

File Code: 1950-1
Date: May 28, 2010

Dear Interested Parties:

The Hahns Peak/Bears Ears (HPBE) Ranger District of the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests is seeking public input on the **Buffalo Pass Road Improvement Project**. The proposal is to reconstruct 7.0 miles of National Forest Service Road (NFSR) 60 and 4.5 miles of NFSR 310 to meet the designated Level 3 standards and maintain consistency with Forest Plan direction.

Reconstruction work would include:

- Adding additional relief culverts to prevent loss of fine material through surface erosion and to reduce sedimentation to the stream system, particularly that within the municipal watershed.
- Adding up to 12 inches of barrow material from an identified source along NFSR 60 to sufficiently cover the large rock and create a smooth running surface.
- Cap the new subgrade material with 6 inches of aggregate to prevent loss of the subgrade material and maintain the investment in the road.
- Replace culvert on Granite Creek to improve aquatic passage.
- Develop a new gravel pit along the road where material would be excavated and crushed on site for use on the proposed road surface.
- Re-open an existing gravel pit and use remaining available road base in the existing area.
- Use of an existing barrow pit to provide road base materials.

The District is initiating the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and performing an analysis for the Buffalo Pass Road Improvement Project. The analysis area is approximately 180 acres and is located in the Middle Yampa Geographic Area, which encompasses approximately 95,040 acres of National Forest System lands on the northwest portion of the HPBE Ranger District. The proposed project is located along NFSR 60 and NFSR 310, with the barrow pit located in T7N, R84W, Section 36; the existing gravel pit is located in T6N, R83W, Section 17; and the proposed new gravel pit would be located in T7N, R82W, Section 32.

Proposed Action

The HPBE Ranger District proposes to crush gravel, add relief culverts, and add intervisible turnouts to the lower 3.5 miles where some previous work to the road has already occurred, and apply crushed aggregate to the surface. Relief culverts and turnouts would be added to the remaining upper 3.5 miles of NFSR 60 that has not yet been treated. Sufficient barrow material would then be added to create a smooth subgrade, and crushed aggregate would be applied to the surface. Drainage would be added and the subgrade would be built up and gravel applied to the surface on NFSR 310 from the top of Buffalo Pass south to Fish Creek Reservoir and the Granite Campground. Additionally, an “arch pipe” would be installed in Granite Creek to improve aquatic passage to the reservoir providing access for fish species to 1.5 miles of spawning habitat.

The proposed project would also include the development of one new gravel pit (T7N, R82W, Section 32). Materials from an existing barrow pit (T7N, R84W, Section 36) and an existing gravel pit (T6N, R83W, Section 15) located near Fish Creek Reservoir, would be used along NFSR 60. Road base material would be provided by the two existing sources to build up or smooth out the subgrade, while the crushed gravel for the surface would be developed at the proposed new pit site.

Purpose & Need

The purpose of the Buffalo Pass proposal is to bring the west side of the NFSR 60 up to the Road Maintenance Objective Level 3 and move toward the condition as specified in the Forest Plan.

There is a need to:

- Improve traveler safety by providing intervisible turnouts, and preventing loss of vehicle control due to rough road conditions.
- Reduce erosion on the road and sediment into the ditches.
- Improve passage for aquatic species.
- Protect water quality in the municipal reservoirs.
- Improve access for emergency response (firefighters, municipal water supply, power companies, etc.) and other maintenance vehicles that have potential emergency needs in the area.
- Reduce sedimentation to the stream system and municipal reservoirs by reducing surface erosion and the extent of connected disturbed areas.

Management Direction and Project Feasibility

Forest Plan Direction

Direction in the Forest Plan is identified at several levels, including:

- **Forest-wide Management Direction** (Desired Conditions, Goals & Objectives, Standards & Guidelines)
- **Management Area Direction** (Management Area Desired Conditions, Standards & Guidelines)
- **Geographic Area Direction** (Desired Conditions, Standards & Guidelines)

Forest Plan direction is implemented with the most site-specific direction (e.g. Geographic Area Direction taking precedence over the more general Forest-wide Direction).

Management Area Direction

Management emphasis within the analysis area and the larger geographic area is distributed among several Forest Plan management area prescriptions (*see Table 1*). Application of management area prescriptions and associated standards and guidelines would move specific portions of the geographic area towards the desired condition (Forest Plan p. 3-1). The descriptions of each management area prescription include theme, setting, desired condition, and standards and guidelines. This information can be found in the Forest Plan Chapter 2, pp. 2-36 through 2-52.

