Board of Review Report

The death of Mr. Brad Treat due to a grizzly bear attack June 29, 2016 on the Flathead National Forest

March 3, 2017

Board of Review Members¹:

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Summary

Mr. Brad Treat was riding a mountain bike with a companion on a trail on the Flathead National Forest in Flathead County, Montana on the afternoon of June 29, 2016. Neither rider carried bear spray or a firearm. Between 13:30 and 14:00 hours, Mr. Treat collided with a grizzly bear with his bike at a high rate of speed on the trail after rounding a blind curve in the trail. The impact of the collision apparently hurled Mr. Treat into and over the handlebars and perhaps into and/or over the bear. Mr. Treat was ahead of his companion and was riding very fast and went out of sight around a curve in the trail. His companion then heard the sound of the collision between Mr. Treat and the bear. The companion also heard the bear vocalize at the time of the collision. The companion came around the curve on his bike and observed Mr. Treat on the ground in the trail with the bear standing over him. The companion then turned around and went back up the trail to obtain help. He was not carrying a cell phone. When he heard cars on the highway (Highway 2), he started toward the highway through the forest while carrying his bike. When he reached the highway, he flagged down a vehicle and asked them to take him to a phone to call for help. The first call about the incident came into 911 at 1452 hours. The first responder on the scene was Glacier National Park Ranger Brad Blickhan at 1603 hours who confirmed that Mr. Treat was deceased.

¹ This report relies heavily on the input of Brian Sommers, a criminal investigator and Wildlife Human Attack Response Team (WHART) leader for Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, who was the lead investigator on this incident.

² Chair of the Board of Review.
Format of this report
This report is an interagency Board of Review report addressing a grizzly-human incident resulting in a human fatality. It is completed as per the protocol in cases of a human fatality due to a grizzly bear that is on p. 59 of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Guidelines. This report summarizes the incident, the investigation of the incident, resolution or response to the incident, and presents information gathered as part of the Board of Review effort. The Board of Review is made up of state and federal agency staff and was chaired by a retired U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grizzly bear biologist who has chaired 7 previous Boards of Review. Members were nominated by their agencies to participate on the Board of Review.

Situation
The trail where the incident took place is near West Glacier, Montana and is called the “Outer Loop”, part of a trail system called “Green Gates Trails”. Elevation in the area varies between 3400 to 3600 feet. This is one of many trails in this area (Figure 1). These trails are on National Forest System lands of the Flathead National Forest in an area intermixed with private lands. The trails are on old logging roads accessed from Highway 2. Motorized access is precluded by green-colored gates, thus the name. These trails are not maintained by the US Forest Service but instead are maintained by trail users. There are private lands interspersed in the area with homes and some businesses, including a KOA campground. Trail users are hikers, joggers, mountain bikers, and horse riders. There are some commercial horse trail rides that occur on these trails. There are no user counts available for these trails but it is likely that the trail
where the attack occurred gets daily use by people. Mr. Treat's wife said she and Mr. Treat jogged this trail every morning and that they had jogged it the morning of the attack. Mr. Treat and his companion accessed the trail from Mr. Treat's home, which is in this area.

![Vegetation along the trail](image)

**Figure 2.** Vegetation along the trail approaching the site of the incident showing limited sight distance. Direction of photo is direction of travel. The person on the trail is at the collision/fatality site and is about 37 feet from the camera. At a speed of 20-25 mph, a bike rider would travel 29-36 feet every second or approximately the distance from the camera to the person on the trail.

Vegetation along these trails is in various stages of regeneration following past timber harvest. Sight-distance is limited along the trail in many areas and at the site of the collision (Figures 2 and 3). Understory vegetation is composed of various shrub species including buffaloberry (*Shepherdia canadensis*), which was fruiting at the time. At the site of the collision and fatality, sight-distance is limited due to a curve to the right in the trail and vegetation along the trail (Figures 2 and 3). The area is close enough to Highway 2 that traffic noise can be heard through the forest from areas along the trail.
Background on the incident
Mr. Treat lived close to the area and had access to the trail system from his home. He regularly rode his mountain bike on the trails in this area, particularly on the trail where the incident occurred. He would ride this trail 4-6 times per week. He also jogged on this trail almost every day during the morning with his wife and their dog. Mr. Treat was very competitive according to his wife and he was always trying to travel the route faster than his previous time. According to this wife, he actively maintained this trail by clearing it of debris on a regular basis so he could use it for biking and jogging. Mr. Treat and his wife had
previously observed both black bears and grizzly bears on this trail while jogging and mountain biking. Mr. Treat’s riding companion was not an experienced mountain biker and in fact, this ride was the first time he rode a mountain bike on a trail.

