





# Motorized Travel Management

## Draft Environmental Impact Statement

### Stanislaus National Forest

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**Abstract:** This Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) describes the environmental effects of a proposal by the Stanislaus National Forest to: (1) prohibit motor vehicle travel off designated National Forest Transportation System (NFTS) roads and trails by the public except as allowed by permit or other authorization (excluding snowmobile use); (2) add 157.39 miles of existing unauthorized routes to the NFTS of trails currently open to the public for motor vehicle use; and, (3) make vehicle class changes to the existing NFTS on 623.28 miles of roads. Season of use on all routes based on elevation and wet weather closures on native surfaced routes replaces all existing closures. These actions are needed in order to implement the 2005 Travel Management Rule (36 CFR Part 212) while providing for a diversity of motor vehicle recreation opportunities, and providing motorized access to dispersed recreation opportunities on the Stanislaus National Forest. The DEIS discloses environmental impacts associated with the proposed action, a no action alternative and 3 additional action alternatives developed in response to issues raised by the public. Of the alternatives under consideration at this stage, Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) is preferred by the responsible official.

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## Cover Photos

Clavey River looking north from 3N01	Wheeled Over Snow use	Developed Camping
4WD on trail	Dardanelles overlook from 6N38Y	Motorcycle trail
Bourland Creek Trestle	Motorcycle trail	Developed Camping
	Administrative use	
Tuolumne Fawn Lily	Log truck	ATV trail

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## Summary

The Forest Service prepared this Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations. This DEIS discloses the direct, indirect and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action, a no action alternative and 3 additional action alternatives developed in response to issues raised by the public. Of the alternatives under consideration at this stage, Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) is preferred by the responsible official.

### Purpose and Need

The following needs were identified for this proposal:

1. There is a need for regulation of unmanaged wheeled motor vehicle travel by the public.

The proliferation of unplanned, unauthorized, non-sustainable roads, trails, and areas created by cross-country travel adversely impacts the environment. The 2005 Travel Management Rule, 36 CFR, Section 212, Subpart B provides for a system of NFTS roads, NFTS trails and areas on National Forest System lands that are designated for motor vehicle use. After roads, trails and areas are designated, motor vehicle use off designated roads and trails and outside designated areas is prohibited by 36 CFR 261.13. Subpart B is intended to prevent resource damage caused by unmanaged motor vehicle use by the public. In accordance with national direction, implementation of Subpart B of the travel management rule for the Stanislaus is scheduled for completion in 2009.

2. There is a need for limited changes to the National Forest Transportation System to:
  - a. Maintain motor vehicle access to dispersed recreation opportunities (camping, hunting, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, etc.).
  - b. Provide a diversity of motorized recreation opportunities (4WD, motorcycles, ATVs, passenger vehicles, etc.).

### Proposed Action

The Stanislaus National Forest proposes to: (1) prohibit motor vehicle travel off designated National Forest Transportation System (NFTS) roads and trails by the public except as allowed by permit or other authorization (excluding snowmobile use); (2) add 157.39 miles of existing unauthorized routes to the NFTS of trails currently open to the public for motor vehicle use; and, (3) make vehicle class changes to the existing NFTS on 623.28 miles of roads. Season of use on all routes based on elevation and wet weather closures on native surfaced routes replaces all existing closures. These actions are needed in order to implement the 2005 Travel Management Rule (36 CFR Part 212) while providing for a diversity of motor vehicle recreation opportunities and providing motorized access to dispersed recreation opportunities on the Stanislaus National Forest.

### Significant Issues

An issue is a matter of public concern regarding the proposed action and its environmental impacts. Scoping identified issues which are a point of discussion, dispute, or debate with the Proposed Action. An issue is an effect on a physical, biological, social, or economic resource. An issue is not an activity; instead, the predicted effects of the activity create the issue. The Forest Service separated the issues into two groups: significant and non-significant. Significant issues are defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action.

