



The Stanislaus National Forest is pleased to announce the release of the Motorized Travel Management Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for your review and comment. The Motorized Travel Management project is part of a national effort to designate transportation systems on each National Forest. The goal is to develop a sustainable network of roads and trails that provide opportunities for access and recreation while protecting natural and cultural resources. The Final Environmental Impact Statement and decision by Forest Supervisor Susan Skalski are expected later this year.

This short guide will help you gain a basic understanding of what is in the DEIS and how to find more detailed information. It also includes some hints about how to make your comments on the DEIS the most useful and effective.

## Background

Forest Service regulations require designation of roads and trails for motor vehicle use. To designate a road or trail for motorized use, it must first be added to the National Forest Transportation System (NFTS).

About 2,260 miles of NFTS routes are currently available for public motorized use on the Stanislaus National Forest. In addition, about 250 miles of unauthorized routes exist on the Forest. These unauthorized routes vary from narrow single-track motorcycle trails, to wider routes passable by trucks and other full-size vehicles. Although many of these unauthorized routes are used by the public, none of them are part of the official NFTS. Under Forest Service regulations, these unauthorized routes can be considered for designation. If unauthorized routes are not designated, motor vehicle use on these routes will be prohibited.

Once a road or trail is part of the system, it will be designated for motorized use with the publication of a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM). The MVUM will display the designated transportation system available for public use. Publication of the MVUM completes the designation process. The prohibition on motor vehicle use off the designated system goes into effect and is enforceable when designated routes and areas are identified on an MVUM.

To help you find your way through the DEIS, the next section of this document provides an overview of the contents and organization of the three main chapters of the DEIS.

## Navigating the Document

### **Chapter 1: Purpose of and Need for Action**

One key aspect of the DEIS is the purpose and need statement described in Chapter 1. The purpose and need statement describes the problems that need to be addressed. The purpose and need serves as the basis for developing different ways to address these problems. In the language of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), these proposed solutions are called alternatives.

Chapter 1 also helps to provide geographic and management context for the project by providing a short history of the planning process, public involvement, and some of the key issues and concerns raised by the public.

### **Chapter 2: The Alternatives**

The DEIS includes five alternatives considered in detail: four action alternatives (Alternatives 1, 3, 4 and 5) and the No Action alternative (Alternative 2). 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 NEPA implementing regulations, serves as a baseline for comparison among the alternatives.

Chapter 2 describes and compares all of the alternatives considered in detail using these four components:

1. **Cross country travel:** All of the action alternatives prohibit cross-country travel.
2. **Additions to the NFTS:** Each action alternative includes unauthorized roads and trails (routes) proposed for addition to the NFTS as trails with each identified by a trail number. DEIS Appendix I (Route Data) shows the specified vehicle class, season of use and mitigations for all proposed additions to the NFTS.
3. **Changes to the existing NFTS:** The action alternatives vary in changes to the existing NFTS in terms of vehicle class, season of use and wheeled over snow use. DEIS Appendix I (Route Data) shows the specified vehicle class, season of use and mitigations for all proposed changes to the existing NFTS.
4. **Forest Plan Amendments:** Some of the alternatives include non-significant Forest Plan Amendments.

Chapter 2 also describes 16 other alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed study.

The following information briefly describes the alternatives considered in detail. Table 1 (see page 4) 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. 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.

### ***Chapter 3: Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences***

Motorized use may cause both beneficial and harmful effects to forest resources. Some routes provide important access to remote campsites, hunting grounds, and a wide variety of other desirable recreation destinations. On the other hand, motorized use of routes can also result in adverse effects such as damage to streambanks, spread of invasive weeds, and recreation use conflicts.

This DEIS discloses the effects of proposed additions and changes to the existing NFTS on forest lands, resources and uses. For purposes of NEPA, "consequences", "effects", and "impacts" mean the same thing. They include ecological, aesthetic,

historic, cultural, economic, social, or health impacts, whether adverse or beneficial.

The Forest Service must avoid impacts to cultural resources and minimize damage to resources such as soil, rare plants and wildlife. At the same time, the alternatives must also provide access to dispersed recreation opportunities such as camping, hunting, fishing, hiking, and exploring. Chapter 3 presents both the beneficial and adverse effects of the alternatives on the ten different resource sections listed below.

- Botanical Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Recreation Resources
- Roadless and Special Areas
- Society, Culture and the Economy
- Soil Resource
- Transportation Facilities
- Visual Resources
- Water Resources
- Wildlife Terrestrial and Aquatic Species

Each resource section in Chapter 3 includes the Affected Environment and the Environmental Consequences (or effects). The Affected Environment describes the current or existing conditions of a resource, such as the number of wildlife or rare plant populations near unauthorized routes. The Environmental Consequences describe the possible effects of implementing each of the alternatives on those existing conditions.

