



File Code: 1950

Date:

Dear Interested Citizen,

The Mt. Hood National Forest is preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS) to establish and designate a system of roads, trails and areas for off-highway vehicle (OHV)<sup>1</sup> use, not including over-snow vehicles. Designations will be made by class of motor vehicle, and if appropriate, by time of year. The EIS will be formulated in accordance with the USDA Forest Service's new travel management policy: *Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use; Final Rule*, announced November 2, 2005. The decisions resulting from this EIS will be used to prepare a motor vehicle use map for the Forest, which is expected to be published in late 2009.

The clear identification of roads, trails, and areas for OHV use will enhance management of the Mt. Hood National Forest; sustain natural resource values through more effective management of motor vehicle use; enhance opportunities for motorized recreation experiences; and preserve areas of opportunity for non-motorized travel and experiences.

**Background:** Recreation is an important value and use of the Mt. Hood National Forest. OHV riders and non-motorized recreation visitors share an interest in enjoying outdoor recreation in a natural environment. OHV recreation is a legitimate activity on National Forest System Lands; however, unmanaged and inappropriate OHV use is a potential threat to ecosystem sustainability. Unmanaged OHV use can affect wetlands and wildlife habitat, erode soils, damage cultural resources, and spread invasive plant species. Most people ride OHV responsibly, but a few riders leave lasting impacts by traveling through wetlands and other sensitive areas.

The current motor vehicle use policy for the Mt. Hood National Forest was developed during land management planning in the 1980's. The policy allows motor vehicles to venture off of roads and trails in areas that have not been specifically closed to such use. Additionally, current state law allows OHV to operate on any public road that is not maintained for passenger car traffic. Many native surface roads in the Forest are in this maintenance category.

Since these policies were established, there has been rapid growth in the popularity and use of OHV, particularly "quad" all-terrain vehicles (ATV). There has also been a trend toward closing private lands to OHV use. These two trends have resulted in significantly increased use of public lands for OHV sports.

**Purpose & Need for Action:** One purpose of this project is to designate routes for off-highway vehicle (OHV) use by class of vehicle (excluding over-snow vehicles) and time of year. Another purpose of this project is to determine where licensed motor vehicles will continue to be allowed

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<sup>1</sup> Off-highway vehicle (OHV) is defined as: "Any motor vehicle designed for or capable of cross country travel on or immediately over land, water, sand, snow, ice, ash, swampland, or other natural terrain" [Federal Register Vol. 70, No. 216 (2005), p. 68288]. OHV also are referred to as all-terrain vehicles (ATV).

to drive off roads to access dispersed (undeveloped) camping. By meeting these purposes, the Mt. Hood National Forest will comply with 36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295 – Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use; Final Rule [Federal Register Vol. 70, No. 216 (2005)] for off-highway vehicle (OHV) use. The Final Rule states that we “must strike an appropriate balance in managing all types of recreational activities. To this end, a designated system of roads, trails, and areas for motor vehicle use established with public involvement will enhance public enjoyment of National Forests while maintaining other important values and uses of NFS [National Forest Systems] lands” (page 68265). This National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process will only address OHV use and motorized access to dispersed camping; subsequent NEPA processes may address broader access and travel management issues.

In order to comply with the OHV and motorized access to dispersed camping portions of the Final Travel Management Rule, there is the underlying need for:

- Designating and/or constructing OHV routes and areas (as appropriate) within the identified six areas (see enclosed map) to provide recreation opportunities;
- Changing the current management direction in the Mt. Hood Land and Resource Management Plan to comply with the Final Travel Management Rule;
- Balancing recreation opportunities for OHV use with other recreational uses of the National Forest and resource sustainability; and
- Designating areas where licensed vehicles will continue to be allowed to drive off roads for the purpose of accessing dispersed camping.

