

CHAPTER 2 - ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

This chapter describes and compares the alternatives considered for the Ely Ranger District Travel Management Project. This section also presents the alternatives in comparative form, sharply defining the differences between each alternative and providing a clear basis for choice by the decision maker. All routes considered in the following alternatives are depicted on a set of 19 maps included on the attached CD. An index to these maps is included as Appendix A of this document. Hard copies of these maps can be requested from the Ely Ranger District office.

Alternatives

Alternative 1: No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, current travel management direction continues. The No Action Alternative does not prohibit motor vehicles from traveling off designated routes and makes no changes to the forest transportation system. All routes considered in this alternative are depicted on a set of 19 maps included on the attached CD.

This alternative serves as the baseline for the analysis and addresses the motorized recreation issue. Under this alternative, all motor vehicles could continue to travel on and off most routes except in Wilderness and in the Duck Creek Basin.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action

The Proposed Action restricts motor vehicle use to designated roads and trails in accordance with 36 CFR 261.13. This alternative addresses the recreation access issue by adding several popular user-created routes to the forest transportation system. It also adds routes into popular hunting areas and dispersed campsites.

The Proposed Action adds 210 user-created routes (250 miles) to the forest transportation system as NFS roads (74 miles) and NFS trails (176 miles) (Table 2). Along with these additions, the District would reclassify four NFS roads as trails, and open two non-motorized NFS trails to motorized vehicle use.

With the proposed changes, the forest transportation system on the Ely Ranger District would have 495 routes with 1,067.6 miles of NFS roads and NFS trails broken down as:

Table 2: Forest transportation system in the Proposed Action Alternative	
NFS Roads	674 miles, 249 routes
NFS Trails (Non-motorized)	191.6 miles, 70 routes
NFS Trails (Motor vehicles permitted)	202 miles, 176, routes
* Totals include routes in Duck Creek Basin	

All routes considered in this alternative are depicted on a set of 19 maps included on the attached CD as “Analyzed Routes”.

Specific changes to the forest transportation system on the Ely Ranger District would include:

- Adding 171 user-created routes as NFS trails, totaling 179 miles;
- Adding 39 user-created high-clearance four-wheel drive roads, totaling 74 miles;
- Reclassifying two system roads (59009 (Fawn Trail road) and 59571 (Kolcheck Road)), totaling 6 miles, as NFS trails open to motorized trails;
- Reclassifying two system roads, Road 59420, and 59435, as NFS trails not open to motorized vehicles; 4 miles
- Prohibiting over-snow vehicles in the Murry Watershed; to protect the municipality watershed;
- Allowing motor vehicle use on the Ranger Trail (19069) north of the Duck Creek area by vehicle type and on trail 19718, for a total of 20 miles; and
- Restricting motor vehicles use on the Ely Ranger District to designated routes.

The user-created routes proposed for addition to the forest transportation system provide access to dispersed recreation sites, connection to other system routes, or valued recreation experiences. These routes average 1.2 miles in length, with the longest being 11.4 miles in length. While many of these routes have been in place for

many years, others are more recent (all were created prior to 2002). Regardless of how they were created or when they were created, the District proposes to retain them as roads or motorized trails because of their value as roads and trails on the Ely Ranger District. The District does not propose any road construction or reconstruction as part of this alternative.

Table 3 displays the miles of NFS roads and NFS trails currently on the forest transportation system for the Ely District and the miles of user-created routes that this alternative would add to the system. Appendix B provides a table containing the following information for each proposed route: temporary route number; designation as a road or trail; map number, length; location by mountain range; and authorized uses.

Table 3: Miles of routes in the forest transportation system under the Proposed Action						
	Grant/Quinn	Moriah	Schells*	Ward	White Pine	*Total
Current NFS Roads	69.5	52.4	206.6	40.5	231	600
Proposed Roads	6	14	10	4	40.0	74
Current NFS Trails	33.7	53.8	98.4	22.5	13.21	221.61
Proposed NFS Trails open to motor vehicles	17	10	39	37	73	176
Proposed NFS Trails non-motorized			3			3
Current NFS Roads converted to NFS Trails open to motorized vehicles			6			6
Current NFS Roads converted to NFS Trails non-motorized	3		3			6
NFS Trails open to motorized trails			20			20
* Total includes Duck Creek Basin						

Motorized trails receive little maintenance and can be very rough and difficult to travel. The Proposed Action adds 176 miles to the forest transportation system for off-highway vehicle (OHV) use. Eighteen miles are ATV or single-track only, with the remaining

158 miles open to all motor vehicles. Distribution of the motorized trails by mountain range is displayed in Table 3. The Proposed Action also adds 74 miles of high-clearance four-wheel drive roads across the District. These roads are open to all motor vehicle types.

