



Frequently Asked Questions

Travel Management Process

1. What is Travel Management?

The Travel Management Rule (36 CFR 212, Subpart B) provides the framework for each National Forest to designate those roads and trails open to motor vehicle use and prohibit cross-country travel.

2. Who is affected by Travel Management?

Travel management decisions will affect anyone who uses a motor vehicle on the National Forests with the following **exceptions**: aircraft; watercraft; over-snow vehicles; limited administrative use by the Forest Service; use of any fire, military, emergency, or law enforcement vehicle for emergency purposes; authorized use of any combat or combat support vehicle for national defense purposes; law enforcement response to violations of law, including pursuit; motor vehicle use that is specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under federal law or regulations; and use of a road or trail that is authorized by a legally documented right-of-way held by a state, county, or other local public road authority (36 CFR 261.13).

3. Why is the Forest Service going through this process?

The Chief of the Forest Service identified unmanaged recreation - especially impacts from motor vehicles - as one of Four Threats facing the National Forests today. Unmanaged motorized use resulted in unplanned roads, trails and areas from off route use that cause erosion, watershed and habitat degradation, as well as impacts to wildlife and cultural resources. Currently, motorized travel is not prohibited off designated routes. As a result, motorized users created numerous unauthorized routes. The number of such routes grows each year with unaddressed impacts and safety concerns. The Travel Management Rule provides policy for ending this trend of unauthorized route proliferation and managing the Forest transportation system in a sustainable manner through designation of motorized facilities and the prohibition of cross-country travel.

4. Does the travel management rule interfere with my right to use public land?

Americans have every right to use their public lands, but in responsible and sustainable ways that do not diminish future use for everyone. It's a question of impact. The goal of managing the National Forests for recreation use is to allow everyone to have a pleasurable experience. Management is called for when a use threatens to damage the land or affect the experience of others.

5. How does the travel management rule affect user-created routes?

Some user-created routes are well-sited, provide excellent opportunities for outdoor recreation, and would enhance the system of designated routes and areas. Other user-created routes are poorly located and are causing unacceptable environmental impacts. The agency anticipates that some user-created routes will be designated for motor vehicle use and become part of the National Forest Transportation System (NFTS) after site-specific evaluation and public involvement.

Alternatives

6. What is proposed?

Under the Proposed Action, motor vehicle travel off NFTS routes by the public would be prohibited with parking allowed within one vehicle length; 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; and, a season of use on all routes based on elevation and wet weather closures on native surface (dirt or bedrock) routes would replace existing closures.

7. Why doesn't this proposal look at all roads for possible closure or decommissioning?

This proposal is based on implementing Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule (36 CFR 212) which requires designation of those roads and trails that are open to motor vehicle use. It considers: prohibiting cross country travel; additions to the NFTS; and, changes to the existing NFTS in terms of vehicle class and season of use. Other activities, such as those suggested are outside the scope of this analysis.

8. How can I see what happens to a specific route?

Appendix I (Route Data) and the maps show the vehicle class and season of use for all routes considered within any alternative.

9. How were the alternatives formulated and why do certain routes appear in one alternative and not another?

The action alternatives represent a wide range of perspectives designed to address the issues identified through scoping. The Forest Service used significant issues to formulate alternatives. Alternative 1 responds to the administration, motorized recreation, private property, recreation and resource issues. Alternative 2, the "No Action Alternative" provides a baseline for comparing the other alternatives. Alternative 3 responds to the administration and resource issues by prohibiting cross country travel without adding any new facilities to the NFTS. Alternative 4 responds to the motorized recreation opportunities issue by providing additional routes and reducing restrictions. 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. Each alternative includes a distinct set of routes based on the theme of that alternative as shown in the DEIS (page 28).

10. Are you closing routes and if you aren't closing them, why can't I ride on them?

Upon implementation of the cross country travel prohibitions, motor vehicle travel off NFTS routes by the public would be prohibited. This means that routes not included in the NFTS will be closed to public motorized use; however, this proposal does not authorize permanent closure and removal (decommissioning) of any routes.

11. Why are only ATVs (not 4WD vehicles) allowed to drive over-snow?

Due to safety concerns with mixed use by non-highway legal and highway legal vehicles, wheeled over snow use by 4WD vehicles is available by permit only.

12. What types of Forest Plan Amendments are proposed?

Some of the action alternatives include non-significant Forest Plan Amendments consistent with the theme of each alternative. Alternatives 1, 4 and 5 include a non-significant Forest Plan Amendment replacing a Standard and Guideline (S&G) that permitted travel up to 100 feet from routes with a new S&G that prohibits travel and allows parking within one vehicle length off of NFTS routes. Alternatives 1 and 4 include non-significant amendments allowing limited route-specific exceptions from western pond turtle and semi-primitive non-motorized S&Gs. Alternatives 2 and 3 do not include any amendments.

