Photo Routes -Monitoring ORV Use on Public Lands Implications for Wildlife Habitat ™s

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Recreational motorized travel on public lands influences the ability of wildlife to effectively use habitat, to move along historic pathways, to maximize seasonal use areas, and to facilitate movement of genetic material along biological corridors. Impacts of motorized recreation upon the landscape can be minimized by implementing clearly defined allowable activities for motorized travel, or be exacerbated through a casual approach. The effectiveness of National Forest travel plans cannot be quantified without on-site monitoring information. Quantitative information about the efficacy of the existing travel management plans did not exist on the Helena National Forest, so it was determined that objective and compelling information could be gathered by photographing conditions along predetermined routes. Eight photo routes were conducted by MFWP personnel and a volunteer citizens group. Routes ranged from approximately 2 miles to 10 miles in length and followed existing off-highway motorized routes, designated hiking trails (no vehicle use), undesignated routes, and proposed motorized routes. Conditions along each route were

quantified using digital photographs. A GPS location and an azmuth reading for each photo point was noted, along with ground conditions such as wetland incursions, depth of trail erosion, trail width; any off-route use of motor vehicles and its effects, such as crushed vegetation, hill climbs, dead animals; and whether signs of wildlife use were present in the immediate vicinity of such activities (droppings, tracks, rolled rocks, trees marked by bears or ungulates, mountain lion scrapes, etc.). The information gathered was assembled in digital and hard copy format. This effort demonstrates that citizen volunteers can be a valuable resource in meeting forest plan travel management objectives through positive feedback loops that can result from a systematic monitoring approach.