

**Montana Department
of
Fish, Wildlife & Parks**



2300 Lake Elmo Drive
Billings, MT 59105
January 4, 1996

TO:

Environmental Quality Council
Director's Office, Dept. of Environmental Quality
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Director's Office
Parks Division
Fisheries Division
Wildlife Division
Regional Supervisors
Lands Section
Design & Construction
Legal Unit

Montana Historical Society, State Preservation Office
Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Montana State Library
George Ochenski
Montana Environmental Information Center
Wayne Hirst, Montana State Parks Foundation
Custer National Forest, Red Lodge Ranger Station
Department of Transportation
Midland Empire Snowgoers

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The enclosed Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared for the Beartooth Snowmobile Program, and is submitted for your consideration. Questions and comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m. February 9, 1996. If you have questions, feel free to contact Ray Berntsen, Parks Manager, at 247-2954. All comments may be sent to the undersigned.

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

Dick Ellis
Regional Supervisor

*snowmobile grant
Carbon*

MEPA/NEPA EA CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of Proposed State Action Snow removal
2. Agency Authority for the Proposed Action Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
3. Name of Project Beartooth Snowmobile Program
4. Name, Address and Phone Number of Project Sponsor (if other than the agency)

5. If Applicable:

Estimated Construction/Commencement Date NA
Estimated Completion Date NA
Current Status of Project Design (% complete) NA

6. Location Affected by Proposed Action (county, range and township)

Carbon County R19E T9S

7. Project Size: Estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------|----------|
| (a) Developed: | (d) Floodplain | __ acres |
| residential | | |
| industrial | (e) Productive: | |
| | irrigated cropland | __ acres |
| (b) Open Space/Woodlands/
Recreation | dry cropland | __ acres |
| | forestry | __ acres |
| (c) Wetlands/Riparian
Areas | rangeland | __ acres |
| | other | __ acres |

8. Map/site plan: attach an original 8 1/2" x 11" or larger section of the most recent USGS 7.5' series topographic map showing the location and boundaries of the area that would be affected by the proposed action. A

different map scale may be substituted if more appropriate or if required by agency rule. If available, a site plan should also be attached.

Attached

9. Narrative Summary of the Proposed Action or Project including the Benefits and Purpose of the Proposed Action.

The proposed action requires snow removal from a portion of Montana Highway 212 south of Red Lodge between mile markers 51.3 and 57.0, a total of 5.7 miles. The project will allow easier access for snowmobilers using the area. Additional benefits of the project include a central parking/orientation area, a means to monitor and control traffic patterns, and providing continuing public education on snowmobile safety.

10. Listing of any other Local, State or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction.

(a) Permits:

Agency Name Permit Date Filed/#

Montana Department
of Transportation

(b) Funding:

Agency Name Funding Amount

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

Agency Name Type of Responsibility

United States Department of Agriculture, Forestry Division - Wilderness travel restrictions

Montana Department of Transportation, Red Lodge Station - Highway right-of-way

11. List of Agencies Consulted During Preparation of the EA:

United States Department of Agriculture
Montana Department of Transportation

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> ● the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
▶ a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil which would reduce productivity or fertility?		X				
▶ c. Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?			X			
f. Other _____						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

See attached.

2. <u>AIR</u> ● the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
▶ a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (also see 13 (c))			X			
b. Creation of objectionable odors?			X			
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a)						
f. Other _____						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Air Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):
See attached.

- ⚙ Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.
- ▶ Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)
- ◆ Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- ◆◆ Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

3. WATER Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
● Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		X				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of flood water or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. ♦♦ For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c)						
m. ♦ For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a)						
n. Other: _____						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

See attached.

- ⚙ Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.
- ▶ Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)
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PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

4. <u>VEGETATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?		X				
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?	X					
f. ♦♦ For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?						
g. Other: _____						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

See attached:

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- ▶ Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)
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PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

▶ 5. <u>FISH/WILDLIFE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
● Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		X				
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		X				
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?				X	Yes	
h. ♦♦ For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f)						
i. ♦ For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d)						
j. Other: _____						

● Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

See attached.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Increases in existing noise levels?			X		Yes	
b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				
e. Other: _____						

● Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed): Attached.

- ⚙ Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.
- ▶ Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)
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HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Interference of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				
e. Other: _____						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

See attached.

8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?			X		Yes	
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		X				
d. †For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)						
e. Other: _____						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

See attached.

- * Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.
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- ♦♦ Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				
f. Other: _____						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

See attached.

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify: _____		X				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased used of any energy source?		X				
▶ e. Define projected revenue sources						
▶ f. Define projected maintenance costs.						
g. Other: _____						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed): Attached.

- ⚙ Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.
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- ◆◆ Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

▶ 11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
▶ c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report)		X				
d. ♦ For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c)						
e. Other: _____						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

See attached.

12. <u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. ♦♦ For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a)						
e. Other: _____						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

See attached.

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HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT*				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown*	None	Minor*	Potentially Significant		
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources which create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. ♦ For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e)						
g. ♦♦ For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

See attached.

- ⚙ Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.
- ▶ Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)
- ♦ Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- ♦♦ Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

MEPA EA DRAFT
BEARTOOTH SNOWMOBILE PROGRAM
CARBON COUNTY

PART II ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. Land Resources: Narrative description and evaluation. The proposed project area is located in a moderate to heavy snowfall region. The only means of travel is over state highway 212. This roadway is normally closed to wheeled vehicle traffic during the winter months due to heavy snowfall. The project will require snow removal from a portion of this highway from mile marker 51.3 to 57.0. The proposed action will take place from December 15th through April 15th and does not impose any negative impacts to the land base. The project will utilize the existing roadway as a travel route and for a parking area. The proposed action will have no impact on the physical environment. Exposure of people to natural hazards and acts of God have been judged as minor and will be mitigated through continued education and public awareness of possibilities of natural hazards in the program area.

2. Air: Narrative description and evaluation. Consideration is given to minor impacts of: (a) Emission of air pollutants and (b) Creation of objectionable odors however ambient air quality will not be significantly impacted. The winter use of the project area is very insignificant compared to the heavy tourist use of the area during the summer and fall. Passenger vehicles traveling the project route will emit some emission pollutants. Snowmobiles traveling from the project parking area will also add some pollutants and exhaust odors. The minor impacts created by this project are mitigated by the low level of winter use, forth-coming EPA emission standards applied to snowmobiles and through continued public education on the importance of operating well maintained and tuned equipment. The project only makes public access a little easier it does not significantly add to the historical use of the area by the snowmobiling public.

3. Water: Narrative description and evaluation. The proposed action will have no impact on water resources. The project area is comprised of steep talus slopes bisected by the Beartooth Highway. No existing drainage areas will be affected. Seasonal moisture run off will follow normal flow patterns. The plowing activity will not alter flow patterns.

4. Vegetation: Narrative description and evaluation.

No impacts to native vegetation is foreseen. The proposed program is a winter based project which utilizes the existing road. Vegetation is located beyond the highway right-of-way. The steep rocky slopes which parallel the project corridor are inaccessible by motorized vehicles. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds is not probable due to seasonality and type of equipment used upon the roadway during the winter months. There has been no evidence of noxious weed introduction in the area due to snowmobile recreation. The possibility for establishment or spread of noxious weeds would best be categorized as unknown at this time.

5. Fish and Wildlife: Narrative description and evaluation.

The proposed project will not affect, alter or impact any fish habitat. No live streams exist in the immediate area.

The vegetative areas located outside the proposed project corridor contain very limited numbers of wildlife species during the winter months. The area is mostly a region of steep wind blown slopes. The winter weather conditions are harsh and the majority of wildlife species retreat to winter ranges beyond the project area. Pine martins and a few non-game birds utilize the tree and scrub areas bordering the highway. The presence of human activity in this area has not had an adverse effect on these species.

(Consideration has also been given to potential impacts on wildlife populations beyond the project area. Snowmobile club members have worked with local wildlife biologists to identify winter ranges of big horn sheep and mountain goats. Identifying these areas is the first step in mitigating minor impacts. Further steps in mitigation include signing of winter range boundaries, and a large orientation sign and brochures available at the program parking area. Trespass into restricted areas are enforceable by federal laws. Club members will continue to stress the importance of observing project covenants.)

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. Noise and Electrical effects:

While the proposed program will cause some increase in existing winter noise levels it will not have a significant impact on the human environment. There are no residential areas near the project site. Noise levels created by the snowmobiling public can not be described as severe or nuisance noise. No one will hear the increased noise level except other snowmobilers. There is really no way to mitigate the minor impact of increased noise levels eventhough the project area serves only as an access point and does not provide an area for focused activity. Traffic during the project duration is minimal with an average of 200 snowmobiles per month leaving the project area.

