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1. Purpose of and Need for Action

The Forest Service prepared this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations. This Environmental Impact Statement discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action and alternatives.

1.01 DOCUMENT STRUCTURE

The document is organized into the following chapters and sections:

- **Chapter 1** Purpose of and Need for Action: this chapter briefly describes the proposed action, the need for that action, and other purposes to be achieved by the proposal. This section also details how the Forest Service informed the public of the proposed action and how the public responded.
- Chapter 2 Alternatives: this chapter provides a detailed description of the agency's proposed action as well as alternative actions that were developed in response to comments raised by the public during scoping. The end of the chapter includes summary tables comparing the proposed action and alternatives with respect to their environmental impacts.
- **Chapter 3** Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences: this chapter describes the environmental impacts of the proposed action and alternatives.
- **Chapter 4** Consultation and Coordination: this chapter provides a list of preparers and agencies consulted during the development of the environmental impact statement.
- **Index** the index provides page numbers by document topic.
- **Appendices** the appendices provide more detailed information to support the analyses presented in the environmental impact statement.

Additional documentation, including more detailed analyses of project area resources, may be found in the project planning record located at:

Stanislaus National Forest Forest Supervisor's Office 19777 Greenley Road Sonora, CA 95370

1.02 BACKGROUND

Over the past few decades, the availability and capability of motor vehicles, particularly off-highway vehicles (OHVs) and sport utility vehicles (SUVs) increased tremendously. Nationally, the number of OHV users climbed sevenfold in the past 30 years, from approximately 5 million in 1972 to 36 million in 2000. California is experiencing the highest level of OHV use of any state in the nation. There were 786,914 ATVs and OHV motorcycles registered in 2004, an increase of 330% since 1980. Annual sales of ATVs and OHV motorcycles in California were the highest in the U.S. for the last 5 years. From 1989 to 2002, four-wheel drive vehicle sales in California also increased by 1500% to 3,046,866 vehicles (Kordell 2005).

Unmanaged OHV use resulted in unplanned roads and trails, erosion, watershed and habitat degradation, and impacts to cultural resource sites. Compaction and erosion are the primary effects of OHV use on soils. Riparian areas and aquatic dependent species are particularly vulnerable to OHV

use. Unmanaged recreation, including impacts from OHVs, is one of "Four Key Threats Facing the Nation's Forests and Grasslands" (USDA 2004).

On August 11, 2003, the Pacific Southwest Region of the Forest Service entered into a Memorandum of Intent (MOI) with the California Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Commission, and the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division of the California Department of Parks and Recreation. That MOI set in motion a region-wide effort to "Designate OHV roads, trails, and any specifically defined open areas for motorized vehicles on maps of the 19 National Forests in California by 2007" (see project record).

On November 9, 2005, the Forest Service published final travel management regulations (70 Federal Register 216, November 9, 2005; p. 68264-68291). Subpart B of the final Travel Management Rule (36 CFR 212), requires designation of those roads, trails, and areas that are open to motor vehicle use on National Forests. Only roads and trails that are part of a National Forest Transportation System (NFTS) may be designated for motorized use. Designations are made by class of vehicle and, if appropriate, by time of year. Part 261 – Prohibitions, Subpart A (36 CFR 261.13) of the final rule, prohibits the use of motor vehicles off designated roads, trails and areas, as well as use of motor vehicles on roads and trails that is not consistent with the designations.

On some National Forest System (NFS) lands, long managed as open to cross-country motor vehicle travel, repeated use resulted in unplanned and unauthorized roads and trails. These routes generally developed without environmental analysis or public involvement, and do not possess the same status as roads and trails included in the NFTS. Nevertheless, some unauthorized routes are well-sited, provide excellent opportunities for outdoor recreation by motorized and non-motorized users, and would enhance the NFTS. Other unauthorized routes are poorly located and cause unacceptable impacts. Only NTFS roads and NTFS trails can be designated for motor vehicle use. In order for an unauthorized route to be designated, the route must first be added to the forest transportation system.

In 2006, the Stanislaus completed an inventory of unauthorized routes on NFS lands as described in the MOI and identified approximately 226.3 miles of unauthorized routes. The 2006 Inventory also showed an additional 61.2 miles of unauthorized use on Maintenance Level 1 roads closed to the public. In addition to the 2006 Inventory, analysis work was going on in other project planning which identified an additional 207.6 miles of unauthorized roads. The Stanislaus used an interdisciplinary process to conduct travel analysis that included working with the public to identify proposals for changes to the existing Stanislaus transportation system. Roads and trails that are currently part of the transportation system and open to motor vehicle travel will remain designated for such use except as described below under the Proposed Action. This proposal makes needed changes (vehicle restrictions, additional motorized trails, etc.) to the NFTS roads and trails on NFS lands in accordance with the Travel Management Rule (36 CFR 212, Subpart B).

