

Motorized Travel Plan Update

By Tom Darin

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While the plan revision described on Page 12 will determine the overall management goals for the Bridger-Teton, a more specific process is underway regarding motorized use in the northern part of the forest. Presently “unrestricted” motorized use is allowed on more than 250,000 acres there during summer and fall. This has resulted in miles of user-created trails, disturbed wildlife, habitat degradation, the spread of noxious weeds and increased soil sedimentation in trout streams.

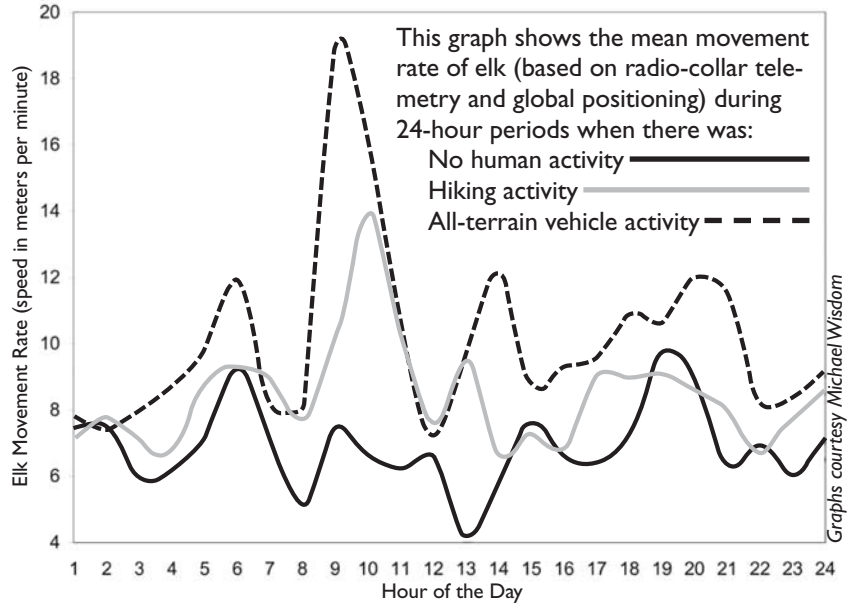
Bridger-Teton officials want the public to help develop a travel plan for this part of the forest. The new plan will specifically limit different types of motorized recreation to certain trails, plus decommission miles of user-created trails.

During the winter, the Bridger-Teton released a set of maps for feedback on proposed routes. The Alliance put together an open house for the public to view the maps and ask questions of recreation specialists. Forest users with site-specific knowledge of the areas in question – Blackrock Creek/Togwotee Pass, Shadow Mountain/Gros Ventre drainage and Munger Mountain to name a few – helped us spot specific problems and pointed out places important for wildlife and other natural resources.

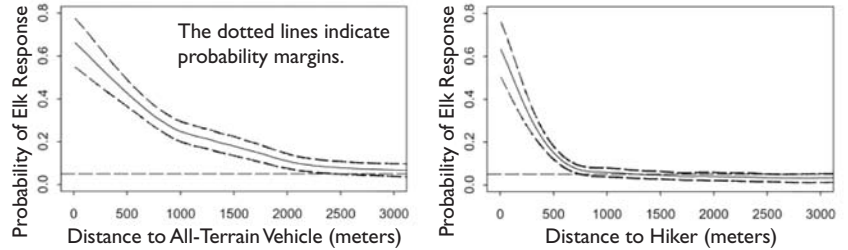
In January, the Alliance submitted comments on the proposed travel routes, pointing out that they still included too many roads in sensitive grizzly bear habitat and that the proposal contained too many spurs (which lead to user-created trails at their end), as opposed to looped trails. We also commented on the need for public education, careful trail monitoring and strict enforcement.

In March, the Forest Service hosted workshops to respond to public feedback on the proposed maps. The agency will use information gathered during the past few months to formulate different route systems for an upcoming environmental study of their impacts. Look for this draft study this fall – your comments and input at that stage will be critical as we move toward a final motorized travel plan in 2008 that protects forest resources. ■

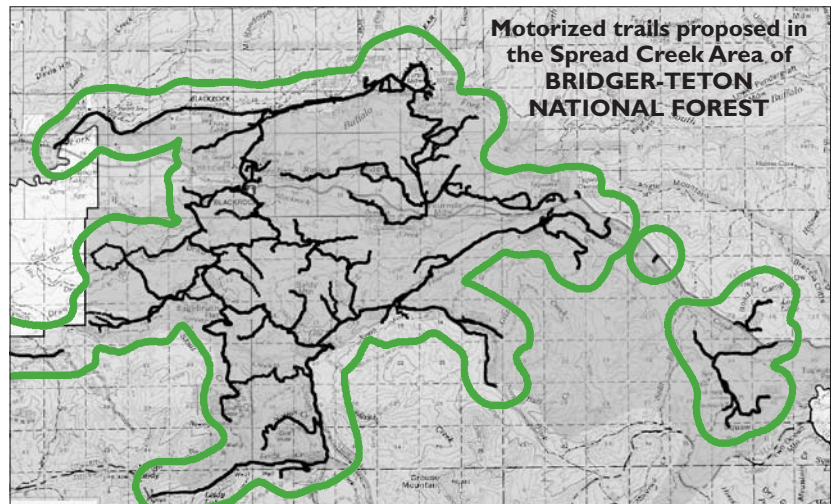
Recent research by wildlife biologist Michael Wisdom found that recreational activities, especially by people riding all-terrain vehicles, disturb elk as far away as 2,000 meters. Wisdom presented his research at a Bridger-Teton forum in Jackson this winter.



Graphs courtesy Michael Wisdom



These two graphs show the estimated probability of a flight response by elk in relation to their distance from people riding ATVs versus people hiking.



As part of their comments to Bridger-Teton National Forest, Wyoming Game and Fish officials mapped a 1,000-meter buffer around motorized routes proposed in the Spread Creek area north of Jackson. Citing Wisdom’s research, Game and Fish found that elk within virtually all the area bordered in green above would be disturbed by motorized recreation. They recommended that forest officials limit motorized roads and trails in this and other areas.