Under NEPA, the Forest Service must analyze the full range of possible effects of the alternatives. This includes effects caused by the alternatives either immediately or later in time (direct and indirect effects), as well as those which could result in "snowball effects" when added to effects caused by other unrelated activities such as livestock grazing and wildfire (cumulative effects).

## How to Comment and Timeframe

We encourage you to give us feedback on the alternatives and analysis in the DEIS. Many of you submitted comments on the Proposed Action released in November 2007. Those comments provided important input about resource concerns and recreational opportunities and were used to develop the range of alternatives analyzed in the DEIS.

Your comments on the DEIS can give the Forest Supervisor new information and perspectives to consider. Forest Supervisor Susan Skalski is considering all of the alternatives although Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) is identified as the preferred alternative at this stage of the planning process.

Once the planning process is complete and all public comments have been considered, the Forest Supervisor will make a final decision to implement one of the alternatives. The Forest Supervisor can select an alternative exactly as it is currently written, or with some slight modifications. Your comments will

help the Forest Supervisor weigh the full costs and benefits of the various alternatives when making a final decision.

While reviewing and commenting on a complex project like this may seem daunting, here are a few tips that may help.

- **Start by familiarizing yourself with the document and its contents.** Understand what each alternative addresses and why certain routes may or may not be included. You may want to focus on one of the alternatives and point to what specifically works well in that alternative as well as what you feel should be done differently.
- **If you are mainly concerned with a particular resource, you may want to focus your review on the analysis for that resource in Chapter 3.** You can provide comments on the pros and cons of the alternatives based on the effects on the resource. You can also suggest changes to the alternatives to address your concerns.
- **When looking at maps, it may be helpful to start by looking at a familiar area.** Reviewing the maps to see how each alternative deals with that one area may help you understand how the alternatives address the issues in the DEIS. The electronic maps make this particularly easy. Please refer to PDF Map Help document for helpful guidance about using the maps before you begin.
- **If providing comments on a specific route, please use the route number.** Site-specific comments could include your recommendations for whether or not to add the route to the system (and why), the type of vehicle allowed on the route, season of use restrictions, etc.
- **Solution oriented comments are most effective.** It is important to note that this comment period is not a "voting" exercise. A single comment which raises an important issue will have the same weight as thousands of identical comments.

### **60-Day Comment Period**

The Environmental Protection Agency will publish a Notice of Availability (NOA) for the DEIS in the Federal Register (expected on March 6, 2009); the opportunity to comment ends 60 days following that date. Comments may be submitted to Stanislaus National Forest; **Attn: Motorized Travel DEIS**; 19777 Greenley Road; Sonora, CA 95370. Comments may be submitted by FAX (209) 533-1890; by TTY/TDD (209) 533-0765; or, by hand-delivery to the address shown above, during normal business hours (Monday-Friday 8:00am to 4:30pm). Oral comments must be provided at the Responsible Official's office, via telephone (209) 532-3671 ext. **350**, during normal business hours.

Electronic comments, in acceptable [plain text (.txt), rich text (.rtf) or Word (.doc)] formats, may be submitted to [comments-pacificsouthwest-stanislaus@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-pacificsouthwest-stanislaus@fs.fed.us) with **Subject: Motorized Travel DEIS**. For electronically mailed comments, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgment from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgment of the receipt of the comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means [36 CFR 215.6(a)(4)(iii)]. Names and addresses of those who comment, 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; however, those who only submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR 215.

In accordance with the April 24, 2006 order issued by the US District Court for the Missoula Division of the District of Montana in Case No. CV 03-119-M-DWM, only those individuals and organizations who provide comments **during the comment period** are eligible to appeal [36 CFR 215.11(a), 1993 version]. Each individual or representative from each organization submitting comments must either sign the comments or verify identity upon request.

### Information Contact

The Stanislaus National Forest website (<http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/stanislaus/projects/ohv>) includes the latest project updates, schedules for public meetings, and other information. To request additional information regarding this project, contact Sue Warren, Team Leader; Stanislaus National Forest; 19777 Greenley Road; Sonora, CA 95370; or, e-mail [swarren@fs.fed.us](mailto:swarren@fs.fed.us) (to ensure a timely response, it is important to include "Information Request" in the subject line).

## Comparison of Alternatives

Table 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
	Elevation 2	4/1-11/30	none	none	4/1-12/31
	Elevation 3	5/15-11/30	none	none	4/1-12/31
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