

Document Number

599

20100709_WilliamsRD_TMP_DN_FONSI.pdf

Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)
for the
Williams Ranger District
Travel Management Project

Kaibab National Forest
Coconino County, Arizona

Introduction

The Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact for the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Williams Ranger District Travel Management Project are presented here. The Decision Notice documents my decision and provides my explanation of the management and environmental reasons I used to make my decision. The FONSI presents the reasons why I find this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment and therefore an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

The Environmental Assessment (EA) completed for this project is incorporated by reference in this Decision Notice/FONSI. The Decision Notice/FONSI documents the following:

- Background information regarding my decision;
- My decision to select Alternative 3;
- The rationale for my decision;
- The alternatives considered;
- A Finding of No Significant Impact;
- The implementation date;
- The rights to appeal and administrative review;
- Contact information; and
- My signature and date, as the responsible official.

Background

The proposed travel management project for the Williams Ranger District of the Kaibab National Forest (KNF) is intended to improve the management of motorized vehicle use on the District in accordance with the Travel Management Rule. An EA was prepared to document the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives to the proposed action. An open, inclusive approach was used in the planning process to help me make this decision. My intent is to continue with this model as we implement the travel management rule. Although I make this decision is based on the best available science and information currently on hand, it is not without some uncertainty or risk. I fully expect that by placing an emphasis on monitoring, any needed course for corrections or adjustments will be made.

I want to also note that the EA and this decision are somewhat different than those done for more typical vegetation management projects. This project has revealed some deep-rooted social values that are difficult to capture and address, especially when considering the rules and

regulations the Forest is required to implement. In my judgment though, the changes and restrictions that will result from this decision will be largely beneficial for the cultural and natural resources we all enjoy on the Kaibab National Forest. The decision I am making will provide for ample opportunities for the public to continue to enjoy the Kaibab National Forest and will also substantially reduce the potential for resource damage in environmentally sensitive areas.

In February 2010, the Williams Ranger District began the official 30-day comment period for the Williams Ranger District Travel Management Project Environmental Assessment (EA). A legal notice was published in the *Arizona Daily Sun* on February 7, 2010 inviting public comment on the Proposed Action and EA. The comment period provided an opportunity for the public to provide early and meaningful participation on the proposed action prior to a decision being made.

I have made my decision after careful review and consideration of the public comments and analyses prepared for this project. I considered all comments collected during the Open Houses held beginning in September of 2006 thru March 2010, as well as individual comments received throughout the planning process. I have reviewed the other alternatives presented in the EA, the alternative maps and the non-significant amendment to the Forest Plan. The following pages document my decision and rationale for selecting Alternative 3.

Decision

Based on the EA completed for this project and comments received from scoping and the 30-day public review of the EA for Comment, it is my decision to select and implement Alternative 3.

My decision includes a non-significant amendment to the Kaibab National Forest Land Management Plan (DN, Appendix 1) to make the plan compliant with the Travel Management Rule (TMR) and will result in the publication of a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) showing those roads, trails and areas designated for motor vehicle use on the Williams Ranger District.

To meet the purpose and need for action in accordance with the Travel Management Rule, implementation of Alternative 3 will do the following:

- Amend the KNF Forest Plan to prohibit motorized travel off of designated routes on the Williams Ranger District, except as identified on the Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM).
- Close approximately 380 miles of currently open roads. These roads would be moved to Maintenance Level 1.
- Add approximately 16 miles of roads to the designated road system. This includes 8 miles of formerly closed roads and 8 miles of unauthorized user-created routes.
- Add approximately 18 miles of short spur roads to the designated system. These routes have historically served as access to dispersed camping sites (and other activities) on the District.

- Allow the limited use of motor vehicles within one mile of all designated system roads (except where prohibited) to retrieve a legally hunted and tagged elk during all elk hunting seasons as designated by the Arizona Game and Fish Department, and for 24 hours following the end of each season.
 - Only one vehicle (one trip in and one trip out) would be allowed for Motorized Big Game Retrieval (MBGR) per harvested animal.
 - Hunters will be required to use the most direct and least ground disturbing route in and out of the area to accomplish the retrieval.
 - MBGR would not be allowed in existing off road travel restricted areas, or when conditions are such that travel would cause damage to natural and/or cultural resources.
 - Motorized vehicles would not be permitted to cross riparian areas, streams and rivers except at hardened crossings or crossings with existing culverts.