Details on the incident
Mr. Treat and his companion left Mr. Treat’s home to ride this trail in the early afternoon of June 29, 2016. At approximately 1330–1400 hours, Mr. Treat was in the lead going downhill and was “going really fast” according to his companion and was continuing to pull ahead. His companion estimated that Mr. Treat was 20-25 yards (60-75 feet) ahead of him when he disappeared around a curve in the trail to the right. Immediately after Mr. Treat disappeared, his companion heard the sound of Mr. Treat and his bike colliding with the bear and the bear vocalizing and making a sound “like it was hurt”. He described what he heard as a “thud' and an “argh”. As his companion rode around the curve and stopped his bike, he saw the bear standing over Mr. Treat who was laying in the trail. The bear was broadside to the companion and on the left side of the trail. His companion described the bear as “very big, brownish-black in color, lighter than black”. He described the hair on the back of the bear as “bristled up”. His companion did not remember if the bear had a dished face or a hump or not, but he did describe it as “big”. His companion waited what he described as “probably within 30 seconds” trying to figure out what to do. His companion said the bear was “intent and focused on Mr. Treat” and did not seem to see or turn toward the companion at all. It appears that his companion was within 37 feet of the bear and Mr. Treat when he stopped his bike at the curve in the trail (Figure 4).

His companion waited for a “short time” and then decided to turn around and head back up the trail the way he had come to seek help. Neither rider carried bear spray or firearms or a cell phone. His companion said he was worried about the response of the bear should he try and “push” the bear off of Mr. Treat since he had nothing with which to defend himself. His companion turned around and headed back up the trail an undetermined distance until he heard the sound of vehicles on Highway 2. At that point, he began bushwhacking toward the highway carrying his bike. The closest distance to Highway 2 from where his companion went back up the trail is approximately 1 mile through thick forest. When his companion reached the highway, he flagged down a vehicle and was driven to a phone to call for help. The call for help was received by 911 at 1452 hours.

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3 Time estimate by Mr. Treat’s riding companion. The actual time period is unknown as his companion was in a state of shock and recollections of time are often hazy while under stress. The actual time could have been much shorter (or longer) than 30 seconds.
Figure 4. Map of the incident site showing distance from the curve (corner) in the trail to the location of the collision. Direction of travel was from the top of the map. Mr. Treat’s companion had to be at least to the curve to be able to see the bear and Mr. Treat and therefore was within 37 feet of the bear that was standing over Mr. Treat. Map by Brian Sommers, MT FWP.

Investigation of the incident
Initial investigators on the scene found Mr. Treat and his bike in the trail at the site of the collision. His bike helmet was beside his body and it was in pieces after being bitten by the bear. Details of the scene as described by investigator Brian Sommers:

“*The victim was traveling at a fairly high rate of speed when he collided with the bear on a corner in the trail that had limited visibility. The victim was wearing biking shoes that clip to the pedals on the bike. Upon impact*
with the bear the victim and the bike flipped over the bear with the victim landing on his hands and then back with the bike landing down trail from the victim in the direction he was traveling. With the landing on the trail, the victim was in very close proximity to the bear.”

The impact of the collision that hurled the victim and his bike over the bear indicates the speed of the collision. The bike shoes victim was wearing (that clipped into the pedals of the bike) pulled bike over the victim and over the bear with the force of the impact, so that the bike landed farther down the trail. The front reflector was knocked off the bike at the initial site of the collision and was found in the trail on the other side of the victim from the bike. Both the victim and the bike were found on the trail indicating that there was no evasive action taken to steer to either side of the trail to avoid the bear in the trail. There were no skid marks in the trail indicating there was no hard braking before the collision. The lack of evasive steering and lack of skidding are further evidence of the surprise and high speed of the collision. The bear apparently had no time to move to avoid the collision. At a speed of 20-25 miles per hour, there were only 1-2 seconds between rounding the curve, the victim seeing the bear in the trail, and impacting the bear (see Figure 2).