Significant Issues are used to formulate alternatives, prescribe mitigation measures, or analyze environmental effects. Issues are significant because of the extent of their geographic distribution, the duration of their effects, or the intensity of interest or resource conflicts. The Forest used the following significant issue statements to formulate and compare alternatives, prescribe mitigation measures, or analyze and compare the environmental effects of each alternative.

### **Significant Issue Statements**

1. Changes to NFTS routes that reduce motorized opportunities, increase restrictions on vehicle class and season of use, and prohibit cross-country travel, may affect forest visitors.

<b>Issue/Element</b>	<b>Cause and Effect</b>
1.1 Motorized Opportunities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Changing the vehicle class and season of use may affect available camping opportunities.</li> <li>b. Route designations may not provide adequate motorized opportunities.</li> <li>c. Route designations may not provide adequate distinction between vehicle classes.</li> <li>d. Route designations may not provide adequate opportunities for motorized special use events.</li> <li>e. Vehicle class, season of use and cross-county travel restrictions may limit motorized access for big game retrieval and dispersed camping.</li> </ol>

2. Changes to NFTS routes that increase motorized opportunities, reduce restrictions on vehicle class and season of use, and allow cross-country travel, may affect forest resources, private property and forest visitors.

<b>Issue/Element</b>	<b>Cause and Effect</b>
2.1 Administration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Increasing motorized use may result in increased non-compliance, unsafe conditions near private residences and unsafe encounters between forest visitors.</li> <li>b. Current and future budgets may not provide adequate funding for maintenance, administration and enforcement of the proposed road and trail system.</li> <li>c. Route designations may cause environmental impacts requiring more maintenance.</li> <li>d. Allowing mixed use on system routes may result in unsafe recreation opportunities.</li> </ol>
2.2 Private Property	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Allowing motorized use near private property may result in noise, dust, trespass and other conflicts with private property owners.</li> <li>b. Some private property owners are unwilling to grant public right of way, thereby limiting motorized route opportunities.</li> </ol>
2.3 Recreation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Increasing motorized use may result in noise disturbance affecting quiet recreation opportunities.</li> <li>b. Increasing motorized use may result in user conflicts between forest visitors.</li> </ol>
2.4 Resources	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Increasing motorized use may increase fire risk and the spread of noxious weeds.</li> <li>b. Increasing motorized use may affect heritage resources, recreation, sensitive plants, soils, vegetation, watershed and wildlife.</li> <li>c. Allowing motorized access for big game retrieval and dispersed camping may affect forest resources.</li> <li>d. Authorizing travel corridors allowing cross-country travel within 100' of roads and trails, or allowing parking greater than one car length from the road may affect forest resources.</li> <li>e. Increasing motorized use may result in undesirable road densities.</li> <li>f. Proposed seasonal closures may not adequately protect natural resources</li> <li>g. Motorized use may not be compatible with Roadless Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wilderness and Yosemite National Park.</li> </ol>



## Alternatives Considered in Detail

The action alternatives (Alternatives 1, 3, 4 and 5) and the no action alternative (Alternative 2) are considered in detail (see Map Package and project record for detailed maps of each alternative). The no action alternative represents the continuation of cross-country travel including continued use of all unauthorized routes by motor vehicles. Alternative 2, required by the implementing regulations of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), serves as a baseline for comparison among the alternatives (73 Federal Register 143, July 24, 2008; p. 43084-43099). Table S.01-1 shows a side-by-side comparison of the features of each alternative.

### **Alternative 1 (Proposed Action)**

This is the Proposed Action, as described in the Notice of Intent (72 Federal Register 222, November 19, 2007; p. 64988- 64991), with corrections based on updated data and map information and refinements responding to the administration, motorized recreation, private property, recreation and resource issues raised during scoping (Chapter 1). These corrections and refinements provide additional motorized recreation opportunities, reduce conflicts and provide additional resource protection. Motor vehicle travel off NFTS routes by the public would be prohibited except as allowed by permit or other authorization. Parking is allowed within one vehicle length off of NFTS routes unless otherwise prohibited. 157.39 miles of unauthorized routes would be added to the NFTS as trails. Vehicle class changes would occur on 623.28 miles of NFTS roads. Season of use on all routes based on elevation and wet weather closures on native surfaced routes replaces all existing closures. Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) is the Forest Service preferred alternative.

