Connectivity

Drafted by Ed Monnig

Given the variety of terrestrial species, the LRC believes that providing a variety of conditions in connectivity areas is essential. This would seem to indicate the need for more landscape manipulation and management. Providing access to critical habitat areas to increase “landscape-level ecosystem diversity and heterogeneity” often challenges managers. The second critical element in well-functioning connection corridors is security from human incursion and disruptive activities for security-sensitive species such as grizzly bears. This implies a careful consideration of the feasibility of managing and maintaining the existing road system and constraining additional new roads in areas of connectivity. Although limiting road access is often assumed to be a barrier and hindrance to management discretion (particularly for fire suppression), the LRC believes this assumption is overemphasized. We believe more frequent use of temporary roads and more diligent monitoring of closed roads can reduce the security issues.

The LRC also notes that at times the Proposed Action endorses a maximalist approach to connectivity and at other times the Proposed Action and the Revised Assessment and Appendix 3 of the Proposed Action acknowledge the challenges of too much connectivity of vegetative conditions because of the risk of extreme contagion in disturbance events like fire and insects. More time should be spent acknowledging and reconciling these perspectives and providing more clear direction in the plan components addressing this issue.

Recommendations:

1. Provide a variety of habitats in connectivity corridors to provide for a variety of terrestrial species.
2. To address the habitat security issue, the Forest plan should more aggressively advocate the use of temporary roads in critical habitats. Practice has shown that well-considered and designed temporary roads can be less expensive than constructing and maintaining permanent system roads. Such temporary roads could allow access to otherwise inaccessible areas to accomplish a variety of management goals and objectives and desired conditions on the landscape.
3. Continue work to remove barriers such as culverts that interfere with aquatic species movement and passage, especially to spawning areas.
4. Provide more clearly considered plan components that reflect the best science on the ecological effects of connectivity and integrates connectivity requirements on the landscapes with the overall need to provide diverse ecological conditions.