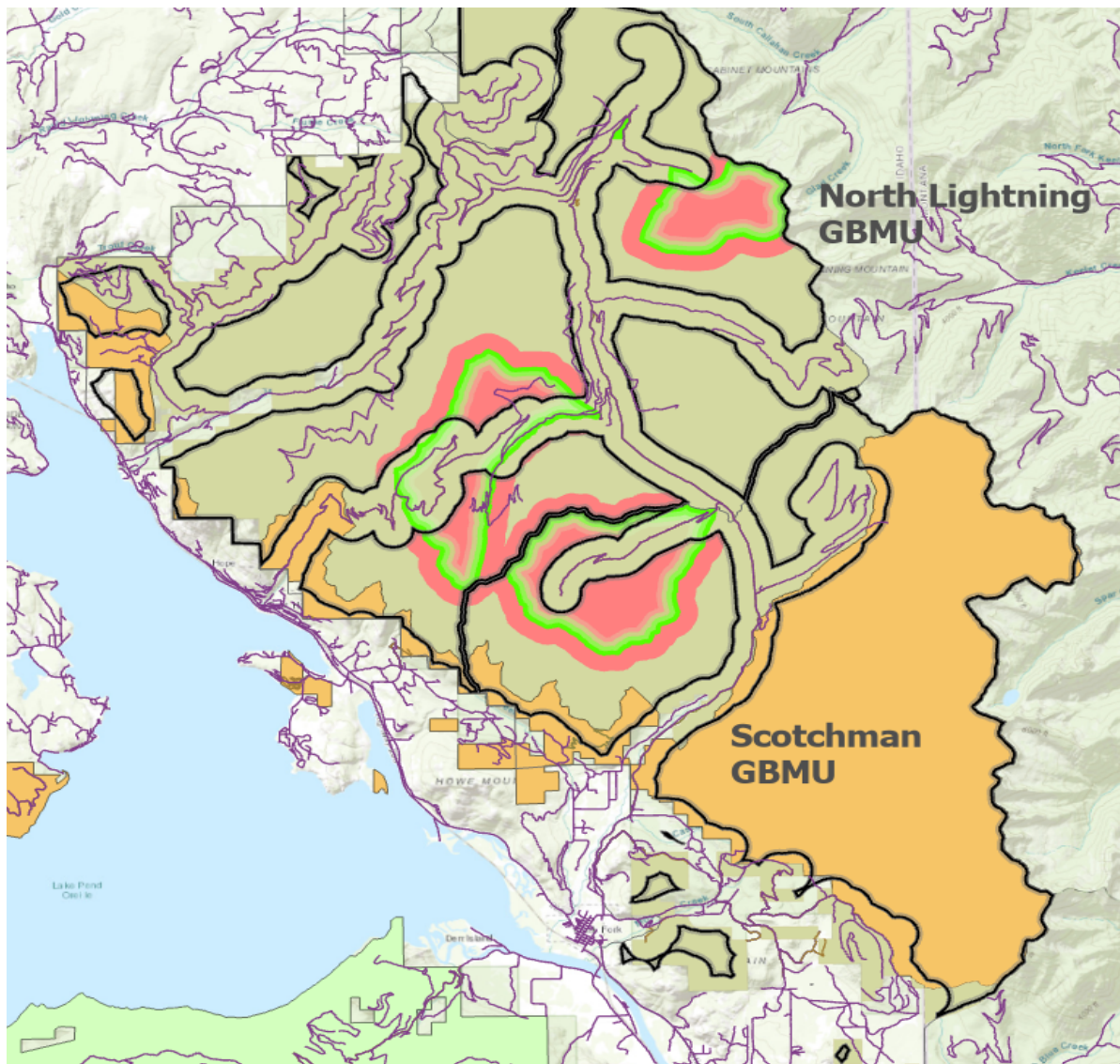


Effects of Proposed Play areas to Core Habitat in the North Lightning and Scotchman GBMU's in the Cabinet-Yaak Grizzly Recovery Area

There are three OSV play areas proposed by the dEA in the Cabinet-Yaak Grizzly Bear Recover Zone. These are located at Moose Lake, Porcupine Creek and Wellington Creek. All three play areas impact grizzly core habitat.

Proposed OSV play areas are a green outline in the map below. The Winter Rec Wildlife Report p 31 states that "Areas that generally receive high amounts of over-snow vehicle use are not the same areas typically selected by grizzly bears for denning." It can be assumed that bears will avoid denning and utilizing the play areas, resulting in a permanent loss of core habitat. The Wildlife Report does not discuss snowbikes and the photograph for the header of the dEA shows OSV's traveling through a treed area. The March 19, 2023 Lighthawk flight over the project area shows many areas where OSV's are traveling through treed habitats.

In the map below, a 500m buffer polygon is shown as a red polygon, showing displacement from dispersed and unpredictable OSV use out from the edges of the green play area polygon.



Core Loss Calculations:

It appears that the implementation of the proposed play areas in the North Lightning GBMU will reduce core habitat well below the 61% Standard (currently at 62%) by slightly less than 8.6 square miles*, an 8.6% reduction or 53.2% total core. The proposed play area with no buffer reduces core by 7.5 sq miles, a 7% reduction or 55% core including the play areas.

For the Scotchman GBMU, the buffered play area will reduce the core below the 62% standard with 65% existing core, by 7.1 square miles using the buffered core* which equals 57.7% core, less than the 62% standard. The proposed play area with no buffer will result in the loss of 5.1 sq miles of core habitat or 60% core which is less than the 62% standard.

Approving use of these core areas will result in violation of IPNF Forest Plan Standards and the ESA.

*Noting overlap of buffered play areas polygons between bear units, this is an approximation of core loss. Buffered cores overlap both GBMUs. Exact displacements including overlap were not quantified because the commenters did not have access to the current core habitat gis dataset, but the results should be similar. Core loss due to play area polygons is accurate because there is no overlap into different GBMU's.

Please disclose for the Objection EA, the core and buffered core deductions, disclose the threshold of OSV use which will displace bears in their den and in play areas open during the bear year.

Core habitat statistics are from the Wildlife Report page 28. The following photo is one example of snowmobiles traversing steep, timbered denning habitat. (Photo JMS 626).

