distributed for public comment in April 1999. It provided analysis of the effects of expanding the SUP boundary to the north and south, amending relevant Forest Plan Management Area prescriptions to conform to the proposed SUP expansion, and approving the revised Bridger Bowl Master Development Plan (MDP). Based upon review of the numerous comments received by the public and the need for new or revised analyses of resources (e.g., Threatened, Endangered, or Sensitive species; old growth forest; and additional analysis of cumulative effects), the Forest Service determined that the preparation of a Supplemental DEIS (SDEIS) would be the most effective way to present new information and respond to public comments on the DEIS. This SDEIS supercedes and replaces the 1999 DEIS, and includes changes to the proposed project elements that have taken place since the 1999 DEIS (Table 1.2-1). Many of the issues raised during the comment period for the 1999 DEIS have been incorporated into this SDEIS. In addition, new topography information and new, more accurate GIS methods have been used for the analysis in this SDEIS. A summary of public comments received on the DEIS is included in this document as Appendix B.

Figure 1-1: Vicinity Map of Bridger Bowl

**Table 1.2-1
Summary Comparison of Proposed Action Elements**

1999 DEIS Project Proposal	2003 SDEIS Project Proposal
Renew SUP	Not required, SUP renewed in 2002 with existing boundary with a reduction of the west boundary
Expand SUP boundary on north and south, reduce boundary on the west to the ridge	Expand SUP boundary on north and south
Change designation of lands to MA 2 on north side of existing SUP (Bradley Meadows) and establish MA 2 on currently undesignated areas	Same
Construct seven new lifts, remove one lift and replace one lift	Construct six new lifts, remove one lift, replace one lift, and modify two lifts
Develop 22 new ski runs; plus N-8 access trail	Develop 16 ski trails; including N-8 access trail
Construct 4 new roads and relocate Bohart Ranch Trail, "Good Clean Fun"	Construct 1.8 miles of new roads (eight segments to proposed lifts and one to Limestone Chalet). No need to relocate Bohart Ranch Trail, "Good Clean Fun"
Expand Snowmaking from 10 to 27 acres	Snowmaking expansion completed, currently 27 acres of snowmaking coverage

Since the 1999 DEIS was issued, some construction activities have taken place at Bridger Bowl, both on private Bridger Bowl property and NFS lands. The Forest Service issued a new SUP to Bridger Bowl for operations within the existing SUP boundary in November 2002 under the authority of National Forest Ski Area Permit Act of 1986 (16 U.S.C 497b). This permit issuance did not constitute a major federal action under the terms of the National Omnibus Parks and Public Lands Management Act of 1996 (16 U.S.C 497c); however, one of the requirements of the new SUP is to have an accepted MDP on file. Bridger Bowl submitted a revised MDP to the Forest Service to fulfill this requirement; the accepted MDP is dated February 2002. The new SUP includes an adjustment to the western boundary of the Bridger Bowl SUP 50 feet west of the ridge line to accommodate Inventoried Roadless Areas. The 136-acre parcel that is now excluded from the SUP area was designated MA12 and has been appended to the GNF Forest Plan. The area of the Bridger Bowl SUP area has been issued for 1,042 acres as a result of this SUP area adjustment.¹ This SUP boundary adjustment of approximately 100 acres was discussed in the 1999 DEIS.

Since 1995, Bridger Bowl has completed several projects on both private and public lands to improve the existing conditions and meet the demands of today's skiers. On private lands, Bridger Bowl had parking lots designed and constructed to meet the Bridger Canyon Zoning Ordinance requirements. They have also completed the installation of a new wastewater treatment system, under the jurisdiction of Montana Department of Environmental Quality. A new Ski Patrol building has been constructed on private lands adjacent to the Jim Bridger Lodge

¹ The current SUP indicates that the permit area is 1,042 acres; however, GIS analysis more accurately indicates the actual area of the SUP is 1,122 acres. The permitted SUP area (1,042 acres) is used throughout the text portions of this SDEIS, while the GIS-derived SUP area (1,122 acres) is used for all GIS analysis and data tables within this SDEIS.

in November 2002. Construction of a new 35,629 square foot new Day Lodge began in the summer of 2003 and is scheduled for completion in 2004. Also, a beginner lift (Snowflake) was constructed on private lands adjacent to the lower portion of the Virginia City lift in the summer of 1999.