Because of a lack of single track opportunities on the Ely Ranger District this proposal includes the designation of a portion of the Ranger Trail (19069) north of Duck Creek as open for single-track motorized use. Currently motorized use on this trail is permitted but it is not limited to motorcycles. This change would add 20 miles of NFS trail (open to motorcycles) to the forest transportation system.

There are 191.6 miles of NFS trails on the District, which are not open to motorized vehicles. Table 4 provides a break down of NFS trail miles by mountain range. These trails, outside of designated wilderness, remain open to all forms of non-motorized travel.

Table 4: Number and miles of non-motorized trails added under the Proposed Action (number/miles)						
	Grant/Quinn	Moriah	Schell	Ward	White Pine	Total
Current NFS Trails Closed to motorized vehicles	10/34	14/54	17/67.6	15/23	5/13	61/191.6
Current NFS Trails open to motor vehicles			9/30.8			9/30.8
Proposed NFS Trails			1/0.3			1/0.3
Current NFS Roads to Trails (non-motorized)	1/3		1/1			2/4
Current NFS Trails to motorized trails			3/20			3/20

This alternative also proposes to prohibit over-snow vehicles in the Murry Watershed on Ward Mountain to reduce disturbance to Ely’s municipal watershed. The closure is 3,990.4 acres in size and is depicted on Map 15 (Ward Mountain). The Humboldt Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1986), pg. IV-172, states, “Maintain the Murray [sic] Watershed to protect the community of Ely, Nevada from potentially damaging high runoff. Allow no activities on the Murray Watershed, which would increase erosion or runoff.”

Alternative 3: Current Road and Trail System

This alternative addresses the potential impacts of adding user-created routes on the physical, biological, and social resources of the District. Under this alternative, the District does not add any user-created routes to the forest transportation system. The current forest transportation system includes 280 routes (210 NFS roads and 68 NFS trails), totaling 831.7 miles (610 miles of NFS roads and 221.8 miles of NFS trails), serves as the forest transportation system within the District boundary. There are currently 30.8 miles of NFS trails open to motor vehicles use. These are all located on the Schell Creek unit in the Duck Creek Basin Area. Maps 1-19 show the current NFS roads (gold routes) and NFS trails (purple solid and broken routes).

Like the Proposed Action Alternative, this alternative would prohibit motor vehicle use on the upper part of the Cleve Creek Road (0.6) (59435) on the east side of the Schell Creek Range and on 59420 for a total of 3.4 miles. This alternative would also convert NFS roads 59009 and 59071 to NFS trails open to motor vehicles for a total of 6 miles.

Following the decision, the District will map the system routes on a motor vehicle use map (MVUM). This Alternative also includes the prohibition on motor vehicles from traveling off the designated roads and trails identified on the MVUM following 36 CFR 261.13. Use of motor vehicles on NFS Trails not open to motor vehicle use would be prohibited.

Design Elements Common to Both Action Alternatives

Silver State OHV Trail

This EA and Decision Notice would be completed before the Ely BLM completes its analysis on the Silver State OHV Trail Project in White Pine County. At this time, it is unclear where the trail would cross NFS lands. The trail may cross NFS lands near Schellbourne, on the North end of the Schell Range, through the northeast edge of Ward Mountain and across the north end of the White Pine Range. When the BLM makes their decision regarding the location of the Silver State Trail, the Forest will change the MVUM to agree with the final route.

Changing road conditions

The Forest Service must continue to respond to public safety concerns and close roads very quickly when roads become dangerous because of floods or other natural events. The District will continue to implement emergency closures. The Ely Ranger District anticipates that in the future some routes on the district will experience damage from flooding. As conditions change, the District will repair roads to standards, change the vehicle class or decide to close routes based on location, use, condition and economic considerations. Annual updates to the MVUM will reflect these changes.

