



Left Coulee Access
DOI-BLM-MT-L070-2024-0001-EA
December 28, 2023

Introduction and Background

The Bullwacker area is considered one of the wildest areas of the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument (Monument) and includes habitat for antelope, sage-grouse, and wintering elk and mule deer. The area includes an existing 51-mile road network analyzed in the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Resource Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and approved through the BLM Road Systems implementation-level decision. The existing road network includes a combination of open and limited primitive roads. These roads provide access to the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River corridor, Ervin Ridge Wilderness Study Area (WSA) and additional access to the Cow Creek Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

In 2009 the only existing access road to this network was closed through a court decision which determined that road is private. The Bullwacker area roads remain inaccessible to motorized and mechanized use except with permission to cross private lands.

In 2023 Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP) entered into a Public Access Land Agreement (PALA) with the Square Butte Grazing Association, providing legal public access for 10 years across a private parcel along Cow Creek. While there is an existing linear feature, there is no open road access connecting the PALA road with BLM road 241215 where it intersects the Left Coulee Airstrip on BLM-managed land.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of this action is to provide legal motorized and mechanized public access to the Bullwacker area of the Monument. The need for the action is to provide motorized access to an existing 51-mile open road network in the Bullwacker area adjacent to a private parcel through which public access has been granted using a Public Access Land Agreement (PALA).

Proposed Action

The BLM Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument (Monument) proposes to amend the Monument's Travel Management Plan to add a 0.6 mile Primitive, Level 1 limited road to the

transportation network in the Left Coulee area of the Monument. The road would be closed to motorized use between December 1st and June 15th. The 0.6-mile proposed road exists as a linear feature on the landscape and the proposed action would not include construction of a new road. BLM would take actions to reduce and prevent erosion as described in the design features below. Signs and gates may be placed to inform the public and allow for enforcement of seasonal closures.

Alternative A: No Action

The No Action Alternative provides a baseline for comparison to aid in determining the relevance of issues and effects of the proposed action. Under the No Action Alternative, the proposed road would not be open to public motorized and mechanized use. The 51-mile road network through the Bullwacker area would remain inaccessible to motorized and mechanized use by the general public. Actions including placing signs and barriers at the access points to the existing linear feature and reclamation actions including erosion control and revegetation may occur. Current management activities would continue, but no action would be taken to meet the purpose of and need for the project.

Alternative B: Open Road, No Timing Limitations

Alternative B mirrors the Proposed Action, including design features, except the road would be open to motorized and mechanized use year-round.

Design Features Common to All Alternatives:

Control erosion and minimize rutting. Measures could include (but not limited to): water bars, drainage dips, gravelling, revegetating, and/or elevating.

Design Features Common to All Action Alternatives:

Repair, improve and/or maintain the roadway to assure safety, stability and to minimize soil erosion and rutting. Keep measures functional through periodic inspection and maintenance.

Maintenance activities shall not be performed during periods when the soil is too wet to adequately support equipment/vehicles. If equipment/vehicles create ruts in excess of three (3) inches deep, operations must cease as the soil will be deemed too wet to adequately support equipment/vehicles.

Improve the road where it overlaps the Left Coulee Airstrip to prevent rutting and erosion to ensure the safety of pilots during takeoff and landing. Actions may include a perpendicular hardened crossing using gravel or road base.

All maintenance activities shall conform to the best management practices as outlined in Appendix C, Roads of the UMRBNM RMP.

Public Input Needed

The BLM is requesting comments specifically on the proposal to open a 0.6 mile road to provide access to the Bullwacker area of Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument.

The BLM is seeking comments that will help:

- Refine the Proposed Action.
- Identify any additional alternatives to be analyzed.
- Identify issues to be considered during the review of alternatives, which could lead to additional design features or mitigation measures to be analyzed.
- Identify any additional information that should be considered during the analysis.