

DECISION RECORD

CO-200-2006-0086 EA

Arkansas River Travel Management Plan Designation of Roads and Trails and Associated Implementation Actions

USDI Bureau of Land Management Royal Gorge Field Office

Fremont, Chaffee, and Custer Counties, Colorado

INTRODUCTION: This document describes my decision to implement a designated network of roads and trails and revise certain travel management regulations as part of the Arkansas River Travel Management Plan. My decision advances goals and objectives defined in the 1996 Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan (RMP) and are in conformance with:

1. BLM policy on Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV) use of public land as covered under Executive Order 11644 and Code of Federal Regulations (43 CFR 8340 0-5) and
2. BLM Colorado guidance on *Comprehensive Travel Management Planning and OHV Designations* as defined under BLM Instruction Memoranda No. CO-2007-020 (2/12/2007) and No. WO-2008-014.

Under these rules, any change to the designation of *areas* as Open, Limited, or Closed requires a Resource Management Plan (RMP) plan amendment and is subject to a public protest period and governor consistency review whereas designation of roads and trails are considered implementation decisions and are subject to USDOJ appeal regulations via the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA).

The BLM Arkansas River Travel Management Plan – Environmental Assessment evaluated both RMP amendment changes to OHV area designations and RMP implementation of route designations and other associated travel management regulations. BLM issued a proposed decision to amend the 1996 Royal Gorge RMP and change OHV Area Designations for the Grand Canyon Hills, Texas Creek and Sand Gulch areas from open to limited, and the High Mesa Grassland Instant Study Area from open to closed in December, 2007. No public protests were received on BLM’s proposed RMP amendment. The RMP amendment for OHV Area Designation Changes was made final by the BLM Colorado State Director record of decision on April, 29, 2008.

With that RMP amendment finalized, this document describes my decisions and supporting rationale concerning specific travel management implementation actions in the Arkansas River travel management planning area.

BACKGROUND: The 531,736 acre planning area extends along the Arkansas River corridor between the cities of Canon City and Buena Vista, Colorado, and the northern half of Custer County to the Town of Westcliff. Of the 531,736 acres in the planning area, 240,555 acres are public land administered by BLM. The following categories and mileages are located on the aforementioned 240,555 acres of public land and reflect the current situation.

- Non-motorized trails (Table 8-1, F, E, B) – 35.1 miles
- Motorized road and trails (Table 8-1, M, A, O) – 232.3 miles
- Administrative access roads (Table 8-1, AA) – 125.7 miles
- Closed and user created roads and trails (Table 8-1, CL, UC) – 155.7 miles

The following issues were addressed in the plan and analyzed during the evaluation of alternatives for the Arkansas River Travel Management Planning process:

- Reducing Damage to Natural Resources and the Environment
- Reducing Conflicts and Impacts on Other Uses
- Improving Access to Public Lands and Increasing Recreation Opportunities
- Managing Growing Amounts of Recreation Use
- Special Requests and Proposals from User Groups
- Request for Additional Areas for Holding Trials Events
- Request for Open Areas for Trials Bikes
- Request for Additional ATV and Motorcycle Routes
- Request for Trail Improvements and New Trails for Mountain Biking and Hiking
- Managing Access Between Private and Public Lands
- Managing Off-road Travel for Parking, Camping, and Game Retrieval
- Limiting the Use of Mountain Bikes to Designated Routes
- Managing Target Shooting, Safety, Noise, Exclusive use
- Providing Adequate Maintenance of High-Use Trail Systems
- Amending the Royal Gorge RMP to Change the OHV Designation of High Mesa Grassland RNA/ISA
- Maintenance of County Roads

The Administrative Record, including the EA that discusses and analyzes the Proposed Action and alternatives, will be made available for review at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Royal Gorge Field Office, 3028 E. Main Street, Canon City, CO. Please direct questions about this Decision Record/FONSI or the EA to John R. Dow, Environmental Coordinator, Royal Gorge Field Office, at (719) 269-8559 or by submitting your questions to rgfo_comments@co.blm.gov. The EA is also available at the following web address:

http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/rgfo/travel_mgmt/arkansas_river_travel0.html

DECISION: It is my decision to implement the travel management actions and route designations contained in the Proposed Action (Alternative C) in the Final EA for the Arkansas River TMP planning area, but with the following changes and mitigation measures. (Note: This decision is related to but separate from another decision to change the OHV area designations for the Grand Canyon Hills, Texas Creek, and Sand Gulch areas.)