Over consecutive summers from 1998 to 2003, additional snowmaking lines were installed near the Virginia City Lift expanding the snowmaking coverage from 10 acres to 27 acres to allow for more reliable early season openings and to improve the quality of the skiing experience for beginners. The volume and timing of water withdrawals were not changed from conditions before the snowmaking expansion, and as such, water rights and instream flows were not affected (Bridger Bowl Management, 2003). All of these activities have occurred on private lands; however, the cumulative effects of these projects are included in this SDEIS.

The Powder Park Lift provides an access route for skiers accessing the Alpine and Bridger lifts and was designed to compensate for the shortening of the Alpine lift in 1995. The patrol surface lift (P-1) was replaced with a new platter lift, with no change to the ski patrol only access policy. This project was approved by the USFS as part of the 2000 summer construction plan. In 2001, the Pierre's Knob lift was replaced with a fixed grip triple chair to reduce lift lines and the unloading area was graded to allow for easier access for lower ability skiers.

In addition to projects and activities that have occurred at Bridger Bowl since the release of the 1999 DEIS, changes to the proposal have occurred as a result of new information and in response to public comments received on the 1999 DEIS; this is pertinent primarily to the Bradley Meadows portion of the analysis area. The options described in the 1999 DEIS for the N-1 and N-2 lifts have been reviewed and consolidated into a single lift line (identified as N-1 in this SDEIS). One ski run has been eliminated from the Proposed Action and three others have been removed from connected or reasonably foreseeable actions. Furthermore, the N-3 lift, described in the 1999 DEIS, has been eliminated. These project elements have been eliminated from the original proposal due to changes in other projects beyond the scope of this proposal (i.e., 360 Ranch). As a result, these projects are not included in this SDEIS; they are not proposed or under consideration by any known agencies at this time.

1.3 PURPOSE AND NEED

The Forest Service and Bridger Bowl management worked cooperatively to develop the purpose and need for this proposal. The overall purpose of the projects within the Bridger Bowl Master Development Plan Update 2002 is to improve the current recreation experience at Bridger Bowl, and address the expected growth in skier visits over the 40-year duration of the SUP in a financially sound manner.

Over the past 50 year operational period of Bridger Bowl, the ski area has seen increases in annual skier visits, with annual skier visits growth reflecting the growth in population in the region. This growth in annual skier visits is affected by the amount and timing of snowfall among other factors.

While the regional population has increased, other regional ski areas that compete with Bridger Bowl have expanded. Despite the increased number and size of the competition, Bridger Bowl continues to attract a high percentage of local skiers, and guests often experience crowded conditions in lift lines and on popular ski trails during busy periods.

Prior to the expansion of the parking and current expansion of the base area facilities, Bridger Bowl visitors regularly found crowded conditions in the parking and lodge facilities. These crowding conditions resulted in decreases in the largest single day (peak day) skier visits. Previous Bridger Bowl MDPs indicated the need for expanded base facilities; focus group studies conducted by Bridger Bowl in 1999 reconfirmed the need for improved facilities and “uncrowded” skiing.

Three needs must be met to achieve this overall purpose: 1) continue to provide uncrowded skiing by better accommodating high demand periods, 2) provide for new trails and lifts to retain existing skiers and attract new skiers by providing terrain variety and a range of trails for all ability levels, and 3) accommodate anticipated growth while maintaining the desired uncrowded slope conditions.

Need 1: To continue to provide uncrowded skiing by better accommodating high use periods.

Background

The current Comfortable Carrying Capacity (CCC) for lifts and terrain at Bridger Bowl is 3,200 skiers. On peak days, which are typically comprised of weekends, holidays, and big snow days, Bridger Bowl has observed up to 4,525 skiers. More routinely, the resort sees high use days of 3,500 skiers. On these days, guests often experience full parking lots, long lift lines, crowded slopes, and congested skier service facilities.