13. How can I comment?

The Environmental Protection Agency published a Notice of Availability (NOA) for the DEIS in the Federal Register on March 6, 2009; the opportunity to comment ends on May 5, 2009. Comments may be submitted to Stanislaus National Forest; Attn: Motorized Travel DEIS; 19777 Greenley Road; Sonora, CA 95370. Electronic comments may be submitted to comments-pacificsouthwest-stanislaus@fs.fed.us with Subject: Motorized Travel DEIS. Comments may be submitted by FAX (209) 533-1890; or, by hand-delivery to the address shown above, during normal business hours (Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.). Oral comments may be provided by calling (209) 532-3671 ext. 350.

Camping

14. What happened to the 100 foot corridors that allowed travel off of designated routes in the original proposal?

The original proposed action described in the Notice of Intent (NOI) would allow vehicle access and parking up to 100' off NFTS routes for motorized dispersed camping. Further review of this concept and public comments revealed a necessity to complete a more detailed and time consuming site-specific analysis covering thousands of acres where motor vehicles would be allowed to travel off NFTS roads. Potential impacts to cultural resources, threatened and endangered species, wildlife and other resources would need to be analyzed.

Based on recent evaluations of the timeline, budget and organizational capacity constraints, it is not feasible for the Forest to complete the required site-specific analysis needed to implement a travel corridor concept at this time. In its place, the Forest developed a strategy to provide access by proposing for addition to the NFTS, as many unauthorized campsite access spur routes as possible within the limited timeframe to complete this analysis.

15. Does this proposal shut down access to dispersed camping?

This proposal does not shut down access to dispersed camping and it does not address where you can camp. It does limit direct motorized access into some campsites; however, you will be able to park within one vehicle length of a NFTS route and camp nearby.

16. How long is one vehicle length and what happens if I'm towing a long trailer?

According to the recently issued (January 8, 2009) Forest Service Manual (FSM) 7716.1: A designation of a road or trail includes all terminal facilities, trailheads, parking lots, and turnouts associated with the road or trail. The designation also includes parking a motor vehicle on the side of the road when it is safe to do so without causing damage to National Forest resources or facilities, unless prohibited by state law, a traffic sign, or an order (36 CFR 261.54). Road designations must specify either that they include parking within one vehicle length, **or** within a specified distance of up to 30 feet, from the edge of the road surface.

The action alternatives considered in the DEIS all prohibit cross country travel and allow parking within one vehicle length of NFTS routes. Of course, vehicle length varies and is normally considered as the length of the specific motor vehicle (including trailer) in question. This means that a vehicle towing a trailer would be allowed to park within one vehicle length (vehicle plus trailer) of the NFTS route as long as it is not causing damage to National Forest resources or otherwise prohibited (36 CFR 261.54).

17. Why haven't you inventoried all the campsite access routes?

The Forest inventoried approximately 200 campsite access routes that are evaluated for addition to the NFTS under Alternatives 1 and 4. Further inventory of about 1,000 other campsite access routes is ongoing and they are not precluded from future consideration in a subsequent analysis.

18. Why am I just now finding out about this proposal and how it affects access to dispersed camping?

The Stanislaus National Forest conducted public outreach since beginning the Motorized Travel Management effort. The Forest held 22 meetings and open houses; issued news releases; published official notices in the Union Democrat newspaper of record and the Federal Register; and, posted project updates on the Forest's website. All notifications and outreach efforts solicited public involvement and comment.

Decision and Implementation

19. Who will make the decision; when is it expected; and, what is the available decision space?

As the Responsible Official, the Forest Supervisor will make a decision in the fall of 2009. 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.

20. How will you enforce the plan?

After a decision, the Forest Service will publish a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM), which will be an enforceable federal regulation. Compliance and enforcement efforts will begin by educating the public about the newly designated NFTS. Violation notices may be issued, but the main emphasis will be on education for the first year or two of implementation.

21. What is a wet weather closure and how will it be implemented?

Native surface (dirt or bedrock) 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. Wet weather closures of native surface routes may be implemented in local use areas based on monitoring local conditions.

22. How and when will you implement the mitigation measures?

Appendix I (Route Data) lists mitigations and other requirements, while they are further defined in Appendix F (Maintenance and Mitigation Definitions). The Forest will utilize a combination of Forest Service funding, grant funding and volunteer labor to complete the mitigations. Specific mitigations must be completed prior to designation of the route for public motorized use.