1. Decisions Changed Based on Substantive Public Comment: As a result of comments received from the public, I have decided to select the Proposed Action (Alternative C) and best management practices defined in Appendices 6 and 7 of the EA but with the following changes:

A. I have decided to close the upper segments of five BLM mountain bike routes, totaling (1.7 miles) in the Salida sub-unit, that originate on lands administered by the San Isabel National Forest, Salida Ranger District. The US Forest Service expressed concerns regarding incomplete and pending NEPA analysis of user created mountain bike routes on San Isabel NF administered lands. The BLM segments of these trails are portions of Cottonwood (0.7 miles), Blood (0.04 miles), Guts (0.4 miles), King Gulch (0.1 miles), and lower Columbine Gulch (0.4 miles).

Provided the USFS NEPA analysis and decision-making is complete within 3-5 years from this decision and no new substantive information is brought forward, these trail segments may be designated for recreation use defined in the TMP-EA as long as these uses are consistent with use defined for the Forest Service portion of these trails. The mitigations and best management practices are defined in the EA and Appendix 7 and provide the required BLM NEPA analysis and mitigations for mechanized designation of these route segments.

In addition to designated roads and trails, BLM will continue to work with the mountain bike community in the Salida sub-unit and the motorized community in the Texas Creek sub-unit east of Fernleaf Gulch and west of Big Hole to re-route unsustainable trails and identify reasonable trails to accommodate their recreational needs while protecting valued resources. These routes, if any, will be evaluated under a separate NEPA document but will have to remain consistent with the desired future conditions outlined in this plan.

B. In response to public concerns regarding changes to trials bike practice at Turkey Rock, I have decided to designate trials bike use at the 52 acre site to “day use” only. BLM staff will monitor resource conditions at the site for change and impact using GPS documentation, photography, and other methods, and work with Rocky Mountain Trials Association members to further define trials bike use in this use area.

C. It is my decision to implement route designations defined in Alternative B pertaining to the upper segment of Route ID 481 (0.3 miles) in the Road Gulch sub-unit. This would close the road from the junction with Route ID 690 and the

private boundary to motorized travel. This is in response to issues concerning management of access across private and public lands in the Road Gulch sub-unit and the need to conform to BLM RGFO policy on exclusive motorized ingress and egress.

D. In response to agency and public concerns regarding the unique biological values of Castle Garden, travel designation enforcement issues associated with physical terrain, and continuing acts of vandalism to public property in the area, it is my decision to designate routes 943 and 1083 as described in Alternative C under an adaptive management strategy. BLM staff will monitor resource conditions at the site for off route travel, illegal trash dumping, and vandalism. BLM will consider revised route designation for the above routes, including but not limited to closure or non-motorized designation, dependant on findings established by BLM following a period of 3 years.

E. In response to public safety risks associated with ingress and egress of vehicles off of BLM lands onto Highway 50 at milepost 221, it is my decision to close two-track exits onto the highway north of the WAPA power line. Access to BLM lands south of these dangerous exits will be maintained approximately ½ mile east across from the Wellsville bridge.

2. Revised Travel Regulations – Off Route Travel: In order to protect the condition of natural resources in the planning area. I have decided to adopt new travel regulations that outline the distance motor vehicles are permitted to be driven off designated routes for all activities as described in the Proposed Action (Alternative C) of the EA.

My decision reduces the distance that motorized vehicles may travel off designated routes from 300 feet to 100 feet. It is my decision that no person may operate a motor vehicle more than a total distance of 100 ft in any direction off a designated road listed in this plan for any reason unless authorized by the authorized officer.

