

Commander Tract Public Motorized Vehicle Access

**USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region
Grindstone Ranger District, Mendocino National Forest
Glenn County, California**

Proposed Action

The Forest Service is proposing to provide public motorized access to a portion of the lands acquired in 2003 from private ownership. These lands are popularly known as the Commander Tract. This proposal would provide motorized access into Commander Tract lands in the upper Cold Creek watershed (hereafter 'project area').

We are proposing to open about 15 miles of road for public motorized vehicle use in the project area (refer to Commander Tract maps). These roads are currently managed for administrative use only. The roads would be managed to accommodate high clearance vehicles (maintenance level 2). We are also proposing to designate these roads for mixed use by both street-legal and non-street-legal vehicles and drivers, as is the standard practice for our maintenance level 2 roads.

Purpose and Need

The roads in this proposal are a portion of the road system that existed prior to the land acquisition. Most of the roads were managed by the previous owner for administrative motorized vehicle use only (not for public use), which is comparable to a Forest Service road management objective of maintenance level 1. We retained the pre-existing road management objectives until we could determine which of the roads were appropriate and affordable to open to public use.

In spite of the roads remaining officially closed, we have experienced extensive unauthorized use on many of them, ever since the land acquisition. Most of this occurs immediately preceding, and during hunting seasons, but it occurs at a lower level at other times.

Our experience in other areas has been that by opening low impact roads in an area, we increase our ability to effectively limit damaging, unauthorized use on the roads that remain closed for resource protection. We have had a chance to evaluate the roads in the Cold Creek watershed to determine which can be managed to provide low impact motorized access to the area for hunting and other recreation activities. The roads that would be opened under this proposal have been identified as well located and designed for relative ease of maintenance for low resource impacts.

The need for motorized access in the project area is comparable to other areas of the Mendocino NF with similar multiple use management objectives. The extent of unauthorized vehicle can be viewed as an indication of strong demand

Scoping, July 2007

for recreation access. This proposal would establish an open-road density in the project area that is comparable to other areas of the Forest with similar resource management objectives and demand for public recreation opportunities.

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. [Forest Plan, p. IV- 3]