



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Stanislaus National Forest

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Dear Stakeholder:

The Stanislaus National Forest (STF) will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) disclosing the impacts of a forestwide (outside of Wilderness and other non-motorized areas) proposed action which focuses on the prohibition of wheeled motorized vehicle travel off designated routes and changes to the STF transportation system, including the addition of user-created routes and changes to existing motor vehicle restrictions.

BACKGROUND

Over the past few decades, the availability and capability of motorized vehicles, particularly off-highway vehicles (OHVs) and sport utility vehicles (SUVs) has increased tremendously. Nationally, the number of OHV users has 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, up 330% since 1980. Annual sales of ATVs and OHV motorcycles in California were the highest in the U.S. for the last 5 years. Four-wheel drive vehicle sales had also increased by 1500% to 3,046,866 from 1989 to 2002 in California.

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 wheeled vehicles on maps of the 19 National Forests in California by 2007.” On November 9, 2005, the Forest Service published final travel management regulations in the Federal Register (FR Vol. 70, No. 216-Nov. 9, 2005, pp 68264-68291). This final Travel Management Rule requires designation of those roads, trails, and areas that are open to motor vehicle use on National Forests. Designations will be made by class of vehicle and, if appropriate, by time of year. The final rule prohibits the use of motor vehicles off the designated system as well as use of motor vehicles on routes and in areas that are not designated.

Unmanaged Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use has 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 Forest Service, June 2004).

In accordance with the MOI, the STF recently completed an inventory of motorized use on NFS lands and identified approximately 270 miles of unauthorized routes. The STF then used an interdisciplinary process to conduct travel analysis that included working with the public to determine whether any of the inventoried motorized routes should be proposed for addition to the STF transportation system. Roads and trails that are currently part of the STF transportation system and are open to wheeled motorized vehicle travel will be designated for such use as described below under the Proposed Action. The proposed action focuses only on the prohibition of wheeled motorized vehicle travel off designated routes and needed changes to the STF transportation system, including the addition of user-created routes to the STF



transportation system and changes to existing motor vehicle restrictions.

The proposed action is being carried forward in accordance with the Travel Management Rule (36 CFR Part 212). Following a decision on this proposal, the STF will publish a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) identifying all STF roads and trails that are designated for motor vehicle use. The MVUM shall specify the classes of vehicles and, if appropriate, the times of year for which use is designated.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The STF currently manages approximately 3,400 miles of NFS roads and 60 miles of NFS motorized trails. Recent travel analysis identified the following needs for changes to the NFS of roads and motorized trails:

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

Currently, wheeled motorized vehicle travel by the public is not prohibited off designated routes. As a result, motorized vehicle users have created numerous unauthorized routes. The number of such routes continues to grow each year with unaddressed environmental impacts and safety concerns. The Travel Management Rule, 36 CFR Part 212, provides policy for ending this trend of unauthorized route proliferation and managing the Forest transportation system in a sustainable manner through designation of motorized NFS roads, trails and areas, and the prohibition of cross-country travel.

2. There is a need for limited changes to the National Forest Transportation System to:

- 2.1 Provide a diversity of wheeled motorized recreation opportunities (4WD, motorcycles, ATVs, passenger vehicles, etc.).
- 2.2 Provide wheeled motorized access to dispersed recreation opportunities such as camping, hunting, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, etc.
- 2.3 Protect FS administrative sites and protect hydropower facilities.

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)). In meeting these needs the proposed action must also achieve the following purposes:

- a. Avoid impacts to cultural resources.
- b. Provide for public safety.
- c. Provide for a diversity of recreational opportunities.
- d. Assure adequate access to public and private lands.
- e. Provide for adequate maintenance and administration of designations based on availability of resources and funding to do so.
- f. Minimize damage to soil, vegetation and other forest resources.
- g. Avoid harassment of wildlife and significant disruption of wildlife habitat.
- h. Minimize conflicts between wheeled motor vehicles and existing or proposed recreational uses of NFS lands.
- i. Minimize conflicts among different classes of wheeled motor vehicle uses of NFS lands or neighboring federal lands.
- j. Assure compatibility of wheeled motor vehicle use with existing conditions in populated areas, taking into account sound, emissions, etc.
- k. Honor valid existing rights of use and access (rights-of-way).