This 100 ft rule does not apply to those areas or roads designated as closed to motor vehicle use or to areas where the operation of a motor vehicle could cause resource damage. Off route travel will be restricted to BLM staff, authorized permit holders, law enforcement, emergency response, or fire fighting personnel performing resource management, permitted activities, and emergency response duties. Variance from this off route travel rule will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Public comments regarding the 100 ft rule were raised regarding route proliferation, game retrieval, and consistency with adjacent USFS public lands. In the course of this decision, I have evaluated US Forest Service parking regulations currently being considered in Colorado's Front Range as well as the probability of increasing recreation traffic loads on BLM designated routes. It is my decision to incorporate adaptive management principles to assess the effectiveness of the 100 ft parking rule for 3 years.

During the 3 year adaptive management period, BLM staff will complete regular monitoring of the designated routes and document instances of off-route resource damage using methods such as GPS and photography. I will direct my staff to complete a baseline condition and geographic inventory of dispersed camping sites in the planning area where issues of resource damage are documented. Should resource damage be documented in specific areas, the distance that motor vehicles may travel off a designated route could be further limited. Following 3 years, the BLM will compile the data for consideration in future NEPA actions and associated travel decisions.

3. Revised Travel Regulations – Bicycle Use: I have decided to adopt new travel regulations pertaining to the use of bicycles. These new bicycle travel regulations are described in the Proposed Action (Alternative C) of the EA and are depicted in the attached Designated BLM Travel Routes map set. The only exception, are the routes in Decision 1 that are closed until the USFS completes NEPA analysis and decides appropriate trail designation on Forest Service administered portions of these trails. The effect of this decision limits the use of bicycles to routes that are identified as available for this use.

4. Target Shooting Restrictions: I have decided to adopt the target shooting restrictions as described in the Proposed Action (Alternative C) of the EA and as delineated on Map 7 of the EA. These restrictions on 2675 acres will enhance public health and safety. The adoption of this decision requires the closure of Turkey Rock near Howard and BLM lands immediately south of the City of Salida to target shooting upon adoption of supplementary rules. This decision restricts the act of target shooting only. Hunting with appropriate state hunting licenses remains an allowable use in all public lands in the planning area. The remaining 237,880 acres in the planning area remain open to dispersed target shooting.

In addition, as signatory to the “Sport Shooting Development Opportunity Development on Colorado’s Front Range” Memorandum of Understanding, BLM is working with other entities and agencies, consistent with BLM policy, guidelines, and procedures to seek safe facilities for target shooting along the Front Range.

5. Clarification on Travel Routes, WSA’s, ISA’s, and Interim Guidance: Public comments were raised regarding motorized use of routes through Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) and Instant Study Areas (ISA) in the travel planning area. BLM Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review requires BLM to preserve the wilderness values within these areas of special designation. Administrative use routes accessed from private property north of the High Mesa Grassland fit this category (ie Final EA Map 37 route ID 262) and are not in compliance with BLM Interim Management Policy. Segments of administrative routes north of the McIntyre Hills WSA (ie. Final EA Map 37 route ID 396) cross WSA boundaries and lead to private property. In order to protect wilderness values in the above areas, this decision limits motorized use of said routes to administrative and BLM authorized uses only.

6. Travel Designations: I have decided to adopt travel designations defined in the Proposed Action (Alternative C) as summarized on pages 1-2 and detailed on pages 30-32 of the EA. Specifically, my travel designation decisions are to:

- a. Implement the Arkansas River comprehensive travel management network as depicted on attached Final Decision Map – Entire TMP area
- b. Designate routes and travel modes in the Salida Subunit- Hecla Junction- Browns Canyon Area as depicted in attached Final Decision Map A
- c. Designate routes and travel modes in the Salida Subunit- Salida Area as depicted in attached Final Decision Map B
- d. Designate routes and travel modes in the Badger Creek Subunit as depicted in attached Final Decision Map C
- e. Designate routes and travel modes in the Sangres Foothills and Badger Creek Subunits as depicted in attached Final Decision Map D
- f. Designate routes and travel modes in the Red Gulch Subunit – Cotopaxi area as depicted in attached Final Decision Map E
- g. Designate routes and travel modes in the West McCoy Gulch Subunit – Cotopaxi area as depicted in attached Final Decision Map F
- h. Designate routes and travel modes in attached the Texas Creek, Big Hole, and McIntyre Hills Subunits as depicted in attached Final Decision Map G
- i. Designate routes and travel modes in the Road Gulch and McIntyre Hills Subunits as depicted in attached Final Decision Map H
- j. Designate routes and travel modes in the McIntyre Hills and Grape Creek Subunits – Poverty Mountain/Copper Gulch area as depicted in attached Final Decision Map I
- k. Designate routes and travel modes in the Grape Creek Subunit Grape Creek area as depicted in attached Final Decision Map J
- l. Designate routes and travel modes in the Crampton Mountain Subunit as depicted in attached Final Decision Map K
- m. Designate routes and travel modes in the Grand Canyon Hills Subunit as depicted in attached Final Decision Map L
- n. Designate routes and travel modes in the Custer County Subunit as depicted in attached Final Decision Map M