The force of the collision with the bear apparently propelled Mr. Treat's torso into the handlebars as evidenced by a straight line bruise across the inside of the lower front part of his ribs. This impact with the handlebars or the impact with the bear also knocked the front reflector off the bike (Figure 5). The force of the collision that hurled Mr. Treat over the bear caused him to break both of his wrists and his left scapula when he hit the ground as he tried to break his fall with his hands.
No part of Mr. Treat’s body was consumed by the bear and the bear did not cache his body by covering it with dirt and debris, as is common for bears that are storing a food source and plan to return to it. There was no bear attractant at the collision site such as an animal carcass. The bear was not present when first responders arrived at the incident site at 1600 hours, an estimated 2 hours after the incident. Neither the bear involved in the incident nor any other bear visited the incident site for at least 48 hours as confirmed by remote cameras placed at the site.

Evidence of bear activity in the area and bear trapping operations
After the initial onsite investigation, the WHART decision was made not to set any traps to capture the bear because it appeared that the bear was acting defensively. Just after dark on the day of the attack, a Sheriff’s Deputy posting closure signs reported being “charged by a bear near the green gate”. In response to that report, MT FWP set two culvert traps and remote cameras that night in the area of the green gate. On the morning of June 30th (the day after the incident), Tim Manley (MT FWP) made a helicopter flight with Two Bear Air Rescue to look for bears in the incident area using a Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR) camera. No bears were located. On the afternoon of June 30th the decision was made by Tim Manley (MT FWP) to move one culvert trap to the site of the incident and the other culvert trap to the east near where the ALERT helicopter crew had reported observing a bear in an open meadow shortly after the incident (Figures 6 and 7). After further discussions with the Sheriff’s deputy who reported a charging bear, it was determined that the report of a charging bear by the green gate did not occur. After Brian Sommers returned from the autopsy of Mr. Treat and after examining the bike and evidence collected from the scene, he determined that Mr. Treat had collided with the bear while riding his mountain bike. Based on this information and the fact that no bears were captured or photographed on the remote cameras, MT FWP decided that all bear traps should be removed from the area on July 1 after being set for 2.5 days.

One of the reports of bear activity in the area came from Swan River Outfitters, a horse concession that used the trails in the incident area (Figure 6). They reported that a bear had charged a group of their riders on the afternoon of the same day as the incident. The bear was described as a black-colored grizzly with white on its face. The description of the attack noted that at 1430 hours they were riding back toward their corrals when they observed a black-colored grizzly bear with white on its face about 40 yards ahead of them. The bear charged to within about 6 feet and then veered off to the left and went a short distance off the trail and made noises and snapped its teeth. The bear then left the area and headed in the direction where they believed the incident with Mr. Treat had occurred. The leader of this horse ride said he estimated that this charge happened about 800 yards or so from where the incident involving Mr. Treat occurred and he was sure it was a grizzly bear.
Figure 6. Locations of closest bear sightings on June 29 to the incident location. ALERT observation is from the medical helicopter that was responding to the incident and was after the incident. This bear was brown in color and the observers first thought it was a deer. Location of charge at horse riders was at approximately 1430 hours.

Figure 7. Locations of trap sites in the incident area. No bears were captured during the approximately 48 hours the traps were set and no bears were photographed by remote cameras set at each trap location.

The crew of the Kalispell Medical ALERT helicopter saw a bear a few hours after the incident in an open area of the forest approximately half a mile from the site
when they were flying in to assist with the incident (Figure 6). They initially thought it was a deer because it was light brown but upon closer examination saw that it was a light brown bear. They thought it was a grizzly but could not be sure.

There was another report on the same day at 2020 hours made by an individual who works for the BNSF railroad. He stated that he was in the West Glacier area approximately one mile from the incident site when he saw a yearling (1.5 years old) grizzly bear cross the BNSF rail tracks and run up the hillside. He remarked that he wondered why this young bear was not accompanied by its mother, which would be normal for a bear of this age.

There was another report on the following day (June 30) when a woman said that she saw a “big black colored bear” at 1100 hours near her driveway. This sighting was approximately 1.5 miles from the incident location and on the other side of Highway 2.

