

# West-End OHV Project

Heppner Ranger District, Umatilla National Forest  
Grant, Morrow, and Wheeler Counties, Oregon

Upper Rock Creek, Wall Creek, and Lower John Day River-Kahler Creek Watersheds

T. 6 S., R. 24 E., Sections 21, 26-28, and 33-35;

T. 6 S., R. 26 E., Sections 26 and 35;

T. 7 S., R. 23 E., Sections 11 thru 14;

T. 7 S., R. 24 E., Sections 1 thru 5, 7 thru 18, and 20 thru 24;

T. 7 S., R. 25 E., Sections 1 thru 27 and 34 thru 36;

T. 7 S., R. 26 E., Sections 1, 2, 6 thru 36;

T. 7 S., R. 27 E., Sections 7, 17 thru 20, and 29 thru 33;

T. 8 S., R. 25 E., Sections 1, 2, and 11 thru 14;

T. 8 S., R. 26 E., Sections 1 thru 30 and 33 thru 35;

T. 8 S., R. 27 E., Sections 4, 17 thru 21, and 29-31; Willamette Meridian, Surveyed

## Background

In 2003, the Chief of the Forest Service identified the four greatest threats facing our nation's forests. One of those threats is unmanaged recreation, including impacts from unmanaged off-highway vehicle use (OHVs). Between 1982 and 2000, the use of off-highway vehicles increased more than 109%, and more than 11 million visits per year to the National Forests involve OHV use. That trend is expected to continue as the U.S. population grows, the availability of open space outside of public land decreases, and OHV technology improves.

Motor vehicles are a legitimate and appropriate way for people to recreate on the National Forests, but improved management of OHVs is necessary to prevent degradation of the natural and cultural resources on federal lands. Unmanaged OHV use on National Forests can result in unplanned roads and trails, erosion, watershed and habitat degradation, and impacts on cultural resource sites. It has led to conflicts between users and caused risks to public safety. The growth of OHV use coupled with the potential degradation of resources led the Forest Service to revise its national policy governing wheeled motor vehicles in 2005.

The 2005 regulation is entitled "Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use," and is commonly referred to as the "Travel Rule." The Travel Rule requires designation of those roads, trails, and areas that are open to motor vehicle use. Designations are to be made by class of vehicle, and, if appropriate, time of year. The Travel Rule prohibits the use of motor vehicles off the designated system, as well as the use of motor vehicles on routes and in areas that are not consistent with the designations.

The Travel Rule creates a national framework for local decisions. The rule would be implemented at the administrative unit or Ranger District level. Those site-specific, local decisions will have an environmental impact, which is the reason for this Environmental Analysis.

The Travel Rule establishes general criteria for the designation of roads, trails and areas under subpart 212.55. Criteria for the designation shall consider effects on National Forest System (NFS) natural and cultural resources, public safety, provision of recreational opportunities, access needs, conflicts among uses of the NFS lands, the need for and availability of maintenance and administration of the system.

In addition to the general criteria, the Travel Rule establishes specific criteria for the designation of trails and areas which identifies the objective of minimizing damage to soil, watershed, vegetation, and other forest resources; harassment of wildlife and significant disruption of wildlife habitats; conflicts between motorized use and existing and proposed recreational uses on NFS lands; and conflicts between different classes of motor vehicle use of NFS lands or neighboring Federal lands in the designation of trails and areas.

