

Summary

In November 2005, the Forest Service issued the final Travel Management Rule (the Rule, or travel management rule - Federal Register, 70FR68264). This Rule specifically requires that any roads, trails, and areas that are to be open to motor vehicle use on a National Forest be officially designated. The Rule also directs that designations be made by class of vehicle and by season of use, where appropriate and necessary. Motor vehicle use would be prohibited on routes and areas not designated open to use.

To comply with the Rule, the Forest Service proposes to designate certain roads and trails open to motorized travel on the Black Hills National Forest. Class of vehicle and season would be assigned to the designated roads or trails. Motorized travel, as allowed on designated routes and areas, would be depicted on a motor vehicle use map (MVUM). The motor vehicle use map would be the primary tool used to determine compliance and enforcement of motorized vehicle use on the ground. Existing Forest Service system routes and other routes not designated on the motor vehicle use map would be legally closed to motorized travel.

The designated route system would reflect current and anticipated travel needs, offer a variety of recreational opportunities, and provide for administrative access, while balancing the physical, biological, and social attributes of the Forest. The area affected by the proposal includes roughly 1.2 million acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands managed by the Black Hills National Forest, within the proclaimed Forest boundary. The decisions on motorized travel would not include snowmobiles or existing winter-use recreation or South Dakota snowmobile trails.

This action is needed to:

- Identify an official travel system and update the Forest travel map;
- Develop a transportation system to meet the increasing demand for recreational travel opportunities and to provide a range of quality experiences for a wide variety of Forest users;
- Reduce adverse impacts caused by unmanaged cross-country and road and trail usage in order to maintain and conserve the condition of ecosystems and watersheds;
- Specify roads, trails and areas open to motorized use; and,
- Closely align travel and recreation opportunities offered to the public with the Forest's management capability.

Based upon the analysis of the effects of the alternatives as disclosed in the final EIS and in the project record, the Forest Supervisor as the responsible official would make the following decisions.

- Whether to designate certain routes, trailheads and other facilities as open to the public for motorized use.
- Whether to authorize improvements to certain routes to allow their use, and if so, the nature of those improvements.
- Whether to allow motorized game retrieval and motorized dispersed camping or off-road parking.
- The season or types of public motorized use allowed for those routes open to motorized travel.
- Whether to amend existing Forest Plan direction to allow implementation of the selected travel management alternative.

To develop this proposal, the Forest worked closely with the National Forest Advisory Board (NFAB), which developed a number of recommendations for a motorized travel system. The Forest also consulted

many user groups and individuals via public meetings and workshops, and questionnaires. During the scoping process, the Forest received comments on the proposed action from the public, Indian tribes and State and Federal agencies. The Forest evaluated these comments and developed four issue statements to guide development of alternatives to the proposed action. The significant issues used to develop alternatives and analyze effects are:

- 1) effects on natural and cultural resource effects;
- 2) effects on recreational opportunities;
- 3) effects of transportation system design on management capabilities; and
- 4) social and economic concerns.

These issues led the agency to develop the following range of alternatives.

Alternative A - No Action. Alternative A would continue the current situation. Current management plans would continue to guide project area management. Cross-country motorized use would continue on 864,000 acres in an unregulated manner. The official motorized trail system would consist of the existing 36 miles of trails. No motor vehicle use map would be issued. User compliance and law enforcement would continue to be difficult without an approved motor vehicle use map. It is expected that motorized cross-country travel and route proliferation would continue to occur in areas of the Forest. Resource damage and conflicts with nonmotorized recreationists would continue to take place, and motorized users would not enjoy a planned travel system designed to meet their needs.

Action Alternatives. Alternatives B, C, D, and E would comply with the Travel Management Rule and meet the purpose and need to designate selected roads and trails open to motorized vehicle travel on lands administered by the Forest. Designations would be made by class of vehicle and by season. A motor vehicle use map would be published depicting designated roads and trails. All of these alternatives would amend the Forest Plan to allow motorized use levels and to specify that motorized use must be conducted in compliance with the motor vehicle use map.

A major consideration in this analysis is motorized-mixed use, or the use of both highway-legal and non-highway-legal motor vehicles on NFS roads. Alternatives B, C and D would pre-empt (not be in accord with) South Dakota State law, which currently requires that only highway-legal motor vehicles may use public roads. Alternatives B, C and D would comply with Wyoming State law by enrolling all designated roads in the Wyoming Off-Road Recreational Vehicle program. All alternatives would be consistent with laws in both states requiring licensing of vehicle operators.

