



REGION 8

DENVER, CO 80202

February 20, 2025

Ref: 8EJC-NE

United States Forest Service
Bridger-Teton National Forest
Jackson Ranger District
Attn: Tim Farris
340 North Cache Street
Jackson, Wyoming 83001

Dear Tim Farris:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 8 has reviewed the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared by the United States Forest Service for the E-Bike Use Designation on Select Jackson Area Trails (64890). In accordance with our responsibilities under Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, we are providing comments that convey questions and/or concerns that we recommend addressing in the NEPA Document.

The USFS has prepared this Draft EA to analyze and disclose the potential impacts of expanding e-bike use through new designations on existing nonmotorized trails, seasonal restriction changes, and other methods in select areas near Jackson, Wyoming. In addition to the Proposed Action and No Action Alternative, Alternative 1 would allow for 3 classes of e-bikes and includes new trail construction and reroutes.

Based on the information provided in the EA and its supporting documentation, our areas of interest for the USFS's E-Bike Use Designation on Select Jackson Area Trails Draft EA include: (1) air quality; (2) water resources; (3) existing soil conditions and impacts; and (4) impacts on wildlife and wildlife-based recreation. We also include general comments concerning the presentation of alternatives, design criteria, and the uncertainty and precedent involved in the project.

We appreciate the opportunity to review this project and hope our recommendations assist the USFS in making final decisions. Thank you for considering our input. If further explanation of our comments is desired, please contact me at (303) 312-6155 or mccoy.melissa@epa.gov, or Greyson Abid, lead reviewer for this project, at (406) 457-5019 or abid.greyson@epa.gov.

Sincerely,

Melissa W. McCoy, Ph.D., J.D.
NEPA Branch Manager

ENCLOSURE

1. EPA's Comments on the USFS's E-Bike Use Designation on Select Jackson Area Trails Draft EA

Enclosure – EPA’s Comments on the USFS’s E-Bike Use Designation on Select Jackson Area Trails Draft EA

General Comments

Presentation of Alternatives

The subtle differences between the Proposed Action and Alternative 1 may not be immediately obvious to the reader, as both alternatives involve the designation of new e-bike trails in the areas surrounding Jackson. The EPA appreciates the inclusion of Table 3, which provides helpful information clarifying the difference between the Proposed Action and Alternative 1.¹ However, we note that Table 3 is not discussed or referenced in the text of the Draft EA. To better contextualize Table 3 and to more effectively clarify the difference between the Proposed Action and Alternative 1, we recommend discussing the differences between the two alternatives and referencing Table 3 within this discussion. For instance, such a discussion may note that Alternative 1 but not the Proposed Action includes new trail construction, and that Alternative 1 does not restrict trails to just Class 1 e-bikes.

To allow for increased clarity and ease of comparison, we also recommend including a GIS shapefile depicting trail construction, trail reconstruction, and trail designations with separate layers corresponding to each alternative, including the No Action Alternative.

Design Criteria

The EPA appreciates that the Draft EA includes a list of design criteria common to both the Proposed Action and Alternative 1,² as such information will help the public understand what protective measures are in place to mitigate any potentially significant impacts. We note that the Draft EA mentions certain design criteria relating to safety, such as grade parameters and intentional trail restriction points to control speed.³ We recommend committing to these features, as they are currently mentioned without any explicit commitment in the list of design criteria.⁴ We also recommend considering expanding the list of design criteria involving plants, which currently includes setbacks for only whitebark pine during new trail construction or reroute. Potential additions might include setbacks for other sensitive or listed species that may be encountered during construction or reroute, or a commitment to conduct a plant survey by a trained botanist prior to construction or reroute. Finally, within the list of design criteria, we recommend outlining dust abatement measures that would be implemented during new trail construction or reroute.

Uncertainty and Precedent

The EPA appreciates that the Draft EA acknowledges the uncertainty regarding the impacts of e-bike use and references applicable research to evaluate potential impacts in light of this uncertainty.⁵ In recognition of this uncertainty, we recommend including a reference or discussion in support of the idea that providing an opportunity for e-bike use on well-designed trails should reduce illegal e-bike use in other areas,⁶ as it seems possible that well-designated trails may have no effect or even increase

¹ Draft EA, page 16.

² Draft EA, pages 14 and 15.

³ Draft EA, page 21.

⁴ Draft EA, page 14.

⁵ See, e.g., the discussion of safety related impacts on pages 17 to 22 of the Draft EA.

⁶ Draft EA, page 24.

illegal e-bike use (e.g., if newly designated e-bike trails become crowded, causing some e-bike users drawn to the area by the designations to begin using nonmotorized trails).

