The Forest Service intends to make a final decision in the next month on a travel plan for about two-thirds of the Rocky Mountain Front, but the agency will spend additional time analyzing the Badger-Two Medicine.

Early last summer, the Forest Service issued a draft travel plan with five different options for motorized and nonmotorized travel in the 392,000-acre Front.

The proposals range from offering no motorized travel to looped trails separating motorized travelers from hikers and horseback riders. The agency received about 37,000 comments on the plan, and has spent the last several months analyzing the comments and designing a final plan.

The Blackfeet Tribe repeatedly asked that motorized travel not be allowed in the Badger-Two Medicine. The fifth alternative, completed in conjunction with the tribe, would eliminate motorized vehicles on trails in the Badger-Two Medicine, a cultural and religious site for the Blackfeet.

The Forest Service travel plan covers forest land in Glacier, Lewis and Clark, Teton and Pondera counties. It does not include designated wilderness areas. The Badger-Two Medicine is National Forest land directly southwest of the Blackfeet Reservation.

The Badger-Two Medicine is also one of the more popular areas on the Front for motorized uses.

Three of the alternatives would allow some motorized use. The second alternative, for example, would allow seasonal ATV use on some trails in the Badger-Two Medicine and in a few other areas. The fourth option includes a trail loop allowing ATV use on a few main access trails in the Badger-Two Medicine.

By the end of March, the Forest Service intends to decide on a travel plan covering the Rocky Mountain Front, but will exclude the Badger-Two Medicine, said Forest Service travel planner Dick Schwecke.

"The forest supervisor is talking with the tribe to see if there are more options," Schwecke said.

William "Allen" Talks About, a member of the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council, said he is pleased with the Forest Service’s decision. The tribe has offered to co-manage the Badger-Two Medicine to enforce travel restrictions, he said.

"This is one of the last pristine places, and it is our sacred hunting ground," he said.

Talks About said the Forest Service recognizes the tribe’s concerns and is respecting its request for additional analysis.

Splitting the Front into two sections has created a few complications, Schwecke said. Information in the draft proposals covers roads and trails throughout the Front. The Forest Service has to revise that analysis so it fairly looks at road systems in the two separate areas.

"We have to show just what exists in the southern two-thirds," he said.

About 98 percent of the comments the Forest Service received on the plan favored an alternative that maintains foot and horse travel and eliminates motorized travel on trails throughout the Front, according to an analysis by
a conservation organization. Existing main access roads to trailheads, developed campgrounds and other facilities would be open to vehicles.