

Proposed Action for Managing Motorized Travel

Cibola National Forest Mt. Taylor Ranger District

Background

On November 9, 2005, the Forest Service published final travel management regulations governing off-highway vehicles (OHV) and other motor vehicles on national forests and grasslands. The new regulations removed part 295 of Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). The regulations also amended part 212, subpart B of part 251, and subpart A of part 261. These three regulations are referred to collectively as the [Travel Management Rule](#). The [Travel Management Rule](#) was developed in response to the substantial increase in use of OHV on National Forest System lands and related subsequent damage to forest resources caused by unmanaged OHV use over the past 30 years. The regulations implement Executive Order 11644 and Executive Order 11989 regarding off-road use of motor vehicles on Federal lands.

The [Travel Management Rule](#) requires each national forest and grassland to designate those roads, trails, and areas open to motor vehicle use. Designation will include class of vehicle and, if appropriate, time of year for motor vehicle use. Designated routes and areas will be identified on a motor vehicle use map (MVUM). Once routes have been designated and identified on a MVUM, motor vehicle use will be prohibited off the designated system. The following vehicles and uses are exempted from these designations: 1) aircraft, 2) watercraft, 3) oversnow vehicles, 4) limited administrative use by the Forest Service, 5) use of any fire, military, emergency, or law enforcement vehicle for emergency purposes, 6) authorized use of any combat or combat support vehicle for national defense purposes, 7) law enforcement response to violations of law, and 8) motor vehicle use that is specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulation [36 CFR 212.51 (a)]. In designating routes, the responsible official may include in the designation the limited use of motor vehicles within a specific distance of certain designated routes, and, if appropriate, within a specified time period, solely for the purposes of dispersed camping or retrieval of a downed big game animal by an individual who has legally taken that animal [36 CFR 212.51(b)].

The increased frequency of unregulated motorized use and increases in the size, power and versatility of off-highway vehicles, has led to a proliferation of unauthorized user-created routes on the Mt. Taylor Ranger District (District). The District is experiencing high recreational use by All Terrain Vehicles (ATV) and Utility Terrain Vehicles (UTV) during the big game hunting season. Some hunters have indicated that motorized cross-country travel, including motorized big game retrieval, has degraded their hunting experience. Motorized dispersed camping is a popular activity and the majority of this

activity is associated with hunting. Unregulated motorized use and traveling cross-country with motor vehicles are causing damage to soils, water quality, wildlife habitat, and heritage resources on the District.

Definitions

The definitions that follow come from the [Travel Management Rule](#) and the Forest Service Manual. A **road** is a motor vehicle route more than 50 inches wide, unless identified and managed as a trail. A **trail** is defined as a route 50 inches or less in width, or a route more than 50 inches in width that is identified and managed as a trail. A **forest road or trail** means a road or trail serving the National Forest System (NFS) lands that the Forest Service determines is necessary for the protection, administration, and utilization of the NFS lands. An **unauthorized road or trail** is a road or trail that is not a forest road or trail or a temporary road or trail and that is not included in a forest road atlas. An **area** is a discrete, specifically delineated space where motorized vehicles can travel anywhere, either on roads or trails or cross-country. A **National Forest System road** is a forest road other than a road which has been authorized by a legally documented right-of-way held by a State, county or other local public road authority. A **National Forest System trail** is a forest trail other than a trail which has been authorized by a legally documented right-of-way held by a State, county or other local public road authority. A **closed road** is a road closed to vehicular traffic, but may be open for non-motorized uses and the road may be converted to a motorized trail. A **decommissioned road** is an unneeded road that has been stabilized and restored to a more natural state. **Motorized dispersed campsite** is a place where people camp in an undeveloped camp site with their vehicle(s) close by.