Given the novelty of e-bike trail designations on public lands, we also recommend acknowledging that the project may create a precedent for e-bike trail designations and motorized use on other public land areas by setting an example of what degree of e-bike use is “appropriate,” even if future e-bike designation decisions would require new environmental reviews, as noted in the Draft EA.⁷

Air Resources

The Draft EA does not provide an analysis of the project’s air quality impacts. However, since the project may include new trail designations as well as construction activities involving small trail machinery, we recommend discussing the emission-generating activities that would need to be completed under each alternative. Based on the explanation of the activity, we recommend providing a roster and schedule for use for equipment needed to complete the alternatives as well as the targeted visitation rates under each alternative. This information provides the basis to be able to estimate the emissions that could result from the alternatives and can provide information to disclose what impacts may occur and whether activities and the resulting emissions have the potential to create air quality impacts that may warrant additional considerations for reducing impacts. This step is also key for stakeholders to understand the tradeoffs between environmental benefits and impacts under each alternative, including the No Action Alternative.

The EPA recommends providing a reasonable estimate for air pollutant emissions associated with the alternatives. In developing estimates, the EPA recommends considering the following emission sources:

- Construction, rerouting, and maintenance of trails and all other proposed developments, including equipment used;
- Projected increases in visitation and vehicle traffic to the project area, as a result of the proposed trail development in combination with general visitation trends; and
- Additional employees needed for enforcement, construction, and maintenance purposes who would need to travel to and from the project area and potential transportation emission reduction strategies.

We recommend the Final EA identify nearby residences and property (e.g., near the newly proposed Swinging Bridge Trail) and work with the affected community to develop best management practices (BMPs) and mitigation measures to address potential impacts to nearby residences and property. For instance, it would be helpful to include BMPs to address air emissions from equipment, including fugitive dust associated with construction, maintenance, and increased traffic; sound impacts; and lighting impacts, if applicable.

⁷ Draft EA, pages 4 and 5.

Water Resources

The Draft EA includes water resources as a part of its “Issues Considered but Not Analyzed in Detail.”⁸ The Draft EA provides the following consideration of water resources:

This issue was determined to not be significant as there are no mapped meadows or wetlands designated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wetlands Inventory, which would be impacted by new trail construction or use. The project also includes decommissioning and restoration of poorly aligned routes currently contributing to sediment delivery into adjacent waterbodies. The overall result is expected to improve water quality in the project area with respect to sediment.⁹

While new trail construction or use may not impact mapped meadows or wetlands, the Draft EA does not provide a characterization of existing waterbodies and does not evaluate the potential impacts to waterbodies, such as lakes, rivers, streams (including intermittent and ephemeral streams as well as perennial streams), and springs. The discussion also does not provide a clear explanation of how the Proposed Action or Alternative 1 would improve water quality with respect to sediment, as stated above.

To address these concerns, we recommend providing the following in the Final EA regarding existing conditions of water resources:

- A discussion and one or more maps or shapefiles of surrounding and downstream surface waters, including available water quality data in relation to current standards (including designated uses), stream functional assessments, stream channel and stream bank stability conditions, sediment loads, and aquatic life conditions;
- A discussion and one or more maps or shapefiles of surrounding wetlands (including those that are not directly in the footprint of proposed trails), riparian areas, springs, and seeps, including types, functions, conditions, and acreages; and
- A map of Clean Water Act impaired or threatened waterbody segments surrounding or downstream of the project area, which can be accessed using the EPA’s How’s My Waterway Tool,¹⁰ and a discussion of any impairments to these waterbodies (e.g., sedimentation, temperature) and their likely causes.

To assess the potential impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternative 1 on water resources, we recommend including the following:

- A discussion and one or more maps or shapefiles of any water crossings under each alternative, including a table outlining the number of stream crossing under each alternative and an evidence-based discussion of the potential impacts of these crossings on water quality, sediment loads, stream function and conditions, and aquatic habitat and life conditions.

⁸ Draft EA, pages 5 and 6.

⁹ Draft EA, page 6.

¹⁰ <https://mywaterway.epa.gov/>

- A discussion of any planned restoration activities and the trail decommissioning process, including the timeline of activities, an indication of where they would be conducted relative to surrounding waterbodies (including any wetlands, springs, and seeps), and a step-by-step breakdown of the restoration and decommissioning process.
- An expanded discussion of BMPs and design criteria relating to water crossings (in addition to those provided on page 15 of the Draft EA), outlining protective measures relating to vegetation removal near riparian areas, the use of machinery near riparian areas and surface waters, trail construction and maintenance in areas with high erosion potential, special protections for impaired or threatened waterbodies, and so on.