There was a possible bear sighting close to the green gate reported by sheriff’s deputies, but upon further discussion with the observers, this was unlikely to be a bear.

There was a large grizzly track seen on the afternoon of the incident in mud in the trail by Tim Manley (MT FWP) on his way into the incident site. This track was in the trail approximately ¼ mile from the incident site, between the green gate and the incident location. This track appeared fresh and the bear was headed in the direction of the incident site. This may have been the bear involved in the incident.

The general area around the incident site is extensively used by grizzly and black bears throughout spring, summer, and fall. Within a 3-mile radius of the incident site, DNA samples from 6 different male and 3 different female grizzly bears were collected as part of a USGS research studies conducted 1998-2011. In addition, between 1999-2016, 5 radio-collared male and 5 radio-collared female grizzly bears were located within this 3-mile radius.

**Identification of bears at the site**

Twelve hair and swab samples were obtained from the bicycle helmet and the victim. These were sent to Wildlife Genetics International for DNA identification of bear species and the bear. All successfully genotyped samples assigned to the same male grizzly bear. This male bear had been previously captured in Glacier National Park in 2006. This bear was also detected 5 times since 2009 in DNA samples collected in research studies in the general area of the incident near West Glacier, Montana. There was no DNA evidence from any other bears in the samples collected at the incident site.
The adult male grizzly bear confirmed at the site had no history of conflicts with humans and was only captured once in May 2006 in Camas Creek in Glacier National Park as part of a research project. At the time of his May 13, 2006 capture, the bear was estimated to weigh 370 pounds and was estimated to be 8 to 10-years old. The bear was not collared, no tooth was taken for aging, and he was released uninjured at the site of capture. If the age estimate made in 2006 is approximately correct, this bear was 18-20 years old at the time of the incident in 2016.

Summary
On June 29, 2016 at between 1330 and 1400 hours, Mr. Brad Treat, while riding his mountain bike with a companion, collided at high speed with a grizzly bear on a trail on the Flathead National Forest approximately 1 mile south of West Glacier, Montana. Mr. Treat was killed by the grizzly bear at the site of the collision, presumably immediately after it occurred. The grizzly bear was likely highly agitated after the collision and that agitation motivated the attack. The collision occurred at a blind curve in the trail with the bike and rider traveling at high speed. The layout of the site indicates that Mr. Treat and the bear saw each other for no more than 1-2 seconds before the collision.

The bear involved was an 18-20 year old male grizzly bear with no history of human-bear conflicts or aggression towards humans. The identity of the bear was determined by the presence of its DNA on hair samples collected from the victim and his bike helmet. The DNA of this bear was detected 5 times since 2009 at rub tree sample sites in Glacier National Park. This bear had also been captured once as part of a research project in 2006 in Glacier National Park. This bear was never captured as a nuisance bear and had no record of conflicts with people.

The bear did not consume any part of Mr. Treat. The bear left the site soon after the incident and did not return for at least 48 hours as documented by camera traps placed at the site. Culvert traps and camera traps were placed at the incident location and at 3 other sites within a mile of the incident. No bears were detected at any of these locations during the more than 48 hours they were in place.

Neither Mr. Treat nor his riding companion carried bear spray or firearms. Mr. Treat’s companion was understandably uncomfortable trying to “push” the bear off Mr. Treat after the collision given that he had no bear spray or firearm.

Conclusions about the incident and response to the incident
The incident appears to be a surprise encounter with a grizzly bear due to the high speed and the lack of noise of bike travel combined with a blind curve on a trail. Mr. Treat’s companion stated that Mr. Treat was going “very fast” and pulling ahead of him just before the collision. A bike rider going 20-25 miles per hour covers 29-36 feet every second. The blind curve in the trail combined with
the visual cover along the trail allowed Mr. Treat to see the bear less than 37 feet from the point of the collision. That assumes he was looking forward at the time rather than down at the trail. At his high rate of speed, he would have likely covered the distance between him and the bear in 1-2 seconds. The high speed of the collision is further supported by the fact that Mr. Treat did not try to ride off to the side of the trail to avoid the bear, there were no bike skid marks in the trail, and the fact that the bear did not jump off the trail to avoid the oncoming bike. The collision, subsequent attack, and death of Mr. Treat all occurred in the trail at the point of impact.