Under the Proposed Action, the BLM transportation system in the Arkansas River TMP planning area will consist of the following designations:

- A. 181.2 miles of motorized access routes in the General, ATV, and motorcycle travel use categories,
- B. 127.7 miles of restricted non-motorized access routes with the following sub-categories;
 - i. 74.9 miles in the Bicycle, Equestrian, and Foot travel use categories
 - ii. 52.8 miles of Administrative Access routes with permanent legal public access that are also available for hiking and horseback riding.
- C. 107.5 miles of non-BLM motorized routes (ie. County Roads) not affected by this plan

MITIGATION: The following mitigation measures will be applied in the implementation of this decision.

1. Apply the procedures detailed in “Addendum 1 to the Colorado Protocol: Section 106 Requirements for Comprehensive Travel and Transportation Management Planning”. If determined to be necessary, the range of treatment (mitigation) activities is large, but might include avoidance (first choice), testing, excavation (salvage, partial, or total) and data recovery in the form of archival recording (for standing structures and other historic-era phenomena). A treatment plan is individually tailored to the historic property that will be adversely affected, in consultation with the Colorado State Historical Preservation Office.
2. Implement temporary wet weather closures where needed to prevent damage to soils and vegetation during saturated soil conditions/snow melt.
3. Implement a public education program to:
 - a. encourage voluntary limited use at any time throughout the year when substantial wet periods exist;
 - b. promote the cleaning of recreational vehicles and the use of weed free horse feed to prevent the spread of noxious weeds and invasive species;
 - c. inform users of state noise level requirements pertaining to the operation of motor vehicles, and to promote compliance; and
 - d. inform users about opportunities, regulations, and responsible use through site specific maps, signs, brochures, interpretive exhibits, and trailhead information kiosks.
4. For construction, maintenance, reclamation of roads and trails:
 - a. utilize Best Management Practices to provide sustainable travel routes that will minimally impact soils and watersheds as developed by BLM RGFO;
 - b. whenever possible, and for all future route construction and reconstruction projects, relocate routes that are directly within or adjacent to riparian/wetlands to adjacent terraces;
 - c. use weed free equipment;
 - d. use weed free seed and mulch;
 - e. require a Phase I or II Storm Water Permit for all new construction resulting in more than 1 acre of disturbance;
 - f. locate new routes, or relocate existing routes, outside of areas of occupied habitat for threatened and endangered species;
 - g. close or reroute those sections of roads and trails that unnecessarily impact vegetation, particularly riparian vegetation, such as braided or parallel routes;
 - h. incorporate newly designated routes into the Facilities Asset Management System (FAMS) for scheduled maintenance;
 - i. utilize alternative funding sources (BLM project funds, grants, permittees, etc.) to augment road/trail maintenance and improvements;
 - j. manage those routes that are severely deteriorated and that cannot be adequately maintained by closing, restricting travel uses, or relocating and reconstructing them;
 - k. develop and maintain partnerships for constructing and maintaining

designated routes, cleaning up litter, assisting in monitoring, and promoting user compliance;

