

# **TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PROJECT PROPOSAL for the Little Missouri National Grassland**

Dakota Prairie Grasslands  
Medora and McKenzie Ranger Districts

Billings, Golden Valley, Slope and McKenzie Counties, North Dakota

## **PROPOSED ACTION**

The Forest Service proposes to designate a system of roads and trails on the Little Missouri National Grassland that the general public is invited to use for wheeled motor vehicle travel. "Wheeled motor vehicle" includes all types of cars, trucks, pickups, motorcycles, and All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs).

The proposed action would designate approximately 1,440 miles of roads and/or trails on National Forest System lands open to motor vehicle use. A map of the proposed system of open and closed roads is available on the Internet at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/dakotaprairie/>.

Off-road travel of up to 300 feet to access a dispersed campsite would be allowed on either side of any road open to motor vehicle travel, provided there are no other resource considerations, such as the adjacent land being a non-motorized area.

Once a final decision is made, whether it is the proposed action or another alternative, a system of open roads and motorized trails shall be printed on a Motor Vehicle Use Map. The Motor Vehicle Use Map will display only the "designated" open routes. All other routes will be closed to general public wheeled motor vehicle use. The free Motor Vehicle Use Map will be readily available to the public at offices of the Dakota Prairie Grasslands, and on the Dakota Prairie Grasslands Internet website.

Currently, there are approximately 2,226 miles of roads on National Forest System lands open to wheeled motor vehicles.

## **PURPOSE & NEED**

Three management directives drive the need for this proposal: The 2001 **Tri-State Decision**, the 2002 **Grasslands Plan**, and the 2005 **Travel Management Rule**. More information on these directives is provided below, but basically these decisions together require the Forest Service to:

- Provide a system of safe roads that the public is invited to use.
- Bring road use into compliance with laws, regulations, and management direction provided in the Grasslands Plan.
- Provide public access to the Little Missouri National Grassland for recreational and other uses.
- Develop and implement a travel plan that is easily understood by the public.

In addition, some of the current system roads may best be managed as motorized trails. This project will address the need to identify and reclassify those system roads to system trails.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **LOCATION**

The Little Missouri National Grassland is made up of approximately 1,023,000 acres of National Forest System lands in Billings, Golden Valley, Slope, and McKenzie Counties in western North Dakota. It is part of the Dakota Prairie Grasslands administrative unit, which was established in 1998 and has a central office in Bismarck. Two ranger districts make up the Little Missouri National Grassland: the McKenzie Ranger District in McKenzie County and the Medora Ranger District in the other three counties.

## MANAGEMENT DIRECTION

In January 2001, then-Regional Forester Dale Bosworth signed the Off-Highway Vehicle Record of Decision and Plan Amendment for Montana, North Dakota, and portions of South Dakota (known as the ***Tri-State Decision***). For the Little Missouri National Grassland, this document prohibited all cross-country motor vehicle travel with a few specific exceptions, and specified that motorized users would have access to roads and trails *until* the Forest Service completed subsequent site-specific planning to designate roads and trails open for motorized use.

The 2002 Dakota Prairie Grasslands Land and Resource Management Plan (***Grasslands Plan***) directs overall management on the Little Missouri National Grassland. It also provides guidance for desired conditions and management on the grasslands, including management of motor vehicles.

The 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 212 (***Travel Management Rule***), published on November 9, 2005, *requires* that National Forest System roads, National Forest System trails, or areas on National Forest System lands open to motor vehicles be designated on a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM).

## DECISION TO BE MADE

The responsible officials who will make the final decision on this proposal are the Medora and McKenzie District Rangers. They will decide whether to adopt the proposed action, or choose another alternative, to designate roads and/or trails open to the general public for motor vehicle use.

*For clarification:*

- A “Road” is defined as a motor vehicle route over 50” wide, unless identified and managed as a trail.
- A “Trail” is defined as a route 50” wide or less **or** a route over 50” wide that is identified and managed as a trail.

Based on requirements brought forth in the Travel Management Rule, the Grasslands Plan, and the Tri-State Decision, the following limitations pertain to the decision:

The following management areas were closed to motor vehicles in the Grasslands Plan decision:

- Management Area 1.2a (Suitable for Wilderness)
- Management Area 1.31 (Non-motorized Backcountry Recreation)
- Management Area 2.2 (Research Natural Areas)

The closure of these areas to motorized travel will not be revisited as part of this decision.

- Travel off of a road to retrieve game is prohibited by the Tri-State Decision, and this policy will not be revisited in this decision.
- Roads within the Elkhorn Ranchlands purchase are being reviewed in a separate environmental document, and will not be part of this decision. Once the decision on the Elkhorn Ranchlands is made, roads that are opened by that decision will be added to the Motor Vehicle Use Map.
- Roads that are currently closed by Grasslands Supervisor’s Special Order will remain closed. These Special Orders are in place because of prior specific resource concerns and will not be reviewed by this decision.
- This planning process applies only to National Forest System roads, National Forest System trails, and areas on National Forest System lands. The Motor Vehicle Use Map will show non-Forest System roads and trails as “other” roads in order to display connectivity of the road system. The Forest Service claims no jurisdiction over these “other” roads.