In accordance with Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule (36 CFR 212.56), following a decision on this proposal, the Stanislaus will publish a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) identifying all NFTS roads, trails, and areas that are designated for motor vehicle use. The MVUM shall specify the classes of vehicles and, if appropriate, the time of year for which motor vehicle use is designated. Upon publication of the MVUM, it is prohibited to possess or operate a motor vehicle on NFS lands other than in accordance with those designations. These maps will be made available to the public on the internet and at the headquarters of the corresponding administrative unit and Ranger Districts of the National Forest System. The unauthorized routes (roads and trails) not included in this proposal are not precluded from future consideration for either removal from the landscape and restoration to the natural condition or addition to the NFTS and inclusion on an MVUM. Future decisions associated with changes to the NFTS and MVUM are dependent on available staff and resources and may trigger the need for additional environmental analysis, public involvement, and documentation

Travel Management on the Stanislaus National Forest

This proposal is just one project among many in the long term goal of managing the transportation system in a sustainable and cost effective manner. Previous administrative decisions reduced the number of miles of NFTS roads available for motorized use. These previous decisions resulted in 21.2 miles of roads closed and 488.7 miles of road decommissioned. These restoration efforts were accomplished through vegetation management projects, watershed restoration projects, fuel treatment projects, trail construction projects, trail management decisions, and OHV projects. All of these efforts helped identify and manage the current transportation system. Other ongoing efforts include efforts to reduce the impacts associated with unauthorized routes and impacts associated with the current NFTS. Implementation of this proposal and subsequent designation of motorized routes through publication of the MVUM are only one step in the overall management of the NFTS.

Project Location

The project location is on the Stanislaus National Forest (see Figure 1.02-1). The Forest contains 898,099 acres located in the central Sierra Nevada. The Forest is bounded on the north by the Mokelumne River and the Eldorado National Forest, to the east by parts of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest and to the south by Yosemite National Park, the Merced River and the Sierra National Forest. The western portions are on the edge of the foothills.

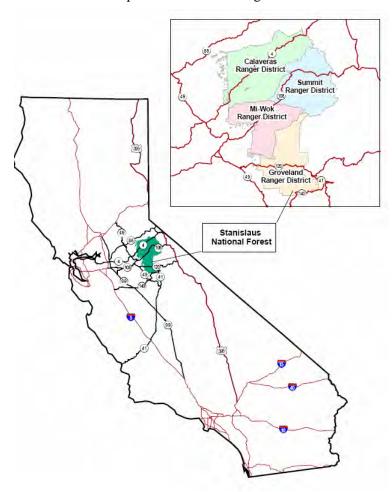


Figure 1.02-1 Stanislaus National Forest Vicinity Map

1.03 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.). A substantial portion of known dispersed recreation activities are not typically located directly adjacent to NFTS roads or NFTS motorized trails. Some dispersed recreation activities depend on foot or horseback access, and some depend on motor vehicle access. Those activities accessed by motor vehicles are typically accessed by short spurs that have been created primarily by the passage of motor vehicles. Many such unauthorized 'user-created' routes are not currently part of the NFTS. Without adding them to the NFTS and designating them on a MVUM, the regulatory changes noted above would make continued use of such routes illegal and would preclude access by the public to many dispersed recreation activities.
 - b. Provide a diversity of motorized recreation opportunities (4WD, motorcycles, ATVs, passenger vehicles, etc.). It is Forest Service policy to provide a diversity of road and trail opportunities for experiencing a variety of environments and modes of travel consistent with the National Forest recreation role and land capability (FSM 2353.03(2)). Implementation of Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule will severely reduce acres and miles of motorized recreation opportunities relative to current levels. As a result, there is a need to consider limited changes to the NFTS.

In making any limited changes to the NFTS, the Stanislaus will consider criteria contained in Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule, which include the following:

- a. Impacts to natural and cultural resources.
- b. Public safety.
- c. Access to public and private lands.
- d. Availability of resources for maintenance and administration of roads trails and areas that would arise if the uses under consideration are designated.
- e. Minimizing damage to soil, watershed, vegetation, and other forest resources.
- f. Minimizing harassment of wildlife and significant disruption of wildlife habitat.
- g. Minimizing conflicts between motor vehicles and existing or proposed recreational uses of NFS lands or neighboring federal lands.
- Minimizing conflicts among different classes of motor vehicle uses of NFS lands or neighboring federal lands.
- i. Compatibility of motor vehicle use with existing conditions in populated areas, taking into account sound, emissions, and other factors.

