

LAZYSMAN INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREA

SUBUNIT D – Northwest Portion

Willow Creek and headwaters of lower Colorado Gulch

May 17, 2026



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Subunit D: Northwest Area: Willow Creek and headwater of lower Colorado Gulch

From April 2020 to January 2026, within Subunit D, three incident reports and one field survey of “road” [4782](#) (3 segments; 55 photos) were recorded.

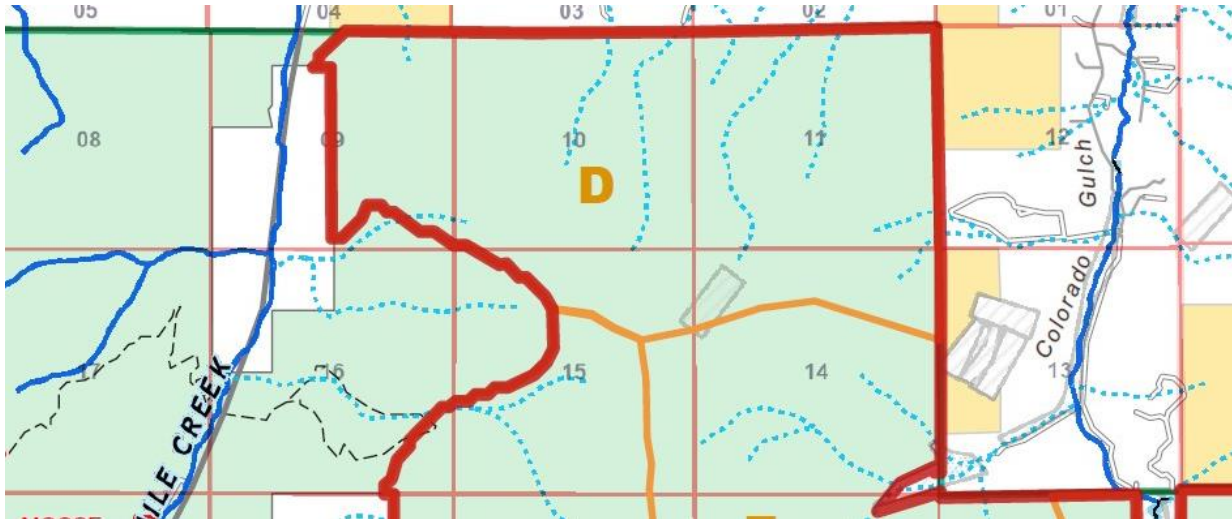


Figure D01 . Map of Subunit D, Lazyman IRA.

Field survey route 4782 involved the road that the Forest Service intended to use during the Tenmile-South Helena Vegetation Manipulation Project. Incident reports included illegal construction of more than 20 miles of bike/hike trails (18+ photos in report, dozens of other previous photos available), illegal motorized use of a side-by-side in the IRA (2 photos), and illegal clearing of illegal trails by two e-bikers (3 photos). At least 12 person-days were spent in field work in this north-northwest portion of the Lazyman IRA. Seven [Field Reports](#) provide photos, waypoints, maps, and narratives in the following reports: 4782-000 Series; Incident: Willow Cr Bike Trails Report 9-24 & 10-9 2022; Incident: LE Report sent to Helena Ranger District; and Incident: e-bike trail clearing 20260111.

April 28, 2020 Lower Colorado Gulch 4782 Series Report by Doug Powell

One field survey was conducted in the Willow Creek portion of the Lazyman Inventoried Roadless Area (Subunit D) along routes the Forest Services intended to use for access for the area for the Tenmile-South Helena Vegetation Manipulation Project.

