

**DECISION NOTICE**  
**BIGHOLE SNOWMOBILE GROOMING GRANT**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**  
January 14, 1997

**PROPOSAL**

The proposed action is for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to award the Bighole Snowmobile Club a grant to continue grooming the existing trails and roads designated for snowmobile use in the Wisdom area. FWP has maintained a trail grooming agreement with the Bighole Snowmobile Club for several years.

Prior to any further granting of snowmobile grooming funds, FWP completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) to address those issues outlined under the Montana Snowmobile Grant Program Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS). This assessment reviewed what, if any, impacts the groomed trails have on the human and natural environment and presented reasonable measures through a public awareness plan to mitigate identified impacts.

**MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT PROCESS**

FWP is required by the Montana Environment Policy Act (MEPA) to assess impacts to the human and natural environment. The Bighole Snowmobile Club grooming proposal and its impacts were documented by FWP in an EA to comply with MEPA. The Montana Snowmobile Grant PEIS was reviewed to determine the issues to be addressed in the Bighole Snowmobile Grant EA.

Public comments were solicited for 30 days from November 4 through December 3, 1996. Legal notices regarding the proposed action were printed in area newspapers and listed on the state's electronic bulletin board. Approximately 27 copies of the EA were mailed out to FWP's standard distribution list and interested parties.

**SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT**

FWP received two letters during the comment period. The comments received during the public comment period were reviewed and noted. The letters received contained a number of comments that were determined to be outside the scope of the environmental assessment process. A summary of the comments follows.

One written comment supported the Bighole Snowmobile Club's grooming proposal. The written comment emphasized the importance of maintaining public access, and expanded motorized recreational opportunities.

The second written comment received was from the Montana Wilderness Association expressing concern about the impact of snowmobile grooming activities on wildlife and Forest Service land management activities. Fish, Wildlife and Parks will respond in summary form to this concern.

## FOREST SERVICE LAND MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

FWP administers a grant program for snowmobile trail grooming activities. The PEIS and EA are intended to provide MEPA compliance for the snowmobile trail grooming grant program. The PEIS requires as a prerequisite for trail grooming funding, that those trails on federal land be covered by appropriate National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation. The Beaverhead Forest has communicated to FWP that the use of federal lands, as proposed in the Bighole Snowmobile Club grooming project, is in compliance with NEPA. For the scope of this EA, FWP must depend on the determination made by the Forest Service. Limiting off road / trail use by snowmobiles and the designation of play areas is outside the scope of the Snowmobile Grooming Grant Program PEIS.

## WILDLIFE

Under the PEIS several measures are available to the agencies that are designed to protect habitat and preserve natural behavioral traits and population distributions. The measures are designed to reduce impacts from the establishment of trails under the Snowmobile Grant Program. Most of the following mitigation measures would be accomplished through a strategic signing, education and enforcement program. The Bighole Snowmobile Grant EA incorporates a public awareness plan to mitigate the impacts to wildlife, through education and trail signing.

## SUMMARY OF REVIEW

No significant issues were identified or generated during the EA review and public comment period to trigger further review.

## DECISION NOTICE

FWP's analysis supports preserving the existing Bighole Snowmobile grooming program, with stipulations identified in the public awareness plan. A tradition of public recreation has developed in the Wisdom area over many years. A state grooming grant will guarantee a continued joint commitment of FWP, USFS, and the Bighole Snowmobile Club to promote resource protection and ethical public land use.

**After review of this proposal it is my intention to accept the EA with mitigation measures addressed in the public awareness plan as the final EA and to award the Bighole Snowmobile Club a grant to continue grooming the existing trails and roads designated for snowmobile use.**

The Final EA may be viewed at or obtained upon request from the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, at the Region 3 Headquarters in Bozeman (994-4042), The Helena Area Resource Office (449-8864), and the Butte Area Resource Office (494-1952).



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