



File Code: 1950-3

Date: May 8, 2008

REQUEST FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS
Travel Management Environmental Impact Statement
Initial Scoping for Proposed Action
Please respond by June 15, 2008

Greetings:

The Forest Supervisors for the Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests, and Crooked River National Grassland are interested in what you think about how they propose to implement the Forest Service's National 2005 Travel Management Rule. Our staff has been working with various members of the community over the last year to help develop this proposal, and we are now ready to begin our environmental analysis of the proposed action.

Background

In 2005, the Forest Service codified a national rule that prohibits motorized travel off of designated routes (the rule is called "Travel Management: Designating Routes and Areas for Motorized Use" - we shortened the name to call it the "Travel Management Rule."). The Rule requires National Forests to publish a "Motor Vehicle Use Map" (MVUM) that will show designated routes (roads and trails) and areas that are open to motorized travel, including the season of use and class of vehicle for each of the routes and areas. The Rule also calls for implementing the rule in collaboration with National Forest stakeholders.

The Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests worked with a chartered federal advisory committee to develop a strategy for implementing the rule that included two distinct outcomes. The outcomes were recommendations for:

- 1) options and criteria for providing motorized access for dispersed camping within the limits allowed by the rule; and
- 2) specific areas that could be considered for developing specialized motorized trail systems

The Travel Management Environmental Impact Statement that we are beginning will focus on implementing the travel management rule (prohibiting motorized travel off of existing designated routes¹ where it is not currently prohibited) and will incorporate options and criteria for continuing to provide motorized access for dispersed camping. Separate analyses are planned to begin later this year to consider designating motorized trails in areas the Forest Supervisors' selected out of those identified in the advisory committee recommendations.

Purpose and Need

Currently, the Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests have over 9,000 miles of designated routes (roads and trails) and several designated areas open to a variety of highway and non-highway licensed vehicles. Across the two forests and grassland, there is a wide variation of whether motorized access is allowed off of those routes. The 2005 Travel Management Rule requires that all national forests prohibit motorized

¹ National Forest System roads, trails and areas



travel off of designated routes or outside of designated areas, with some exceptions². The rule was passed because of a number of resource and social concerns related to motorized travel that are detailed in the Rule.

However, if motorized travel off of existing designated routes were prohibited without some provision to continue motorized access for dispersed camping, it would affect the ability of many forest users to access existing “dispersed” or informal campsites, some of which have been used by generations of families. Our objective is to provide for motorized access to dispersed camping without adversely affecting sensitive resources.

There are also some potential safety concerns concerning “mixed” (highway licensed and non-highway licensed vehicles) that could result from limiting all motorized use to the existing designated National Forest System roads and motorized trails on the Forests and Grassland. Currently, many roads under Forest Service jurisdiction have designations that follow state regulations allowing for “mixed” use by both highway and non-highway licensed vehicles on roads that are classified by the Forest Service as “Maintenance Level 2.”³ “Mixed” use of some of these roads may pose a risk to reasonable levels of public safety for motorized users.

The proposed action would implement the national Travel Management rule while continuing to provide motorized access for dispersed camping on the Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests and the Crooked River National Grassland and maintaining reasonable levels of public safety on “mixed” use roads.

Proposed Action

In accordance with the Travel Management Rule⁴ the Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests and the Crooked River National Grassland propose to prohibit motorized travel⁵ outside of those existing designated routes (roads and trails) and areas - where it is not already restricted or prohibited by law, regulation, policy, order, Forest Plan direction, or site-specific decision⁶. The Proposed Action would not close any existing designated routes open for motorized use, although non-highway licensed vehicles are proposed to be prohibited from some roads based on safety concerns. The designated routes and areas that will continue to be open to motorized use will be identified on the Deschutes and Ochoco National Forest and Crooked River National Grassland Proposed Action maps according to the season of use (time period when motorized use is allowed) and class of vehicle (highway licensed or non-highway licensed). These maps will be available at Forest Service and Grassland offices, on the Travel Management website, and at the six public open houses that will be held during the scoping period.

In accordance with provisions of the Travel Management Rule, and with the objective of minimizing resource damage associated with motorized travel off of designated routes, the proposed action would:

1. Continue to allow motorized access for the purpose of entering and exiting to a dispersed campsite within 300' of the centerline of most of the designated routes shown on the Proposed

² A complete list of exceptions are included in the rule and available on the website. Especially worth noting are exceptions for motorized access that is authorized by written permit such as woodcutting or administering grazing allotments.