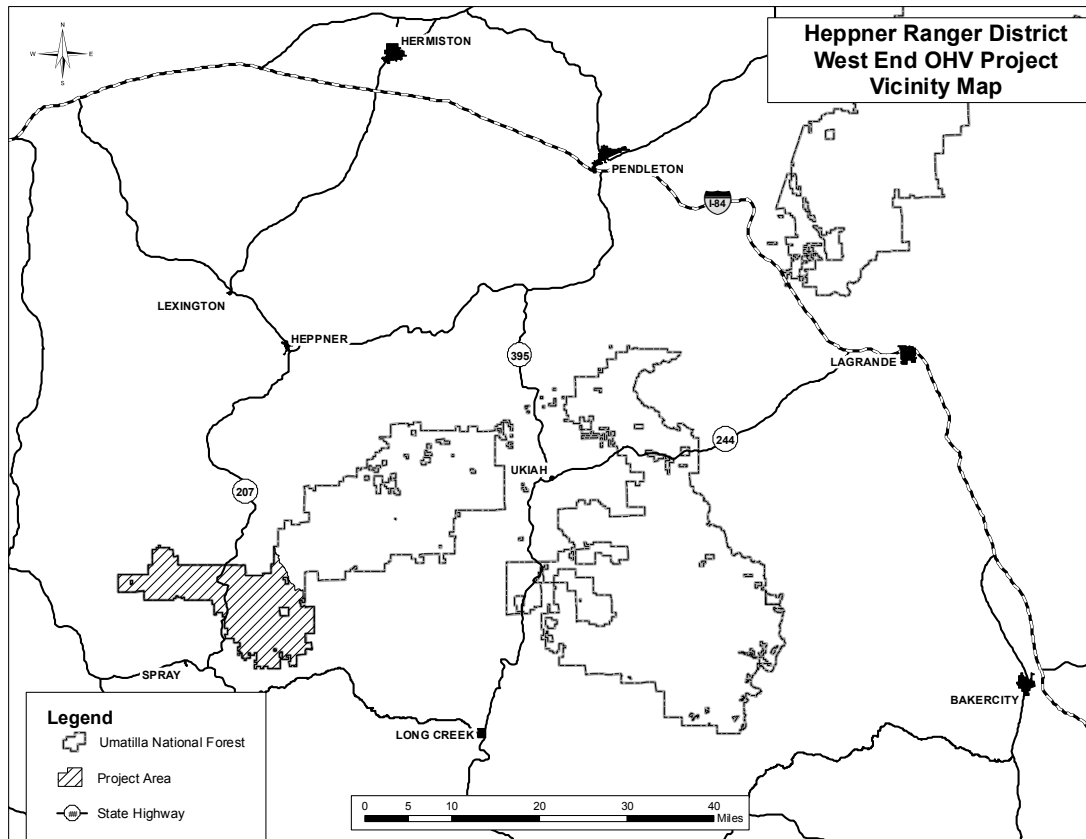
In addition to the general criteria, the Travel Rule establishes specific criteria for the designation of roads. This includes consideration of the speed, volume, composition, and distribution of traffic on roads, as well as the compatibility of vehicle class with road geometry and road surfacing.

Off-highway vehicles are a common form of recreation on and near the Heppner Ranger District. The Morrow County OHV Park opened in 2002, and is adjacent to National Forest land. Since its opening, visits to the OHV Park have steadily increased. In 2007, the 6,000 acre OHV Park acquired an additional 1,900 acres. Similarly, use of OHVs on the Heppner Ranger District has increased over the years. This trend is expected to continue. As OHV recreation increases and machine capabilities increase, the potential for resource damage may also increase.

The majority of current Access and Travel Management (ATM) Plans on the Umatilla National Forest are consistent with new Travel Rule direction with designated roads and routes for both motor vehicles and OHVs. The Heppner Ranger District's 1992 Access and Travel Management Decision designated roads and routes for motor vehicle and OHV use on most of the district. Within the 1992 Access and Travel Management Decision, the General Forest area west of the 22 Road permitted overland OHV use yearlong and did not designate a system or routes. Since most of this 91,000 acre area is currently open, year round, to Class I and Class III OHVs for off road travel it does not meet the intent of the Travel Rule and will be analyzed under the West-End OHV Project described below.

### **Project Area:**

The West-End OHV project area is located on the west side of the Heppner Ranger District and includes all Forest Service lands west of Forest Road 22 (Morrow County Road 670/Grant County Road 3). Private land and non-Forest Service Roads are not part of this project.



In accordance with the November 2, 2005 Travel Management Rule the Heppner Ranger District will develop a system of roads, trails and areas designated for off-highway vehicle (OHV) travel within the project area.