The table below summarizes the Key Features of the Selected Alternative.

Key Feature	Description
Changes to Designated Road System	Close approx. 380 miles (move to ML 1). Add approx. 34 miles to designated system (at ML 2) which includes 8 miles of formerly closed, 8 miles of unauthorized user created routes and Add approx. 18 miles of short spur roads.
Designated Open Road System Mileage (FS Jurisdiction)	ML2 – 994 ML3 – 110 ML4 – 10 TOTAL: 1,114
Motorized Dispersed Camping	Adds approx. 18 miles of short spurs to the system and continues to allow roadside parking along all open roads.
Motorized Trails	No motorized trails would be designated.
Motorized Big Game Retrieval	Allows for MBGR of legally downed elk: Up to 1 mile off all designated open roads One trip that uses most direct route and least ground disturbing No time or seasonal restrictions

Fuelwood Gathering and Special Forest Products Management Strategy

I have heard several times and am well aware that fuelwood and Special Forest Product (SFP) collection on the Williams Ranger District is a popular and necessary activity for many local users of the National Forest. I can assure you that the District will continue to offer fuelwood and SFP permits to meet local demands. The District will also continue to accommodate the collection of special forest products and fuelwood by Native Americans for traditional use per the existing MOU and law, regulation, and policy. Fuelwood/SFP gathering will continue to be permitted on the Williams Ranger District, provided that:

- 1) The permittee does not travel off of designated open system roads (except for roadside parking) and is in compliance with permit stipulations; or,
- 2) The permittee is in a designated area that authorizes off road travel for fuelwood/SFP collection.

Areas that allow fuelwood/SFP collection off of the designated open roads are, and will continue to be approved through subsequent environmental analysis and authorization.

Mitigation Measures Specific to the Selected Alternative

The Forest Service will apply the following mitigation measures to this alternative:

- Prohibit the use of motor vehicles for dispersed camping or for the purpose of retrieving a legally taken elk when it results in damage to natural and cultural resources and/or compromises the ability of the Forest Service to meet management objectives.
- Implement the Wet Weather Roads Policy (see glossary) when soil moisture conditions and the potential for road and resource damage exist. Implementation of the policy is at the discretion of the Forest Supervisor or District Ranger.
- Implement Appendix B “Design Features, Best Management Practices, and Mitigation Measures” in the “Final Environmental Impact Statement for Integrated Treatment of Noxious or Invasive Weeds on the Coconino, Kaibab, and Prescott National Forests within Coconino, Gila, Mojave, and Yavapai Counties, Arizona” (2004).

Monitoring Specific to the Selected Alternative

Monitoring entails the gathering of information and observation of management activities to ensure that Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines as well as the objectives of the project are being met. Forest Plan monitoring and evaluation items will be implemented where appropriate. Additional monitoring needs were also compiled for this project to validate assumptions used in this planning process, and to verify that the project is being implemented as intended. This analysis includes the following project specific monitoring:

- Monitor the road system and determine if there are roads that could be decommissioned or obliterated in future planning projects.
- Areas with limited use of motor vehicles for the purposes of dispersed camping and big game retrieval will be monitored to assess for damage to natural and cultural resources and/or frequently occurring actions that compromise the ability of the Forest Service to meet management objectives. This monitoring will occur in conjunction with other project or management activities, including enforcement of the Wet Weather Roads Policy.
 - If soil damage and/or excessive damage to vegetation are discovered, the Forest Service will take the necessary action to move the area into compliance with the Forest Plan. This may include temporarily or permanently closing areas to motorized vehicle use. All permanent closure proposals will follow the required NEPA process.
- Designated roads as well as closed roads and dispersed camping routes will be monitored periodically for ruts, erosion, or sedimentation of water bodies. This monitoring will occur in conjunction with other project or management activities, including enforcement of the Wet Weather Roads Policy.