When making any limited changes to NFTS roads, the Stanislaus will also consider the following:

- 1. Speed, volume, composition and distribution of traffic on roads.
- 2. Compatibility of vehicle class with road geometry and road surfacing
- 3. Maintaining valid existing rights of use and access (rights-of-way)

Table 1.03-1 provides a summary of the Purpose and Need details related to the four components of the Proposed Action.

Table 1.03-1 Purpose and Need

What	Where	Why	How				
1. Cross Country Trav	1. Cross Country Travel						
Travel and Parking	forestwide outside of Wilderness	implement 36 CFR 212, Subpart B limiting motorized use to the NFTS system; protect resources by preventing route proliferation; provide parking for dispersed recreation	prohibit cross country travel; parking allowed one vehicle length off of NFTS routes unless otherwise prohibited				
2. Additions to the NF	TS						
Add existing unauthorized routes to the NFTS	specific routes (157.39 miles) shown in Appendix I	provide a variety of motorized trail opportunities; enhance loop opportunities; access destinations; reduce conflicts between different uses; include most past managed trails	add unauthorized routes to the trail system; show on MVUM pending completion of mitigations				
3. Changes to the Exi	sting NFTS						
Convert NFTS roads to NFTS trails	specific routes (63.06 miles) shown in Appendix I	road not maintained; don't need as a road; road never physically closed to public motorized use; access to popular destinations	remove from road system; add to trail system; show on MVUM				
Change NFTS roads from Closed to Open	miles) shown in Appendix I	existing NFTS roads; access destinations or private property; enhance loop opportunities by connecting trails	open any existing gates or remove barriers as needed; show on MVUM				
Change NFTS Roads from Open to Closed	specific routes (51.40 miles) shown in Appendix I	protect facilities; not needed for recreation; reduce conflicts between different uses	close any existing gates				
Change NFTS roads from Highway Legal Only (HLO) to All Vehicles (ALL)	specific routes (93.59 miles) shown in Appendix I	provide a variety of motorized mixed use opportunities; enhance loop opportunities by connecting trails; reduce maintenance needs	show on MVUM as open to all vehicles pending completion of combined use and mixed use mitigations				
Change NFTS roads from ALL to HLO	specific routes (400.49 miles) shown in Appendix I	county roads; private property; short roads; no connection to non-highway legal opportunities; reduce incursions into adjacent non-motorized areas; reduce conflicts between different uses	show on MVUM as open to highway legal only				
Season of Use	forestwide outside of Wilderness	protect resources including road and trail surfaces during the normal winter season	native and non-native surfaced routes open by elevation zone; show on MVUM				
Wet Weather Closures	forestwide outside of Wilderness	protect resources including road and trail surfaces in storm events during the normal season of use	during the season of use all native surfaced routes are subject to closure when 1 inch of rainfall occurs in a 24 hour period and allowing for 72 hours of drying; show on MVUM				
Wheeled Over Snow Use	in Table 2.02-2	protect resources including road and trail surfaces; provide a variety of motorized winter recreation; reduce conflicts with other winter recreation uses	prohibited except on routes identified or where allowed by permit or other authorization; show on MVUM				
4. Forest Plan Amend							
Non-significant amendments	specific routes (10.63 miles); cross country travel prohibition	allow continued existing motorized use on routes where it is not compatible with current Forest Plan direction; update cross country travel prohibition to comply with 36 CFR 212	Forest Plan Amendment for route specific exceptions allowing motorized routes; show on MVUM				

1.04 Proposed Action

This is the Proposed Action, as described in the NOI, 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. These corrections and refinements provide additional motorized recreation opportunities, reduce conflicts and provide additional resource protection.

The Stanislaus currently manages and maintains approximately 3,260 miles of NFTS roads of which 2,164 miles are open to public motorized use; and, 95 miles of NFTS trails open to public motorized use (see Table 2.02-4). Based on the stated Purpose and Need for action, and as a result of the recent travel analysis process, the Stanislaus proposes to:

- 1. **Cross Country Travel**: 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.
- 2. **Additions to the NFTS**: 157.39 miles of unauthorized routes would be added to the NFTS as motorized trails (see Table 2.05-2). Appendix I (Route Data) shows the specified vehicle class, season of use and required mitigations.
- 3. Changes to the existing NFTS: 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. Appendix I (Route Data) shows the specified vehicle class, season of use and required mitigations.