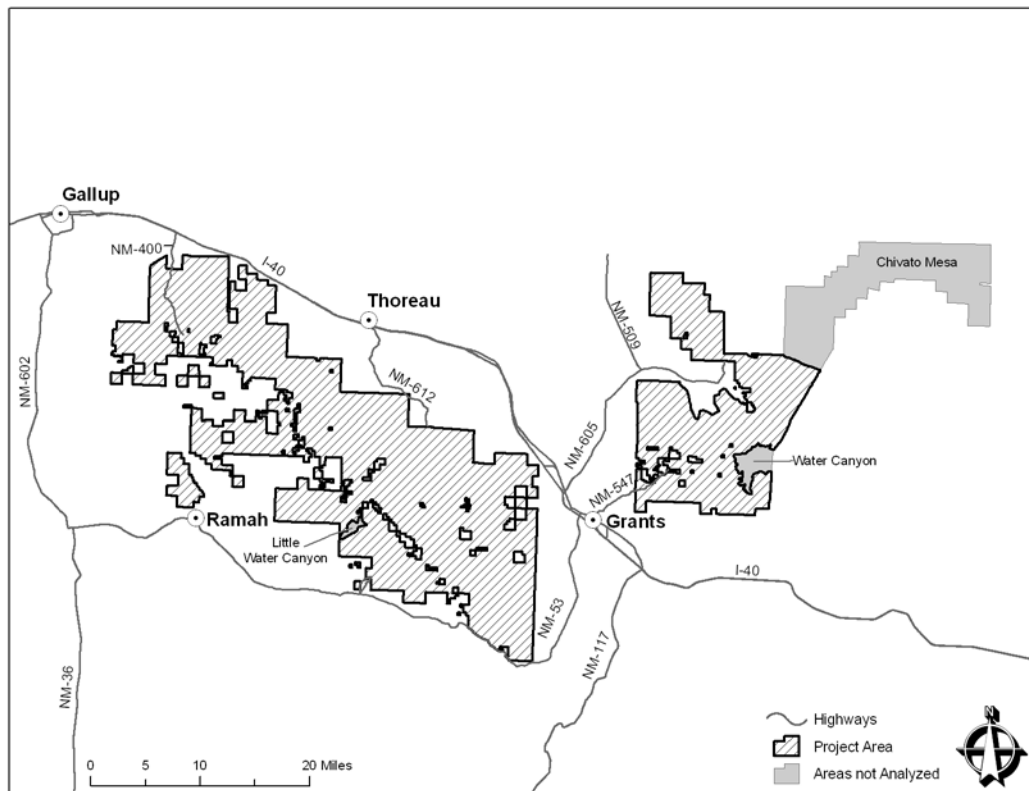
Purpose and Need

There is a need to comply with 36 CFR 212.51(a) which requires the forest designate a system of roads, trails and areas for vehicle use by vehicle class, and if appropriate by time of year. There is a need to comply with the [Travel Management Rule, 36 CFR 261.13](#), which requires that forests prohibit motor vehicle use off the system of designated roads, trails and areas. There is a need to amend the [Cibola National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan \(Forest Plan\)](#) to be compliant with the [Travel Management Rule](#).

Project Location

The Mt. Taylor Ranger District of the Cibola National Forest (Forest) is located in Northwest New Mexico. There are approximately 515,536 acres within the District. The Project Area that will be analyzed under the [Travel Management Rule](#) is comprised of 445,623 acres because 69,913 acres were analyzed under the Checkerboard Transportation Plan and under Forest Plan direction for Water Canyon (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - Project Area location



Previous Decisions

Several previous planning efforts made decisions about travel management that will not be revisited in this process because the decisions comply with the [Travel Management Rule](#). These specific decisions are:

- Checkerboard Transportation Management Plan (1998) which designated roads for motorized use on Chivato Mesa.
- L-Bar Land Exchange Environmental Assessment and Decision (2000) amended the Checkerboard Transportation Management Plan for Chivato Mesa.
- Forest Closure Order 03-173 which prohibits year round cross-country motorized travel off designated roads on Chivato Mesa.
- [Cibola National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan \(Forest Plan\)](#) direction prohibits OHV use in Water Canyon to protect sensitive soils and in Little Water Canyon as a part of potential Research Natural Area (pg. 128, 135, 159, & 167).
- Forest Closure Order 03-33(2) which is a seasonal closure that prohibits 1) motorized travel off forest development roads (Forest Roads 151, 152, 162, 164, 166, 402, 481, 496, 503, 546, 547), and 2) prohibits motorized travel on those forest development roads between December 15 and March 31.