- If damage, erosion, or sedimentation of water bodies is discovered, the Forest Service may repair or upgrade the roads and routes. Temporary or permanent closures of roads and/or forest access spur roads may be necessary. Decommissioning or obliteration of closed roads (i.e. block access rip compaction, re-vegetate) may be necessary. All closure, decommissioning, or obliteration proposals will follow the required NEPA process.
- Staff will continue to do annual invasive exotic weed inventory and monitoring in conjunction with other project or management activities. Areas targeted for weed surveys will include all roads and unauthorized routes.
 - If weed populations are discovered, the Forest Service may temporarily close specific roads, dispersed camping routes, or areas that allow motorized vehicle use for big game retrieval, until the weeds are controlled.
- Known rare plant populations will be monitored periodically for impacts. Surveys for new populations of rare plants will be conducted periodically in conjunction with other project and management work in the area.
 - If new rare plant populations are discovered, the Forest Service may close specific roads, road segments, or prohibit the use of motorized vehicles for the retrieval of legally taken big game in the area. Road or area closures or road decommissioning may be needed if motorized vehicle travel is harming or has the potential to harm rare plants. All closure proposals will follow the required NEPA process.
- Monitor motor vehicle use for compliance with the Motorized Vehicle Use Map and forest closures. Adjust management strategies as needed to increase compliance.

Rationale for the Decision

I made my decision based on the best science and information available and carefully considered applicable laws, regulations and policy. I also considered the information disclosed in the EA, the Forest Plan and the project's record. I considered how the alternatives in the EA met the stated Purpose and Need for Action, and how they addressed the key issues. I carefully considered public, tribal governments, and State and other Federal agencies' comments. In summary, my decision to select Alternative 3 is based on the following factors:

1. How the alternative meets the Purpose and Need for Action.
2. How the alternative addresses the Key Issues developed from scoping.
3. How the alternative responds to public comment.

1. Meeting the Purpose and Need for Action (Section 1.3 of the EA)

The purpose of this action is to improve the management of motorized vehicle use on National Forest System lands on the Williams Ranger District (WRD) of the Kaibab National Forest (KNF) in accordance with the Travel Management Rule (36 CFR 212, 251 and 261). The action is needed to:

- **Amend the KNF Plan to prohibit motor vehicle use off the designated system of roads, trails, and areas on the district, except as displayed on the MVUM;** Currently,

the KNF Plan allows for motorized travel off of forest roads. Amending the plan will bring travel management policies in compliance with the Rule.

- **Reduce adverse resource impacts caused by roads and motorized cross country travel in order to maintain and restore the health of ecosystems and watersheds;** Some existing system roads are creating unacceptable resource damage while cross country travel has resulted in the creation of unauthorized roads, many of which can damage and/or provide unwanted motorized access to sensitive resources on the WRD.
- **Specify the appropriate uses of motor vehicles on the designated road system and provide opportunities for motorized dispersed camping and motorized retrieval of legally taken big game animals;** These popular activities each present social and environmental implications that need to be addressed in the implementation of the Rule. Road designations and the accommodation of recreation opportunities must meet the social, environmental, and safety criteria outlined in the Rule. Cooperation with State agencies in achieving game and habitat management objectives while protecting other forest resources is directed by the KNF Plan and other regional and national guidance.

I find that Alternative 1 does not comply with the Purpose and Need for Action since it would continue with the current management of the District transportation system and not implement the Travel Management Rule. Implementation of Alternative 1 would not restrict motor vehicle use or make any needed changes to the transportation system. Motorized cross country travel would continue to be allowed, except in the areas currently closed to off road vehicle travel; existing roads would remain open and unchanged. Motorized dispersed camping and motorized big game retrieval would continue to be allowed across the District. Unauthorized routes would continue to be available for public use, and would likely increase in number. The wet weather road system would continue to be implemented when necessary. A Forest Plan Amendment would not be included under the No Action alternative to prohibit cross country travel; and, Plan language would remain unchanged.

