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Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

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Decision Memo

Stough Creek Trail Re-route Project

USDA Forest Service
Shoshone National Forest
South Zone / Washakie Ranger District
Fremont County, Wyoming
(T32N, R101W, portions of Sections 31 & 32)

Decision

Summary of Decision

It is my decision to implement the Stough Creek Trail Re-route Project. The intent is to relocate approximately ¼-mile of non-motorized trail for the purpose of resource improvement/protection and public access improvement. The project would include the use of hand tools (i.e. saws, shovels, rock picks, etc) to clear and establish a new section of trail between the Worthen Reservoir parking area and the Popo Agie Wilderness boundary, while performing rehabilitation work on the older, bypassed trail (Map 1). The desired outcome is a non-motorized trail that would be more convenient and safe for users, while reducing erosion concerns along the existing trail. I have considered both the input of the interdisciplinary team and the public in my decision.

This project is in conformance with the Shoshone National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and the prescribed Management Area Direction. Floodplain, wetlands, prime farmlands, threatened and endangered species, and cultural resource management implications have been considered and these resources will not be adversely affected.

The planned action was evaluated pursuant to Categorical Exclusion 31.2(1), in Section 31.2 of the Forest Service Handbook 1909.15 – *Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook*: “Construction and reconstruction of trails”.

Project

Background

The present route to Roaring Fork Lake on the Stough Creek Trail follows the vehicle road from the trailhead for about 200 yards and then turns directly up the hill towards Roaring Fork Lake following the old four-wheel drive road. The long term plan, when the trailhead parking and



equestrian trailhead facilities were developed about 10 years ago, was to re-route the Stough Creek trail on a reasonable grade directly from the trailhead to the trail to Roaring Fork lake avoiding the road and the steep washed out hill for the first ¼ mile. This long-term plan also called for rehabilitation of the unusable portion of the old four-wheel drive road.

Purpose & Need

The action is located in the Frye Lake Analysis Area (pages J-153 thru 156) and in Management Direction Area 9E (Water Improvement Sites, pages III-223 thru 230) and 7E (Wood-fiber Production and Utilization, pages III-173 thru 180). The primary purpose of the project is to provide better recreational access and to reduce existing resource damage.

Project Description

The project will occur west of Worthen Meadow Reservoir, 14 miles southwest of Lander, Fremont County, Wyoming. The project will include tree and rock removal, tread development and waterbars as needed. It will also include rehab of the old trail section including check dams, water bars, fill, vegetation and rock reestablishment as needed to arrest erosion, reestablish vegetation, and prevent future use.

Project Design

I have decided to implement the planned action as described, including specific project design features (PDFs) and mitigation measures to minimize environmental effects. PDFs are integral and critical elements of the planned action; their purpose is to reduce potential impacts and ensure that the proposed fuel reduction treatments are consistent with the management objectives for a variety of resources (e.g., fisheries, wildlife, and botanical) in the project area. Their basis includes the management direction of the Shoshone National Forest Plan, as amended to which the project is tiered, pertinent best management practices, and the professional expertise of the interdisciplinary planning team.

Soils, topography, slope and aspect, elevation, access, recreation, wildlife and other environmental considerations are part of the PDFs for the planned action, along with additional concerns and issues identified through scoping. An interdisciplinary team of resource specialists was involved with project design, and reviewed and analyzed the planned action for compliance with the limitations for categorical exclusions, extraordinary circumstances, applicable laws and commensurate with the issues and concerns raised from the scoping, public involvement cooperation process. Specific PDFs related to this action include, but are not limited to:

- Using only existing roads to implement the project.
- Using standard construction and safety measures.
- Providing monitoring of the newly constructed and rehabilitated sections of trail through Washakie Ranger District Staff.

Public Involvement

Scoping

Scoping is to determine the scope of the issues to be addressed and to identify significant issues related to the proposed action (40 CFR 1501.7). Due to the limited nature of the project, the action was internally review by the interdisciplinary team and several local hiking and trail

organizations. All comments received through scoping were considered in developing the project action and which directed the analysis process. Using the comments from the interdisciplinary team and local organizations, we developed a list of key issues to address and activities to implement.

Key Issues

Key issues identified through the interdisciplinary team and organizations included effects to historic properties, wildlife and soil erosion. The interdisciplinary team evaluated and addressed these key issues, adding appropriate mitigation and monitoring requirements to the proposed action, also included in this decision.

Findings Required by Other Laws

Compliance with the Forest Plan

Mechanical construction and rehabilitation are consistent with activities identified in the Forest Plan. The decision is consistent with the Shoshone National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as required by the National Forest Management Act. The project was designed in conformance with forest plan standards and incorporates appropriate Forest Plan guidelines for the given management areas.

Clean Water Act

The planned action will comply with the Forest Plan while pursuing project objectives. Best Management Practices (BMPs) will minimize sediment production during and following treatment. Prior to treatment, the new trail section will be surveyed with any waters of the United States marked and avoided. No Section 404 (Clean Water Act) Permit is required for this project.

National Forest Management Act

The planned action will meet all requirements of the National Forest Management Act.

National Historic Preservation Act / Section 106 Compliance

The proposed action was coordinated with the Forest Archeologist. The Forest Archeologist conduct a Class III survey and determined that the project would not have an affect on historic and/or cultural properties. Based on the findings of “no affect” and on the Memorandum of Understanding with the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), no further coordination with the SHPO is required.

Endangered Species Act

Forest Service policy is to protect the habitat of federally listed proposed, candidate, threatened or endangered species from adverse modification or destruction, as well as to protect individual organisms from harm or harassment. Biological assessment processes are intended to conduct and document activities necessary to ensure proposed management actions will not likely jeopardize the continued existence or cause adverse modification of habitat for threatened and endangered (T&E) species.

Biological Assessment. The Forest Service coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for this project and its effects on federally listed T&E species, or their critical habitat during a Level 1 – Coordination Meeting. Based on this coordination and Forest review, it was determined that the proposed action would have “no affect” to T&E species and/or their critical habitat. No further coordination or consultation with the USFWS is required; therefore, consultation is complete.

Biological Evaluation. The Forest Service also considered potential impacts to the R2 Regional Forester’s Sensitive Species List and the appropriate Forest Management Indicator Species. Based on our review, we concluded that there will be no adverse effect on any such species and that this action will not have a measurable effect on Forest wide population trends or viability of any species.

Coordination with Other Agencies. Applicable plans and decisions of other agencies were reviewed and considered in respect to the project (Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan, Lynx Conservation Strategy, etc.).

Rationale for Decision

It is my decision to proceed with the project, with the included mitigation and monitoring, because it will result in safer more efficient access and reduced resource damage. I feel that taking no action with the treatment area will allow continued trail erosion and resource damage, while impeding the public’s access.

I have reviewed the proposal and determined that no significant effects will occur from its implementation, including no adverse effects to actual extraordinary circumstances (FR Vol. 69, No. 108, page 33814). The effects of the actions, as determined through scoping and interdisciplinary review, are not highly controversial and are similar to other actions that have been implemented in the area. I find that the planned action can be categorically excluded from further environmental documentation pursuant to USDA Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 30, Section 31.2 (1) – Construction or reconstruction of trail.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities and Implementation

This decision is not subject to administrative appeal in accordance with 36 CFR 215.4 and may be implemented immediately.

Contact Person

For additional information on this decision, contact: Mark King, South Zone NEPA Coordinator, Washakie Ranger District, 333 E. Main Street, Lander, WY 82520; phone (307) 332-5460 or email at jmking@fs.fed.us.

/s/ Burns L. Davison
BURNS L. DAVISON
District Ranger