- Forest Closure Order 03-155 which prohibits motor vehicle travel on Forest Road 569 and 192 between December 15 and April 15.

Public Involvement

The District hosted two phases of open house sessions in Gallup and Grants, NM, during the development of the proposed action. The initial open house sessions were held primarily to inform the public about the facts of [Travel Management Rule](#) and explain the need for the analysis. The second phase focused on public input and solicited the public for detailed information on how they use and enjoy NFS lands within the Project Area. The public was then asked to clearly define what places on the District were important in providing them with opportunities for this use and enjoyment. Meeting participants defined the roads needed to access these important places on the District as well as travel routes currently in use and their input was captured on maps of the Project Area.

Maps were posted at the District Office in Grants and at the McKinley County Agricultural Service Center in Gallup for public review and comment. Information about travel management, maps, public meetings and project contacts was available online (Cibola National Forest Website: http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/cibola/travel-management/tm_mt_taylor/index.shtml) for people outside of the local area. Local newspapers were utilized to notify the public.

The District hosted two additional open houses at the District office in Grants. In addition, people with an interest in the project met with Forest Service personnel at the district office. The district received hand-drawn maps, GIS data, verbal descriptions, and letters from the public.

Developing the Proposed Action

The information from the open houses played a key role in developing and shaping the proposed action. The Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) compared the public's input with natural resource concerns determined by a Travel Analysis Process (TAP). Some of the key resource management concerns and public desires that were identified in this process were:

- Roads that were poorly located and causing resource damage such as erosion, damage to archeological sites, and impacts to important wildlife habitat.
- Motorized access to dispersed campsites.
- Motorized access for big game retrieval.
- Non-motorized users desire for fewer encounters with motorized users.
- Desire for motorized trail opportunities.

Where the public input was consistent with the resource recommendation of the TAP, travel route was brought forward to the proposed action. In some situations the public's input did not align with the TAP recommendations. In cases where feasible mitigation measures were identified to address the resource concern, travel route was carried forward into the proposed action. If a publicly-identified area or travel route posed a

threat to natural resources that could not be mitigated, then the area or travel route was excluded from the proposed action.

In some cases, multiple routes access the same area. The ID Team considered these to be duplicate routes. The ID Team selected the route that best met the resource objectives and the need for public access, to carry forward into the proposed action.

Proposed Action

The Mt. Taylor Ranger district proposes the following actions to implement the National Travel Management Rule:

1. Prohibit cross-country motorized travel on the district, including cross-country motorized big game retrieval;
2. Designate 10 miles of closed roads and 88 miles of unauthorized roads as open to motorized use for all class of vehicles to provide motorized access ;
3. Designate 15 miles of closed roads as motorized trails (50" or less) to provide motorized trail opportunities;
4. Designate 43 miles of unauthorized roads as motorized trails (50" or less) to provide motorized trail opportunities;
5. Convert 99 miles of NFS roads to motorized trails (50" or less) to provide motorized trail opportunities;
6. Construct 0.3 miles of new motorized trails to provide motorized trail opportunities and create a loop trail;
7. Do not designate 465 miles of NFS roads for motorized use by the public to reduce resource damage to soils, water quality, wildlife habitat, and heritage resources; and
8. Allow motorized access for dispersed camping 100 feet on either side of the road on 127 miles of designated roads to provide motorized access to dispersed campsites;¹

A table of individual roads, the changes being proposed, and the rationale for ID Team recommendations on each will be available online at

http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/cibola/travel-management/tm_mt_taylor/index.shtml or a copy can be obtained by contacting the district office at (505) 287-8833.

When combined with previous decisions, these proposed changes would result in a motorized system with:

- 649 miles of designated NFS roads – of these, 78 miles will continue to be seasonally closed from December 15 through April 15 and 127 miles will have designated dispersed motorized camping corridors;
- 177 miles of motorized trails, of which 20 miles will be single tracked motorized trails

¹ Motorized travel within the designated dispersed camping corridor may only be for the purpose of driving from the road to a dispersed camp site. Driving for other purposes is prohibited.