1. address maintenance needs in areas where specific routes are needed for range management purposes but that may also be causing or contributing to erosion or other problems. Actions may include assignment of route maintenance responsibilities to the permittee, BLM maintenance of routes, adjustments in the maintenance or management practices on the allotments, or route closure/rehabilitation.
5. Institute an aggressive sign maintenance program utilizing the Travel Management Sign Guidance developed by the Colorado Natural Resources Group.
6. Utilize signs, barriers, fencing, and other appropriate means to prevent or reduce motorized travel off designated routes.
7. Develop staging and parking areas/trailheads at major access points.
8. Minimize impacts to existing range improvements or livestock water sources for any newly established travel routes.
9. To maintain dispersed camping opportunities and authorized activities, identify existing and appropriate short spur routes (less than 600 feet) that lead to dispersed campsites and incorporate them into the designated travel system.
10. Construct sediment detention structures and clean them on a regular basis where needed to address severe problems that cannot be mitigated by other means.
11. Obstruct or close access roads constructed for timber harvesting operations, except for those where determinations are made to retain them.
12. Close non-system roads leading into known fossil locations with locked gates.
13. Conduct periodic monitoring of travel routes for new routes, new weed infestations
14. Ensure all temporary roads created by forestry activities are properly closed where possible with gates.

IMPLEMENTATION: This decision will be implemented, with the help of various user groups, over a period of years. Priority areas will be identified where conflicts between users and resource management needs are greatest. Scheduling of implementation is dependent on factors including available funding, staff, materials, equipment, and volunteer resources.

MONITORING: The BLM RGFO will develop and implement a plan to:

- monitor types and levels of use on all routes
- inspect and treat new weed infestations on designated routes;
- monitor for impacts to the desired future conditions (DFCs)
- monitor use of non-system routes and vehicle use off designated routes for livestock management purposes as part of BLM's on-going range management program
- monitor use of the 100 foot rule and document areas of success or failure in reducing the proliferation of user created roads and resource damage (Adaptive Management)
- monitor use as identified in decisions 1b, 1d, and 2.

RATIONALE: The designated routes found in the Proposed Action (Alternative C) will best balance travel and access demands with resource management needs, RMP goals, and compliance with Public Land Health Standards. The designation of roads and trails in the Arkansas Travel Management Plan planning area completes the implementation of travel management decisions outlined in the 1996 Royal Gorge RMP for this Eco-Subregion.

My rationale to modify portions of Alternative C as defined in Decision 1a is based on US Forest Service concerns regarding resource impacts and the need for NEPA analysis on those portions of user-created routes under USFS jurisdiction. My rationale for Decision 1b is based on potential noise impacts to adjacent property owners from extended trials bike practice use at Turkey Rock in the Badger Creek sub-unit. Control of unauthorized equipment use on public land from adjacent private property in the Road Gulch sub-unit is my rationale for Decision 1c. My rationale for Decision 1d is based on accelerating rates of resource degradation in a biologically significant area and vandalism occurring to public property since initiation of the Arkansas River Travel Management Plan in 2004.

My rationale for revising travel regulations and off route travel in Decision 2 from 300 to 100 feet for all activities and implementing an adaptive management strategy for dispersed camping in priority areas is discussed in the EA. BLM rationale includes the scale, extent, and growth of resource damage occurring due to off route travel on public lands in the context of increasing recreational traffic on BLM. My rationale for revising travel regulations and bicycle travel under Decision 3 is discussed in the EA and concerns growth in popularity of this recreation use of public lands in the planning area, the need to address proliferation of unauthorized routes, and focus trail planning and use on sustainable routes in cooperation with volunteers and partners.

My rationale for target shooting restrictions under Decision 4 in the Methodist Mountain area south of Salida and Turkey Rock, Howard is described in the EA and is justified on grounds of public safety, population growth adjacent to public land, and increased recreation use on those areas.

My rationale for clarifications on Travel Routes adjacent to WSAs and ISAs in Decision 5 is based on the needs to comply with BLM Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review that would be violated with designated motorized routes in those areas. Finally, my travel designation decisions defined in Decision 6 to select the Proposed Action is based on the findings and analysis in the EA, including supporting documentation and reports, extensive public participation and involvement in this project and RMP goals.

APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES: Within 30 days of receipt of this decision, you have the right of appeal to the Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations at 43 CFR 4.400. Appeal and stay procedures are outlined in attached Form CO-050-1840-191. Appeals must reference decision numbers 1-6(a-f), specific proposed final decision maps (A-M), route designations, route ID numbers and/or other travel decisions made in this Decision Record.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:

\s\ Roy L. Masinton
Roy L. Masinton
Field Manager
Royal Gorge Field Office

5/21/2008
Date