

ANACONDA HILL IRA

If it were not for the Mike Horse Mine, this area should be recommended for Wilderness. As it is, defining this IRA as “non-motorized backcountry with a wildlife emphasis” would be essential to establish this first link in the wildlife corridor extending from the Bob Marshall Complex south of Highway 200, south through the more fractured country along this portion of the Continental Divide west of Helena. I recorded extensive grizzly bear digs along the spectacular ridge with views to the Scapegoat and Bob Marshall Wilderness Areas. Bear hair snare collections in this area conducted by MFWP over the past 10 years has resulted in “hits” for grizzly bear.

The following is the Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society’s 1984-2005 canvassing questionnaire regarding roadless values for possible Congressional consideration of wilderness for Anaconda Hill.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment regarding recommendations for our valued Inventoried Roadless Areas. I commend the HLCNF for extending this opportunity and providing an informative and educational method to gather this information through the Interactive Mapping exercise offered at the Open House that was held at Jorgensen’s Inn on March 7, 2016.

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Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society, Member

SUMMARY OF WILDLIFE, FISHERIES & HABITAT VALUES FOR ROADLESS AREAS

ROADLESS AREA (name) Anaconda Hill 17,461 net acres (#1602-HNF Forest Plan 1986)
National Forest Helena NF
Direction and distance to nearest town Helena – 25 mi SE; Lincoln – 15 mi SW
Hunting Districts in which Roadless Area occurs: HD339
Individual providing this information: Gayle Joslin
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1) Please briefly explain the importance of the area to wildlife and fisheries. Consider wildlife use/habitat for as many of the following as pertinent: Elk, Mule deer, White-tailed deer, Moose, Mountain Goat, Bighorn Sheep, Other species of concern (important seasonal use, security, denning habitat, connectivity to other important habitats, spawning habitat, coldwater downstream fisheries, etc.) Elk, Mule Deer, White-tailed Deer, Black Bear, Grizzly Bear, Mountain Lion, Lynx, Wolverine occur. Bighorn Sheep and Mountain Goats are known to occur in this area as they move between the Continental Divide and the Wolf Creek Canyon and the Sleeping Giant area to the east. Grizzly bear are known to den in the area, and a female grizzly produced several litters of cubs in this area during the 1990’s and into 2000. Essential fall big game security is provided. Portions of the RA are winter range for elk, mule deer and

moose. The Continental Divide Scenic Trail runs nearly the length of this RA. No fisheries.

2) Is there hunter/angler access to the area? YES. From Flesher Pass, Rogers Pass, Beartrap Creek, Lyons Creek, the Lincoln Highway (279), and from the MFWP Canyon Creek Wildlife Management Area that adjoins the Roadless Area on the south. Hunters use the area heavily.

3) Are there adjoining parcels of land that could be added to this Roadless Area? No.

4) Does this Roadless Area provide a buffer zone between Wilderness and developed public or private lands? NO, but it adjoins the Canyon Creek Wildlife Management Area, the MFWP O'Connell Ranch Conservation Easement, the MFWP Sieben Ranch Conservation Easement, and is within ½ mile of the Specimen Creek Roadless Area for approximately 5 miles, with only the Lincoln Highway in between, so roadless continuity in this area is good.

5) Are there areas in this Roadless Area that should be removed from Roadless status?
NO

6) Are there opportunities for reclamation within this area to improve its Roadless character? YES – some old roads occur, but nature for the most part is reclaiming them. Enforcement to minimize illegal use of OHVs is important.

7) What are the threats to this Roadless Area? (motorized use/expansion; ski developments, etc.)

The biggest threats to this area are subdivision proposals on private lands in Woods and Greenpole Creeks, and illegal motorized use from adjacent private lands.

8) Does this area contribute to wildlife movement through the landscape? YES. It straddles the Continental Divide for approximately 8 miles. The Continental Divide is possibly the most important and perhaps the most threatened wildlife movement corridor in North America. Wildlife are known to move through this area along the Divide and to branch off to the east, moving through a series of private land conservation easements and State and BLM land. This eastern movement corridor is realized by a variety of wildlife such as bighorn sheep and mountain goats, moose and bears crossing Interstate 15 to get to the Sleeping Giant Wilderness Study Area and even crossing the Missouri River to get to the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness and the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area in the Big Belt Mountains. (Map attached)

9) Is there good/poor travel planning on surrounding public lands? N/A. Surrounding lands are in private and state ownership. Enforcement of existing travel restrictions is important in retaining the Roadless Character of this area on the Helena National Forest.

10) Would the surrounding areas of non-Roadless public lands be capable of providing yearlong functional habitat and security? Probably, because much of the adjacent land on the east and south are in conservation easements with MFWP. The western adjacent property is heavily roaded Helena National Forest and the abandoned and toxic Mike Horse Mine.