7. Land Use:

There are no cumulative or secondary adverse effects caused by the proposed project on land base use. The project area is currently a highway and the proposed use during the winter time frame does not conflict with existing land use nor does it interfere with any profit or productive orientated activity. The Beartooth Highway is a designated scenic highway. It hosts a multitude of travelers during the summer months in route to Yellowstone National Park. The proposed project does not affect the highways summer use patterns or its scenic status.

8. Risk and Health Hazards:

The only possible source of hazardous substances, through normal use, would come from vehicle accidents. There is always the possibility of vehicle collision involving both snowmobile and passenger vehicles with a chance of oil, engine coolants or gasoline being spilled. Any human error created hazard, due to vehicle accidents, can not be directly mitigated however if the release of hazardous vehicle liquids were to occur it would more than likely occur upon the travel route, over the highway asphalt surface. The potential impact would be minimal and more easily corrected than if the release were to take place in a naturally vegetated area. Again, the low numbers of recreational users would diminish the chances of vehicle incidents.

The potential hazards created by nature can exist anywhere. The project corridor has possibilities of hazards created by rock and snow slides. This minor impact can only be mitigated through public awareness and education. The brochure available at the parking area alerts would be project users of possible hazards. The snowmobile club participates in avalanche awareness and search and rescue training for its members and the general public.

A positive impact will be created through use of the project area by local search and rescue organizations. The plowing of the project corridor will offer quicker and more efficient response to emergency situations in the Beartooth Pass area.

9. Community Impacts:

The proposed project is removed from residential and commercial areas. There is no proposed activity which will alter human population patterns or adversely affect sociological development. The off season use of a portion of highway 212 for this project should not create significant traffic hazards nor impact transportation facilities.

10. Public Services/Taxes/Utilities:

There are no projected effects on public services, taxes or utilities as a result of this proposal. There are no new or altered government services required to initiate this program. The use of a portion of the state gas tax to fund the proposed action is proportionately insignificant to the total funding available to the state wide trails programs. Implementation of the proposed action would not have an adverse effect on this special revenue source.

Contracting to have the Department of Transportation (DOT) plow the project corridor once a week from December 15 through April 15 suggests no impacts to there existing operations. A limited amount of winter maintenance is performed on this highway section at various times throughout the winter by the DOT. This agencies willingness to assist in the proposed project offers assurance that the project is not impacting their operating schedule.

11. Aesthetics and Recreation:

Travel through the proposed access area is not lingering. There will not be an accumulation of anything that could be described as visually offensive. The parking area will contain vehicles and snowmobile trailers however since this activity will be concentrated rather than scattered throughout the area no visual negative impact will be created.

There will be no impact to the character of distant communities or other urbanized areas. The quality or quantity of recreational activities will be slightly enhanced but not to the point of creating impacts to recreation or aesthetic settings.

12. Cultural/Historical Resources:

There has been no prehistoric, historic or paleontological sites, structures or objects defined in the immediate area of the project. Due to the physical setting of the project area most extant cultural resources are located in other areas of the region more suitable for human adaptation. Historic sites in the immediate area are lacking with no physical or recorded evidence existing to verify their existence. The geology of the area is not conducive to containment or preservation of paleontological specimens. Once again, the proposed project utilizes a portion of an existing highway and there are not any human cultural resources at risk. There are not any existing religious or sacred sites of contemporary or historic use on the project area.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. Summary Evaluation of Significance:

There have been a few minor impacts recorded in this EA that are individually limited in overall significance. The cumulative effects of these impacts do not create secondary adverse stress on the available resources. Minor impacts noted, in most cases, can be easily mitigated. Those factors which deal with human behavior and acts of nature can be defined but not readily resolved. Risks and adverse effects of this project have been well defined by participating recreational users. It was determined that extreme hazards do not exist along the proposed project corridor.

Use of the project area without implementation of this program would continue as it has in the past. The proposal for enhanced access to a parking area would not add to increased governmental participation. The particular agencies involved are already mandated to follow established plans to monitor use conflicts and seek compliance with pertinent laws.

An evaluation of future winter use in the area does not lead to the likelihood of an expanded program. The proposed project is not a typical trails program. There are not any maintained trail systems in the immediate area. The project corridor and parking area meet the needs of present and future winter recreational use.