**Proposed Action:** The Proposed Action will change OHV access through much of the Forest in order to meet the intent of the Final Travel Management Rule. The Proposed Action focuses on travel management within six proposed OHV areas and motorized access to dispersed camping (see enclosed map of overall areas). All National Forest System lands were considered by the Forest Service and members of the public during a two-year long dialogue with the public. The six areas that resulted from this dialogue provide a balance between providing recreational opportunities and protecting natural resources as required by the Final Travel Management Rule.

Within each area, specific OHV routes are proposed by motor vehicle class, and new trails are proposed for construction where they would create trail loop opportunities. Through the NEPA planning process, the Forest Service will consider alternative OHV routes within each of the six designated OHV areas. OHV use would be allowed only on these designated routes.

The six areas proposed for OHV use are listed below.

- McCubbins Gulch, Barlow Ranger District
- Rock Creek, Barlow Ranger District
- Gibson Prairie, Hood River Ranger District
- Bear Creek, Hood River Ranger District
- Peavine, Clackamas Ranger District
- LaDee Flats, Clackamas Ranger District

The enclosed maps represent the Forest Service’s Proposed Action and include the following features.

- Some roads identified in the Roads Analysis – Mt. Hood National Forest (2003) as decision roads (not needed for management purposes) would be converted to OHV trails and removed from the road system in order to improve the safety of all users.
- New OHV trails would be constructed within these six areas to connect existing roads and trails and to provide loop routes.<sup>2</sup>
- Some decision roads would be proposed to be closed, if designating nearby routes would cause these roads to become a law enforcement or natural resource problem. Approximately 12 miles of roads are proposed to be closed.
- Mixed-use routes would be proposed in each area. Mixed-use routes allow OHV and licensed motor vehicles to use the same routes.
- Classes of motor vehicles allowed would be designated for all routes.
- An area within the Rock Creek OHV area would have some restrictions on camp fires and overnight dispersed camping.
- A staging area would be identified within each OHV area. The staging area would be a day-use area that serves as a trailhead for motorized recreation. McCubbins Gulch Campground would continue to be the staging area for this OHV area.

The following table summarizes the allowable OHV use under the Proposed Action.

Area	Class of Vehicle*	Trails (miles)		Roads (miles)		Total Miles by Area
		Existing Trails	New Const.	Convert to Trail	Mixed-Use	
Bear Creek	Class III	0.0	40.4	0.0	0.0	<b>40.4</b>
Gibson Prairie	Class I	4.0	4.3	1.8	5.1	<b>15.2</b>
LaDee Flats	Class I, II and III	0.0	0.5	5.4	0.0	<b>39.5</b>
LaDee Flats	Class I and III	0.0	0.9	4.5	19.4	
LaDee Flats	Class II	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.8	
McCubbins Gulch	Class I and III	32.5	0.0	4.8	8.8	<b>51.2</b>
McCubbins Gulch	Class III	0.0	5.1	0.0	0.0	
Peavine	Class I, II and III	0.0	3.0	19.6	15.2	<b>37.8</b>
Rock Creek	Class I and III	2.1	6.2	14.6	16.7	<b>39.6</b>
<b>Total Miles</b>		<b>38.6</b>	<b>60.4</b>	<b>50.7</b>	<b>74.0</b>	<b>223.7</b>

\* Class I (Quads, 3-wheelers): Vehicles 50 inches wide or less; dry weight of 800 pounds or less; has a saddle or seat; and travels on 3 or more tires.  
 Class II (Jeeps, Sand rails, SUVs, etc.): Vehicles wider than 50 inches; and dry weight more than 800 pounds.  
 Class III (motorcycles): Vehicles on two tires; and dry weight less than 800 pounds.

In addition to OHV use, motorized access to dispersed (undeveloped) camping will be designated for the Forest. Licensed motor vehicles would be allowed to leave the designated road system up to 150-feet from a proposed designated route to access dispersed camping. Some routes are not proposed in order to protect natural resources (e.g., sensitive species) or to comply with existing management direction (e.g., no motorized use in wilderness or some wild and

<sup>2</sup> All new construction will be subject to availability of funding.

scenic rivers). A map of the proposed motorized access to dispersed camping is enclosed.