Vehicle Class Changes

Vehicle class changes would occur on 623.28 miles of NFTS roads including: opening 67.96 miles of closed roads; converting 5.42 miles of closed roads to administrative use only; closing 45.98 miles of open roads; converting 93.59 miles of roads from highway legal only to all vehicles; and, converting 400.49 miles of roads from all vehicles to highway legal only. This alternative also converts 63.06 miles of the 623.28 miles of NFTS roads to trails (the mileage overlaps with the other changes described above and shown in Table 2.02-1 and Table 2.05-5).

Season of Use

Except as allowed by permit or other authorization (i.e. routes identified for wheeled over snow use), **native** surface and **non-native** (aggregate and paved) surfaced NFTS motorized routes are open to motorized use only during the season of use shown below, unless specifically prohibited (see Season of Use Map).

1. Lower Elevations Open all year

Middle Elevations
 Open April 1 – November 30
 Upper Elevations
 Open May 15 – November 30

<u>Wet Weather Closures</u>: During the season of use, all **native** surface routes are subject to wet weather closure when 1 inch of rainfall occurs in a 24 hour period and allowing for 72 hours of drying.

Wheeled Over Snow Use: Wheeled over snow (WOS) use would be prohibited except by 4WD and ATVs when 12 inches or more of snow is present: on the routes listed in Table 2.02-2; or, where allowed by permit or other authorization.

4. **Forest Plan Amendments**: includes the non-significant route specific amendments shown in Tables 2.02-3, 2.02-4, and 2.02-5.

1.05 Principle Laws and Regulations

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requires that all major federal actions significantly affecting the human environment be analyzed to determine the magnitude and intensity of those impacts and that the results be shared with the public and the public given opportunity to comment. The regulations implementing NEPA further require that to the fullest extent possible, agencies shall prepare environmental impact statements concurrently with and integrated with environmental analyses and related surveys and studies required by the Endangered Species Act of 1973, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, and other environmental review laws and executive orders. Principle among these are the Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act of 1960, the National Forest Management Act of 1976 as expressed through the Forest Plan, the Clean Air Act of 1955, the Clean Water Act of 1948 and the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974.

Travel Management Rule (36 CFR 212, 251, 261 and 295): this Motorized Travel Management EIS is designed specifically to implement the requirements of the November 5, 2005 Rule for Travel Management, Subpart B.

1.06 DECISION FRAMEWORK

As the Responsible Official, the Forest Supervisor may decide to: (1) select the proposed action; (2) select one of the alternatives; (3) select one of the alternatives after modifying the alternative with additional mitigating measures or combination of activities from other alternatives; or, (4) select the no action alternative, choosing to take no action at this time to prohibit cross country motor vehicle travel by the public off the designated system and make changes to the existing Stanislaus National Forest Transportation System.

1.07 Public Involvement

The Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) relied on public involvement to ensure that a full range of alternatives, representing a broad array of perspectives, would be analyzed in this DEIS. Public involvement occurred during three key periods: first, in 2003 when a group of concerned publics held a community forum in to discuss OHV recreation on the Stanislaus National Forest. Over 150 individuals attended to identify issues and possible management solutions for OHV recreation. As a result of the forum, a group called the Stanislaus Recreation Stakeholders (SRS) formed with the Forest Service as an ad hoc member to discuss OHV and associated recreational issues; second, a broadened public collaboration process for Travel Management that began in 2005, and third, during the 60-day public scoping period for the proposed action.

In 2005, the Forest Service requested the SRS, with the assistance of the Center for Collaborative Policy, Sacramento State University, to serve as a design team to help develop the process for public involvement, identification of key stakeholders, and act as a sounding board for critical issues associated with motorized recreation. In 2007, they assisted in designing all the workshops for the development of the Proposed Action, and designing the workshops for rolling out the Notice of Intent. In late 2005, the Forest held three public meetings in Sonora, Greeley Hill and Arnold, sharing the route designation process developed with the State of California MOI and OHV inventory process with 240 attendees. The Forest completed the OHV inventory (step 1) in June 2006, with CD copies of the OHV Inventory mailed to 500 individuals.