Skier focus group surveys, conducted by Bridger Bowl, indicated that a high quality recreation experience includes uncrowded slopes, a variety of slopes and terrain, low prices, and access to ridge skiing (Bridger Bowl Focus Group Study, 1999). Due to the close proximity of the ski area to Bozeman and the high number of local skiers, Bridger Bowl experiences high weekend and low midweek skier utilization levels. This utilization pattern tends to create a more expensive and inefficient resort operation, in that the ski area infrastructure realizes low utilization midweek. The current use pattern also results in the perception of crowded weekends at the resort. Although skier visitation continues to increase annually, peak day visitation has decreased since 1995. The reduction in the quality of the recreation experience has had a direct effect on visitation patterns and an indirect effect on the economic viability of the resort.

On-slope congestion is partially controlled by lift capacity; the lift only delivers a certain number of persons per hour despite high demand. Under peak conditions, the length of time and number of people in the lift line expands to unacceptable levels. Increasing lift capacity, without terrain expansion, would increase skier density above current levels and not address issues of amount and variety of terrain.

A second crowding condition occurs during periods of high snowfall or adverse wind conditions. During this condition, lifts and trails that are below avalanche terrain cannot be opened or have delayed openings until avalanche hazard reduction is accomplished. This means that in a highly desirable skiing condition (i.e., good new snow conditions), skiers who wish to utilize the Bridger Lift and Deer Park lifts are diverted to the Pierre's Knob and to a lesser degree, the Alpine lift. The diversions create long lift lines, sometimes in excess of three times the lift ride time (Bridger Bowl Management, 2003). This condition also causes more advanced, faster skiers to utilize terrain more used by lower ability level skiers, creating the potential for skier conflicts on limited terrain.

Focus

Reducing skier congestion at the base of lifts and on existing trails could be accomplished via the expansion of skiable terrain at Bridger Bowl, installation of new lifts, and modification of existing lifts. Expansion of skiable terrain would create more areas in which people could ski and help better distribute skiers across the mountain. Installation of new lifts would serve the new terrain in the expansion areas and increase access to existing ski terrain along the ridge, which is currently accessible only by foot. New lifts, located in areas of reduced avalanche potential, could distribute skiers better and reduce the mixing of different ability level skiers during times of snow safety concerns. Modification of some of the existing lifts within the SUP would improve skier circulation among lifts near the Deer Park Chalet.

Need 2: To provide new trails and lifts to help retain existing skiers and attract new skiers by providing a range of trails for all ability levels and terrain variety.

Background

Bridger Bowl has seen modest development over the past eight to ten years, with projects on both private and NFS lands designed to improve the recreation experience and better meet skier demands. In contrast to Bridger Bowl's modest development over the past eight years, Big Sky (45 miles from Bozeman) has developed 13 new lifts in the past 10 years (Big Sky Resort; website; November, 2003). Moonlight Basin, adjacent to Big Sky (47 miles from Bozeman) opened with four lifts as an independent ski area (Moonlight Basin website, December 2003). The Discovery Ski Area (134 miles from Bozeman) has added three new lifts since 2002 with three new trails in 2003 (Discovery Ski Area website, November 2003). Expansion of lifts, trails and facilities has also take place at Red Lodge Mountain Resort in Red Lodge, Montana and Big Mountain Ski and Summer Resort in Whitefish, Montana. A new ski area named Blacktail Mountain near Kalispell, Montana also opened recently.

Focus

Bridger Bowl could expand the amount and variety of skiable terrain available by incorporating the Slushman Drainage and Bradley Meadows areas into its SUP. The Slushman Drainage has already been allocated for winter sports (ski area) by the Forest Plan. Bridger Bowl could also provide increased access to existing ski terrain within the SUP area. Opportunities for expansion would create additional ski terrain for intermediate, advanced, and expert skiers as well as provide a diversity of terrain at the resort. Additional lift service to the ridge would also enhance access to unique ski terrain within the existing SUP area.

