

Recreation and Travel

Recreation use has increased on the Bighorn National Forest since 1985, a result of increases in numbers of visitors coming to the area. There were many issues identified during public meetings and letters received that related to recreation and travel management. Some of those issues are:

- separating motorized and nonmotorized users
- resource damage concerns from increasing numbers of recreation users
- access needs to be provided
- motorized travel needs to be restricted to designated routes
- need to identify areas for winter nonmotorized use

The Big Horns are a travel through area for persons between Mount Rushmore and Yellowstone National Park. In 1985 there were 2,226,159 visitors to Yellowstone and in 2000 there were 2,838,233, an increase of nine percent. This is a representative growth number because use has fluctuated during the past fifteen years.

Dispersed recreation use, especially snowmachine and atv (all terrain vehicle) motorized use, has increased since 1985. There were few if any atvs on the forest at that time and now there may be several hundred on any weekend day on the forest. The use of atvs is very popular for summer riding and camping and also during the fall hunting season. Because of this growth, there are more conflicts for those seeking a more primitive experience on the forest.

DEVELOPED RECREATION

Developed recreation opportunities are located primarily along existing travelways. Most developed campgrounds are managed through a concessionaire program. The season is from May to September and campgrounds are open only during a portion of May and September. Campground occupancy during 2000 was twenty percent in May, forty percent in June, eighty-seven percent in July, eighty-four percent in August and forty-six percent in September.

There are thirty-seven developed campgrounds on the forest with a total of 496 campsites, sixteen picnic grounds with several picnic sites, twenty-two trailheads and three warming huts for cross country skiers in the winter. In addition, there are several parking lots and areas that provide information services on the forest.

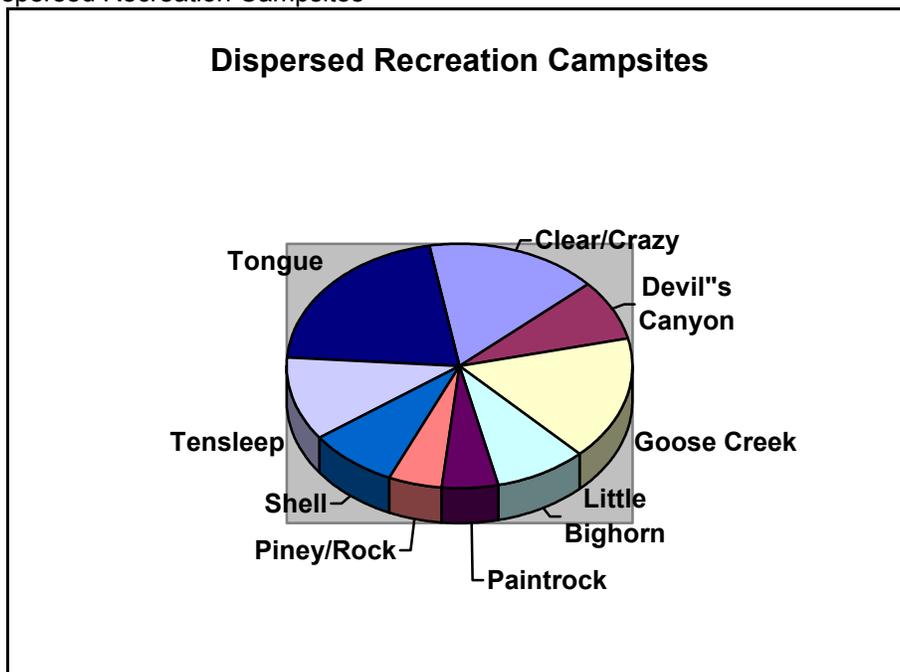
Interpretive services are provided at three major sites: Burgess Visitor Center on US Highway 14, Shell Falls Visitor Center on US Highway 14 and Medicine Wheel Historic Preservation site on US Highway 14A.

DISPERSED RECREATION

There are 2,992 dispersed campsites on the Bighorn National Forest outside of wilderness that were identified and mapped in 1997 and updated in 2001.

The following chart displays those campsites by geographic area.

Figure 9A. Dispersed Recreation Campsites



There are an additional 1,387 dispersed campsites that were inventoried in the wilderness in the mid 1980's.

RECREATION SETTINGS

Some people desire an emphasis on undeveloped, remote recreation settings, while other people want a mix of developed and undeveloped settings and yet others are interested in seeing more developed settings and easier access. The Forest Service uses the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) to describe different recreation experiences using the setting, activities and the experience. These experiences are separated in (ROS) classes. The following ROS classes and acres have been identified on the Bighorn National Forest:

Primitive – 181,232 acres

These areas are characterized by an unmodified environment and have a very high probability of experiencing solitude, freedom, closeness to nature, tranquility, self-reliance, challenge and risk. There is very low interaction between recreation users. Access and travel is nonmotorized on trails or cross country.

Semi-primitive nonmotorized – 278,105 acres

Areas in a semi-primitive nonmotorized class are in a natural appearing environment with a high probability of experiencing solitude, closeness to nature, tranquility, self-reliance, challenge and risk. There is low interaction between users. Access and travel is nonmotorized on trails, some primitive roads or

cross-country.