Considering the amount of public use and travel over this same route during the summer months it is not likely the proposed project would generate substantial controversy or debate. In the overall picture of public use, the use of a small portion of the existing highway by a limited number of winter recreationists does not open the door for justifiable concerns. No potentially significant impacts have been outlined in this EA. The minor impacts addressed, even cumulatively, should not generate major public concern. When dealing with human concerns there is always the possibility someone would like to generate debate over this project. The no impact designated for (e) could realistically fade into the unknown category.

1. **Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:**

The Beartooth Highway has long been used by the public as a travel route for summer and winter recreational outings. The alternatives to the proposed project are limited.

Alternative A: No Action. A portion of the existing highway would continue to be used by snowmobilers without benefit of the plowing program and control measures. Pertinent educational training sessions open to the public would be adversely affected.

2. **Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:**

The categories defined in this EA as creating minor impacts have been evaluated and assigned priority ratings. Those impacts which can be mitigated by control measures such as signing, training and law enforcement compliance will be handled through cooperative arrangement with the snowmobile club and the agency. Minor impacts dealing with human error or acts of nature can only be enhanced through educational endeavors. Residual impacts of additional air pollutants and odors cannot be controlled by the sponsors of this program. Excessive noise levels created by defective or altered equipment is controllable by the agency.

3. **Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? YES / NO If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action:**

Based on the review of all significant criteria in this EA it is suggested an EIS is not required. This environmental assessment is the appropriate level of analysis based on the following criteria:

Throughout the environmental review no significant impacts were assessed. The minor impacts reported can be mitigated in most instances. There were no adverse individual, collective or cumulative impacts discovered. Those that fell into the unknown category will be monitored for future reference.

The proposed project is very close to falling into a categorical exclusion due to the nature of the program. The road plowing action proposed is a minor operation.

4. **Describe the level of public involvement for this project if any and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?**

The environmental issues identified in the program's proposed action are not complex or significant. In the best interest of the public, a comment period will be advertized. Public involvement to date has taken place through open snowmobile club meetings.

5. **Duration of comment period if any:** The comment period will be advertized in local papers for a period of three weeks.

6. **Name, title, address and phone number of the Person(s) Responsible for Preparing the EA:**

Midland Empire Snowgoers
Pierre Holland, President
4251 Jack Rabbit Dr.
Billings, Montana 59106
406-245-2729

Harley Sorrells
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
P.O. Box 253
Joliet, Montana 59041
406-962-3655

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

Throughout this evaluation the reviewers were consistent in identifying specific areas of concern. Greater concern was voiced over those impacts which, although considered minor impacts, could not be easily or readily mitigated.

AIR Part a & b: Emission of air pollutants and creation of objectionable odors were the first topics discussed at length. It was concluded the proposed project would not have a direct affect on these categories since snowmobile activity has always taken place in the area and the air quality concerns previously existed. Implementation of the project would not necessarily cause an increase in use of the area. It would be the goal of the program participants to encourage improved maintenance of snow machines to help limit excessive air pollutants. This combined with forthcoming EPA standards would help reduce the impacts noted.

VEGETATION Part e: There has been no evidence of noxious weed introduction or spread in the area due to snowmobile activity. Cooperative efforts with the county weed board will monitor the site for future reference.