The project area consists of eight management area strategies as described in the Land and Resource Management Plan, Umatilla National Forest (Forest Plan). Proposed designated roads and trails lie within all Management Areas except the D2- Research Natural Area (see attached map). The Forest Plan permits OHV use on roads and trails in all Management Areas within the project boundary.

Management Area Strategy	Acres in Project Area
A3 – Viewshed 1	664
A4 – Viewshed 2	1,718
A6 – Developed Recreation	259
C1- Dedicated Old Growth	3,909
C3 – Big Game Winter Range	22,307
C5 – Riparian and Wildlife	2,960
D2 – Research Natural Area	84
E1 – Timber and Forage	58,237

### Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed action is to provide a transportation plan for the west end of the Heppner Ranger District, in compliance with the Travel Rule. The proposed action will develop a system of roads, trails and areas designated for motor vehicle travel.

The following describes the need for this proposed action:

There is a need for travel management on the Heppner Ranger District to be consistent with national direction. The need for this action is to meet national direction as published in the Federal Register, 36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, 295 “Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use” (Federal Register 2005: 70FR68264) (Travel Rule). This rule requires designation of those roads, trails, and areas that are open to motor vehicle use. The rule prohibits the use of motor vehicles off the designated system, as well as use of motor vehicles on routes and in areas that are not consistent with the designation.

## **Development of the Proposed Action**

The proposed action was developed after 18 months of collaborative efforts with federal, state, county, and tribal agencies, motorized and non-motorized recreation user groups, conservationists, hunters and interested individuals and consideration of the general and specific criteria as described in the Travel Rule.

The Heppner Ranger District initiated public dialogue to evaluate options to designate roads, trails or areas for OHV use within the West-End area in September of 2006. Over the last 18 months, district officials have shared information and received feedback through public meetings, newsletters, websites, as well as written correspondence and phone calls.

Three separate occasions have provided information and opportunity to become involved in the development of this proposal. In September 2006 the District began informing local users of upcoming changes through the distribution of a newsletter and contact card. The newsletter and request for contact names to receive further information of the project were distributed through: a general forest wide mailing list, visitors to the Heppner Ranger District office, and distributed to hunters, campers, and other users throughout the project area during deer and elk rifle seasons. The newsletter was also made available at the Morrow County OHV Park.

The second opportunity included a newsletter mailed to over 130 individuals, groups, organizations and federal, state, county, and tribal agencies. This newsletter identified opportunities to visit several open houses, sponsored by the Heppner Ranger District, to ask questions and provide feedback on the changes to OHV use in the project area. In addition, people were advised to provide comments of how they liked to use the area. A news release was published in the East Oregonian newspaper listing open house opportunities in Heppner, Monument, and Fossil during the month of March 2007. Thirty-two individuals visited one of the open houses and provided feedback to forest service personnel. A website was made available [http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/uma/recreation/westend\\_ohv/index.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/uma/recreation/westend_ohv/index.shtml) to the public for information and an additional opportunity to provide comments.

A third newsletter mailing was made to 137 individuals, groups, organizations and federal, state, county, and tribal agencies during the Summer 2007 with information on the project status.

Comments and input have been received throughout this process. Public feedback diversity ranges from only allowing OHV use on roads open to vehicle traffic to allowing OHVs access to all closed roads and skidtrails as well as roads open to vehicles. Another range of comments was

banning the use of OHVs on all roads and areas during hunting seasons verses requesting to allow cross country travel on OHVs during the hunting seasons to allow for game retrieval or access to specific areas. We received 41 separate comments specific to this project in the form of letters, personal contact, and telephone conversations.

Feedback was considered in the development of the proposed action along with what we know about the current use patterns and the current resource conditions and concerns in the area. The Proposed Action was designed to improve public safety, maintain water quality, provide for the protection of archaeological, botanical, fisheries and wildlife resources, and provide a quality recreational experience.