Please see the attached maps for the designations.

Forest Plan Amendment

In order for the Proposed Action to comply with both the [Forest Plan](#) and the requirements of the Travel Management Rule, two types of plan amendments are needed. The first addresses inconsistencies in road density guidance and the second removes language that does not comply with the Travel Management Rule requirement to close the Forest to cross-country travel off of designated roads and trails.

Road Density Guidance

The ID Team compared the Proposed Action to the guidance in the [Forest Plan](#) to determine if the actions are consistent with the [Forest Plan](#). The [Forest Plan](#) addresses road density in two places, forest-wide guidance and in the management area guidance for transportation. The forest-wide guidance (page 61-1 of the Forest Plan) provides for a road density of 1.9 miles per square mile of forest land. The Proposed Action is consistent with the forest-wide guidance in the [Forest Plan](#) for road density (See Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of [Forest Plan](#) road density guidance and comparison to the existing condition, the minimum road system, and the Proposed Action

Existing Forest Plan Direction for Road Density	Existing District Road System - Open Road Density	Minimum Road System - Road Density	Proposed Action - Open Road Density
(miles / sq. mile)	(miles / sq. mile)	(miles / sq. mile)	(miles / sq. mile)
1.90	1.48	1.32	0.85

The management area guidance on road density varies by analysis areas, which are subdivisions of management areas that are described but not mapped in the [Forest Plan](#). The analysis area road density guidelines range from 0.3 to 1.6 miles per square mile (See Table 2). Many of the analysis areas were defined according to the seral stage² of the vegetation type or range condition. Analysis areas based on vegetation structure change over time and shift across the landscape; shifts are caused by management activities and natural disturbances. Road locations generally do not change over time. Because the exact location of the analysis area boundaries is unclear and the conditions used to define them have changed, it is no longer meaningful to define road densities by analysis area. Because analysis areas cannot be mapped consistently over time, there is no way to determine if the Proposed Action road system exceeds the [Forest Plan](#) guidance. Therefore, there is a need to amend the road density guidance in the [Forest Plan](#) so that it is clear and consistent.

We propose to retain the current forest wide road density direction (1.9 miles/sq mile) while eliminating road density guidance for each management area and its associated

² Seral stage is a temporal and intermediate state in the process of succession. Succession is the gradual replacement of one community of plants by another in a given area over time.

analysis areas. We also propose an amendment to allow for temporary increase in road density (2-3 miles/sq mile) in active vegetation management areas in all management areas. In the current plan, this direction only applies to some management areas.

Table 2: Existing Plan Direction for Road Densities by Management Area

Management Area	Analysis Area	Existing District System Open Road Density
		(miles / sq. mile)
8	7 and 8	1.3
	9	0.9
9	11	1.6
	12	0.3
10	13	0.5
13	18	0.14
14	19 and 20	0.5
	21	1.3
	22	0.3
18	10	0.8

Cross-Country Travel

Since the [Forest Plan](#) permits cross-country travel across 445,623 acres on the district, there is a need to amend the [Forest Plan](#) to implement the provisions of the Travel Management Rule for the District.

To provide for consistency between the plan and the Travel Management Rule, we propose deleting or changing standards/guidelines listed below, which refer to OHV area closures and restrictions, signing of closed areas (no longer appropriate), or specific acreages of OHV closed areas (no longer necessary as all areas outside the designated system will be closed). This amendment would be specific to the Mt. Taylor Ranger District.

Table 3. All Changes Proposed in the Forest Plan Amendment

Management Area and/or pg	Current Forest Plan Direction	Change to Forest Plan Direction
Pg 61-1	I Water, (1) Quality, (a) Maximum road density of 1.9 miles of road per square mile.	<i>Add following text;</i> Open system road densities will increase temporarily to 2-3 miles per square mile in active vegetation management areas.

