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SCOPING DOCUMENT

BRIDGEPORT RANGER DISTRICT

TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PROJECT

HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST



INTRODUCTION

This scoping document is part of the public involvement process for the proposed Bridgeport Ranger District Travel Management Project. The project addresses motorized travel on the 1.2 million acre Ranger District (Map, Page 6). The purpose of this document is to provide initial information on the proposed project and to invite your comments. Public involvement is encouraged and is used for identifying issues that are relevant to this project.

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.

Unmanaged 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).

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.

On some NFS lands, long managed as open to cross-country motor vehicle travel, repeated use

has resulted in unplanned, unauthorized, roads and trails. These routes generally developed without environmental analysis or public involvement, and do not have the same status as NFS roads and NFS trails included in the forest transportation system. Nevertheless, some unauthorized routes are well-sited, provide excellent opportunities for outdoor recreation by motorized and non-motorized users, and would enhance the National Forest system of designated roads, trails and areas. Other unauthorized routes are poorly located and cause unacceptable impacts. Only NFS roads and NFS trails can be designated for motorized vehicle use. In order for an unauthorized route to be designated, it must first be added to the national forest transportation system (NFTS).

The Bridgeport Ranger District recently completed an inventory of unauthorized routes on NFS lands and identified approximately 800 miles of unauthorized routes. The Bridgeport Ranger District then used an interdisciplinary process to conduct travel analysis that included working with the public to determine whether any of the unauthorized routes should be proposed for addition to the Bridgeport Ranger District transportation system in this proposed action. About 300 miles of routes are currently being considered for addition to the system. Routes that are currently part of the Bridgeport Ranger District transportation system and are open to motorized vehicle travel will remain open. This proposal focuses only on the restriction of motorized vehicle travel to designated routes and needed changes to the Bridgeport Ranger District transportation system, including the addition of some user-created routes to the Bridgeport Ranger District transportation. The proposed action is being carried forward in accordance with the Travel Management Rule (36 CFR Part 212).

PURPOSE AND NEED

There is a need for regulation of unmanaged motorized vehicle travel by the public. Currently, motorized vehicle travel by the public is not prohibited off designated routes in much of the Ranger District. In their enjoyment of the

National Forest, motorized vehicle users have created numerous unauthorized routes. The number of such routes continues to grow each year with many routes having environmental impacts and safety concerns that have not been addressed. 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.

There is a need for limited changes and additions to the Bridgeport Ranger District transportation system to:

- Provide motorized access to dispersed recreation opportunities (camping, hunting, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, etc.)
- Provide a diversity of motorized recreation opportunities (4X4 vehicles, 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)).

In meeting these needs the proposed action should also achieve the following purposes:

- Limit impacts to cultural resources.
- Provide for public safety.
- Provide for a diversity of recreational opportunities.
- Assure adequate access to public and private lands.
- Provide for adequate maintenance and administration of designations based on availability of resources and funding to do so.
- Minimize damage to soil, vegetation and other forest resources.
- Avoid harassment of wildlife and significant disruption of wildlife habitat.
- Minimize conflicts between motor vehicles and existing or proposed recreational uses of NFS lands.

- Minimize conflicts among different classes of motor vehicle uses of NFS lands or neighboring federal lands.
- Assure compatibility of motor vehicle use with existing conditions in populated areas, taking into account sound, emissions, etc.
- Have valid existing rights of use and access (rights-of-way).

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The first formal opportunity to comment on the Bridgeport Ranger District Travel Management Project is during the scoping process (40 CFR 1501.7), which begins with the issuance of this Notice of Intent. All comments, including the names, addresses and when provided, will be placed in the record and are available for public inspection. The Forest Service is seeking comments from individuals, organizations, and local, state, and Federal agencies that may be interested in or affected by the proposed action. Comments may pertain to the nature and scope of the environmental, social, and economic issues, and possible alternatives related to the development of the travel management plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

A series of public open houses are scheduled to explain the proposed travel plan and route designation process and to provide an opportunity for public input:

- Hawthorne, Nevada: December 8, 4-6 pm. Mineral County Public Library. 1st and A St. Hawthorne, NV.
- Bridgeport, California: December 9, 4-6 pm Memorial Hall, 100 Sinclair St. Bridgeport, CA.
- Smith Valley, Nevada: December 10, 6-8 pm. Smith Valley High School Multi Purpose Room, 20 Day Lane, Smith, NV.