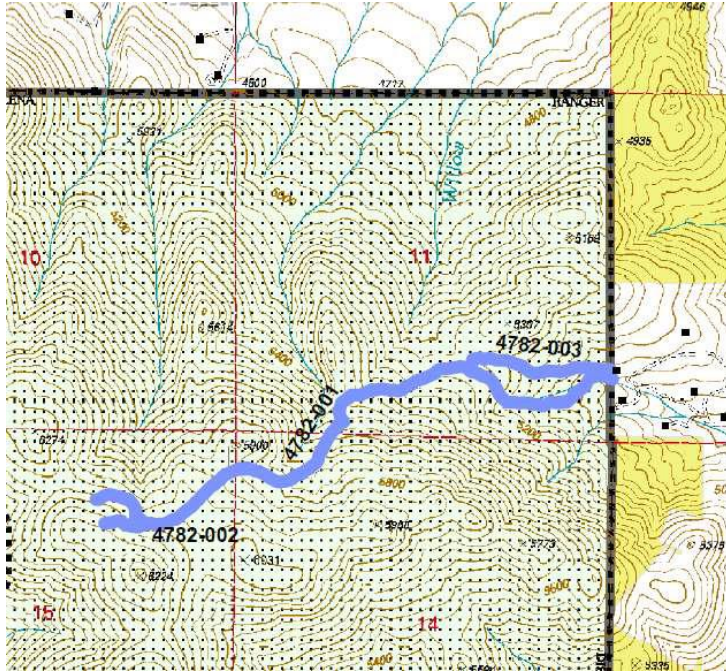


Figure D02 . Map of 4782 field survey, north Lazyman IRA.

This survey involved photographing three aspirational roads that the Forest Service intended to use to access the Tenmile-South Helena Vegetation Manipulation Project. (The IRA portion of that project did not proceed subsequent to litigation by HHA.) Although 55 photos were taken for the 4782-000 Series North Lazyman IRA Report, representative pictures reveal that these “roads” have been naturally reclaimed.

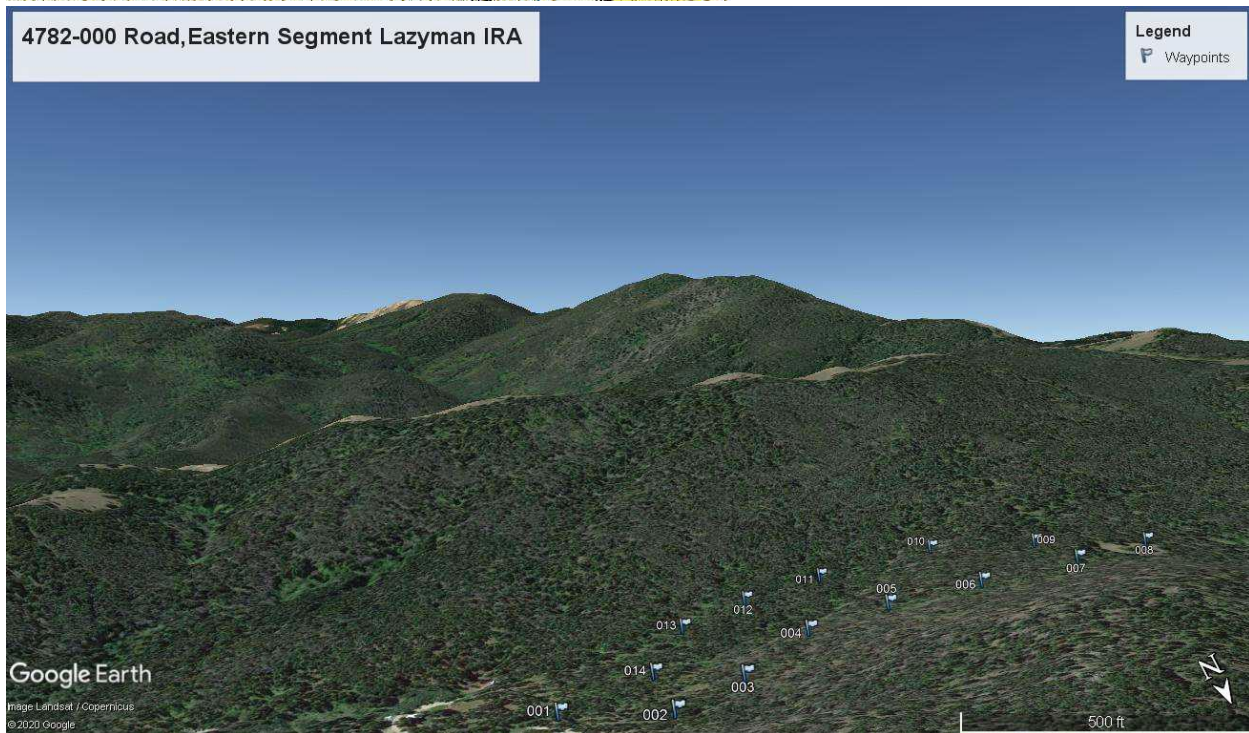


Figure D03. Field survey of north Lazyman IRA in Willow Creek - 4782-003.