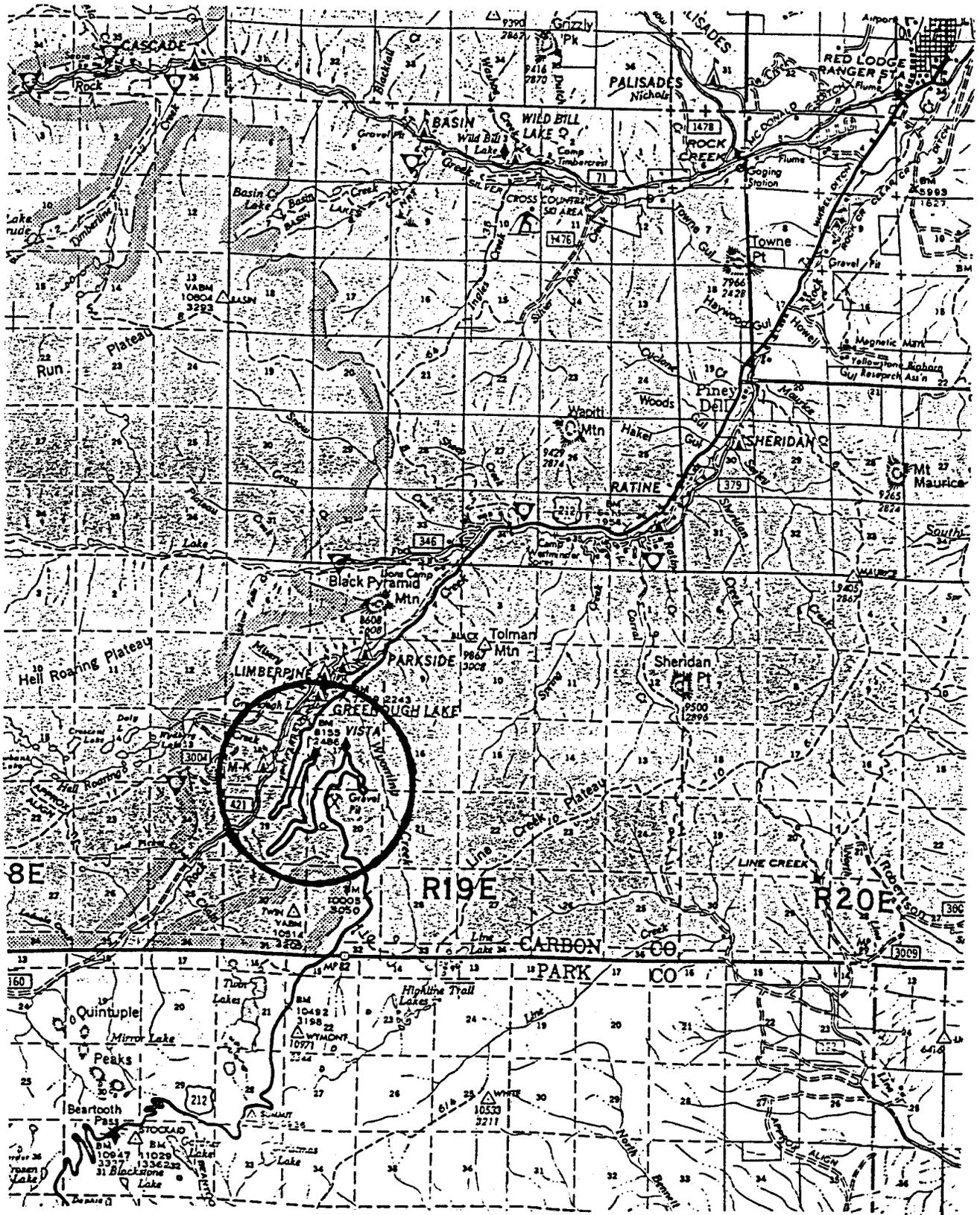
FISH AND WILDLIFE Part g: Although no impacts were noted in the fish and wildlife sections of this assessment, the reviewers have worked with area biologists to determine the possibility of creating impacts to wildlife located beyond the project area boundaries. Consideration has been given to winter ranges that historically exist in the area. These areas have been identified and measures taken to minimize possible impact. Boundaries have been marked and travel routes designated. A large orientation map (4'x8') located at the project parking area informs would-be users of restricted areas. There are also project brochures available at this same area which contain an area map. The restrictions noted are enforceable both by state game wardens and forest service officers.

NOISE EFFECTS Part a: An increase in existing noise levels has been assessed and identified as a possible minor impact. Again, it was the opinion of the reviewers that this noise level, caused primarily by snowmobiles, is a pre-existing condition. Monitoring of noise levels by club participants and law enforcement will help to keep impacts minimal.