Semi-primitive motorized – 372,549 acres

There is a moderate probability of experiencing solitude, closeness to nature and tranquility. The setting is in a predominantly natural appearing environment. There is a low concentration of users, but often evidence of others on trails. Motorized vehicles are allowed for travel.

Roaded modified – 106,532 acres

In a roaded modified setting, there is opportunity to get away from others, but with easy access. There is moderate evidence of other users on roads and little evidence of others or interaction at camp sites. Conventional motorized access includes sedan, trailer, atv and motorcycle travel.

These areas are located where concentrations of roads occur due to past timber harvest.

Roaded natural – 140,393 acres

Self-reliance on outdoor skill is of only moderate importance to the recreation user with little challenge and risk. The environment is mostly natural appearing. Access and travel is motorized including sedan and trailers.

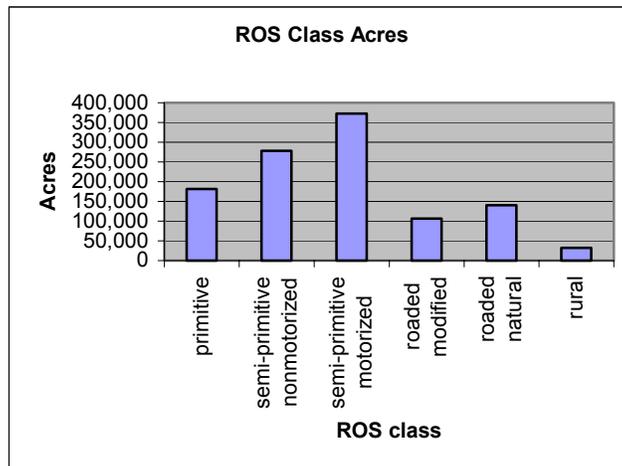
These areas are located along the major US Highways 14 and 14A corridors.

Rural – 32,544 acres

The opportunity to observe and affiliate with other users is important as is convenience of facilities and recreation opportunities. There is little challenge and risk. Interaction between users may be high as is evidence of other users.

The following bar chart displays the acres of ROS classes on the forest.

Figure 9B. Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Class Acres



WINTER RECREATION

There are two developed downhill ski areas on the forest that provide over 10,000 skier visits per year. The state grooms 347 miles of snowmachine trails. There are 56 miles of cross-country ski trails groomed by the Forest Service and volunteers.

RECREATION SPECIAL USE

Currently there are fifty-three outfitter/guides providing services throughout the year. Twenty-one of those outfitters provide service in the Cloud Peak Wilderness. The following table displays existing activities and numbers of service days issued on the forest.

Bighorn National Forest				
Outfitter/guide use by activity by district				
Activity	Tongue	Powder River	Medicine Wheel/Paintrock	Totals
spring				
spring bear hunting	149	0	75	224
summer				
trail rides, camping, fishing	2,650	10,616	1,979	15,245
fishing	80	172	206	458
cattle drives	180		390	570
rock climbing		160		160
backpacking		660		660
env. ed ,backpacking			1,790	1,790
fall				
big game hunting	441	245	2,192	2,878
winter				
snowmobile guiding	1,600	1,750	790	4,140
dog sledding			20	20
lion hunting	40	40		80
Total service days provided for outfitting on the Bighorn National Forest				26,225

TRAILS

Motorized trails include those trails where atvs and/or dirt bikes are acceptable uses. Nonmotorized trails include those trails for hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking.

Total miles includes miles of trail added to the forest trail system with the 1997 Little Goose/Park Reservoir decision on the Tongue Ranger District and miles of trail in the Cloud Peak Wilderness. There are 143 miles of trail within the Cloud Peak Wilderness. Total miles of trail on the forest including winter trails are 1,248 miles.

The following chart displays approximate trail miles on the Bighorn National Forest.

Miles of Trail			
Ranger District:	<i>motorized trails</i>	<i>nonmotorized trails</i>	Total miles by district
Tongue	98	210	308
Powder River	116	182	298
Medicine Wheel/Paintrock	65	154	219
summer use trails	279	546	825
snowmobile trails	347		
cross country ski trails		56	

LANDS SPECIAL USES

The lands program on the Bighorn National Forest administers many different permits and easements for use of land on the forest. The table below lists those permits authorized on the forest.

Lands Special Uses	Number of Permits
Powerlines	4
Private Road Easements	6
Ditches	8
Communication Sites	18
Dams / Reservoirs	11
Recreation Residences	265
Organization Camps	3
Ski Areas	2
Resorts	10
Pastures	8
Fish Hatchery	1
Outfitter/guides	53
Telephone Lines	5
Gravel Pits	2
Water Pipelines	9
Campground Concession	1
Fences	5
Agricultural Residence	4
Roadside Chapel	1
Wildlife Water Supply	1
Research Area	2
Construction Camps	5
Hydroelectric / FERC Exempt	1
DOT Easements	8
FRTA Easements	3
Stream Gauging Stations	2
Stockwater	1
Weirs	5
Monument	1
Sign	1
Road Permits	5