In contrast, I find that the action alternatives analyzed in the EA, including the selected alternative, meet the purpose and need for action and the requirements of the travel management rule. The Selected Alternative best addresses the purpose and need for action by reducing adverse resource impacts on 380 miles of roads and substantially reducing motorized cross country travel while continuing to provide a variety of recreational opportunities.

2. Addressing Key Issues (Section 1.9 of the EA)

The Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) used scoping comments from the public, tribal governments, State and other Federal agencies to identify the key issues to be analyzed. Three key issues were identified for this project and those issues, along with the indicator(s) of each issue are described in Chapter 1, Section 1.9. The following is a brief summary of how the alternatives responded to each key issue (EA, Chapter 2, Table 4).

Alternative 1 – No Action

Key Issue 1 – The proposed action would restrict motorized recreation opportunities because of the prohibition of motorized cross country travel, the extent of road closures and the restrictions placed on Motorized Big Game Retrieval.

Alternative 1 provides for 1680 miles of roads open to motorized use, which includes existing system roads and known unauthorized roads. As a result, there would be little to no restrictions on motorized recreation opportunities and motorized cross country travel would continue to be authorized. This alternative would not close any roads having resource concerns and would not change any restrictions on motorized big game retrieval.

Key Issue 2 – *The proposed action allows for motorized dispersed camping and motorized big game retrieval across a large area of the district and is not used sparingly.*

Alternative 1 would continue to allow for motorized dispersed camping across the entire District, except in areas currently restricted. Motorized big game retrieval would continue to be allowed for all big game species across the entire District, except where cross country travel is already prohibited.

Key Issue 3 – *The proposed action does not close enough miles of road to protect wildlife and plant habitats, watersheds, and archaeological resources.*

Alternative 1 would not close any roads and would allow for a continuing decline in scenery integrity, soil, watershed, sensitive plants and cultural resource conditions. The average forest-wide open road density for Alternative 1 would be 1.92 mi/mi².

Overall, Alternative 1 does not meet the stated Purpose and Need for Action and does not adequately address all of the Key Issues. Compared with the Selected Alternative and other alternatives analyzed in detail, implementing Alternative 1 would respond the best to Key Issue 1 because of the lack of restrictions on motor vehicle use. This Alternative is reflective of many commenters' desires to continue to allow cross-country travel and not change the District's transportation system. However, Alternative 1 would not address Key Issues 2 & 3 because it does not restrict cross country travel for any purpose nor does it propose to close any roads with resource concerns.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

Key Issue 1 – *The proposed action would restrict motorized recreation opportunities because of the prohibition of motorized cross country travel, the extent of road closures and the restrictions placed on Motorized Big Game Retrieval.*

Alternative 2 provides for 1114 miles of open road and 25 miles of motorized trails. The ability to have a quality recreation experience would continue and this alternative would provide for the greatest mix of motorized recreation opportunities (road and trail riding). This alternative would prohibit motorized cross country travel (except as identified on the MVUM), close 380 miles of roads identified in the TAP as having resource concerns, and restrict motorized big game retrieval.

Key Issue 2 – *The proposed action allows for motorized dispersed camping and motorized big game retrieval across a large area of the district and is not used sparingly.*

Motorized big game retrieval would be restricted to elk only; retrieval would also only be allowed during the warmer months of September and October. Motor vehicles would be restricted to traveling no more than one mile off of the designated road. Dispersed camping would be restricted to camping corridors identified on 220 miles of open system roads and 18

miles of short spur roads historically used for dispersed camping.

Key Issue 3 – *The proposed action does not close enough miles of road to protect wildlife and plant habitats, watersheds, and archaeological resources.*

Alternative 2 would close 380 miles of road which equates to an average forest-wide open road density of 1.27 mi/mi². This would provide for more resource protection than Alternative 1 but will not necessarily eliminate all effects to the resources.

Overall, I find that Alternative 2 meets the purpose and need for action. However, the public input and analysis provided in the EA describe some concerns and environmental consequences with the proposed motorized trail system adjacent to private lands. I have determined that further analysis is needed regarding a motorized trail system, and that a decision to add motorized trails is not appropriate at this time. Compared with the Selected Alternative, Alternative 2 would apply seasonal restrictions to motorized big game retrieval and not address Key Issue 1 as well as the Selected Alternative. Alternative 2 does not address Key Issues 2 & 3 as well as the Selected Alternative because of the potential resource impacts from incorporating camping corridors.