Road 4782-003 is a trail that is predominantly 24-36 inches wide, with a faintly wider bed visible at a distance in some places. The bed is completely overgrown with native vegetation and covered with top soil in most places. The landscape consists of large granite boulders, areas of Ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir trees with a small opening at the western edge of the road.

Landscape consists of moist drainages with numerous small and large meadows at the end of the route on the top of Lazyman Pass. Route was surveyed from east to west.



Figure D04. Proposed haul route 4782-003, very narrow, steep incline. Goshawk nesting site occurred in this vicinity.



Figure D05. View to north of Willow Creek in Lazyman IRA, 4782-001 and 4782-002 waypoints.

Elk, moose and carnivore sign was evident along the entire route. A group of thirty elk was observed during the survey.



Figure D06 . “Roadway” indicated on map, however, no sign of roadway on the ground. Waypoint 033, 4782-002, Location 46.53923N, -112.21360W

Figure D07 . “Road” naturally reclaimed and covered with downfall, Waypoint 019, 4782-001.

September 24 and October 9, 2022 Illegal Bike/Hike Trails by Doug Powell, Camie Westfall, Gayle Joslin, Jason Jolliff, Ann Jolliff

An extensive network of trails being used by both hikers and e-bikers was documented in the Willow Creek area in the north portion of the Lazyman IRA (Fig. D8). This activity had been repeatedly reported to the Forest Service by HHAA member Doug Powell.

In 2022, HHAA undertook an effort to map (Figure D8), photo document (Figs D10-D13; many more photos in original report), submit a letter (Figure D9. Cover letter to Willow Cr Bike Trails Report 9-24 & 10-9 2022) and file a complaint (Complaint-Illegal Trails Lazyman IRA-Willow Cr 2022-11-4) about the illegal trails – all of which were submitted to the Forest Service.

Supporting documents occur in: Lazyman Subunit D field monitoring and incident reports at <https://helenahuntersandanglers.org/our-impact/habitat/>.

