ISSUE 32: PUBLIC SAFETY

Changes from the Draft to the Final EIS

There were no substantive changes to this section between the Draft and the Final EIS.

Introduction

This issue concerns the safe use of Forest roads and trails by the recreating public.

Discussion

Public safety on Forest roads and trails is achieved by three basic means: maintaining facilities in good condition, managing the mixture of user types on the same facility and expecting reasonable user behavior.

Facility condition is an aggregation of design, construction and maintenance of a transportation facility. Design and construction dictate the geometric parameters of the facility; the sharpness of the curves, the travel surface widths, the surface type, the climbing and descending gradients, the stopping site distances, signing needs, etc. Maintenance of drainage, surfacing, vegetation, signing, etc. is an attempt to preserve the original design and construction standards of the facility. When maintenance efforts are unable to keep up with the deterioration caused by traffic and environmental forces, a maintenance backlog occurs. Users are typically sensitive to this backlog as it creates, for example, rough driving surfaces on roads, logs across trails, and deteriorating or missing signs.

Mixing conflicting uses on the same facility can create safety conflicts. Some examples include:

1) Mountain bikes on high-use stock trails: Mountain bikes on a downhill run tend to be fairly quiet and move at a high rate of speed which can surprise and spook stock into unsafe behaviors.
2) Unlicensed ATV riders on roads: ATVs typically travel roads at a higher rate of speed than highway vehicles. When the ATV user is unlicensed and/or inexperienced, meeting on-coming traffic is hazardous and occasionally disastrous.
3) Cross-country skiing on groomed snowmobile trails: Cross-country skiers on flat or climbing grades move at a much slower speed than snowmobiles and can have visibility problems. Skiers on downhill grades may be moving at higher speeds and unable to control encounters with snowmobiles climbing up at a high rate of speed.

User expectation and behavior can be characterized by the reasonable and responsible use of Forest roads and trails. Reasonable users will assess the type and condition of road or trail and modify their driving or traveling techniques accordingly. Wet or icy conditions, for example, require the user to exercise enhanced judgment. This might mean turning around, chaining up, etc. Responsible users will not use a road or trail for a purpose for which it is not intended or allowed. Unintended use of a road or trail typically damages the facility and jeopardizes the user or others. Enforcement is necessary where self-regulation cannot be achieved.

General Effects

The effects to user safety by the Travel Plan decision are similar for all alternatives. Three factors influence the safety of the road and trail system: the condition of the facilities, the mixture of uses on a particular facility and user behavior. Safety is enhanced if Forest roads and trails are routinely maintained and unexpected damage or unsafe conditions are identified and corrected in a reasonable amount of time. Regardless of the alternative chosen, public safety issues would be addressed as identified.

Facility Condition

All alternatives provide for user safety. It is expected that, as part of the decision, the Forest will maintain a program of inspecting the transportation system on a regular basis and identifying safety issues needing correction. It is also expected that the Forest will sufficiently fund and maintain any transportation system in order to correct safety issues in a reasonable amount of time.

Mixing Conflicting Uses

Alternatives 2 through 7-M have been designed to separate conflicting uses on roads or trails where safety is an issue. For example, ATVs would be discouraged on passenger car and many backcountry road systems, mountain bikes are eliminated or discouraged on popular stock trails, stock has been discouraged or eliminated on popular mountain bike or hiking trails and skiers and snowmobilers have generally been separated. User guides and some signing are planned to educate users on these issues. Where uses must be mixed, signing will be used to alert users of the condition.

User Expectation and Behavior

Safety will be achieved in all alternatives if users act reasonably and responsibly on Forest roads and trails. Users must learn to expect a variety of standards and conditions on Forest roads and trails and adjust their driving, riding and walking techniques and behaviors. These expectations are learned from visitor maps, educational brochures, experience, state motor vehicle licensing, etc. Expectations vary by type of facility:

Public Forest Service roads
Public Forest Service roads are roads intended to have a similar function as county and state roads. Road standards are generally capable of supporting higher speeds and higher traffic volumes. Safe and reasonable users should expect conditions including:

1) Slow to moderate driving speeds.
2) Low to high traffic volumes.
3) A variety of road surfaces, including native road surfaces that can become slippery when wet.
4) Routinely maintained road surfaces.
5) Navigational signing.
6) No snowplowing (some roads are occasionally plowed for residential or administrative uses including timber hauling).