Alternative 3 – The Selected Alternative

Key Issue 1 – *The proposed action would restrict motorized recreation opportunities because of the prohibition of motorized cross country travel, the extent of road closures and the restrictions placed on Motorized Big Game Retrieval.*

Alternative 3 provides for 1114 miles of open road. The ability to have a quality recreation experience would continue as forest roads vary in condition and provide some challenging riding opportunities.

The Selected Alternative would prohibit motorized cross country travel (except as identified on the MVUM) and close 380 miles of roads identified in the TAP as having resource concerns. While this alternative closes 380 miles of road, it provides for 35 miles of more open road system than Alternative 4. The retention of 35 miles of road in the selected alternative responds better to Key Issue 1 than Alternative 4.

Alternative 3 would allow the limited use of motor vehicles to retrieve a legally hunted and tagged elk during all elk hunting seasons, except where prohibited. Therefore this alternative is less restrictive than Alternative 2 and more responsive to public comments and desires to retain motorized big game retrieval.

Key Issue 2 – *The proposed action allows for motorized dispersed camping and motorized big game retrieval across a large area of the district and is not used sparingly.*

While Alternative 3 allows for motorized big game retrieval, it places limitations on these activities. MBGR is limited to a single species, elk, and hunters would be restricted to one trip in and one trip out when retrieving their game. Motor vehicles would be restricted to traveling no more than one mile off of the designated road in order to retrieve their elk.

Alternative 3 does not include any camping corridors, but adds 18 miles of short spur roads that have historically been used for motorized dispersed camping (and other recreation

activities). It limits motorized dispersed camping to roadside parking along the open road system. This approach greatly reduces the potential for impacts compared with Alternative 2.

Key Issue 3 – *The proposed action does not close enough miles of road to protect wildlife and plant habitats, watersheds, and archaeological resources.*

Alternative 3 would close 380 miles of road, which equates to an average forest-wide open road density of 1.27 mi/mi². This is a reduction of 0.65 mi/mi² of open roads and represents a balanced road system and density which, when considered in combination with the effects from prohibiting cross-country travel, will have substantial beneficial effects.

Overall, I find that the selected alternative is consistent with the travel management rule and meets the stated purpose and need for action. This alternative best addresses the key issues identified and the comments that were submitted during this planning process. I find that the Selected Alternative is the most balanced alternative on both the social and environmental scale.

Alternative 4

Key Issue 1 – *The proposed action would restrict motorized recreation opportunities because of the prohibition of motorized cross country travel, the extent of road closures and the restrictions placed on Motorized Big Game Retrieval.*

Alternative 4 provides for 1,079 miles of open road, thus slightly decreasing the opportunities for motorized recreation compared with Alternatives 2 & 3. Non-motorized opportunities would increase which could improve the overall quality of the quiet recreation experience.

Key Issue 2 – *The proposed action allows for motorized dispersed camping and motorized big game retrieval across a large area of the district and is not used sparingly.*

Motorized big game retrieval would be prohibited under this alternative. This alternative does not include any camping corridors, but adds 18 miles of short spur roads that have historically been used for motorized dispersed camping (and other recreation activities), greatly reducing the potential for impacts compared with Alternatives 1 & 2.

Key Issue 3 – *The proposed action does not close enough miles of road to protect wildlife and plant habitats, watersheds, and archaeological resources.*

Approximately 415 miles of road would be closed in Alternative 4. This would provide for an average forest wide open road density of 1.23 mi/mi². This alternative offers the greatest reduction in road density, slightly (0.04 mi/mi²) more than the Selected Alternative.

Overall, I find that Alternative 4 meets the purpose and need for action. However, Alternative 4 does not adequately address Key Issue 1 as well as the Selected Alternative because it prohibits MBGR altogether and closes more miles of road.

3. Public Comment

I want to thank the individuals, organizations and agencies that participated and provided comments for this analysis. The input was valuable in helping me make my decision.