Need 3: To accommodate anticipated growth in visitation at Bridger Bowl.

Background

Skier visits have increased by approximately 1.5 percent per year over the past 15 seasons (Bridger Bowl Management, 2003). Similarly, average annual growth in Gallatin County/Bozeman has been approximately 1.6 percent (Greater Bozeman Area Transportation Plan; Bozeman Transportation Coordinating Committee, 2001). Due to the strong connection between the community and the ski area, increases in skier visitation are directly tied to population growth.

As stated previously, the lift and terrain CCC for Bridger Bowl is 3,200 skiers. Using the population growth rates identified above, and a similar relationship between annual skier visit growth and population growth, Bridger Bowl will need to accommodate to 4,500 skiers, with an ability to handle peak days of up to 6,000 within the next 10 years.

Some of this expansion has taken place in the parking and skier services areas after 1999, so that the capacity of the guest services is 5,400 skiers. With completion of the base area improvements, parking congestion has been reduced, and facility congestion will be reduced upon completion of the new day lodge.

Focus

Accommodations for anticipated growth in the market could be accomplished via the expansion of skiable terrain and by providing increased access to existing ski terrain within the SUP area. Opportunities for expansion would create additional ski terrain for intermediate, advanced, and expert skiers as well as providing a diversity of terrain at the resort. Upgrading some of the existing lifts, as well as installing new lifts, would increase uphill capacity to service new and existing terrain. Providing lift service to the public to the ridge would enhance access to unique ski terrain within the existing SUP area.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND FORMAT OF THE SDEIS

The scope of this SDEIS includes the range of actions, alternatives, and impacts associated with the proposal. It also includes the geographical, spatial, and temporal boundaries involved. Chapter 2 describes the individual project elements in detail. Chapter 3 defines the scope of analysis, or study area, included in each resource section and provides an analysis of existing conditions. Chapter 4 then analyzes the environmental and social impacts associated with each alternative within the study area.

The SDEIS is presented in four major chapters, each of which provides an essential element of the environmental impact analysis as required by Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) and NEPA guidelines. This analysis includes direct and indirect effects to resources as well as the connected, cumulative, and similar actions identified in the scoping process. A summary as required by CEQ/NEPA guidelines is included at the beginning of this document as the Executive Summary.

Information collected and analyzed as part of the SDEIS preparation is available for review at the Bozeman Ranger District of the GNF. This information is referenced as the project file in the document.

CHAPTER 1 - Purpose and Need - describes project background, the Proposed Action, the purpose of and need for the Proposed Action, management direction, the public involvement process and resulting issues, the decision to be made, and additional permits required.

CHAPTER 2 - Description of Alternatives - describes the alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed study in the EIS as well as the four alternatives considered in the DEIS, including the No Action alternative. It also describes the methodology of the evaluation and selection of alternatives. All proposed mitigation measures are listed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 3 - The Affected Environment - describes the existing physical, biological, economic, and social environment that may be affected by the alternatives. These existing conditions are described in terms of resource areas such as water resources, wildlife, fisheries, recreation, and socio-economics. The detail presented in this chapter provides the basis for, and supports the analysis of, the impacts defined in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER 4 - Environmental Consequences - describes in detail the potential physical, biological, economic and social consequences of the alternatives by resource area. Direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of implementing the alternatives are described. This chapter also identifies impacts that cannot be avoided, the relationship between short-term uses of the environment and long-term productivity, and any irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources.

CHAPTER 5 - List of Preparers - provides a list of the preparers of the SDEIS.

CHAPTER 6 – Agencies and Other Governments Consulted - lists the agencies, other governments, and organizations that were consulted to assist in the preparation of the SDEIS.

CHAPTER 7 - References - provides a list of documents referenced in the SDEIS.

CHAPTER 8 - Glossary – provides a list of terms used in the SDEIS and their definitions.