Permitted Uses

The exemptions to the prohibitions allow motor vehicle use that is specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulation (e.g., woodcutting permits, term grazing permits, approved plans of operations) (36 CFR 212.51a). Mine operators, grazing permittees, private landowners, and others can acquire permits to use motor vehicles off designated system or even to construct roads following the appropriate processes outlined in Forest Service manuals and handbooks. These uses would require additional site specific NEPA analysis.

Comparison of Alternatives

This section summarizes the effects of implementing each alternative. Table 5 displays how the forest transportation system is configured under the three alternatives. In Table 5, the District focused on activities and effects in which different levels of effects or outputs are distinguished quantitatively or qualitatively among alternatives.

Issues

Recreation 1: The recreation issues are addressed by development of both the No Action Alternative and the Current System Alternative. These alternatives illustrate the effects of these alternatives on the distribution of Semi-Primitive Non-motorized (SPNM) and Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM) recreation opportunities across the District and provide means to compare the effects of the Proposed Action. In the No Action Alternative the effects of unmanaged cross-county travel is displayed. Motor vehicle users are free to travel on or off forest system routes and are unrestrained by restrictions limiting them to designated routes. Under the Current System Alternative, the opposite is true, motor vehicles are restricted to a finite set of NFS roads and a very small set of NFS trails open to motor vehicles.

Recreation 2: For those seeking a non-motorized recreation experience the No Action Alternative represents the worst case. Those visiting the Forest with the idea of escaping the sites and sounds of the modern world would potentially have to go further and further to meet their needs. Without the restriction of motor vehicles to designated routes, there would always be a potential to find a favorite isolated location accessed by new tracks. The Current System Alternative restricts motor vehicles to designated routes and does not designate user-created routes. This alternative was developed to address the concerns of users who are concerned that by increasing the forest transportation system more and more of the district is lost to motorized use.

Roadless: The roadless issue is also addressed in both the Proposed Action and Current System Alternative. Contrasting the amount of routes in the No Action Alternative, that is currently open in inventoried roadless areas, the two Action Alternatives show impacts to roadless attributes and wilderness characteristics.

Biological and Physical Resources: The Current System Alternative was developed to address concerns regarding the effects of the proposed action on the physical and biological resources.

Social/Economic: The Current System Alternative was developed to address concerns regarding the Social and economic effects of the proposed action.

Table 5: Forest transportation system Under Each Alternative			
Forest transportation system	Alternative 1 No Action Alternative	Alternative 2 Proposed Action	Alternative 3 Current System
Total Number of NFS Roads Open	210	249	210
Total Number of NFS Trails open to motor vehicles	9.0	179	9.0
Total Number of NFS Trails not open to motor vehicles	68	70	68
Total Miles of NFS Roads Open	610	674	599.8
Total Miles of NFS Trails Open		232.2	30.8
Total Miles of Non-motorized Trails	191.6	198.6	191.6