Passenger car roads
Passenger car roads are identified on the on Forest visitor maps as paved, graveled, or improved roads and are typically roads that have been designed and constructed to carry commercial truck and recreational highway vehicles. Road standards for a passenger car road can vary considerably. They can include double-lane paved or gravel roads for higher speeds and traffic volumes to single-lane native surface roads with inter-visible turnouts for slower speeds and lower traffic volumes. Safe and reasonable users should expect conditions including:
1) Slow to moderate driving speeds.
2) Low to high traffic volumes.
3) A variety of road surfaces, including native road surfaces that can become slippery when wet.
4) Routinely maintained road surfaces.
5) Navigational signing.
6) No snowplowing (some roads are occasionally plowed for residential or administrative uses including timber hauling).

Backcountry roads
Backcountry roads are displayed on the on Forest visitor maps as unimproved roads and can be characterized as narrow single-lane, native surfaced roads with few passing turnouts, minimal direction signing, and minimal surface or vegetation maintenance. Safe and reasonable users should expect conditions including:
1) Very slow-speed driving and minimal site distance.
2) Native road surfaces that can become slippery when wet.
3) Narrow, rough, and high-clearance road surfaces.
4) Steeper road gradients and tight curves.
5) Low to moderate traffic volume.
6) Limited use of towing units.
7) Chaining-up during wet or icy conditions.
8) Navigating using maps without a lot of signing aids.
9) Having to back up occasionally when meeting on-coming traffic.
10) No snowplowing.

Motorized summer trails
Motorized summer trails offer a variety of standards and challenges. Safe and reasonable users should expect conditions including:
1) Varying widths, gradients, surface types and challenges.
2) Obstacles like downed logs or protruding rocks and roots.
3) One-lane trails where passing is a challenge.
4) Encountering a variety of other types of users and sharing the trail
5) Stopping and turning around when the challenge of the trail exceeds their ability.

Motorized winter trails
Motorized winter trails offer a variety of standards and challenges. Groomed trails tend to be on roads or cleared corridors. Marked trails tend to be on summer trail routes or unimproved roads. Safe and reasonable users should expect conditions including:
1) A variety of groomed widths and surface types.
2) Passing significant on-coming traffic traveling at higher rates of speed.

3) Continuous marking or grooming.
4) Varying and changing climate conditions that affect visibility and navigation.
5) Stopped vehicles on trail.
6) Wildlife on the trail.

Mountain bike trails
Mountain bike trails offer a variety of standards and challenges. Safe and reasonable users should expect conditions including:
1) A variety of widths, gradients, surface types and challenges.
2) Downslope exposures.
3) Obstacles like downed logs, rocks, roots, drainage structures, etc.
4) Encountering a variety of other types of users.
5) Slippery surfaces when wet.

Pack and saddle stock trails
Pack and saddle stock trails offer a variety of standards and challenges. Safe and reasonable users should expect conditions including:
1) A variety of widths, gradients, surface types, and challenges.
2) Obstacles like downed logs, rocks, roots, drainage structures, etc.
3) Passing other stock users on narrow sections of trail with steep side-slopes.
4) Encountering a variety of other types of users like motorized or mountain bikes under adverse passing conditions.
5) Slippery shelf rock.

Hiking, skiing and snowshoeing trails
Hiking, skiing and snowshoeing trails offer a variety of standards and challenges. Safe and reasonable users should expect conditions including:
1) A variety of widths, gradients, surface types, and challenges.
2) Obstacles like downed logs, rocks, roots, drainage structures, etc.
3) Encountering a variety of other types of users.

Reasonable behavior by users any road or trail significantly improves the overall safety of the transportation system.

In conclusion, the potential effects to public safety do not vary significantly by travel plan alternative. The safety of the road and trail system is more influenced by the condition of the facilities and user behavior.