CHAPTER 9 - Index – provides a list of key terms used in the SDEIS and where to locate them within the document.

Additional elements of this SDEIS include a table of contents, a list of acronyms, and four appendices.

1.5 SCOPING AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A notice of intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS was published in the Federal Register on June 13, 1997. Sixty-six letters were sent, using the GNF mailing list, to federal, state and local government agencies, Native American tribes and groups, and individuals interested in Forest activities. The GNF created an interdisciplinary team (IDT) to coordinate the scoping process within the Forest Service and assist in the development of issues and alternatives in response to the issues raised during the scoping process. Internal scoping involved meetings with IDT members on the Bozeman Ranger District and the GNF. Written correspondence with the USDI-Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) identified wildlife species of concern.

This project has been under discussion since 1986. Numerous newspaper articles (Bozeman Chronicle 6-23-91, 10-23-96, 10-24-96, 6-20-97, 6-24-97, Lone Peak Lookout 9-19-97) and local radio interviews have been prepared and conducted for the project at various times over the past 17 years. Several public meetings have also been held to discuss the various past proposals and consultant studies (June 23, 1997 - 3 PM and 7 PM Open House at Bozeman Ranger District offices, Bozeman, MT). A total of 87 letters and telephone calls were received and recorded in response to the initial scoping process. Additional comments were received during the two open houses. A synthesis of comments received during the initial scoping process is included in this document as Appendix A.

1.6 ISSUES RAISED DURING SCOPING

The comments received during the scoping process raised issues, concerns, or questions regarding the environmental effects of the project or alternatives. Some issues were identified by the public during the scoping process; other issues relate to resources that are protected by federal and/or state laws or management practices, and as such, they require analysis in the EIS.

From comments received during scoping and the comment period for the 1999 DEIS, issue statements were developed and refined to provide a measurable estimate of the environmental consequences that could result from each of the action alternatives. The intent of the following

issue statements is to clearly identify environmental resources that may be affected by specific activities associated with the implementation of each alternative.

Visual Resources

Existing ski trails at Bridger Bowl are visible from many locations adjacent to the project. Implementation of the Proposed Action would result in the location and construction of additional ski trails. This has the potential to change the existing visual condition as observed from various points, of which Bridger Canyon Road (BCR) was identified as the critical viewing point. Effects to this resource are estimated through comparison of existing visual conditions in the Bridger Bowl study area against impacts of alternative implementation.

Roadless

About 101 acres of the proposed expansion into the Slushman drainage basin to the south would be within the Bridger Bowl Roadless Area #1534. Effects to this resource are estimated through comparison of existing roadless characteristics (i.e., Natural Integrity, Natural Appearance, Remoteness, Solitude, and Special Features and Boundary Management) against expected impacts of alternative implementation.

Watershed

The Proposed Action has the potential to affect water quality and quantity. Existing water quality may be affected by surface and subsurface ground disturbance. These disturbances may include construction of parking areas, ski trails, access roads, and area operations such as increased demands on water and the sewer/septic system. Flow regime and channel morphology may be affected by these disturbances, which could alter the hydrologic response of the watershed. Water quality effects have been estimated by comparing existing sedimentation and water quality in surface and subsurface water resources to the condition under the developed condition. Water quantity effects have been estimated through the use of computer models and professional interpretation of the modeled effects under the developed condition in the SDEIS.

Wildlife

The Proposed Action has the potential to affect Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, Sensitive, and/or Management Indicator species. Habitat removal from the installation of chairlifts and the construction of ski trails may negatively affect the viability of species within Bridger Bowl study area. Effects on wildlife habitat are estimated through analysis of survey information and comparison of the existing wildlife habitat to wildlife habitat under the developed condition. Effects on wildlife disturbance are estimated by comparing existing use of Bridger Bowl and the disturbance regime to the anticipated condition after development.

Fisheries

The Proposed Action has the potential to affect habitat for aquatic species in the South Fork of Brackett Creek, which is inhabited by Yellowstone cutthroat trout and other species. Effects have been estimated through comparison of the existing aquatic habitat conditions to the anticipated conditions after development and how habitat changes would affect these species.