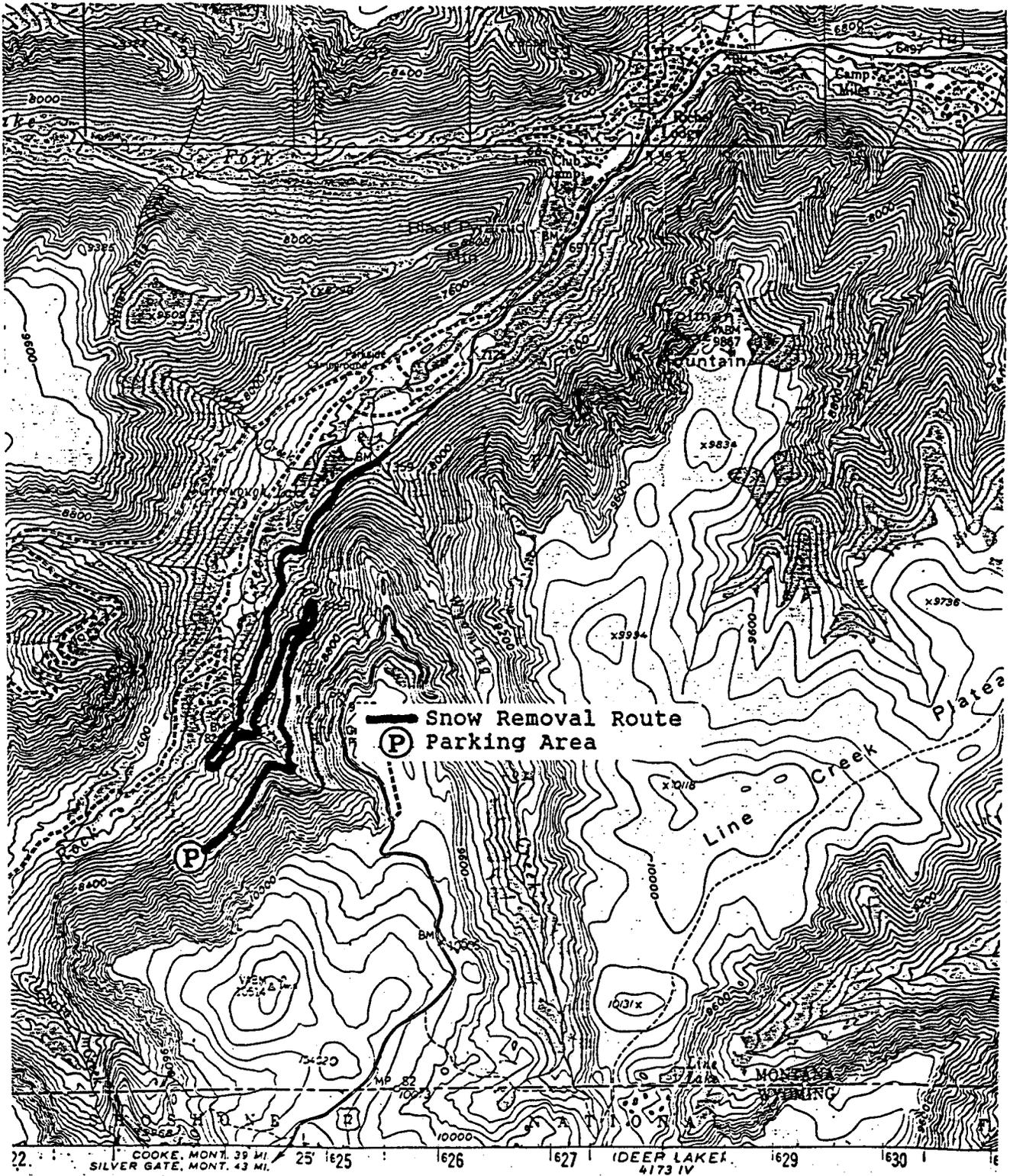
RISK AND HEALTH HAZARDS Part a, b, c: The possibility of introducing health hazards to the human environment was categorized as an unknown. The only source for release of hazardous substances would be from motor vehicles and perhaps from snowmobiles. Such hazards would be created by human error over which the program sponsors have little control. The hazardous materials identified for clarification in this project were engine oil and gasoline. No other substances would normally spill. The proposed project area utilizes the existing highway surface for vehicle travel. It is conceivable that spills would take place upon the asphalt surface of the roadway.

The potential hazards of nature can exist anywhere. The project corridor has possibilities of snow and rock slides. This unknown impact can only be mitigated through public awareness and education.

A positive impact will be created through use of the project by local search and rescue organizations. It is not believed this project will create the necessity for more rescue callouts. The response time to emergency situations will be enhanced.