Table 6: Comparison of Alternatives			
	Alternative 1, No Action	Alternative 2, Proposed Action	Alternative 3, Current System
Recreation	<p>482,401 acres of Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM) ROS.</p> <p>316,448 acres of Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM) ROS.</p> <p>610 miles NFS road open to motor vehicle use.</p> <p>54.7 miles of NFS trails with no use restrictions.</p> <p>160 miles NFS trails not open to motor bvehicle use.</p> <p>Cross-country motorized use continues.</p>	<p>573,568 acres of Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM) ROS.</p> <p>212,514 acres of Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM) ROS.</p> <p>686 miles of NFS Road open to motor vehicles use.</p> <p>192.3 miles of NFS Trail not open to motor vehicles.</p> <p>196.2 miles of NFS Trail open to motorized vehicles.</p> <p>Cross-country motor vehicle use prohibited.</p> <p>Access to popular dispersed campsites maintained, along with access to popular big game and upland bird hunting areas.</p> <p>Additional motorized trails offer loop opportunities and improve quality of OHV experience while maintaining quality of non-motorized opportunities.</p>	<p>618,887 acres of Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM) ROS.</p> <p>150,056 acres of Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM) ROS.</p> <p>610 miles of NFS Road open to motor vehicles.</p> <p>208 miles of NFS Trail not open to motor vehicles.</p> <p>22.4 miles of NFS Trail open to motor vehicles.</p> <p>Motorized access to some dispersed campsites and hunting areas restricted.</p> <p>Reduced opportunities for OHV riding. Little change to non-motorized recreation opportunites, motorized access is limited, making non-motorized opportunities more primitive, but less accessible.</p>
Roadless	<p>13.6 miles of NFS Routes in IRAs remain open.</p> <p>Cross-country motor vehicle use in IRAs continues including use of approximately 170 miles of user-created route.</p>	<p>32.6 miles of existng user-created trails added to the forest transportation system.</p> <p>13.6 miles of NFS routes in IRAs remain open.</p> <p>Motor vehicle use restricted to designated routes.</p>	<p>No user-created routes in IRAs.</p> <p>13.6 miles of system routes in IRAs remain open.</p> <p>Motor vehicle use restricted to designated routes.</p>

Table 6: Comparison of Alternatives			
	Alternative 1, No Action	Alternative 2, Proposed Action	Alternative 3, Current System
Noxious Weeds	<p>113 miles of NFS roads crossing high risk areas remain open for motorized use.</p> <p>Cross-country motorized vehicle use in High Risk areas continues including use of approximately 55 miles of user-created route.</p> <p>442 miles of NFS roads crossing medium-risk areas remain open for motorized use.</p> <p>584,587 acres in medium-risk areas.</p> <p>New infestations may result from unrestricted cross-country travel.</p>	<p>18 miles of existing user-created routes crossing high risk areas remain open for motorized use.</p> <p>622 miles of NFS roads and NFS Trails crossing medium-risk areas remain open for motorized use.</p> <p>71.4 percent of proposed routes in medium-risk areas.</p> <p>570,319 acres in medium-risk areas.</p> <p>Area prioritized for treatment.</p>	<p>113 miles of NFS roads crossing high risk areas remain open for motorized use.</p> <p>442 miles of NFS roads crossing medium-risk areas remain open for motorized use.</p> <p>70.7 percent of proposed routes in medium-risk areas.</p> <p>564,535 acres in medium-risk areas.</p> <p>Area prioritized for treatment. No routes added in high risk areas.</p>
Sage grouse	<p>40 miles of NFS roads located within two miles of leks.</p> <p>Cross-country motor vehicle use continues including use of approximately 60 miles of user-created routes.</p>	<p>15 miles of existing user-created routes within two miles of leks remain open.</p> <p>Cross-country motor vehicle use prohibited.</p>	<p>40 miles of NFS Roads within two miles of lek.</p> <p>Cross-country motor vehicle use prohibited.</p>
Pygmy Rabbit	<p>84 miles of NFS Roads within potential pygmy rabbit habitat.</p> <p>Cross-country motor vehicle use continues including use of approximately 75 miles of user-created routes.</p>	<p>24 miles of existing user-created routes within potential pygmy rabbit habitat remain open.</p> <p>Cross-country motor vehicle use prohibited.</p>	<p>84 miles of NFS Roads within potential pygmy rabbit habitat.</p> <p>Cross-country motor vehicle use prohibited.</p>