Wetlands

Several small wetlands occur in or near the project area. The Proposed Action has the potential to affect the wetlands by construction or operation activities. Effects to wetlands are estimated

through comparison of the existing area and function of wetlands against the effects of development on the area and function of wetlands.

Recreation/User Conflicts

The proposed expansion of the SUP boundary may block access to or result in a loss of backcountry skiing and snowboarding terrain. Effects will be estimated through comparison of the existing capacity and economics of the ski area to the developed condition. Effects to backcountry and Nordic skiing have been estimated in the SDEIS by comparing the existing opportunities for these activities to the opportunities available under the developed condition.

1.7 ADDITIONAL ISSUES RAISED DURING THE DEIS PROCESS

Additional input on the document was received during the comment period for the 1999 DEIS; these comments raised issues, concerns, or questions regarding the environmental effects of the project or alternatives that were not clearly addressed or were not included in the 1999 DEIS. Additional issue statements were developed and refined to provide a measurable estimate of the environmental consequences that could result from each of the action alternatives and to include this information in the SDEIS. A more complete summary of the comments received during scoping is included as Appendix B in this document.

Purpose and Need

The document needs to better support the purpose and need to expand the ski area beyond its existing boundaries.

Recreation

Dispersed recreation and access to public lands needs to be described in more detail in the document. Additionally, ski area capacity across the alternatives should be described more clearly. Lastly, snowmobile use within the area needs to be addressed.

Socio-Economic Resources

The issue of Environmental Justice was not outlined in the document; there are potential effects to minority and low-income populations as a result of this proposal.

Noise

The document should describe current noise levels and anticipated effects as a result of the proposal.

Safety

The document should describe more clearly about issues of safety including skier safety, transportation and road safety, and emergency services.

Watershed Resources

The document should describe the anticipated road density at Bridger Bowl. It should also include a map of affected watersheds as well as disclose impacts to wetlands.

Vegetation

The document needs to describe the potential for noxious weeds to invade the project area as a result of construction. It should also describe effects to white bark pine.

Wildlife and Fisheries

There is no documentation of correspondence with the US Fish and Wildlife Service in the document. Additional surveys are requested for the boreal owl, wolverine, flammulated owl, and goshawk. Impacts to the Yellowstone cutthroat trout need as a result of increased snowmaking need to be more clearly defined.

Cumulative Effects

The document inadequately describes cumulative effects, particularly any reasonable foreseeable actions.

1.8 FOREST PLAN MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

The 1987 Forest Plan is the comprehensive, long-term planning document for the GNF. Consisting of inventory and analysis, the Forest Plan is the primary planning tool used by the Forest Service to balance competing resource uses on the GNF. The Proposed Action and alternatives considered in this analysis were formulated within the framework of the management direction contained in the Forest Plan, which is a guide for the management and use of the GNF. There are a variety of laws and regulations that require the Forest Service to work with private industry to provide needed recreation facilities on NFS lands, including downhill ski areas. The Forest Service is to provide recreational opportunities on NFS lands funded through private enterprise (16 U.S.C. 497). As such, the Forest Plan identifies a desired mix of resource uses and specific permits under which these uses may be authorized. Special Use Permits (SUPs) are to be administered for recreation uses that serve the public, promote public health and safety, and protect the environment.

Forest-wide Goals and Objectives

Provide for a broad spectrum of recreation opportunities in a variety of Forest settings (p II-1).

Designated ski and snowmobile trails will provide winter recreation opportunities in areas with low avalanche hazard (p II-2).

Forest-wide Standards

Forest-wide standards for recreation are to: 1) expand existing ski areas (on NFS lands, i.e., Bridger Bowl) prior to considering any new proposals, and 2) meet ADA requirements with new construction and upgrades (p. II-15). The Forest Plan also states that expansion of Bridger Bowl, Big Sky,² and the potential development of Ski Yellowstone³ ski areas will be given priority before any new proposals for ski areas are approved (p. II-15).

