

ELECTRIC PEAK IRA

Recent grizzly bear occurrence has been captured through MFWP camera monitoring and several reports from the public indicate that this area is used consistently by grizzlies. The photo of a grizzly in March strongly suggests that the area is used for denning. It is the largest IRA in the wildlife corridor linkage along the Continental Divide, and one of the most important in providing a stepping off point for genetic connection bridging Interstate 90 to wild lands available in the Yellowstone Ecosystem south of I-90. Electric Peak provides an island of wildlife security in an otherwise heavily roaded and cut landscape. I documented during aerial wildlife surveys a moose killed by wolves about a mile south of the IRA in the upper Boulder River. My recommendation for this area is Wilderness.

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 Electric Peak.

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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SUMMARY OF WILDLIFE, FISHERIES & HABITAT VALUES FOR ROADLESS AREAS

ROADLESS AREA (name) Electric Peak 46,497 net acres (HNF Forest Plan 1986)
National Forest Helena National Forest
Direction and distance to nearest town Deerlodge – 9 mi W; Elliston – 5 mi N
Hunting Districts in which Roadless Area occurs: HD215 and HD318
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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.) Several mountains in this Roadless Area extend above 8,000 feet thus providing a range of habitat needs for a variety of wildlife. This area is notable for its sightings of wolverine. A female grizzly inhabits the area and consistently produces cubs. Elk, Mule Deer, Moose, Black Bear, Grizzly Bear, Lynx, Wolverine occur along with a variety of grouse and other wildlife and birds. The area almost certainly provides black bear, grizzly

bear, wolverine, and lynx denning habitat. Wolverine have been repeatedly observed over the years by a variety of individuals and FS employees. Essential wildlife movement corridor along Continental Divide, particularly in this portion of the state where motorized recreation otherwise dominates the landscape. It is critical fall big game security. Portions of the RA are winter range for elk and mule deer. Wolves are present in the area. There is a brook trout and cutthroat trout fishery.

2) Is there hunter/angler access to the area? YES. The Little Blackfoot River road runs into Little Blackfoot Meadows and ends at Kading Campground. This is a direct access point to the Roadless Area. In addition there is access from Telegraph Creek, and from a variety of roads along the western southern half of the area, as well as the Basin Creek road, and from near the end of the Thunderbolt Creek road.

3) Are there adjoining parcels of land that could be added to this Roadless Area?

YES. The eastern and northern boundary could be expanded outward by 1 to 3 miles to incorporate lynx and wolverine use areas as well as quality big game summer range and Cliff Lake which is a small lake that hosts a rare population of high elevation, permanently neonatal salamanders. The Electric Peak RA could be expanded northward along the Continental Divide to connect with the Jericho Mountain RA and thus enhance protection of the Continental Divide as a wildlife movement corridor. (Maps attached.)

4) Does this Roadless Area provide a buffer zone between Wilderness and developed public or private lands? NO. But it is the second largest expanse of Roadless land along the Continental Divide from Highway 200 south to the Pioneer Mountains south of Butte. It is the most important Roadless Area within Hunting Districts 318 and 215, and would be enhanced if it were connected with Jericho Mountain.

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 – several miles of old roads occur and could be reclaimed. Particularly important would be eventual reclamation of roads along the Continental Divide in the connection area between Electric and Jericho RAs. Travel management to control off road use is particularly necessary on the Deerlodge National Forest portion of this Roadless Area. On the Helena National Forest side, the past supervisor closed the Helena forest portion to snowmobiling, which has substantially enhanced successful denning opportunities for bears and furbearing animals. In 1997, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks worked with the Jefferson Ranger District and the Deerlodge Snowmobile Club to clarify snowmobile use south of the area on the big game winter range. It was decided that the state would not contribute snowmobile grooming money to connect trails between the Helena and the Deerlodge Snowmobile Clubs because too many motorized trails already existed across the Berkin Flats Winter Range. This decision helped to maintain the non-motorized character of the Roadless Area, particularly along the RA boundary north of the Boulder River.

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

Illegal motorized use. ATV users have been establishing unauthorized trails into the area from several access points. Recognition of the RA and enforcement of its boundaries is essential.

8) Does this area contribute to wildlife movement through the landscape? YES. It straddles the Continental Divide, which is the most important wildlife movement corridor in North America. It occurs about 3 miles south of the Jericho Mountain Roadless Area, also along the Continental Divide just south of Highway 12.

9) Is there good/poor travel planning on surrounding public lands? POOR. Travel planning on this portion of the Helena National Forest has been deferred indefinitely until funding is available from the Regional Office, thus the maintenance of this Roadless Area is critical to wildlife security and habitat integrity. On the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest, travel planning is not even being incorporated into current forest planning. The status of management of off-road travel on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge is shameful. [Divide Travel Plan was signed 2/29/2016]

10) Would the surrounding areas of non-Roadless public lands be capable of providing yearlong functional habitat and security? No. Particularly since travel management is not being implemented on either the Helena or Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forests. Carefully designated routes and consistent monitoring and enforcement are urgently needed in this area if the Continental Divide is to continue to provide continuity in the wildlife movement corridor and between functional wildlife habitats.