

Decision Memo
USDA Forest Service

Long Ridge OHV Corridor Connector
Upper Lake Ranger District, Mendocino National Forest
Lake County, California

Decision and Rationale

I have decided to revise the current road management objective for forest road 17N16 (see vicinity map, pg 2, and proposal map, pg 3). Total length of 17N16 is about 5.5 miles. The road management objective has been to provide for low clearance vehicles; the revised objective would be to provide for high clearance vehicles. 17N16 has been managed for high clearance vehicles for many years, so the revised road management objective would formally acknowledge our intent to continue that.

As explained in more detail below, this would maintain connectivity for non-street-legal vehicles and drivers by keeping it legal for them to travel on 17N16 between the Stonyford and Upper Lake OHV Management areas.

This proposal is one of several travel management proposals that were developed at public workshops during 2006 (refer to Public Involvement section below). Seven of the other proposals are being concurrently analysed in other environmental documents as separate proposed actions¹. We are considering each of these proposals separately, on its own merits, because none of them depend on any of the others for its justification. However, we will consider any overlapping environmental effects to assure that no cumulatively significant effects are overlooked.

Reasons for the Decision

This and the other proposals are being made pursuant to recent changes in travel management and other regulations [36 CFR Parts 212, 261, and 295²], which require all national forests to restrict motorized use to designated roads, trails, or areas.

For national forests, such as MNF, that have already restricted motorized use to such designated route systems, the regulations allow two options: a) provide public notice that the existing designated system will remain unchanged; or b) work with the public to make needed changes to the existing system. During

¹Hull Mt to Bald Mt OHV Hunting Connectivity, Ivory Mill Saddle to Snow Mountain OHV Hunting Connectivity, Wolf-Trough-Letts OHV Riding Connectivity, Upper Deer Valley OHV Riding Connectivity, Motorized Access for Dispersed Camping, Close OHV Trail 68, and Commander Tract Motorized Access.

² Refer to Federal Register / Vol. 70, No. 216 / Wednesday, November 9, 2005 / Rules and Regulations / pp. 68287 – 68291.

VICINITY MAP

PROPOSAL MAP

2006, Mendocino National Forest worked with stakeholders to examine whether there were affordable improvements that could be made to the existing motorized route system.

During that process, MNF staff became aware that the established management objective for 17N16 was for low clearance vehicles. However, 17N16 has actually been managed for high-clearance vehicles and for mixed-use³ for over 20 years. This discrepancy should be resolved in order to bring the road management objective up to date. Continuing management of 17N16 for high-clearance vehicles and mixed-use is important because it provides a key connection between Upper Lake and Stonyford OHV Management Areas, and is part of the MNF OHV Corridor.

This proposal implements the following Forest Plan direction:

It contributes to the following Forest Goal:

Recreation – Provide a full range of developed and dispersed recreation opportunities at levels meeting projected demand and within the physical limits and resource capabilities of the Forest.

It contributes to the following Desired Condition:

Recreation – ...Off-highway-vehicle use will be on designated routes with the major concentration of use in the southern portions of the Forest...
[Forest Plan, p. IV- 6]

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement, pursuant to Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 30, Section 31.12, Category 4) *Repair and maintenance of roads, trails, and landline boundaries*. The substantive decision in this case is to revise a road management objective regarding the class of vehicle (high-clearance vs. low-clearance) for which the road will be maintained. The effects of the decision are limited to guiding road maintenance activities, and will not result in any reconstruction, construction, or changes in vehicle class. A decision memo is not required for documenting a decision under this category. However, I elected to do so in this case in order to provide some continuity with the documentation of our other travel management decisions in the route designation process.

Determination Regarding Extraordinary Circumstances

Pursuant to FSH 1909.15, Section 30.3, I have determined that no extraordinary circumstances exist regarding the following resource conditions:

- a) Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.

³ Mixed-use refers to sharing of the road by both street-legal and non-street-legal vehicles and drivers.

The project effect documentation form⁴ for threatened, endangered, proposed, and FS sensitive species determined that there would be no effects to any of these categories of species. This determination is based on there being no change in existing uses on existing roads.

b) Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.

The hydrology report⁵ determined that: 1) 17N16 is not located within or near a floodplain, and there is no potential to impact downstream floodplains through peak flow alteration or sediment production; 2) 17N16 is not located in a wetland; 3) 17N16 is not located in a municipal watershed.

c) Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas.

17N16 is not located within any of the four wilderness areas on the MNF.

d) Inventoried roadless areas.

17N16 is not located within an inventoried roadless area.

e) Research natural areas.

17N16 is not located in a research natural area.

f) American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites.