## **Proposed Action**

The Proposed Action identifies a designated system of roads and trails that would be available for OHV use in the West-End area (see attached map). The majority of roads currently open to motorized travel would remain open to OHV travel. New trails would be added to provide connections to other trail systems on the forest and to the Morrow County OHV Park. The proposal focuses on roads and routes that were important to the users and provided access to key destinations on the Forest, connections into the Morrow County OHV Park and loop systems. In this proposed action OHV use refers to Class I – vehicles less than 50 inches wide, dry weight of 800 pounds or less, has a saddle or seat, and travels on three or four wheels; Class III refers to – vehicles dry weight less than 500 pounds, travels on two wheels, and meets safety equipment standard for off road vehicles.

The Proposed Action aligns motorized travel strategies across the Forest and with the 2005 Travel Rule direction. It includes:

Open roads and designated routes:

- 191 miles of open roads that are open to all motor vehicle traffic that would be designated open for Class I and III OHV use as well.
- 48 miles of roads that are currently closed to motor vehicles that would be designated as open motorized trails for Class I and III OHV use.

There would be 239 miles of open roads and motorized trail for OHV use on existing road beds. Levels would vary from maintained roads to unmaintained motorized trail on the closed road beds. These roads and trails would be open year round as conditions permit.

Seasonal restrictions:

- 16 miles of roads that are seasonally open to all motor vehicle traffic that would be designated as seasonally open for Class I and III OHV use as well.
- 32 miles of roads that are currently closed to motor vehicles that would be designated as seasonally open motorized trails for Class I and III OHV use.

Six miles of seasonal motorized and constructed trail would be closed from September 15 thru December 1 to reduce disturbance to big game habitat during the rifle hunting seasons. This includes the 2128-065 designated motorized trail and proposed constructed trail at the southern end of this route that connects to the 2128-060 road in T. 7 S., R. 26 E.

All roads and routes available for OHV use within the Monument Winter Range that are not open to all motor vehicle traffic year round would be seasonal for OHV use. This seasonal restriction would be consistent with the Heppner Ranger District Access and Travel Management Plan. Routes would be closed December 1 thru April 15. This would include about 16 miles of seasonal roads open to all motor vehicle traffic and 26 miles of seasonal motorized trail open only to OHVs. These seasonal restrictions are located in T. 8 S., R. 26 and 27 E., the southern portion of T. 7 S., R. 27 E., and the 2500410 road in T. 7 S., R. 25 E.

Constructed trails:

- 5 miles of new trail would be designated as motorized trails for Class I and III OHV use.

There would be 6 sections of constructed or designated trail to close loops or connect two trail systems. These are located throughout the project area in section 25, of T. 7 S., R. 25 E.; sections 10, 23, and 31 of T. 7S, R. 26 E.; and sections 2 and 8 of T. 8 S., R. 26 E. The proposed trail in section 15, T 7 S, R 25 E would provide a connection from Fairview campground to FS Road 2000400.

OHV use limits:

- 29 miles of roads open to motor vehicle traffic would be closed to Class I and III OHV use due to mixed use concerns.
- OHVs would not be allowed within the Bull Prairie Campground administrative site.
- OHV use would not be allowed cross-country.

The proposal would eliminate OHV use on roads where motor vehicle traffic mixed with OHV use (mixed-use) creates high levels of safety concerns. This would include the paved portion of FS Road 2039 into Bull Prairie, 2039030 road within the Bull Prairie Campground (paved portion only), FS Road 21-West from State Highway 207 to FS Road 25, 4.6 miles of FS Road 2128 and FS Road 24 from Highway 207 to junction with FS Road 2407.

Bull Prairie Campground and administrative area would restrict OHVs. The gate on the 2307035 would be the boundary on the southern end. The 2000350 and the 2039 to the north would allow for a connecting loop with the OHV Park and allow riders within walking distance to Bull Prairie Reservoir and the campground area. All paved roads within the administrative site and the campground area would restrict OHVs.

The proposal would eliminate cross-country travel and the use of closed roads and user created trails within the West-End area that were determined to conflict with general criteria as outlined in the Travel Rule.

The proposed action provides 292 miles of roads and designated routes for Class I and Class III OHV use. Of these 292 miles, 207 miles of road is also open to other motor vehicle traffic and 85 miles of designated route is closed to other motor vehicle traffic. See the attached map for specific road and route information.