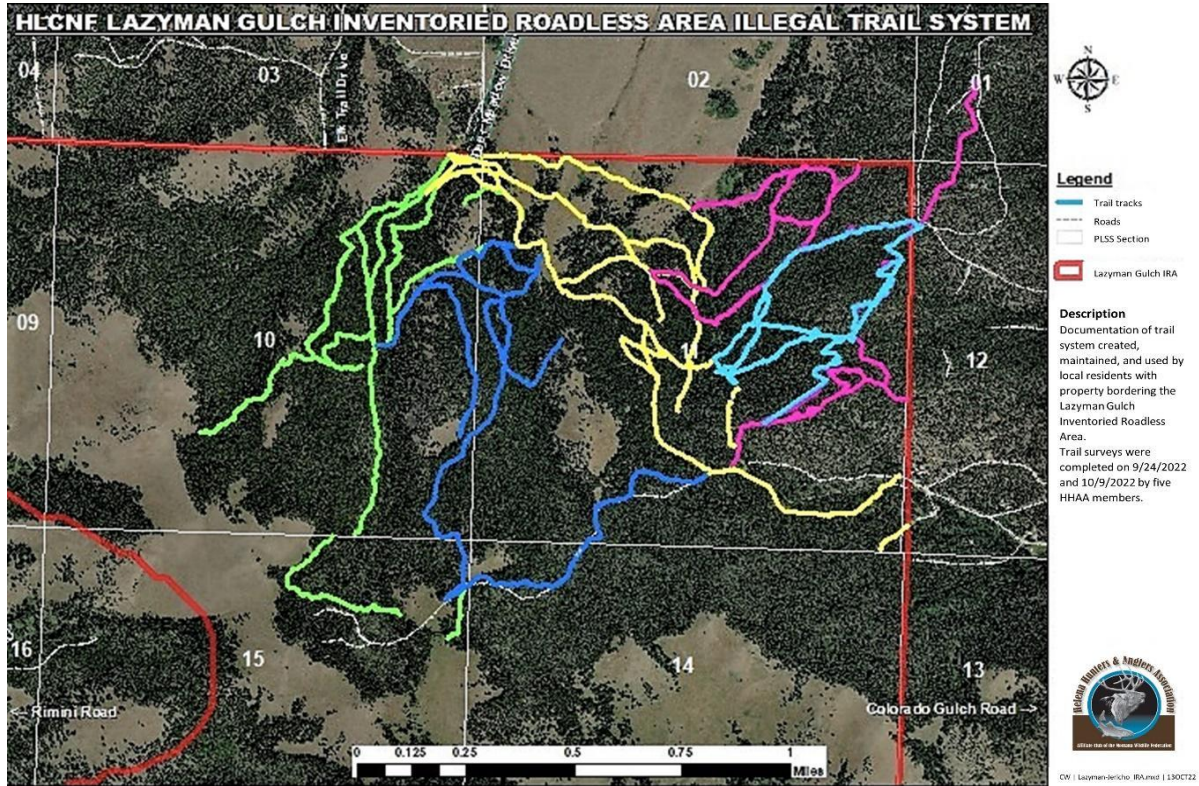


Figure D08. Map of illegal trails in Willow Creek, Lazyman IRA, documented by Helena Hunters and Anglers Association members, Sep-Oct 2022.

Emily Platt, Supervisor
Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest
2880 Skyway Drive
Helena, MT 59601

October 17, 2022



Dear Supervisor Platt,

With this correspondence, Helena Hunters and Anglers Association (HHAA) is making good on our promise of August 3rd to you during our field trip, that we would quantify the presence of illegal trails, primarily in Sections 10 and 11, T9N, R5W, within the Lazyman (Black Mountain) Inventoried Roadless Area. While we have made attempts to quantify all human created/maintained trails in this area, we conclude that, even if incomplete, the HLCNF needs to know the nature and extent of illegal trail activity that we have documented to date.

We wish to point out that this area is exceedingly important big game winter range and is documented as such by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

The importance of IRAs cannot be overstated when it comes to providing public land wildlife habitat and meeting the obligations of the Forest Plan for that purpose as well as providing quality water, weed-free uncompacted soils, and healthy functioning ecosystems. However, over the past several years, trail proliferation has seriously compromised the ability of the landscape to sustain big game on these ranges. HHAA members have expressed our concerns to the HLCNF, but have been ignored. We are asking for education efforts and enforcement of regulations preventing rogue trail building, as well as stopping use of e-bikes in the IRA.

We would appreciate it if you would provide a contact within your office to whom we should send our georeferenced mapping data. More than 120 photos have been taken along the more than 20 miles of trails we have mapped, in order to provide insight regarding the nature of the trail construction and maintenance, such as cut green trees, large rocks moved to line the trails, constructed switchbacks, slalom biking courses, creek crossings, and a wide variety of trail markers including a plethora of deer/elk bones tied to trees with baling twine, snoose cans nailed or screwed to trees, paint, and hatchet slash marks. In some cases, trails have even been raked to remove rocks and debris.

We have spoken with some of the landowners whose property adjoins the IRA and have learned that many are distressed with the ever-expanding trail network. Others, who may be complicit and may not know that trail construction on public lands is illegal (36CFR261.10(a)) without going through the Forest Service NEPA compliance process, are somewhat recalcitrant.

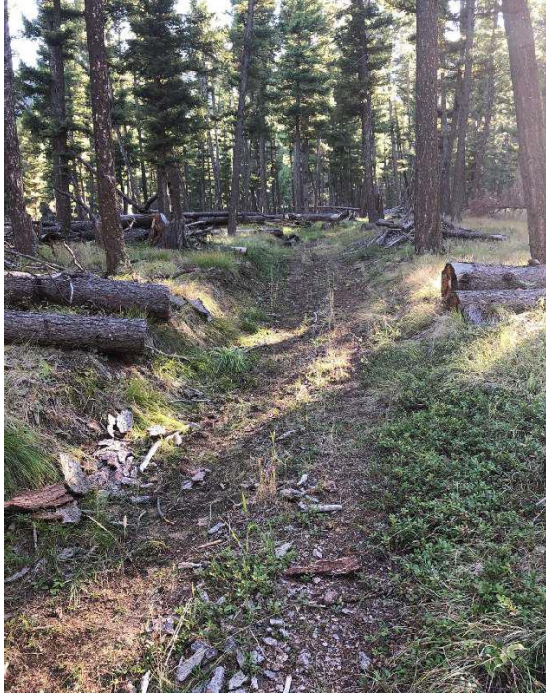
We offer recommendations in the attached report. Please let us know how you intend to proceed with a restoration plan. We are available to help.