Times, dates and locations will also be posted through local public notice and on the project webpage at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/htnf>. Written comments will be accepted at these meetings.

Public involvement will be ongoing throughout the EIS process. However, written scoping comments should be received by December 31, 2008. Comments received, including the names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposal and will be available for public inspection.

PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action would restrict motor vehicles to designated roads and trails, consistent with the national travel management rule; and change the forest transportation system, including the recognition and designation of certain user-created routes for motor vehicle use.

The Ranger District currently manages about 1,500 miles of motor vehicle routes for public use. Motor vehicles will continue to be welcome on these roads and trails. The proposed action would recognize and adopt an additional 300 additional miles of existing informal (user-created) roads and trails. Most of these have been in existence for many years, but have not been recognized as a part of the forest transportation system. Maps describing the proposed action can found at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/htnf/projects/#bridgeport> CDs with copies of the maps area available on request from the Bridgeport Ranger District. In addition, maps will be available for viewing at the Bridgeport Ranger District, HC 62, Box 1000; Bridgeport, CA 93517.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

The starting point for this project is the current forest road system and existing motor vehicle use restrictions and prohibitions. The no action alternative makes no change to the system, restrictions, or prohibitions. All user-created routes that are currently open would remain open to motorized vehicle use and cross country travel off those routes would continue to be allowed in areas where current restrictions do not apply.

Scope of Project

The geographic scope of this project is the Bridgeport Ranger District of the Humboldt-

Toiyabe National Forest. It does not include any lands not under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Forest Service.

Physical route closures are not within the scope of this project. Any such physical closures would require separate decisions and associated environmental analysis on a site specific scale. The decision resulting from this analysis is expected to provide general travel management direction on the Bridgeport Ranger District for the foreseeable future. Minor adjustments to the travel management system are anticipated on an annual basis as better information is available and on-the-ground conditions change. Forest Service regulations (36 CFR 212) require the publication of a motor vehicle use map that displays the decisions from this project. The regulations provide for annual updates to that map that will include any future adjustments to the travel management system.

PRELIMINARY ISSUES

- Designating motorized routes and prohibiting motorized use off those designated routes would reduce disturbance and resource impacts across the district.
- The Proposed Action has the potential to change current use patterns by restricting motorized travel to designated routes. Forest visitors would no longer be authorized to drive cross-country to hunt, retrieve game, create dispersed camp sites, or engage in other cross country motorized off-road recreation opportunities. By prohibiting cross-country travel and reducing the extent of dispersed camping, the Proposed Action could result in diminished recreation experience.
- The user-created routes being considered for designation as either NFS roads or NFS trails developed overtime and through use may be in areas that are ill suited for the road or trail locations. This may result in impacts to watershed conditions, wildlife, fish and rare plant habitats, non-motorized recreation areas, heritage resources, and nearby roadless areas. Designating these routes and authorizing continued use may cause

continued impacts to these resources.

COMMENTING GUIDANCE

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns about the project, comments or suggestions should be as specific as possible. It is also helpful if comments refer to specific routes, whenever possible. Comments are also welcome on the proposed action, issues, and alternatives described in this scoping document. Reviewers may wish to refer to the National Environmental Policy Act Regulations at 40 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points.

Email comments are preferred, they should be sent to **comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-bridgeport@fs.fed.us**. You may also fax, hand-deliver, or send hard copy comments to: 1) FAX#: 760-932-5899) Address: Travel Management Team, Bridgeport Ranger District, HC62, Box 1000, Bridgeport, CA 93517. Comments received, including the names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposal and will be available for public inspection.

For further information please contact David Loomis, Travel Management Project Manager, at 775-884-8132.