### **Alternative 2 (No Action)**

The No Action Alternative provides a baseline for comparing the other alternatives. Under the No Action alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. This alternative would **not** change the use of any NFTS roads and would **not** add any miles of NFTS motorized trails. Under this alternative the agency would take no affirmative action (no change from current management or direction) and cross country travel with continued use of unauthorized routes would occur. It would include only existing closures and would **not** include any restrictions on motorized dispersed recreation access. No changes would be made to the current NFTS and no cross country travel prohibition would be put into place. The Travel Management Rule would not be implemented and no MVUM would be produced. Motor vehicle travel by the public would not be limited to NFTS routes. Unauthorized routes would continue to have no status or authorization as NFTS facilities.

### **Alternative 3 (Cross Country Prohibited)**

Alternative 3 responds to the administration and resource issues by prohibiting cross country travel without adding any new facilities to the NFTS. This alternative also provides a baseline for comparing the impacts of other alternatives that propose changes to the NFTS in the form of new facilities (roads and trails). None of the currently unauthorized routes would be added to the National Forest System under this alternative. Alternative 3 would not change the use of the NFTS and would not add any miles to the NFTS. It would include seasonal closures on routes with existing closures and prohibit motorized access beyond existing NFTS routes. Motor vehicle travel off NFTS routes by the public would be prohibited except as allowed by permit or other authorization. Parking is allowed within one vehicle length off of NFTS routes unless otherwise prohibited.

### **Alternative 4 (Recreation)**

Alternative 4 responds to the motorized recreation opportunities issue by providing additional routes and reducing restrictions. This alternative would maximize motorized recreation opportunities (including those accessing dispersed recreation activities thereby partially replacing the need for

travel corridors). Motor vehicle travel off NFTS routes by the public would be prohibited except as allowed by permit or other authorization. Parking is allowed within one vehicle length off of NFTS routes unless otherwise prohibited. 181.72 miles of unauthorized routes would be added to the NFTS as trails. Vehicle class changes would occur on 371.32 miles of NFTS roads. Season of use on all routes based on elevation and wet weather closures on native surfaced routes replaces all existing closures.

### **Alternative 5 (Resources)**

Alternative 5 responds to the administration, private property, recreation and resource issues by limiting additions to the NFTS and increasing restrictions that would reduce conflicts and provide additional resource protection. This alternative would limit motorized recreation opportunities (including those accessing dispersed recreation activities) by providing greater protection for forest resources. Motor vehicle travel off NFTS roads and NFTS trails by the public would be prohibited except as allowed by permit or other authorization. Parking is allowed within one vehicle length off of NFTS routes unless otherwise prohibited. 31.51 miles of unauthorized routes would be added to the NFTS as trails. Vehicle class changes would occur on 531.39 miles of NFTS roads. Season of use on all routes based on elevation and wet weather closures on native surfaced routes replaces all existing closures.