² Big Sky Resort is located on private lands and not under the authority of the GNF.

³ Ski Yellowstone is not the same area as the existing Yellowstone Club, which is located on private lands.

Management Area 2 – Winter Sports (Ski) Areas

Ski areas on the GNF are allocated to Management Area (MA) 2. MA 2 encompasses the Bridger Bowl SUP area, including ski trails, lift facilities, and buildings, as well areas that exhibit potential for development or expansion of facilities to meet increasing demand for downhill skiing on NFS lands (p. III-4).

Specific goals for MA 2 include:

- Manage these winter sports areas in accord with approved master plans.
- Ensure that permit holders providing service to the public have inspection, maintenance, and documentation processes that provide for applicable public health and safety standards.

Forest Plan Consistency

In addition to meeting the specific goals and standards for MA 2, the proposed MDP would be consistent with forest-wide standards. Proposed lift, ski terrain, day lodge, parking, and other base area improvements on private land were determined by the Forest Service to be consistent with the Forest Plan, which states that “the private sector will be encouraged to provide facilities and services on private land where needed to serve the public” (p. II-3).

Proposed expansion of the SUP area into the Slushman Drainage would be consistent with the Forest Plan. This area is currently allocated to MA 2, identified for future ski area expansion. To the north (Bradley Meadows), approximately 104 acres located south of the existing MA 12 and directly north of the existing MA 8, in Section 13, was acquired by the Forest Service via a land exchange in 1993 with no current management area designation. The purpose of the acquisition of these lands was to provide for additional developed winter recreation and the eventual expansion of Bridger Bowl. (Marlenee, 1999) The Forest Service has identified the 104 acres as appropriate for the land allocation of MA 2 (see figures 2-2 and 2-4) for existing and proposed land allocations and MAs).

1.9 DECISION TO BE MADE

This SDEIS documents site-specific environmental analysis for each of the alternatives. Based on this analysis, the Forest Supervisor is the responsible official who will decide which alternative to select and allow to be implemented. The Forest Supervisor may select any one of the alternatives or components from among the alternatives. As required by NEPA [40CFR 1502.14(d)], a no action alternative has been included as a baseline by which to compare the effects of each action alternative. Decisions made in the ROD for this NEPA document will be valid for the next five to ten years; however, the Selected Alternative, as identified in the ROD, will provide the framework that will guide development of Bridger Bowl for the life of the SUP.

1.10 PERMITS REQUIRED

This SDEIS is designed to serve as an analysis document for parallel processes at several levels of government. The Forest Service decision would apply only to NFS lands analyzed within this SDEIS. However, potential effects resulting from implementation of any of the action

alternatives on lands and activities administered by other federal, state, and local jurisdictions are also disclosed within this SDEIS.

Decisions by other jurisdictions to issue or not issue approvals related to this proposal may be aided by the analyses presented in this SDEIS. While the Forest Service assumes no responsibility for enforcing laws, regulations, or ordinances under the jurisdiction of other governmental agencies, Forest Service regulations require permit holders to abide by applicable laws and conditions imposed by other jurisdictions. In addition to requisite Forest Service approvals, the following permits or approvals may be required to implement the Proposed Action:

- State of Montana Permit to construct in stream corridors.
- Army Corps of Engineers 404 Permit for impacts to streams.
- 310 Permit from the Gallatin Soil Conservation District for disturbance of perennial streams.
- Water rights and/or permits necessary to meet expanded domestic water demand requirements.
- National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office for impacts to heritage resources.
- NPDES stormwater permit from the EPA or appropriate state agency and a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan for land disturbing activities greater than one acre.
- Endangered Species Act, Section 7 consultation with the USFWS for impacts to wildlife has already been completed for this proposal. A Biological Assessment (BA) was prepared by the Forest Service and submitted to USFWS to initiate the Section 7 consultation process in February 2003. The USFWS returned a Biological Opinion (BO) on the project that included a determination of “not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of Canada lynx.”