Sincerely,

Steve Platt, President

cc: Kathy Bushnell, District Ranger
Nick Scholz, Law Enforcement Patrol Captain

Figure D09. Cover letter to Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest Supervisor regarding Lazyman IRA (Willow Cr) Bike Trails Report.



Figures D10 and D11. Illegal trails marked with paint and bones attached to trees.

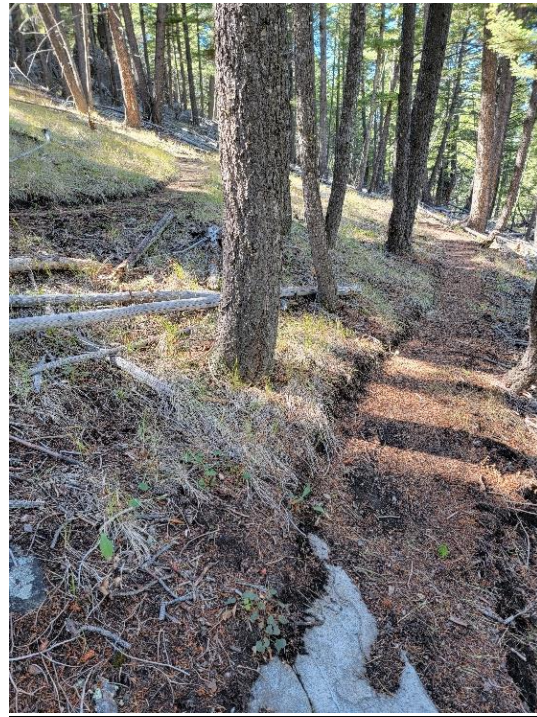


Figure D12. E-biker on illegal trail in Willow Creek, Lazyman IRA, September 24, 2022.

Figure D13. Constructed illegal "slalom" trail in Willow Creek, Lazyman IRA; note parallel trails.

June 14, 2023 Action in Response to Illegal Trail Construction in Willow Creek

The Forest Service responded to the complaint filed by HHAA in a letter (2022-11-23 FS Response to HHAA Official Public Complaint), explaining actions to be taken.

The Forest Service then sent a letter to adjacent landowners on May 18, 2023 explaining regulations that prevent unauthorized trail construction, and the functional nature of the Lazyman Gulch Inventoried Roadless Area (Figure D . letter).

With the help of HHAA volunteers, the Helena Ranger District arranged a field work day on June 14, 2023, to erect signs at certain junctions along illegal trails (Figures D - D .) within the Willow Creek drainage of the IRA.

An informational flier describing regulations of the travel plan and e-bike use on motorized routes only, was printed for distribution (Figure D.flier).



Figure D14. HHAA volunteers and Forest Service crew in Lazyman IRA – placing regulation sign posts along unauthorized trails.



Figures D15. Four photos of putting in sign posts describing regulations preventing unauthorized trail construction and maintenance.