Table S.01-1 Comparison of Alternatives: Alternative Components and Outputs

Component		Alternative 1 (Proposed Action)	Alternative 2 (No Action)	Alternative 3 (X-C Prohibited)	Alternative 4 (Recreation)	Alternative 5 (Resources)
Cross Country Travel		prohibited	not prohibited	prohibited	prohibited	prohibited
Parking allowed off NFTS		one vehicle length	no restriction	one vehicle length	one vehicle length	one vehicle length
Add existing unauthorized routes to the NFTS (miles)		157.39	0.00	0.00	181.72	31.51
Convert NFTS roads to NFTS trails (miles)		63.06	0.00	0.00	99.86	21.51
Change NFTS roads from Closed to Open (miles)		67.96	0.00	0.00	101.83	11.66
Change NFTS Roads from Open to Closed (miles)		51.40	0.00	0.00	13.13	64.45
Change NFTS roads from HLO to ALL (miles)		93.59	0.00	0.00	99.76	0.00
Change NFTS roads from ALL to HLO (miles)		400.49	0.00	0.00	145.76	441.10
Existing Closures and Restrictions		replaced	remain	remain	replaced	replaced
Season of Use	Elevation 1	all year	none	none	all year	all year
	Elevation 2	4/1-11/30	none	none	4/1-12/31	4/15-11/15
	Elevation 3	5/15-11/30	none	none	4/1-12/31	5/15-11/15
Wet Weather Closures (native surface routes)		during the season of use when 1 inch of rain occurs in a 24 hour period and allowing for 72 hours of drying	none	none	same as Alternative 1	same as Alternative 1
Wheeled Over Snow Use		prohibited except on routes identified or where allowed by permit or other authorization	prohibited on groomed snowmobile routes and marked cross country ski trails	same as Alternative 2	same as Alternative 1	prohibited except where allowed by permit or other authorization
Non-significant Forest Plan amendments (miles)		10.63	0.00	0.00	14.52	0.00

## Summary of Environmental Consequences

Table S.01-2 shows a summary of the environmental effects of the alternatives.

Table S.01-2 Comparison of Alternatives: Summary of Effects

	<b>Alternative 1 (Proposed Action)</b>	<b>Alternative 2 (No Action)</b>	<b>Alternative 3 (X-C Prohibited)</b>	<b>Alternative 4 (Recreation)</b>	<b>Alternative 5 (Resources)</b>
<b>Botanical</b>	mileage and number of routes increases effects to sensitive plants and suitable habitat; greatest risk to sensitive plants affected by routes within 200 feet of areas infested with noxious and invasive plants	greatest effects to sensitive plants and suitable habitats along existing routes and to lava cap and moist habitat types	reduction in routes and mileage concentrates use increasing effects to roadside occurrences; least overall impacts to sensitive plants	mileage and number of routes increases effects to sensitive plants and suitable habitat; highest impacts to known sensitive plants	reduction in routes and mileage concentrates use increasing effects to roadside occurrences; least impacts to unique habitats such as lava caps and meadows
<b>Cultural</b>	additions to the NFTS and opening closed roads could adversely effect cultural resources	cross country travel with continued route proliferation adversely effects cultural resources	none	same as Alternative 1	none
<b>Recreation</b>	third highest mileage available to motorized use; reduces impacts to non-motorized activities; reduces motorized access to dispersed recreation sites	highest mileage available to motorized use with fewest limitations; greatest conflicts with adjacent landowners; alters recreation settings; highest impacts on non-motorized or quiet recreation activities; continues motorized access to all dispersed recreation sites	lowest mileage available to motorized use; least conflicts with adjacent landowners; recreation setting changes from predominately motorized to predominately non-motorized; highest reduction of motorized access to dispersed recreation sites	second highest mileage available to motorized use; conflicts with adjacent landowners may occur; second greatest impacts to non-motorized activities; reduces motorized access to dispersed recreation sites	second lowest mileage available to motorized use; few loops and very limited riding opportunities; reduces conflicts with adjacent landowners; reduces motorized access to dispersed recreation sites
<b>Roadless and Special Areas</b>	roadless characteristics and special area values improve over time as unauthorized routes passively restore to natural conditions; additions to the NFTS and opening closed roads reduce opportunities for solitude in the Carson-Iceberg, Mt. Reba, North Mountain, Raymond Peak and Tuolumne River roadless areas	noise and more evidence of human activity due to cross country travel with continued route proliferation reduce roadless character in all roadless areas; cross country travel with continued route proliferation could reduce values in all Special Areas (Proposed Wilderness, SIAs, RNAs, Wild and Scenic Rivers and Proposed Wild and Scenic Rivers) outside of Wilderness	roadless characteristics and special area values improve over time as unauthorized routes passively restore to natural conditions	roadless characteristics and special area values over time as unauthorized routes passively restore to natural conditions; additions to the NFTS and opening closed roads reduce opportunities for solitude in the Carson-Iceberg, Mt. Reba, North Mountain, Raymond Peak and Tuolumne River roadless areas	roadless characteristics and special area values improve over time as unauthorized routes passively restore to natural conditions; additions to the NFTS reduce opportunities for solitude in the Carson-Iceberg and Raymond Peak roadless areas
<b>Transportation</b>	greatest risks to public safety with the most miles where motorized mixed use occurs on roads	none	none	same as Alternative 1	least risk to public safety with the lowest miles where motorized mixed use occurs on roads