Existing Soil Conditions and Impacts

The Draft EA does not meaningfully analyze the existing conditions of and potential impacts to soils in the project area and deems this to be a non-significant issue due to the similarity of soil erosion impacts from e-bikes and conventional mountain bikes.¹¹ However, these considerations do not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the project will not have significant impacts on soil conditions. Under the Proposed Action, new e-bike designations on existing trails and roads would permit an additional type of recreational activity (i.e., e-biking), in addition to all other nonmotorized forms of recreation currently permitted. This may increase the total number of recreational visitors or expand visitation in areas with low levels of current use, resulting in increased soil erosion impacts. These impacts may also result from the construction of new e-bike trails (i.e., those proposed under Alternative 1).

Soil erosion impacts have the potential to affect surface water resources. Trail networks through areas with highly erodible soils often contribute to water quality impairments and alteration of stream flow. This occurs because disturbance in erosive soils can alter watershed drainage patterns and increase surface runoff, erosion and delivery of surface sediment and other pollutants to streams. It can also cause mass wasting on slopes and delivery of debris to streams, and stream temperature changes. Depending on variables including soil characteristics, management actions and topography, runoff from future surface disturbances could introduce sediments as well as salts, nutrients, and other pollutants into surface waters. We recommend the EA describe the baseline condition of soils in the planning area and how they have been impacted by historic and ongoing e-bike and mountain bike use. We also recommend including detailed maps illustrating the soil erosion potential layered with the trail network and any potentially affected aquatic resources such as surface water, wetlands, springs, riparian areas, and shallow aquifer recharge areas. The inclusion of this information will provide context for assessing potential impacts and help determine whether the Proposed Action or Alternative 1 could result in potentially significant impacts in areas with high erosion potential.

To disclose and mitigate the potential impacts of future soil disturbance, we recommend the EA include an estimate of erosion rates and resulting impacts to water quality for each alternative. Erosion rates can be calculated using the Water Erosion Prediction Project model, a web-based interface developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service.¹² We recommend the

¹¹ Draft EA, page 5.

¹² <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/resources/tech-tools/water-erosion-prediction-project>

USFS consider using this model or another appropriate model that would be applicable to this planning area.

We appreciate that the Draft EA states that “attention will be given to ensuring sustainability to minimize soil erosion.”¹³ To ensure that appropriate design criteria for soil erosion are applied and are understood by the public, we recommend outlining and committing to specific design features and BMPs that the USFS would undertake within areas of highly erosive soils that contain trail networks that are candidates for e-bike use.

Impacts on Wildlife and Wildlife-Based Recreation

Trails and motorized uses can increase wildlife encounters with humans, displace wildlife, impede migration corridors, and degrade and fragment wildlife habitat. This can change wildlife behavior, increase stress, reduce reproductive success, reduce security, and increase wildlife mortality. For some species, such as mule deer, recreational disturbance can lead to animals being driven from cover if they are within 100 meters from the nearest trail.¹⁴ By potentially expanding e-bike use, the Proposed Action may increase these impacts due to more frequent use of areas not utilized by other recreationists (e.g., areas with steep terrain, areas farther from trailheads).¹⁵ The Draft EA states that the Proposed Action is “...not expected to accelerate ecological impacts, decrease habitat effectiveness, or reduce secure wildlife habitat adjacent to the existing trails”.¹⁶ However, if the Proposed Action may expand recreational use and if such use has potential impacts to wildlife adjacent to existing trails, a logical consequence is that the Proposed Action may impact wildlife adjacent to trails. The EPA recommends that the USFS address the potential wildlife impacts of expanded e-bike use due to the Proposed Action.

Given the goal of providing balanced opportunities for different forms of recreational activity, we also recommend considering how these potential wildlife impacts may result in negative changes to wildlife-based recreation, including both non-consumptive recreational activities, such as birdwatching and wildlife viewing, as well as consumptive recreational activities, such as hunting, which the Draft EA notes is popular activity throughout the project area.¹⁷ Lastly, we recommend coordinating, or summarizing prior coordination, with the Wyoming Game & Fish Department to evaluate impacts on wildlife and wildlife-based recreation and to determine how best to mitigate any potential impacts on wildlife from e-bike use.

¹³ Draft EA, page 14.

¹⁴ See, e.g., <https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1890/1051-0761%282003%2913%5B951%3AWRTRAA%5D2.0.CO%3B2>.

¹⁵ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2351989423001105>

¹⁶ Draft EA, page 36.

¹⁷ Draft EA, page 38.