

# USDA Forest Service Update

## March 2008



### **SUBJECT: Travel Management**

**SUMMARY:** Unmanaged recreation, including cross-country motor vehicle travel, is one of four key threats facing national forests and grasslands. On November 9, 2005, the Forest Service published a final travel management rule in the *Federal Register* (70 FR 68264). On June 8, 2006, the Forest Service Chief approved the national schedule for route and area designation covering all National Forest System units. By the end of calendar year 2009, designation of those roads, trails, and areas open to motor vehicle use should be complete on all national forests and grasslands.

**BACKGROUND:** Off-highway vehicles are a legitimate use of National Forest System lands – in the right places and when properly managed. The number and capabilities of these vehicles is increasing rapidly, and the agency must manage this use in order to sustain it.

The Forest Service's travel management rule requires each national forest to designate those roads, trails, and areas open to motor vehicle use. Designations include class of vehicle and, if appropriate, time of year. Once designated, routes and areas are identified on a motor vehicle use map, and the rule prohibits motor vehicle use inconsistent with the designations. Decisions on individual routes and areas will be made by line officers at the local level, based on public involvement, appropriate site-specific analysis, and coordination with federal, state, county, and other local government entities, and tribal governments. The rule maintains pre-existing authorities for over-snow vehicles, which may be allowed, restricted, or prohibited at the local level.

The travel management rule exempts emergency and administrative use of motor vehicles and use under a written authorization such as a permit or contract. The rule also provides the responsible official with discretion to consider "limited use of motor vehicles within a specified distance of certain designated routes, and if appropriate within specified time periods, 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)). Many forests are including the allowance for dispersed camping in some of their route designations, and some are considering authorizing motorized big game retrieval.

The Forest Service has proposed to amend internal agency directives regarding travel management to make them consistent with and facilitate implementation of the agency's final travel management rule (36 CFR part 212). The comment period closed May 8, 2007. Meanwhile, many national forests across the country are engaged in the route designation process. Travel planning on each unit will reflect its particular history of past travel management decisions, its local community, and its environmental issues.

#### **Key Messages**

- Motorized recreation is a legitimate use of NFS lands – in the right places, and properly managed
- Rule provides a national framework for local decision-making
- Designation will involve close collaboration with public, various government entities
- Vehicular use off of designated roads, trails and areas will generally be prohibited
- A designated system of routes and areas will enhance public enjoyment of the national forests while providing better protection of water, soil, wildlife, and other values and uses

The Forest Service Travel Management Implementation Schedule can be viewed at:  
<http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/ohv/>

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