	<b>Alternative 1</b> (Proposed Action)	<b>Alternative 2</b> (No Action)	<b>Alternative 3</b> (X-C Prohibited)	<b>Alternative 4</b> (Recreation)	<b>Alternative 5</b> (Resources)
<b>Society, Culture and Economy</b>	does not meet demand for motorized access to dispersed recreation sites; proliferation of new sites impacts land and driving experiences	cross country travel and route proliferation degrade the quality of the recreation setting	does not meet demand for motorized routes displacing use to other locations; does not meet demand for motorized access to dispersed recreation sites; proliferation of new sites impacts land and driving experiences	same as Alternative 1	same as Alternative 3
<b>Soil</b>	128 miles of additions to the NFTS occur on high MEHR soils; 55 miles of additions to the NFTS occur on soils with HFC concerns; opens 29 miles of closed roads prone to loss of hydrologic function and water control	204 miles of unauthorized routes occur on high MEHR soils with route proliferation adding another 22 miles over 10 years representing a loss of soil productivity on 158 acres	vegetation growth on most unauthorized routes stabilizes them to background erosion rates	151 miles of additions to the NFTS occur on high MEHR soils; 68 miles of additions to the NFTS occur on soils with HFC concerns; opens 45 miles of closed roads prone to loss of hydrologic function and water control	24 miles of additions to the NFTS occur on high MEHR soils; 8.6 miles of additions to the NFTS occur on soils with HFC concerns; opens 2.9 miles of closed roads prone to loss of hydrologic function and water control
<b>Visual</b>	high positive effect on the overall scenery by prohibiting cross country travel; parking and camping along NFTS roads makes roads appear less natural and more congested	negative effect on the overall scenery by continued cross country travel and route proliferation resulting in loss of natural character and a inconsistency with VQOs; parking and camping remain hidden from view in most locations	same as Alternative 1 except: highest positive effect on the overall scenery; reduced motorized touring and enjoyment of the scenery at many locations; increased parking along NFTS roads makes roads appear least natural and most congested	same as Alternative 1 except: lower positive effect on the overall scenery; maximizes motorized viewing opportunities at the expense of some non-motorized	same as Alternative 1 except: higher positive effect on the overall scenery although less access to early spring (wildflowers) and fall (peak fall color) scenery at some locations
<b>Watershed</b>	reduces direct, indirect and cumulative watershed effects by prohibiting cross country travel; water quality is good to excellent; meets beneficial uses of water; sediment, water temperature and oil and grease are consistent with water quality objectives	cross country travel and route proliferation slightly increase sedimentation but do not adversely affect beneficial uses	same as Alternative 1 except: most reduction in direct, indirect and cumulative watershed effects	same as Alternative 1 except: less reduction in direct, indirect and cumulative watershed effects	same as Alternative 1 except: more reduction in direct, indirect and cumulative watershed effects
<b>Wildlife</b>	additions to the NFTS and opening closed roads adversely affects individuals of numerous wildlife species over the short and long-term	cross-country travel impacts individuals of numerous wildlife species; continued route proliferation exacerbates long-term impacts	beneficial effects to all wildlife species	same as Alternative 1 except more additions to the NFTS and opening more closed roads increases impacts on the number of individuals for each species	same as Alternative 1 except fewer additions to the NFTS without opening closed roads decreases impacts on the number of individuals for each species