Alternative B – Modified Proposed Action. Alternative B represents the original proposed action. It has been modified to correct data errors, but the intent of this alternative is the same as the original proposed action on which the public was asked to comment. This alternative would meet most NFAB recommendations to provide an active (designed) travel system while protecting resources and reducing conflicts with other users. It would provide 3,466 miles of roads including 2,226 miles of motorized-mixed-use roads; boost motorized trails to 663 miles; and limit cross-country motorized use to 179,000 acres only for the purposes of game retrieval (elk only) or dispersed camping. The motor vehicle use map would make user compliance and law enforcement easier. Resource damage and conflicts with nonmotorized recreationists would be reduced, and motorized users would find a planned travel system designed to meet their needs.

Alternative C. Alternative C would provide the largest motorized travel system. It would provide 3,582 miles of roads including 2,878 miles of motorized-mixed-use roads; boost motorized trails to 771 miles; and limit cross-country motorized use to 473,500 acres only for the purposes of game retrieval (elk and deer) or dispersed camping. The motor vehicle use map would make user

compliance and law enforcement easier. Higher user numbers could bring more business to adjacent communities, and motorized users would find a planned travel system designed to meet their needs.

Alternative D. Alternative D would provide the smallest motorized travel system. It would reduce impacts of motorized travel on natural and cultural resources, reduce conflicts with nonmotorized recreationists, and would promote a safer environment for motorized users. It would provide 2,877 miles of roads including 580 miles of motorized-mixed-use roads; and 320 miles of motorized trails, and prohibit motorized cross-country use for any reason, with exceptions. The motor vehicle use map would make user compliance and law enforcement easier. Resource damage, conflicts with nonmotorized recreationists and system maintenance costs would be reduced, and motorized users would find a planned travel system designed to meet their needs.

Alternative E. Alternative E would take the minimum actions necessary to comply with the Travel Management Rule. It would provide a motor vehicle use map designating the existing travel system. Alternative E would provide 3,740 miles of roads including 160 miles of motorized-mixed-use roads; and 36 miles of motorized trails. It would prohibit motorized cross-country use for any purpose, with exceptions. The motor vehicle use map would make user compliance and law enforcement easier. Resource damage, conflicts with nonmotorized recreationists and maintenance costs would be reduced. Motorized users would find a minimal planned travel system designed to meet their needs.

Major Conclusions

Concerning effects of the alternatives on natural and cultural resources (Issue 1), all action alternatives would reduce current levels of effects from motorized use. All action alternatives would reduce the miles of motorized routes in several important habitats and across the Forest, would limit or prohibit motorized cross-country use, and would reduce the number of points at which motorized routes cross streams and wetlands. These reductions would improve habitat conditions for a variety of species of plants and wildlife. Alternatives D and E would generally present the most improvements in habitat conditions, followed by Alternatives B and C.

Concerning recreation opportunity (Issue 2), route miles available to drivers of highway-legal machines on trails and mixed-use roads would be greatest under Alternative C, followed by Alternatives B and D. Alternatives A and E would offer much less route mileage for drivers of both highway-legal and non-highway-legal machines. Mileage available to unlicensed drivers (on trails only) would be greatest under Alternative C, followed by Alternatives B, D, and E. Motorized cross-country use for any purpose would be available only under Alternative A. Limited motorized cross-country use for game retrieval or dispersed camping would be offered under Alternatives B and C; such use would be prohibited under Alternatives D and E.

Regarding effects on management capabilities (Issue 3), motorized travel use would be more easily enforced under any of the action alternatives than under Alternative A because a motor vehicle use map would be issued. Users not in compliance with the motor vehicle use map could be cited. Considering the total miles of trails, number of trailheads and miles of roads that could be closed, Alternatives C and B would be most costly to implement, in that order, followed by Alternative D. Alternative A would have the highest maintenance costs, followed by Alternatives C, B, D, and E.

Regarding social and economic concerns (Issue 4), Alternatives B and C would offer the highest number of trailheads within 3 miles of communities, which could induce more user-related business in those communities. Alternative D would have the lowest potential for disturbance from noise and dust from motorized use near private lands. The population in the Black Hills region would continue to grow under all alternatives, as would recreational use of the Forest. Forest visitors will continue to expect diverse

recreational opportunities. The reduction or loss of opportunity for motorized cross-country use would be partially offset by the enhanced OHV trail system opportunities under Alternatives C, B, and D, in that order. Private recreational opportunities could be developed to provide other opportunities, but none of the alternatives would be expected to create any measurable social or economic effects in the Black Hills region.