In late 2006 and early 2007, the Forest held seven meetings and three open houses in Sonora, Greeley Hill, Arnold, and West Point presenting a series of "discussion proposals" to 340 attendees. Rather

than start with a "blank palette", the Forest presented an initial look at what the transportation system changes and additions might be and sought public feedback on those ideas. District personnel also met with individuals and OHV clubs, identifying important trails that were needed for the OHV recreational experience. Informal briefings were also held with the Tuolumne Band of Mi-Wuk Indians.

The Forest Service first listed the Motorized Travel Management project in the January 2007 issue of the Stanislaus National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA). The Forest distributes the SOPA to about 160 parties and it is available on the internet [http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/stanislaus/projects/sopa].

Public Scoping Period (60-days) for the Notice of Intent

On November 13, 2007 the Forest sent a scoping letter to 950 individuals, permittees, organizations, agencies, and Tribes interested in this project. The letter requested comments on the Proposed Action. The Forest Service published a Notice of Intent (NOI) that asked for public comment on the proposal between November 19, 2007 and January 18, 2008 (72 Federal Register 222, November 19, 2007; p. 64988-64991). In addition, as part of the public involvement process, the agency held five public meetings attended by 237 individuals and four open houses attended by fourteen individuals. In April, 2008, the Forest sent an informational mailing to the public, containing information on how to obtain a copy of the Scoping report.

1.08 ISSUES

Comments from the public, other agencies, and the Tuolumne Band of Mi-Wuk Indians were used to formulate issues concerning the proposed action (see project record, Public Comment Summary). 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. Non-Significant Issues were identified as those that were: 1) outside of the scope of the proposed action; 2) already determined through law, regulation, Forest Plan, or other higher level decision; 3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific fact; 5) a comment, opinion, or position statement; or, 6) a question for clarification or information. Although non-significant issues are not used to formulate alternatives or prescribe mitigation measures, the EIS will disclose all significant environmental effects including any related to non-significant issues.

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations explain this delineation in Sec. 1501.7, "...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)..." A list of non-significant issues and reasons why they were found non-significant may be found in the project record.

As described above, 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 IDT used the following significant issue statements to formulate and compare alternatives, prescribe mitigation measures, or analyze and compare the environmental effects of each alternative. The significant issue statements identify elements (individual or groups of significant issue topics) along with a cause and effect based

on public comments. Based on public comment, the IDT identified the significant issues shown in Table 1.08-1.

Table 1.08-1 Significant Issue Statements

Issue/Element	Cause and Effect
	ment 1 : Changes to NFTS routes that reduce motorized opportunities, increase restrictions on vehicle and prohibit cross-country travel, may affect forest visitors.
1.1 Motorized Opportunities ¹	 a. Changing the vehicle class and season of use may affect available camping opportunities. b. Route designations may not provide adequate motorized opportunities. c. Route designations may not provide adequate distinction between vehicle classes. d. Route designations may not provide adequate opportunities for motorized special use events. e. Vehicle class, season of use and cross-county travel restrictions may limit motorized access for big game retrieval and dispersed camping.
	ment 2: Changes to NFTS routes that increase motorized opportunities, reduce restrictions on vehicle and allow cross-country travel, may affect forest resources, private property and forest visitors.
2.1 Administration	 a. Increasing motorized use may result in increased non-compliance, unsafe conditions near private residences and unsafe encounters between forest visitors. b. Current and future budgets may not provide adequate funding for maintenance, administration and enforcement of the proposed road and trail system. c. Route designations may cause environmental impacts requiring more maintenance. d. Allowing mixed use on system routes may result in unsafe recreation opportunities.
2.2 Private Property	 a. Allowing motorized use near private property may result in noise, dust, trespass and other conflicts with private property owners. b. Some private property owners are unwilling to grant public right of way, thereby limiting motorized route opportunities.
2.3 Recreation	 a. Increasing motorized use may result in noise disturbance affecting quiet recreation opportunities. b. Increasing motorized use may result in user conflicts between forest visitors.
2.4 Resources ²	 a. Increasing motorized use may increase fire risk and the spread of noxious weeds. b. Increasing motorized use may affect heritage resources, recreation, sensitive plants, soils, vegetation, watershed and wildlife. c. Allowing motorized access for big game retrieval and dispersed camping may affect forest resources. 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. e. Increasing motorized use may result in undesirable road densities. f. Proposed seasonal closures may not adequately protect natural resources g. Motorized use may not be compatible with Roadless Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wilderness and Yosemite National Park.

 ¹ This element groups significant issues from the Routes, Special Uses and Travel Corridor topics.
 ² This element groups significant issues from the Resources, Routes, Special Areas, and Travel Corridor topics.