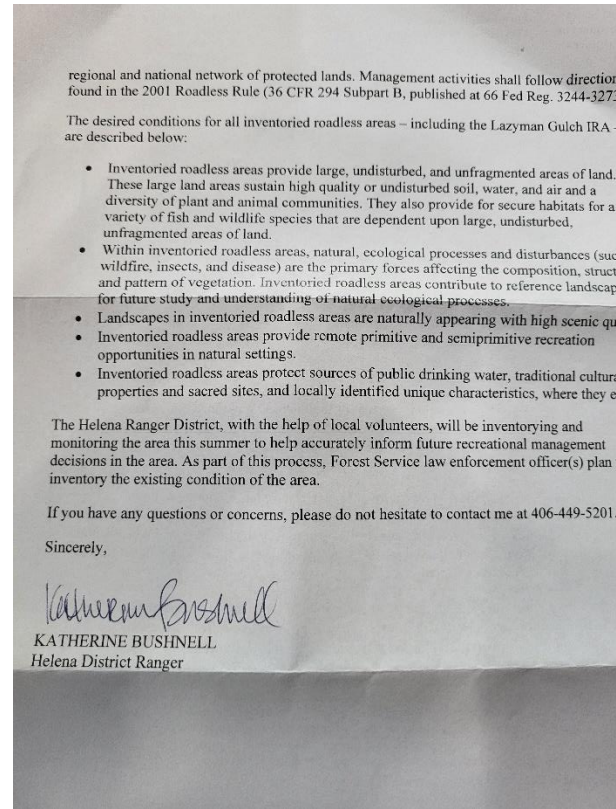
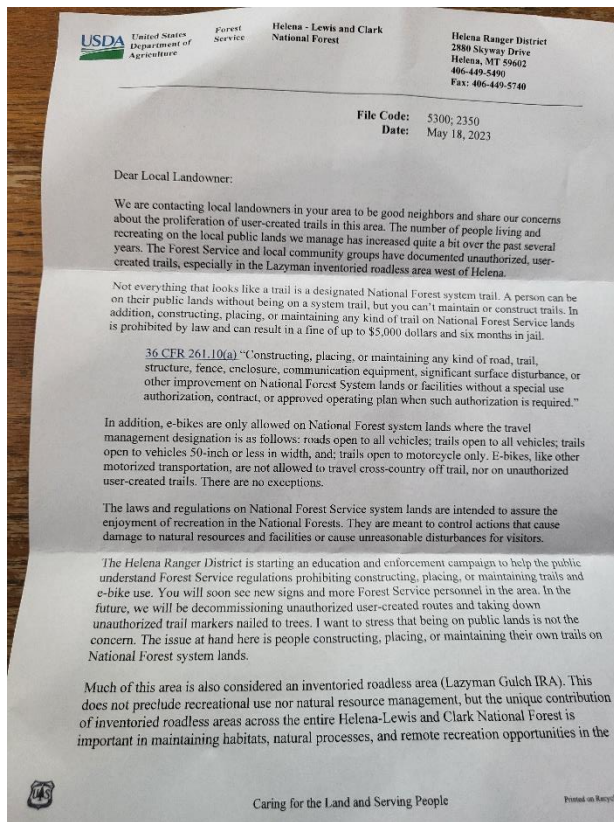


Figure D16. Letter to landowners adjacent to the Lazyman IRA from Helena Ranger District, May 18, 2023.

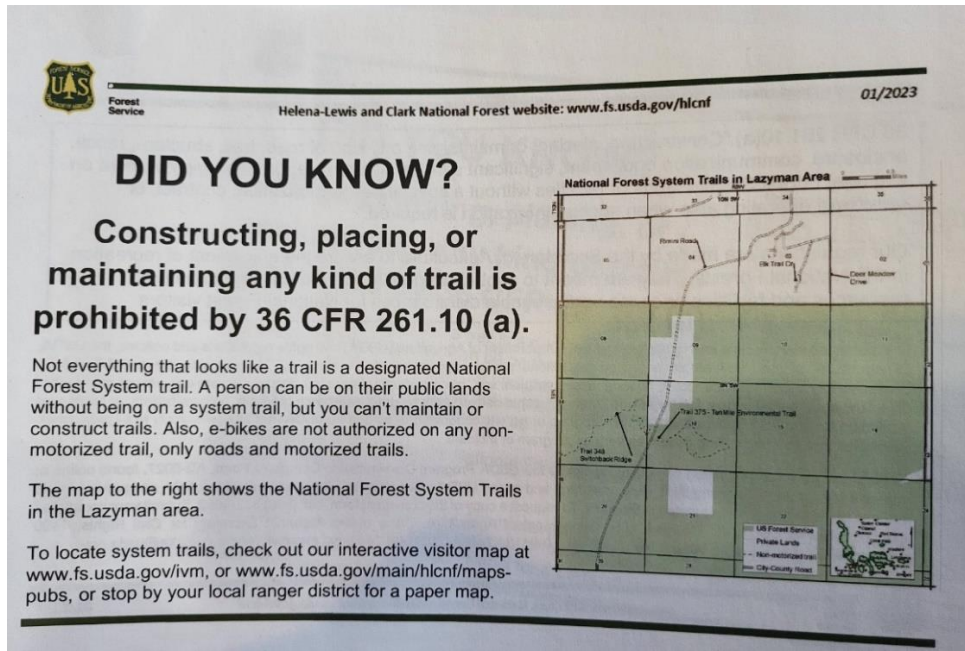


Figure D17. Flier produced by Helena Ranger District for distribution to landowners living adjacent to National Forest property where 20+ miles of illegal trails had been constructed.