The proposed action would move the project area toward the Road Management Objective Level 3. Improvements to the road would enhance driving safety along the road; reduce sedimentation that is

occurring in adjacent streams and protect municipal reservoir water quality; improve access to campgrounds and municipal reservoirs; and provide quicker access for emergency and maintenance needs.

Management Area 4.2 (Scenery) exists throughout the NFSR 60 corridor and is managed for scenic values and recreation uses of designated scenic byways. Travel ways will be clearly marked and maintained to facilitate large numbers of visitors. Management Area 4.3 (Dispersed Recreation) exists along the upper elevations of NFSR 60 and is managed to provide undeveloped recreation opportunities in landscapes which are natural or have a natural appearance. These areas will be characterized by easy access and will be capable of sustaining a relatively high number of recreationists. From NFSR 60, NFSR 310 heads south and moves into Management Area 3.23 (Municipal Watersheds, Water quality Emphasis). In the 3.23 Management Areas, the direction specifically states that primary roads will be surfaced with gravel.

Table 1. Road miles proposed for treatment within Management Area Prescription.

Management Area	Prescription	Miles
4.3	<i>Dispersed Recreation</i>	0.5
4.2	<i>Scenery</i>	7.0
3.23	<i>Municipal Watersheds-Water Quality Emphasis</i>	4.0
TOTAL		11.0

Geographic Area Direction:

Analyses at the Geographic Area (GA) level provide a framework for short and long-term projects, for monitoring the effectiveness of Forest-wide goals and management area standards and guidelines, and for achieving Forest-wide goals and objectives. A GA is a piece of land, 100,000 acres or less, in which management is directed toward achieving a specified desired condition. GAs link the Forest Plan to management at a landscape or watershed scale. Application of management area prescriptions and associated standards and guidelines would move the GA towards the desired condition (Forest Plan p. 3-1).

Preliminary Issues and Concerns

The following preliminary issues and concerns were identified:

- Public Safety
- Water Quality
- Hazard trees along NFSRs 60 and 310

Decision to be made

Jamie Kingsbury, the Hahns Peak/Bears Ears District Ranger, will be the deciding official for this project. After the analysis process is completed, a decision will be made that includes the following:

- The selected alternative. The selected alternative could be the Proposed Action as described in this scoping letter, an alternative to the Proposed Action, or a “No Action” alternative;

- Rationale for the decision; and
- Mitigation measures, design criteria, and monitoring requirements necessary for project implementation.

Implementation

Plans are to complete the NEPA analysis and make a decision whether or not to implement the proposed action or another alternative during the spring of 2010. If no significant issues are identified by the public or Forest Service specialists, the Forest Service proposes to begin implementation in 2011.

Public Participation

Scoping is an important part of the analysis process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues related to a Proposed Action (36 CFR 1501.7). For these reasons, you are encouraged to take the time to consider the proposed action, and to submit your site-specific comments. The 30-day comment period will begin after a press release for the Buffalo Pass Road Improvement Project is published in the newspaper of record, the Steamboat Pilot. After receiving your comments, we will identify and analyze the issues raised, finalize a Proposed Action, and if necessary, develop alternatives to the Proposed Action.

Comments can be submitted on the Web at: comments-rocky-mountain-medicine-bow-routt-hahns-peak-bears-ears@fs.fed.us. When submitting your comments, please include your full name and address. When submitting comments on the web, the SUBJECT LINE must be "Buffalo Pass Road" to ensure proper routing. Written comments should be submitted to:

Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests
Attn: Jamie Kingsbury, District Ranger
925 Weiss Drive
Steamboat Springs, Colorado. 80487
Telephone Number: (970) 870-2149.
Fax Number: (970) 870-2284.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Parts 215 or 217. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR, Subpart B, Section 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. All future documents and information on the Buffalo Pass Road Improvement Project will be posted at www.fs.fed.us/r2/mbr/projects/travel_management and you are encouraged to use this site for all your participation in the analysis.

The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request of confidentiality, and where the request is denied; the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 10 days.

For more information concerning the Proposed Action, please contact Liz Schnackenberg (970) 870-2234 or Rob Bringuel at (970) 870-2227.

Thank you for caring about your National Forest!

Sincerely,

/s/ Jamie Kingsbury

JAMIE KINGSBURY

District Ranger