See (g) below.

g) Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

The proposed action is an exempt undertaking (Stipulation III(E)) under terms of the *First Amended Regional Programmatic Agreement Among the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, California State Historic Preservation Officer, and Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Regarding the Process for Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for Undertakings on the National Forests of the Pacific Southwest Region* (2001) and can be implemented without further review or consultation. The exemption category is IIC. - activities that do not involve ground or surface disturbance.

Neither public comments nor agency analysis have identified any potential for the proposed action to cause a loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.

Public Involvement

July 2004 the Forest Service Chief announced the Forest Service decision to develop a strategy for OHV management (designated trails and route system). Concurrently, FS Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5) announced a Memorandum of Intent with the State of California OHV Commission to work together to implement the national direction and conduct trail inventories on all

⁴ FOREST-WIDE MINOR PROJECT EFFECT DOCUMENTATION FORM, 11 September 2007.

⁵ Hydrologic Analysis, 26 November 2007

Region 5 national forests. The MNF sent copies of the news releases regarding these two announcements to local media, congressional staffers and county officials.

The MNF team developed a strategic public involvement plan. To announce the beginning of the route designation process and provide information about upcoming public meetings, they sent a target-audience letter, issued news releases and did an Internet web posting. Three public meetings were held in March and April 2005, in Willows, Ukiah, and Red Bluff.

During the remainder of 2005, public involvement centered on validating our route inventory. The public was asked to provide information regarding motorized routes that may have been missed by the inventory.

In 2006 we turned to the task of developing a proposed action in collaboration with the interested public. We asked for a few volunteers to help us determine how best to include people that would be interested or affected by motorized route designation.

Two rounds of public workshops were held during the proposed action development process – one in late February and March, and one in mid-June. Each round had one workshop each in Willows and Ukiah. The workshops were announced in advance through news releases, mailings, and web posting. Workshop materials were also posted on the web for those who could not attend.

Their input, along with that which we received by mail or personal contact, was used to identify needs and possible actions for improving the existing Mendocino NF designated motorized route system. Those were presented at a third round of public workshops, in November, prior to finalizing a set of proposed actions for scoping. The main objective of these workshops was to get stakeholder input regarding a set of proposals that we had identified as tentative proposed actions that were ripe for decision at this time.

This proposal generated no concerns at either the Ukiah or the Willows workshop. Therefore, this proposal, as scoped, is the same as the tentative November 2006 proposal.

Scoping letters, including project description and maps, were sent out via regular mail (97 addressees), email (115 addressees), and to the listserve FS-ROUTE-DESIGNATION@newsbox.usda.gov. The list of addressees was compiled from public workshop sign-up sheets, and other expressions of interest received since the route designation process began in late 2004. The same scoping materials were posted to the MNF web page. Notice was published in Ukiah Daily Journal. All scoping materials requested that comments be submitted by 3 Aug 2007.

Six organizations submitted a co-signed comment letter that provided one comment related to this proposal. The comment was a statement of non-opposition to this or the other four OHV connectivity proposals.

Findings Required by Other Laws

National Forest Management Act – The Mendocino NF Forest Plan established the management direction with which management actions must comply to ensure conformance with the NFMA. The interdisciplinary team identified applicable Forest Plan direction, and evaluated the effects of the proposed action⁶ regarding compliance with that direction. The team concluded that the proposed action was compliant with applicable management direction. Details of the review and conclusions are in Appendix L.

The Forest Service Manual provides additional NFMA management direction, regarding species viability. FSM 2670.32 directs that we avoid or minimize impacts to species whose viability has been identified as a concern. This would include federally listed threatened or endangered species, FS sensitive species, and for Northwest Forest Plan forests such as the MNF, survey & manage species. Effects on threatened and endangered species and critical habitat are noted under that subsection above. The biological evaluation determined that there would be no effect on FS sensitive species, because there would be no change in the type of use of an existing facility. A compliance review for survey & manage species⁷ determined that there would be no effect on any of these because the proposal would not affect suitable habitat.

Appeal Opportunities and Implementation Date

My decision is not subject to appeal, pursuant to 36 CFR §215.4, and in accordance with the October 19, 2005, order issued by the U. S. District Court for the Eastern District of California in Case No. CIV F-03-6386JKS. Implementation of this proposal may occur immediately.

⁶ The no action alternative, by definition, cannot violate Forest Plan direction, because the MNF Forest Plan does not compel any action.

⁷ 2001 ROD Compliance Review, 12 September 2007.

Contact

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s/Lee Johnson

12/5/07

LEE JOHNSON

Date

District Ranger

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