January 11, 2026 Incident: Willow Creek - Illegal clearing of illegal trails by e-bikers

Although surrounding landowners had been notified, and the trails that had been illegally constructed in the Willow Creek portion of the Lazyman Inventoried Roadless area had been clearly marked with signs describing the illegality of the trails and the fact that they are not to be maintained, HHAA member Doug Powell discovered not only continuing e-bike use of the illegal trails, he photographically documented that e-bikers were continuing to access the area and clear the trail with chainsaws. The fact that fat-tired e-bikes were being used was written in the snow by tracks that revealed steady climbing on steep terrain without stopping by fat-tired bikes. And then when a downed log was encountered, the bike rider got off and cut out the trail with a chainsaw. Someone carrying a chainsaw on a regular bike (not e-bike) would have had to stop to rest going up the steep terrain.

Powell noted, "Snow tracks indicate two E-bikes went by our 'un-authorized' trail signs multiple times while they were clearing deadfall and at times re-routing around large fallen trees. I followed the tracks to private land in Colorado Gulch (red X). 46.55582. -112.17764 The trail is well defined and crossed multiple land ownerships. I was able to get a photo of the tracks leading to a parcel of private land. Though when looking at Google Earth the trail appears to also extend to other private parcels near the Colorado Gulch Rd."

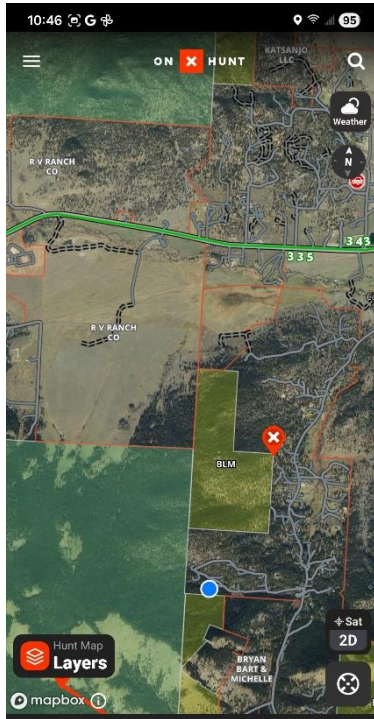


Figure D18. Map of location where bikers are entering public land.

Figure D19. Trail within the IRA accessed by e-bikes and sawed out with chainsaw.

Figure D20. E-bike tracks in snow go past the regulation sign several times.

Clearly, posted regulations were violated. The regulation sign states:

“NOTICE This is an unauthorized route and not a component of the Forest trail system. Constructing, placing or maintaining any kind of trail is prohibited by 36 CFR 261.10(a).”

Efforts will be undertaken to identify the violators and press for citations to be issued by Forest Service law enforcement.

September 18, 2025 Incident: Willow Creek - Illegal motorized side-by-side use

Fifty years ago, in the 1970's, there was a horse trail up Willow Creek for moving cattle, according to HHAA member Doug Powell. On September 18, 2025, side-by-side tracks coming through a gate from the RV Ranch (noted with green “+” in Fig. D21) had entered the IRA, following the approximate route of the old stock trail. The tracks turned around at the trees at the far side of the meadow (Fig. D22). Adjacent landowners, expressing concern about the motorized use, had contacted HHAA to report the wheeled tracks emanating from the RV Ranch into the IRA.



Figure D21. Location of gate between RV Ranch and Helena National Forest: NW 1/4 of NE 1/4 Section 11; 46.55580, -112.19736 through which illegal motorized use is occurring.

Figure D22. Photo looking south from gate between the IRA and RV Ranch.



Figures D23. Motorized tracks travelled into the Lazyman Inventoried Roadless Area from private land and turned around at the green “+”.

Figure D24. Photo looking north across private land from gate on the boundary of the Inventoried Roadless Area.