BEARTOOTH SNOWMOBILE PROGRAM
 PROJECT AREA
 HIGHWAY 212 CARBON COUNTY
 RED LODGE, MONTANA



**BEARTOOTH SNOWMOBILE PROGRAM
 ACTIVITY AND PARKING AREA**

SNOWMOBILE GROOMING PROGRAM

Regional Wildlife Clearance

Trail expansion (attach map highlighting expansion)

New trail system (attach map highlighting trail system)

MIDLAND EMPIRE SNOWGOERS

Snowmobile Club

Are there any wildlife concerns?

YES

NO

If yes:

Species Bighorn Sheep and Mountain Goat

(list)

1. Winter range Line Creek Plateau and between East & West Fork of Line Creek (area)

2. Travel corridor NONE

3. Other Area between Chain Creek & Mirror Lake (sheep area)

Suggested alternate route _____

Other mitigation measures (such as signing; trail restrictions, etc.)

Sign winter range boundary and keep snowmobile traffic out. SEE MAP

Approved with above-mentioned mitigation measures

Not approved as submitted

Charles D. Custace 5-14-92
Regional Wildlife Biologist Date

Raymond V. Buntzen 5/14/92
Regional Parks Manager Date

JAN 8 1993

Marc Racicot, Governor



Montana Department of Transportation

2701 Prospect Avenue
PO Box 201001
Helena MT 59620 1001

Kathy

© to

C.R.
FILE
COPY

January 7, 1993

Marcella Sherfy
State Historic Preservation Office
225 North Roberts
Helena, MT 59620

Subject: STPP 28-2(17)45
Beartooth Pass - North
Control No. 2044

Enclosed is the cultural resource report and CRABS form for the above project. Aaberg Cultural Resource Consulting Service recorded three prehistoric and one historic Isolated Artifact Localities (IAL) within the designated project area. We are requesting your concurrence that none of IALs are eligible for the NRHP.

If you have any questions, please contact Jon Axline at 444-6258.

Edrie Vinson

Edrie L. Vinson, Chief
Environmental & Hazardous Waste Bureau

ELV:D:ENV:169.gg

Enclosure

- cc: David S. Johnson, P.E., Preconstruction Bureau w/attach.
- Roy R. Ventura, Jr., P.E., Billings District Engineer w/attach.
- Lee Greer, USDA - Forest Service Region One Office Halcyon LaPoint, Custer National Forest

CONCUR
NO PROPERTIES ON OR ELIGIBLE
FOR NRHP APPEAR LIKELY TO
EXIST WITHIN PROJECT IMPACT AREA
MONTANA SHPO
DATE 1/13/93 SIGNED *[Signature]*

RECEIVED

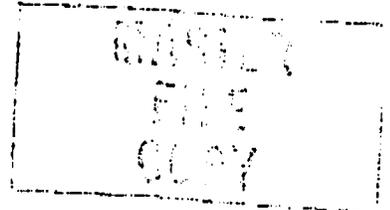
JAN 14 1993



Montana Department
of Transportation

2701 Prospect Avenue
PO Box 201001
Helena MT 59620-1001

Marc Racicot, Governor



May 3, 1993

State Clearinghouse
c/o Office of Budget & Program Planning
Capitol Building, Room #221
Helena, MT 59620

Subject: STPP 28 - 2(17)45
Beartooth Pass - North
(P.M.S. C#2044)

Enclosed is one (1) copy of the Categorical Exclusion for this proposed project as approved by the U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) on April 30, 1993.

This document also complies with the provisions of MCA 75-1-103 and MCA 75-1-201 (see ARM 18.2.261, MEPA "Actions that qualify for a Categorical Exclusion" as applicable to the Montana Department of Transportation/MDT).

Additional copies of this document are available through this office (MDT's Environmental & Hazardous Waste Bureau).

Edrie L. Vinson

for Edrie L. Vinson, Chief *EMW*
Environmental & Hazardous Waste Bureau

ELV:KMH:asj:SC.LET

Enclosure

CC: Edrie L. Vinson, Chief - MDT Environmental & Hazardous Waste Bureau



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Custer NF

2602 1st Avenue North
P.O. Box 2556
Billings, MT 59103

RECEIVED

MAY 03 1993

Reply To: 7700

Date: April 20, 1993

MASTER FILE
COPY

ENVIRONMENTAL BUREAU
Edrie L. Vinson, Chief
MDT - Environmental & Hazardous Waste Bureau
2701 Prospect Avenue
PO Box 201001
Helena, Mt. 59620-1001

STPP 28 - 2(17)45
Beartooth Pass - North
(P.M.S. C#2044)

Dear Edrie:

I have reviewed the documents for the above, proposed project.