PROPOSED ACTION

Based on the stated purpose and need for action, and as a result of the travel analysis process, the STF proposes to change the use of 324 miles of NFS roads and add approximately 142.5 miles to its NFS motorized trails. These changes would adjust the total NFS roads to approximately 3,415 miles and the total NFS motorized trails to 186.2 miles. The proposed action includes the following items:

1. Add approximately 126.2 miles of existing unauthorized routes to the National Forest System (NFS) of trails open to public wheeled motorized use.
2. Add approximately 0.03 miles of unauthorized routes to the NFS of roads open to public wheeled motorized use.
3. Convert approximately 16.3 miles of existing NFS roads to NFS trails open to public wheeled motorized use.
4. Change approximately 11.6 miles of existing NFS roads closed to public wheeled motorized use to NFS roads open to public wheeled motorized use.
5. Change approximately 24.5 miles of existing NFS roads open to public wheeled motorized use to NFS roads closed to public wheeled motorized use.
6. Change approximately 73.7 miles of existing NFS roads open to highway legal vehicles only to NFS roads open to all public wheeled motorized use.
7. Change approximately 214.2 miles of existing NFS roads open to all public wheeled motorized use to NFS roads open to highway legal vehicles only.
8. Prohibit public motorized travel off of designated NFS roads and trails except where: (a) traveling up to 100 feet off of designated NFS roads and NFS trails for direct access to campsites, parking, woodcutting, or gathering forest products provided that no resource damage occurs and such access is not otherwise prohibited, totaling approximately 2,272.9 miles or, (b) allowed by permit or other authorization, totaling 1.0 miles.
9. Provide for certain seasonal closures to wheeled motorized travel on NFS roads and trails to protect resources, totaling approximately 837.5 miles

Maps and tables describing in detail both the STF transportation system and the proposed action can be found at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/stanislaus/projects/ohv> and in the enclosed CD.

PRELIMINARY ISSUES

A number of public meetings have been held over the course of the year to discuss possible proposed actions for the roads and trails system on the Forest. Some preliminary issues have been identified and are as follows. This list is not all encompassing.

- Meet Wild and Scenic values in the Clavey river corridor;
- Whatever system is established, law enforcement will need to play a key role in implementation
- Protect wildlife with seasonal road and trail closures
- Encourage consideration of all uses in this process
- Volunteers will be needed to implement and maintain any trail system
- Balancing competing needs will be a big challenge
- Retention of trails not designated for motorized use should be retained for other recreational uses
- Private land issues associated with trespass, dust, and noise

- Loss of access
- Loss of recreational opportunities
- Change
- Mutual respect of recreationists' needs
- No net loss
- Loss of old trails from old maps
- Right of way and public access to NFS lands
- Roadless and trails
- Access from Bear Valley important

DECISION TO BE MADE

The project area is forestwide (outside of Wilderness and other non-motorized areas). The responsible official will decide whether to adopt and implement the proposed action, an alternative to the proposed action, or take no action to make changes to the existing Stanislaus National Forest Transportation System and prohibit cross country wheeled motorized vehicle travel by the public off the designated system. Previous NEPA decisions that addressed motorized use of NFS roads and trails on three areas on the Forest: the Summit Ranger District, the Interface Trails, and the Granite Watershed Enhancement Project on Groveland, are not being reconsidered at this time.

Once the decision is made, the Stanislaus National Forest will publish a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) identifying the roads, trails and areas that are designated for motor vehicle use. The MVUM shall specify the classes of vehicles and, if appropriate, the times of year for which use is designated.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL

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

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The public has been involved in several meetings to help develop the proposed action. A summary of the comments and how they were used in the development of this Proposed Action can be found at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/stanislaus/projects/ohv> and on the enclosed CD.

COMMENT REQUESTED

Public participation is important at numerous points during the analysis. The Forest Service seeks information, comments, and assistance from the federal, state, and local agencies and individuals or organizations that may be interested in or affected by the proposed action.

Comments on the proposed action should be submitted within **60 days** of the date of publication of the **Notice of Intent** in the **Federal Register**. The Notice of Intent initiates the scoping process which guides the development of the environmental impact statement. A draft EIS is expected by May 2008 followed by a 45 comment period on the draft EIS with the final EIS completed by October 2008.

Comments may be submitted to: Stanislaus National Forest; **Attn: Motorized Travel**; 19777 Greenley Road; Sonora, CA 95370. Comments may be submitted by FAX [209-533-1890] or by hand-delivery to the address shown above, during normal business hours (Monday-Friday 8:00am to 4:30pm). Electronic comments, in acceptable plain text (.txt), rich text (.rtf), or Word (.doc) formats, may be submitted to comments-pacificsouthwest-stanislaus@fs.fed.us with **Subject: Motorized Travel**.

Please include the following information with your comments:

- Your name, address (include in any e-mail correspondence) and, if possible, telephone number.
- Site-specific facts or comments concerning the proposed transportation changes along with supporting information that you believe I should be considering in reaching a decision.

INFORMATION CONTACT

Sue Warren, Stanislaus National Forest, 19777 Greenley Road; Sonora, CA 95370; phone: (209) 532-3671 ext. 321; or, e-mail: swarren@fs.fed.us .

I look forward to talking with you on this important issue. We have scheduled a series of public workshops and open houses to facilitate dialogue and an exchange of ideas. Please check the enclosed flyer for meeting times and location as well as our website.

Sincerely,

/s/ Tom Quinn
TOM QUINN
Forest Supervisor