Natural aggression of grizzly bears toward humans most commonly occurs in 3 specific instances: 1) surprise encounters when humans and bears surprise each other at close range due to inadvertently getting too close, often along trails; 2) defense of a food source such as inadvertently getting close to the bear in possession of a carcass; or 3) defense of young when a human inadvertently gets close to a bear cub(s) or between a mother bear and her cubs. In these instances, the aggression of the bear is a natural defensive response. In most cases of such natural aggression, the bear does what it can to neutralize the human threat and then flees the area. Human injuries can be minor to fatal from such attacks. The incident in this case has all the characteristics of a surprise encounter on a trail with the reaction of the bear enhanced due to the physical collision of the bear with the bike and person. Mr. Treat’s companion describes hearing the sound of the collision and hearing the bear make a sound “like it was hurt”. The agitation and response of the bear after such a collision likely resulted in the severe injuries to Mr. Treat and his death. The fact that this incident was the result of a surprise encounter and that trapping for the bear was not necessary was discussed and agreed to the evening of the incident by WHART Team Leader Brian Sommers and MT FWP grizzly bear specialist Tim Manley.

Bears involved in such surprise encounters are not captured or removed in most cases, even when the result of the encounter is serious injury or death to a human. Bears involved in surprise encounters have no record of repeated attacks on humans, nor is there any information that they are more dangerous because of their involvement in such an incident. This highlights the complications arising when setting traps for bears involved in such surprise encounters, particularly in high density bear habitat where the likelihood of capture of non-involved bears is high. Careful consideration should be given about why trapping should take place and what will happen to any bears captured before any traps are ever set in such cases. Release, relocation, or removal of captured bears under such conditions will be complex issues with the public and will involve significant and difficult public relations efforts with minimal benefits to human safety or improved bear management resulting from such captures.

Normal agency response to such human fatalities from grizzly bears is an area closure around the incident site for 1-2 weeks and then reopening the area for
public use, usually with enhanced signage to alert the public to proper safety precautions in grizzly habitat. In this case, the Forest Service did close the area around the incident to public entry for public safety on June 30 and reopened on July 8 (Appendix A).

There were no bear safety signs posted before the incident at the green gate entry point from Highway 2. The trails in the area are not maintained or managed for recreation by the US Forest Service. In addition, there are multiple entry points to these trails from other locations and from adjacent private lands. Private land entry to the trail was how Mr. Treat and his companion entered the trail system on the day of the incident. This highlights the complexities of educating the public about bears and bear safety in areas of user maintained trails on public land, and focuses attention on how to better communicate the dangers of bear conflicts while mountain biking in grizzly habitat.

To avoid encounters with grizzly bears, management agencies make 5 basic and fundamental suggestions about how to behave in bear habitat. These safety suggestions are targeted toward hikers⁴:

1) **Be Vigilant** – Being vigilant for bears and bear sign (tracks, scat, feeding sites) can reduce the chances of stumbling onto a bear at a close distance, thereby reducing the risk of bear attack. Be especially vigilant if hiking off-trail. Bears may be more likely to respond aggressively in off-trail areas where they don’t expect to encounter people. However, bears frequently use maintained trails and encounters may occur anywhere. Agencies encourage hikers to remain vigilant while hiking in all bear country.

2) **Carry Bear Spray** – Bear spray has proven to be effective at stopping aggressive bear behavior during surprise encounters when the person involved has time to deploy it. The public should be made aware of this fact and encouraged to carry bear spray and to be familiar with how to rapidly deploy it.

3) **Make Noise** – Making noise while hiking is an effective method of forewarning bears of your presence, thereby reducing the chances of surprise encounters and related attacks.

4) **Don’t Run** – Running during an encounter can trigger a chase response in a bear. In addition, jogging in bear country increases the odds of surprise encounters at close distances and surprised bears are more likely to be aggressive.

5) **Do not Hike Alone** – Hiking in group sizes of 3 or more people or traveling by horseback is known to reduce the risks of bear attack. Larger groups are more intimidating to bears and more likely to have at least one member making noise or being vigilant, thereby reducing the risk of bear attack. Horses are more likely to smell, hear, or see a bear before a person does, reducing the likelihood of surprise encounters. Horses are also more

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⁴ These recommendations are made in various forms by all state and federal agencies to people in grizzly habitat.
intimidating to bears and if needed, unlike humans, are capable of outrunning and outmaneuvering bears.