A Forest Plan Amendment would be required to achieve the purpose and need, and implement the Proposed Action. The Amendment would close all areas and roads to OHV use, unless designated open; and would discontinue all motorized use cross-country use, except allowing licensed motorized access to dispersed camping in designated areas.

**Preliminary Issues:** The potential for impacts/effects as a result of designating and constructing OHV routes as well as motorized access to dispersed camping are important considerations that need to be addressed in the analysis. The following issues were identified during the preliminary effects analysis and public input in designating the OHV routes, both conducted in 2005.

- Soils: Sedimentation input from disturbance next to streams. Impacts to cryptobiotic crust, which do not recover quickly.
- Fisheries: Presence of threatened, endangered and sensitive aquatic species. Potential stream crossings by OHVs. Trails located within riparian reserves.
- Botany: Impacts to sensitive plant, fungi, lichen and moss habitat, if users venture off designated routes. Increased potential to spread non-native invasive plants.
- Law enforcement: Capacity to enforce designated OHV routes and ability to keep users to the designated routes.
- Fire and fuels: Increased potential for fire starts, especially at staging areas.
- Recreation: Conflicts between user groups, particularly non-motorized and motorized trail use.
- Social: Increased accidents, noise and crime due to increased OHV use. Potential sanitation problems associated with the more people. Conflicts with local residents.

**Timeline:** The draft EIS is expected to be available for public comment in late winter/early spring 2008. The comment period on the draft EIS will be 45 days. The final EIS and accompanying Record of Decision are scheduled to be completed by September 2008.

**Public Scoping:** As directed by the National Environmental Policy Act (1969), the Forest Service is now seeking comments from individuals, organizations, local and state governments, and other federal agencies that may be interested in or affected by the proposed action. Comments may pertain to the nature and scope of the environmental, social, and economic issues, and possible alternatives to the proposed action. Comments will help the Forest Service assess the proposed action, develop alternatives and prepare a draft environmental impact statement.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project and will be available for public inspection and will be released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

The Mt. Hood National Forest is providing a 30-day comment period, commencing on the date that legal notice is published in the Federal Register, approximately August 31, 2007. Written

comments to be considered in the preparation of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) should be submitted by October 1, 2007.

The Forest Service will be host two open houses to present and answer questions about the proposed action. Since there will be no formal presentations at the open houses, please feel free to come at any time during the meetings. The meetings are scheduled as follows.

September 11, 2007 6:00PM to 7:30PM  
University Place Hotel and Conference Center  
Willamette Falls Room  
310 SW Lincoln Street  
Portland, OR 97201

September 12, 2007 6:00PM to 7:30PM  
Best Western Hood River Inn  
Riverview Room  
1108 East Marina Way  
Hood River, OR 97031

Please send your written comments to: Jennie O'Connor, Mt. Hood National Forest Motorized Travel Plan Team Leader, 6780 Highway 35, Parkdale, Oregon 97041; FAX: (541) 352-7365. You may also hand-deliver your comments to the above address during normal business hours from 8:00 am to 4:30 Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays. Electronic comments may be submitted to [comments-pacificnorthwest-mthood@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-pacificnorthwest-mthood@fs.fed.us) in a format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc). All those who comment will remain on our mailing list and receive future updates on this proposal. If you are not providing comments at this time, but would like to remain on the mailing list, please notify us.

Interactive electronic maps and route data and other information about the project are available on the Internet at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/mthood/projects/>. If you have any questions concerning this proposal please contact Jennie O'Connor at (541) 352-6002 x634 or [jmoconnor@fs.fed.us](mailto:jmoconnor@fs.fed.us).

Sincerely,

GARY L. LARSEN  
Forest Supervisor  
Mt. Hood National Forest