³ These are usually, but not always, routes with vertical signs and 3 digit numbers.

⁴ 36 CFR 212, 251, 261, and 295.

⁵ Over the snow vehicles are excluded from this proposed action.

⁶ Road closures (designation as Maintenance Level 1 or decommissioned roads) that were approved under previous decisions will not be displayed as “open to motorized travel” in maps of the proposed action.

Action maps. This mirrors the "green dot" motorized access rules that have been in place along designated roads on the forests for many years during hunting seasons.

2. In certain areas with specific resource concerns, special provisions would continue to allow motorized access within 300' of the centerline of a designated route **only** for the purpose of accessing *designated, defined* or *existing* dispersed campsites. *Designated sites* are marked with a sign; *defined sites* limit the extent of the site and motorized access to the site with boulder or wood structures; and *existing sites* have established fire rings or other evidence of historic use.
3. In riparian areas (those areas adjacent to wetlands, lakes, streams and springs), motorized access would continue to be allowed **only** to designated, defined, or existing camping sites. Motorized access to **existing** (not specifically *designated* or *defined*) dispersed campsites less than 30' from the edge of the wetland, lake, stream or spring would not be allowed. Motorized vehicles would not be permitted to cross streams except on designated roads or trails.
4. Motorized access to areas with current prohibitions or restrictions to motorized access to dispersed campsites (e.g.: Wilderness or other Management Areas adjacent to open roads but closed to motorized use) or motorized access to dispersed campsites not on national forest lands would not be authorized under this proposal.

Motorized access adjacent to designated routes would be limited to those classes of vehicles and seasons of use that apply to the adjacent designated route. For instance, if a route is only open to highway-licensed vehicles from April 1 to November 30, then the area adjacent to that route would have the same vehicle requirement and season of use.

The proposed action would amend the Ochoco National Forest Plan by deleting forest plan standards and guidelines that are not consistent with the Travel Management Rule and the proposed action. The proposed action would also amend the Deschutes National Forest Plan to make minor (1-2 day) corrections to some motorized season of use dates for consistency with other similar season of use dates, and change some analysis requirements from outdated "implementation units" to watershed or similar sized ecologically-based areas.

Public Involvement

We are seeking your input to help us develop alternatives, analyze the effects of the alternatives, and select a preferred alternative for our draft Environmental Impact Statement. We welcome your comments anytime during the project; however, **your comments would be most helpful if received by June 15, 2008**. A comment form is attached for your use. We plan to complete a Draft EIS late in 2008 or early 2009. Following the release of the Draft EIS, we will have a 45-Day Public Comment Period for your review and comment. This will be followed by the release of the Final EIS and a Record of Decision in December, 2009.

City	Location	Date	Time
Sisters	Sisters High School 1700 W. McKinney Butte Rd.	May 19	5:00 - 8:00pm
Madras	Senior Center 860 S.W. Madison	May 20	5:00 - 8:00pm
Bend	Deschutes S.O. 1001 Emkay Dr.	May 21	5:00 - 8:00pm
Prineville	Ochoco S.O. 3160 NE 3 rd St.	May 27	5:00 - 8:00pm
Gilchrist	Gilchrist High School 201 Mountain View Dr.	May 28	5:00 - 8:00pm
Redmond	Hugh Hartman Bldg. 2105 W. Antler Ave.	June 2	5:00 - 8:00pm

If you would like more information or to discuss the project, please contact Mollie Chaudet, Peggy Fisher, or Laurel Skelton at (541) 383- 5300.

How to Provide Comments:

You can provide comments by filling out the attached Comment Form, writing a letter. or by sending an email or fax.

Please send written comments to:

Deschutes/Ochoco/Crooked River National Grassland Travel Management EIS
1001 SW Emkay Drive
Bend, Oregon 97702

FAX Number: (541) 383-5531

Or, you can send comments via email to: comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes@fs.fed.us. Electronic comments must be submitted as part of the actual e-mail message, or as an attachment in plain text (.txt), Microsoft Word (.doc), rich text format (.rtf), or portable document format (.pdf). E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed above, or in formats other than those listed or containing viruses, will be rejected.

We look forward to your participation in this important project.

Sincerely,

/s/ John Allen
JOHN ALLEN
Forest Supervisor
Deschutes National Forest

/s/ Jeff Walter
JEFF WALTER
Forest Supervisor
Ochoco National Forest