Management Area and/or pg	<u>Current Forest Plan Direction</u>	Change to Forest Plan Direction
Pg 120	<p>Restrict ORV use on 565 acres of the Zuni Mountains where State Habitat Protection Act and ORV restriction is in effect from December 15 through March 31 (Order 03- 32, Fort Wingate Road and Off-Road Motorized Vehicle Restriction dated January 13, 1983). Maintain 1,198 acres closed to ORV use: 316 acres-closed to protect sensitive soils, 882 acres-potential RNA (Little Water Canyon)</p> <p>Expand the off-road vehicle closure along Bluewater Creek to include an additional 110 acres between the bridge on FR178 and Andrews Cabin.</p>	<i>Text Deleted</i>
Pg 128	Maintain 1,684 acres closed to ORV use to protect sensitive soils.	<i>Text deleted</i>
Pg 135	Maintain 757 acres closed to ORV use to protect sensitive soils.	<i>Text deleted</i>
Pg 159	Maintain 5,495 acres on Mt. Taylor District closed to ORV use to protect sensitive soils.	<i>Text deleted</i>
Pg 167	<p>Evaluate and, if warranted, maintain 11,976 acres closed to ORV use. Restrict ORV use in that portion of Zuni Mountains where State Habitation Protection Act and ORV restriction is in effect from December 15 through March 31 (Order 03-32, Fort Wingate Road and Off-Road Motorized Vehicle Restriction dated January 13, 1983. Manage 28 acres closed to ORV as par of potential RNA (Little Water Canyon).</p>	<i>Text deleted</i>
Pg 196	Maintain 100 acres closed to ORV use as part of potential RNA (Bluewater Creek).	<i>Text deleted</i>

Management Area and/or pg	<u>Current Forest Plan Direction</u>	Change to Forest Plan Direction
MA 8 (pg. 125)	<p>Manage the following average road densities: 1.30 miles of road average road density (Applicable Analysis Area 7 & 8) 0.90 miles of road average road density (Applicable Analysis Area 9)</p> <p>Road densities will increase temporarily to 2-3 miles per square mile in active timber harvest areas.</p>	<i>Text deleted</i>
MA 9 (pg. 132-)	<p>Manage the average road densities indicated below: 1.60 miles of road per square mile (Applicable Analysis Area 11) 0.30 miles of road per square mile (Applicable Analysis Area 12)</p> <p>Road density will increase temporarily to 2-3 miles per square mile in active timber harvest areas.</p>	<i>Text deleted</i>
MA 10 (pg. 139)	<p>Manage an average road density of 0.50 miles of road per square mile. Road density in active timber harvest areas will be temporarily increased to 2-3 miles per square mile. (Applicable Analysis Area 13)</p>	<i>Text deleted</i>
MA 13 (pg. 161)	<p>Manage an average road density of 0.14 miles of road per square mile. (Applicable Analysis Area 18)</p>	<i>Text deleted</i>
MA 14 (pg. 173)	<p>Manage the road system for an average road densities indicated below: 0.50 miles of road per square mile (Applicable Analysis Area 19 & 20) 1.30 miles of road per square mile (Applicable Analysis Area 21) 0.30 miles of road per square mile (Applicable Analysis Area 22)</p>	<i>Text deleted</i>
MA 18 (pg. 198)	<p>Manage an average road density of 0.80 mile of road per square mile. (Applicable Analysis Area 10)</p>	<i>Text deleted</i>

Decision to be Made

The Forest Supervisor is the deciding official who will make the following decisions after the analysis and public collaboration is completed:

- Which system of roads, trails, and areas to designate for motorize use;
- Which class of motor vehicles will be allowed on specific roads and trails;
- What special seasonal or timing restrictions, if any, will be applied to specific routes;
- If motorized access for dispersed camping will be provided and if so, where and in what manner;
- What mitigation and/or monitoring measures to implement as part of the selected alternative,
- If motorized cross-country retrieval of big game will be included;
- Whether to amend the [Forest Plan](#) to prohibit cross-country travel, and;
- Whether to amend the [Forest Plan](#) to update the road density guidelines.

Contact Information

For more information on this proposal and the project, contact Arnold Wilson, project team leader at (505) 287-8833 or email awilson01@fs.fed.us. Additional information about this project can also be found at: http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/cibola/travel-management/tm_mt_taylor/index.shtml.