- The following vehicles and uses are managed by other laws, regulations, Grasslands Plan direction, or permit and are not included in this analysis:
  - Aircraft
  - Watercraft
  - Over-snow vehicles
  - Limited administrative use by the Forest Service
  - Emergency use of fire, military, emergency, or law enforcement vehicles
  - Combat vehicles in support of national defense
  - Motor vehicle use that is specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulations

## CRITERIA USED TO DEVELOP THE PROPOSED ACTION

**Road Inventory** – There is an extensive road system on the Little Missouri National Grassland. The *Travel Management Rule* places these roads into two basic categories for use in this analysis – System Roads and Unauthorized Roads.

**System Roads** are inventoried, numbered, and mapped by the Forest Service. System roads include paved, gravel/scoria-surfaced, and native surface “two-track” roads. System roads were primarily used to develop the proposed action.

Other roads currently open to the public that are largely user-created are **Unauthorized Roads**. Unauthorized roads are not numbered, and may or may not be inventoried or mapped. Because there is not a complete inventory of these unauthorized roads they are not shown on Forest Service maps. With few exceptions, unauthorized roads were not used in developing the proposed action.

Currently, all open motorized routes are classified as “roads”. There are currently no motorized routes classified as “trails” on the Little Missouri National Grassland.

In developing the proposed action, the system roads were evaluated using the following criteria:

**High Value Roads** – Generally, high value roads were proposed as open to the public. These included:

- Main through-roads
- Roads needed to access private residences
- Roads needed to provide adequate access to National Forest System lands
- Roads that are reliably passable and safe

**Low Value Roads** – Generally, low value roads were all roads not meeting the *High Value Roads* criteria. These roads may or may not have been proposed as open to the public, depending on the risk factors present.

**Risk Factors** – Several factors were considered when determining whether a road should remain open or be closed to public use. These factors were considered together and in relation to the high or low value rating of a road. Generally roads with risks were proposed as closed to the public unless they were ranked as *High Value*. Risk factors included:

- Undetermined public access across private or state land.
- Single use road, such as one constructed solely to access an oil well.
- Steep slope with eroding soils.
- Known heritage or cultural site within 30 meters.
- Stream crossings.
- Known sensitive species locations.
- Black-footed ferret reintroduction area.
- Bighorn sheep lambing areas.
- Known grouse leks within ¼mile.
- Known golden eagle & raptor nest locations within ½ mile.
- Known noxious weed concentrations.
- Dangerous or impassible roads.
- Parallel roads (more than 1 road in the same general area accessing the same land).

## PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Your participation is important to the development of a travel system for the Little Missouri National Grassland. Please contact us if you would like more information, or to provide your comments on this proposal.

If there is a specific road(s) you would like to see open or closed please provide a map, other data, and/or some other means to help us specifically determine which road(s) you are interested in. Please also identify what reason(s) you may have for wanting to see a road open or closed. This will help us develop issues and alternatives for this project.

A map of the Proposed Action is available on the Internet at <http://www.fs.fed.us/ri/dakotaprairie/>. A CD is also available if you would like a copy. For those who are unable to use an electronic format and would prefer a paper copy, please contact Paula Johnston at 701-250-4443.

Paper maps are available for viewing at the following Forest Service offices:

- Dakota Prairie Grasslands  
Supervisor's office  
240 W. Century Avenue, Bismarck, ND 58503
- McKenzie Ranger District office  
1901 Main Street S., Watford City, ND 58854
- Medora Ranger District office  
99 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue West, Dickinson, ND 58601
- Sheyenne Ranger District office  
1601 Main Street, Lisbon, ND 58054
- Grand River Ranger District office  
1005 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue West, Lemmon, SD 57638

## HOW TO COMMENT

### ***Open houses***

Watford City – March 16, 2009, 3-7 pm

Watford City Civic Center  
213 2<sup>nd</sup> Street NE

Dickinson – March 17, 2009, 3-7 pm

Dickinson Research Extension Center  
1041 State Ave. N

Bismarck – March 18, 2009, 3-7 pm

Bismarck Public Library, meeting room "C"  
515 N. 5<sup>th</sup> Street

### ***Sports shows***

Fargo – March 5 – 8

Minot – March 13 - 15

Comments regarding this project proposal may be submitted to the following:

### ***Written Comments***

Paula Johnston  
240 W. Century Avenue  
Bismarck, ND 58503

### ***Internet Comments***

[comments-northern-dakota-prairie@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-northern-dakota-prairie@fs.fed.us)

Title: Travel

### ***Verbal Comments***

Libby Knotts or Ron Hecker  
McKenzie Ranger District, Watford City  
701-842-2393

Jeff Adams or Ron Jablonski  
Medora Ranger District, Dickinson  
701-227-7800

Paula Johnston or Brenda Quale  
Supervisor's Office, Bismarck  
701-250-4443

Please be as specific as possible in your comments.

The interdisciplinary team for this project will review your comments and may use them to refine the proposal, develop additional alternatives, define and clarify the important issues, and/or further assist in the analysis.

Comments on this project are welcome throughout the planning process. However, **your comments would be most useful if we received them by April 1, 2009.**

Your comments, including your name and address, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered regarding this project. However, for obvious reasons we would not be able to notify anonymous commentors when the Environmental Assessment is available for comment.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST  
AND PARTICIPATION!**