

In deciding to allow the ski area to expand, I balanced the impacts to wildlife and their habitat with the need to accommodate increasing demand for skiing and maintaining quality, uncrowded skier experiences. This area is currently one of the most fragmented areas on the Forest due to past public and private timber harvest, road building, and residential development. I anticipate that private development will continue to occur in the future. I have concluded because of this that the direct impact to wildlife habitat from ski area expansion is far more acceptable here than they may be on other parts of the Forest.

FISHERIES

Sediment modeling of my selected alternative, Alternative 2, indicates that sediment yields in the South Fork of Brackett Creek will increase from 89.8 to 91.4 tons/year or from 8.2% over natural to 10.1% over natural.(FEIS Chapter 4: Table 4.6-1) Sediment levels would decrease to 8.4% over natural as the run clearing disturbances are re-vegetated. These sediment level increases are too low to be measured with conventional in-stream sediment measuring equipment. I've concluded that this low level of sediment increase to the South Fork of Brackett Creek would result in extremely limited, if any, negative effect on Yellowstone cutthroat trout habitat within the Brackett Creek watershed. In addition, construction activities that will occur under my decision have been designed to provide for aquatic resource protection. Refer to the FEIS, Table 2.6-1 (Mitigation Measures) and Appendix D (Implementation and Monitoring Plan).

ROADLESS

The approved expansion will encompass about 101 acres of the Bridger Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) in the Shushman drainage. A portion of the S-1 chairlift; the P-2 surface lift; and portions of ski trails 1S, 2S, and 3S would be located within the IRA, resulting in approximately 1.4 acres of vegetation removal and 0.7 acres of grading. I've considered concerns that ski lifts and ski trails in the IRA will have visual impacts and will decrease the integrity of the roadless character. The approved lift will be installed without any road construction and the trails will be located on open meadows and rock outcroppings. No significant amount of tree cover will be removed. The sights and sounds of human activity during construction will be temporary and the loss of opportunity for solitude during use would be limited to the winter months. The Gallatin Forest Plan does not recommend this roadless area for future designation as wilderness but instead assigned these lands a management area (MA) 2 management prescription which emphasizes developed ski area as the highest and best use.

VISUAL RESOURCES

The Bridger Mountains rugged natural beauty is a big attraction to the ski area. Travelers on Bridger Canyon Road, heading north within two miles of the Bridger Bowl access road, may notice a change in the landscape as implementation of my decision occurs. However, the approved surface lifts and the ski terrain served by these lifts will not be readily visible due to the vertically oriented rock areas and existing openings. New ski trails will be visible below the Bradley Meadows ridge but ski trail clearings will be designed to replicate the existing opening pattern of the ski area and surrounding higher terrain. The design criteria includes scalloping and feathering of the trails and making use of existing openings where possible. Clearing will be