With this letter I concur that this proposed project meets the criteria for classification as a Categorical Exclusion under the provisions of 23 CFR 771.117(d). The description, purpose & need, environmental impacts, locations map and related documents appear to be in order.

From my analysis as the Responsible Official of a Cooperating Agency I believe this proposed project is in accordance with the above and the Memorandum of Understanding on Procedures Related to State Highways over National Forest Lands signed by MDT, the FHWA, and the USFS in January, 1993.

Please call Carl Wolf at 406-657-6361 in my Billings office if we can be of further assistance.

CURTIS W. BATES
Forest Supervisor

cc: Beartooth RD
B. Johnston, RO
R. Snyder, RO
Roy Ventura, MDT, Billings
R. Weed, MDT, Billings



INTERAGENCY COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT

This interagency cooperative agreement is made this date, July 1, 1995, by and between the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), and MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS ("FWP") for the purpose of cooperatively maintaining a section of State Highway U.S. 212 for snowmobile use on land shown on the attached map, (Attachment A).

This agreement will be effective for the period beginning July 1 1995, and ending June 30, 1996.

RECITALS

1. Legislation was passed by the 47th Montana Legislature earmarking a portion of gasoline taxes for snowmobile facility operation, maintenance, and development for public use, at no cost to the public;

2. Sufficient funds have accrued in the snowmobile earmarked revenue account to fund the proposal described in this agreement;

3. The Parks Division of FWP has been assigned the responsibility for administration of the program and the Parks Division desires to seek means of providing snowmobile facilities; and

4. The MDT has maintenance equipment in the vicinity of the project area of concern.

NOW, THEREFORE, IN CONSIDERATION of the promises and

conditions and terms set forth in this agreement, the parties agree as follows:

1. The attached map, designated as Attachment "A", is an accurate graphic depiction of the land area covered by this agreement.

2. FWP shall provide the following to the MDT:

a. Reimburse MDT in an amount not to exceed \$4,000.00 for the maintenance of the area set forth in Attachment "A" upon receipt of proper documentation showing actual costs of said maintenance.

3. The MDT shall perform the following activities and duties:

a. Plowing of snow not to exceed 5 miles from the state highway's closure gate, the point of beginning. All plowing will take place between December 15 and April 15 of each year.

b. Create a parking area for vehicles for the purpose of loading and unloading snowmobiles near that portion of highway where plowing will cease. The area is approximately (1) mile below upper Quad Creek.

4. The MDT shall follow established accounting procedures and shall permit Legislative or Department auditors access to its records for the purpose of determining if this grant is administered in accordance with grant terms and conditions.

5. In the maintenance and performance of this agreement,

both parties shall act in accordance with appropriate and applicable state laws. Either party may terminate this agreement with or without cause by giving ten days written notice. Upon termination, FWP shall pay the MDT for work actually performed under this agreement to the date of termination.

6. It is agreed upon by both parties that plowing of this portion of Highway U.S. 212 for the purpose of snowmobile use is of lower priority than the standard maintenance responsibilities of the MDT.

Plowing will be conducted weekly if the following conditions permit:

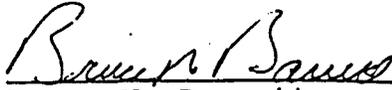
- a. All other public safety concerns are met;
- b. Other responsibilities of the MDT have been completed;
- c. Crews are available; and
- d. Weather conditions permit.

This writing contains the entire agreement between the parties.

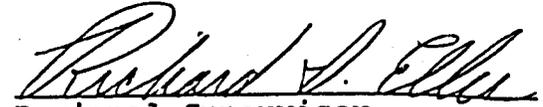
The MDT designates Bruce Barrett to act as liaison for this agreement. FWP designates Ray Berntsen to act as liaison for this agreement. All contacts for the purpose of fulfilling this cooperative agreement between the MDT and FWP shall be made through the designated liaisons or their delegates.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE &
PARKS



Bruce H. Barrett
District Administrator



Richard A. Ellis
Regional Supervisor

Date: 5/5/95

Date: 5/5/95



Approved for legal content
Tim Reardon, Chief Counsel

Date: _____