Table 6: Comparison of Alternatives			
	Alternative 1, No Action	Alternative 2, Proposed Action	Alternative 3, Current System
Northern Goshawk	114 miles of NFS Roads within potential goshawk habitat. Cross-country motor vehicle use continues including use of approximately 64 miles of user-created routes.	18 miles of existing user-created routes within potential goshawk habitat remain open. Cross-country motor vehicle use prohibited.	114 miles of NFS Roads within potential goshawk habitat. Cross-country motor vehicle use prohibited.
Flamulated Owl	15 miles of NFS roads within potential flamulated owl habitat. Cross-country motor vehicle use continues including use of approximately 13 miles of user-created routes.	4 miles of existing user-created routes within potential flamulated owl habitat remain open for motor vehicle use. Cross-country motor vehicle use prohibited.	15 miles of NFS roads within potential flamulated owl habitat. Cross-country motor vehicle use prohibited.
Townsend's Big-eared and Spotted Bats	3 miles of NFS roads near potential hibernula and maternity roost habitat. Cross-country motor vehicle use continues including use of approximately 9 miles of user-created routes.	2 miles of existing user-created routes near potential hibernula and maternity roost habitat remain open for motor vehicle use. Cross-country motor vehicle use prohibited.	3 miles of NFS roads near potential hibernula and maternity roost habitat. Cross-country motor vehicle use prohibited.
Mule Deer and Elk	309 miles of NFS roads within deer winter range. Cross-country motor vehicle use continues including use of approximately 548 miles of user-created routes.	115 miles of existing user-created routes within deer winter range remain open for motor vehicle use. Cross-country motor vehicle use prohibited.	309 miles of NFS roads within deer winter range are open for motor vehicle use. Cross-country motor vehicle use prohibited.

Table 6: Comparison of Alternatives			
	Alternative 1, No Action	Alternative 2, Proposed Action	Alternative 3, Current System
Peregrine Falcon and Migratory Birds	610 miles of NFS roads near potential falcon foraging and migratory bird habitat remain open for motor vehicle use. Cross-country motor vehicle use continues including use of approximately 978 miles of user-created routes.	266 miles of existing user-created routes near potential falcon foraging and migratory bird habitat remain open for motor vehicle use. Cross-country motor vehicle use prohibited.	610 miles of NFS roads near potential falcon foraging and migratory bird habitat. Cross-country motor vehicle use prohibited.
Bighorn Sheep	50.5 miles of NFS roads within bighorn sheep habitat. Cross-country motor vehicle use continues including use of approximately 61 miles of user-created routes.	14.5 miles of existing user-created routes within bighorn sheep remain open for motor vehicle use. Cross-country use of motor vehicles is prohibited resulting in improved habitat.	50.5 miles of NFS roads within bighorn sheep habitat. Cross-country use of motor vehicles is prohibited resulting in improved habitat.
Cultural Resources	Continued use of routes crossing heritage resource sites.	No adverse effect on heritage resource adjacent to proposed routes.	No adverse effect on heritage resources.
Water Quality/ Soil Erosion	167.8 miles of route (244 acres) within 300 feet of riparian areas. 170 perennial and 1,561 intermittent stream crossings. 189.4 (275.4 acres) of route located on slopes greater than 30 percent. Potential for increases in the amount of route in riparian areas, the number of crossings of perennial and intermittent water crossings.	132.8 miles of route (193.1 acres) within 300 feet of riparian areas. An increase of 17.9 miles (26 acres) when compared to the Current System Alternative. 131 perennial and 977 intermittent stream crossings. 92.7 (134.8 acres) of route located on slopes greater than 30 percent. Prohibition on cross-country travel results in a decrease in the creation of new routes in riparian areas and the number of perennial and intermittent stream crossings.	114.9 miles of route (167.1 acres) within 300 feet of riparian areas. 104 perennial and 733 intermittent stream crossings. 66.9 (97.3 acres) of route located on slopes greater than 30 percent. Prohibition on cross-country travel results in a decrease in the creation of new routes in riparian areas and the number of perennial and intermittent stream crossings.

Table 6: Comparison of Alternatives			
	Alternative 1, No Action	Alternative 2, Proposed Action	Alternative 3, Current System
Public Health and Safety	No increased likelihood of accidents under any alternative.		
Native American Values	Continued cross-country travel with potential to adversely affect sites.	Prohibiting cross-country travel minimizes the risk to areas with potential Native American values.	No impacts from existing roads. Prohibiting cross-country travel minimizes the risk to areas with potential Native American values.
Social/Economics	There would be little positive or negative effect on local economies that results in increase or decreases in populations or employment.		
Environmental Justice	No disproportionate impact on minority or low income populations.		
Road Management	No Action & Current System: No new system mileage to maintain; system mileage remains at 610 miles. Proposed Action: Add 74 miles of NFS road to forest transportation system that would be maintained on an as needed basis.		
Livestock Management	Livestock management would continue under current management under all alternatives. Appropriate motor vehicle use by permittees would be authorized under grazing permits.		