

MONTANA STATE
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HELENA, MONT.

**BEAR CANYON MANAGEMENT PLAN
AND
DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
OCTOBER 1980**

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Bear Canyon was originally contained within the Fort Ellis Military Reserve and, after being surveyed in the 1870's, was granted to the state of Montana in 1892. Timber figured prominently in the early development of Bear Canyon. A major timber operation consisting of a tie mill at Cooper's Camp, 10 miles up Bear Canyon, and a lath mill on the rail siding near the present Bear Canyon interchange on 1-90 was in operation from 1902 until 1914. A 9 1/2-mile long flume was used to transport ties, timbers, and logs to the siding for transport to such places as Butte mines. The entire operation ceased in 1914 when fire destroyed the tie mill, homes, school, and stores at Cooper's Camp.

The town of Commissary, once located about five miles up Bear Canyon, owed its existence to the timber operations. Its residents, two hundred at one time but normally forty, probably worked at Cooper's Camp as well as at Park Camp, another lumber camp located 4 miles up New World Gulch at the Base of Mount Ellis. This camp was also short lived. A large forest fire in 1910 burned much of the mill's available timber and continued burning eastward until an unseasonable snow storm stopped it and saved the town of Commissary. Little remains of either lumber camp or Commissary.

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Limestone Creek differs from New World Gulch and Bear Creek in that man's activities have contributed little if any to stream sedimentation. Livestock grazing (none in recent years) and occasional pedestrian, horseback, or motorbike traffic are the only human influences in this drainage. No roads, logging areas, or other developments exist along Limestone Creek (except for a narrow trail constructed many years ago part way up the East Fork), which is fortunate, since unstable soils and boggy conditions are common in this nearly pristine drainage.

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ZONE C

Zone C, the Limestone Creek drainage, is unique. In contrast to New World Gulch and Bear Canyon, which are partially developed and receive considerable use, Limestone Creek is virtually pristine and receives light use. The undisturbed nature of this 956-acre zone is complemented by impressive scenery and an abundance of wildlife, including deer, elk, moose and golden eagle.

Steep, rocky hillsides that are unstable in many areas and remain partially denuded by previous fires occur along the upper slopes of Limestone Canyon. The valley bottom is relatively wide and wet with numerous boggy spots and unstable areas along the lower slopes. This combination of conditions has provided excellent wildlife habitat and precluded man's development of the area. The severe topographic and soil conditions present in the Limestone Creek drainage will continue to prevent development of the timber resource.

This zone contains a significant timber resource, including the most productive sites on the Bear Canyon planning unit. All age classes of timber are present, but much of it is old-growth, deteriorating lodgepole pine. Salvage operations are not possible because conventional logging systems are not environmentally acceptable and more advanced techniques are not likely to be economically feasible.

Management Goals for Zone C

1. To provide revenue to the school trust fund through special use permits.
2. To manage the zone's unique water, wildlife, and scenic resources to provide long term revenue to the school trust fund.

Management Objectives and Guidelines for Zone C

A. Recreation Management

1. Recreation management objective— to provide dispersed recreation while protecting the natural resources of this zone
2. Recreation management guidelines
 - a. Cabin site authorizations will not be granted due to environmental constraints and lack of access
 - b. The use of motorized vehicles within this fragile watershed and important wildlife habitat will not be permitted, except for authorized and emergency vehicles
 - c. Management activities will be designed to protect the natural character of the Mount Ellis Ridge and other significant visual resources

B. Timber Management 1. Timber management objective— to protect, to the greatest extent possible, the timber resource from loss due to fire, insects, or disease

2. Timber management guidelines

- a. Timber harvesting is precluded in this zone because it cannot be economically performed in an environmentally sound manner
- b. The timber in this zone will not be considered part of the timber base on the Bear Canyon planning unit

C. Insect and Disease Management

1. Insect and disease management objective— to reduce the loss of timber due to injurious insects and diseases
2. Insect and disease management guidelines
 - a. Salvage of infested stands is not now economically and environmentally feasible in this zone
 - b. Treatments to reduce insect infestations that don't require access by road may be employed where appropriate to prevent the infestation's spread to unaffected areas

D. Natural Area Management and Cultural Preservation

1. Natural area management objective— to prevent degradation of areas possessing natural area potential
2. Natural area management guidelines
 - a. Significant scenic, biological, educational, or scientific values are recognized in this zone; therefore, a natural area designation for this zone will be considered if an adequate source of funding becomes available to compensate the school trust fund
 - b. Prior to any significant ground disturbing activities, a survey designed to identify archeologic, historic, or paleontologic resources will be conducted
 - c. Any discovery on state-owned land of any sites, objects, or structures that are significant to American history or culture or discovery of any fossilized plants or animals that are scientifically rare and critical shall promptly be reported to the state Historic Preservation Officer and all reasonable steps taken to protect such findings

E. Fire Management

1. Fire management objective—to reduce and prevent, where possible, damage to natural resources due to wildfire.
2. Fire management guidelines
 - a. Cooperative Fire Protection Agreement with Gallatin County will be maintained.
 - b. A fire prevention program in cooperation with the Gallatin National Forest will be maintained.

F. Watershed Management

1. Watershed management objective— to prevent degradation of water quality and the riparian zone in the Limestone Creek drainage; a significant trout-spawning tributary.
2. Watershed management guidelines
 - a. Watershed protection is a primary objective in Zone C.
 - b. Conventional road building is not considered feasible along the lower slopes or in the valley bottom due to unstable soils and a high water table.
 - c. Any management activity within 200 feet of a stream or wet area will be designed to protect the integrity of the stream or wet area.

G. Range Management

Currently, range management activities have been determined to be unsuitable due to access and physical use limitations.

H. Transportation Management

1. Transportation management objective— to provide environmentally sound transportation systems to support necessary management activities.
2. Transportation management guidelines
 - a. Severe road construction conditions preclude conventional forest road construction in much of Zone C, therefore road construction will not be allowed.

b. Nonmotorized use of the current trail system will be permitted.

I. Wildlife Management

1. Wildlife management objective— to protect or enhance wildlife habitat where possible and to minimize adverse impacts when conflicts exist.

2. Wildlife management guidelines

a. The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks will be consulted before the implementation of actions that might adversely affect wildlife in this zone.

b. Wildlife habitat will not be altered by timber harvesting during the period.

c. Any management activities will include the protection of the golden eagle nesting site.