Of these 5 recommendations, all apply in one degree or another to mountain biking in grizzly habitat. Mountain biking is a recreational activity that involves increased risk and danger of surprise encounters with bears because: 1) it is relatively quiet; 2) the high speed of bike travel compared to hiking; and 3) the necessity of the bike rider to focus his/her vision down on the trail close to the bike to avoid obstacles instead of looking ahead for bears, especially on single-track trails. With the increase in mountain biking, surprise encounters with bears resulting in human injuries and possibly deaths are likely to increase. In a separate report, this Board of Review makes recommendations about how to improve safety for mountain bikers in grizzly habitat.
APPENDIX

Appendix A – US Forest Service area closure order and closure termination order
APPENDIX A

FLATHEAD NATIONAL FOREST
650 Wolfpack Way
Kalispell, MT 59901
Forest Supervisor’s Order

AREA CLOSURE ORDER – BEAR CLOSURE AREA

PROHIBITIONS

Pursuant to Title 36 Code of Federal Regulation 261.50 (a) and (b), the following restriction is in effect on the Hungry Horse – Glacier View Ranger District on the Flathead National Forest, Flathead County, Montana as depicted on the attached map as Exhibit A, and hereby incorporated into the order. This temporary restriction is in addition to those enumerated in Subpart A, Part 261, Title 36, Code of Federal Regulations, and becomes effective when signed and will remain in effect until rescinded.

1. 36 CFR 216.53(e) – Special Closures - Going into or being upon any area which is closed for the protection of:

Public health or safety. [Title 36 CFR 216.53(e)]

Description of Restricted National Forest Access

For the purpose of this order, it is prohibited to be on any National Forest System Trail, National Forest System Road, or within the boundaries of the closure area defined as Forest Service managed lands within Flathead County, State of Montana Sections 1, 2, 11, PB 37, PB 38, 14, 15, 16, 21, 22, 23, PB39, T31N, R19W; Sections 36, T32N, R19W; Section 30, 31, 32, T32N, R18W; and Section PB43, PB42, 7, T31N, R18W.

- National Forest System lands east of US Highway 2, starting from the northern boundary of NFS road 11067 to NFS Road 10325 and stretching east to the Great Bear Wilderness boundary, south to the Coram Experimental Forest boundary.
- The following FSR roads will be closed, including all roadways and trails departing from them:
  - FSR 11065A, known locally as “Pack Trail”;
  - FSR 2863, known locally as “Hog Haven”;
  - FSR 2805 known locally as “Belton Point Road”;
  - FSR 11011 known locally as “Halfmoon Lake Road”;  
  - FSR 632 known locally as “Belton Ski Course”; 
  - FSR 10325 known locally as “Ryan Road”;
- The unofficial trail way that extends from 590A is closed past the Coram Experimental Forest Boundary.
TERMINATION ORDER

NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM LANDS
FLATHEAD NATIONAL FOREST
REGION ONE

The following Closure Order on the Hungry Horse Ranger District is hereby rescinded.

Order # D06-132-S-16 on Half Moon Flats area near West Glacier, Flathead County, Montana.

Done at Kalispell, MT on this 8th day of July, 2016.

CHIP WEBER
Forest Supervisor
Flathead National Forest
Exemptions:
Pursuant to Title 36 CFR 261.50(e), the following are exempt from this restriction:

1. Persons with a permit issued by a forest officer specifically authorizing the otherwise prohibited act or omission.

2. Any Federal, State, or local officer, or member of an organized rescue or fire fighting force in the performance of an official duty.

3. Owners or lessees of land in area.

Done at Kalispell, Montana this 30th day of June 2016

By: JANE DARNELL
Deputy Regional Forester

Penalty:
Violation of these prohibitions is punishable by a fine of not more than $5,000 for an individual or $10,000 for an organization, or imprisonment for not more than 6 months, or both (16 USC 551 and 18 USC 3559 and 3571).

Notification:
A copy of this order shall be posted as prescribed under 36 CFR 261.51.