Public involvement was a key component in the planning and decision making process (see Section 1.8 of the EA). Public comment was received during the scoping process and the formal comment period in response to the EA for Comment. The IDT responded to comments in various ways throughout the NEPA process, including refining alternatives, adding or modifying mitigation and monitoring measures, responding to key issues and enhancing the analysis. Appendix 5 contains the comments received during the comment period and the Forest Service's response to those comments.

The public comment we received on this project was important to me in making my decision. I have reviewed the many public and agency comments we received and the responses to those comments. I have also reviewed the changes from the EA for Comment to the final EA. I want to specifically address some of the comments here in order to better explain my decision.

Significance

Some of the comments received stated that we should prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for this project given the size and scope. In my review of the EA, I find that it appropriately and adequately defines the effects from the federal action and the effects from the non-federal activities.

The analysis in the EA was conducted in compliance with NEPA. Detailed biological, physical and social data were assembled and evaluated in this EA (Chapter 3). Public comments were used to identify key issues (Chapter 1). The Forest Service used an IDT of qualified professionals to conduct a thorough analysis and the effects analysis in Chapter 3 consistently indicated no adverse significant effects were expected. The cumulative effects analysis (Chapter 3) provides an integrated review of relevant biological, physical, and social components and did not indicate significant adverse effects. The best available and high quality scientific information was used throughout the analysis. Comments received did not refer to or cite better quality information that was relevant to this project that should have been considered. I find the information presented in the EA allows for a meaningful analysis of the environmental impacts of the proposed action and selected alternative by presenting the information in comparative form, sharply defining the issues and providing a clear basis for choice.

Alternatives

We received some comments regarding the range of alternatives and suggestions for additional alternatives. The final EA considered these alternatives, analyzed one of them but did not consider the rest of them in detail (Chapter 2, Section 2.7). I believe that an adequate range of alternatives has been presented in response to public comments that dealt with the key issues as well as the purpose and need for action. Upon review, I agree with the rationale as to why several alternatives were not analyzed in detail.

Fuelwood

Many comments came in regarding the ability to collect fuelwood. This is a popular and necessary activity on the Williams Ranger District. The District will continue to accommodate fuelwood collection through a permit system to meet local demands provided that the permittee does not travel off of designated open system roads and is in compliance with permit stipulations; or, the permittee is in a designated area that authorizes off road travel for fuelwood collection.

In choosing the Selected Alternative, I carefully considered the effects of not being able to travel off road for fuelwood. The analysis and anticipated effects on fuelwood gathering are addressed in Section 3.9 of the EA. Parking next to the road and carrying your wood to the vehicle is a viable option for wood gathering. Our estimates of wood availability within 100 feet of open roads (Alternatives 2 and 3) show that approximately 17,825 acres would be available for roadside fuelwood gathering. This, in addition to annual vegetation treatment areas (approx. 4,000 acres), would easily meet the current demand of 3,000 to 4,000 cords per year (assuming approximately ½ cord of wood is available per acre). I know this will be a change for many of the local users; however, I am confident that there is an abundant supply of fuelwood that can be found on the District. Granted it may not be in the areas people are used to going to; however, alternative methods for gathering and retrieving wood that is not within reasonable walking distance are available.

Motorized Trails

We received some comments expressing concerns about the motorized trails included in Alternative 2 – the Proposed Action. The concerns and environmental consequences associated with the proposed motorized trail system being to adjacent private property led me to determine that further analysis is needed regarding a motorized trail system, and that a decision to add motorized trails is not appropriate at this time. The Selected Alternative, which does not include any motorized trails, provides approximately 1114 miles of forest roads varying in condition that can provide some challenging riding opportunities (Section 3.1 of the EA) and this decision does not preclude the consideration of motorized trails in the future.

Camping Corridors

We received some comments expressing concern about the camping corridors included in the proposed action. In my decision to select Alternative 3, I considered the potential effects and risks to natural and cultural resources from allowing motorized dispersed camping in camping corridors. I find that the District was very proactive in surveying and adding approximately 18 miles of short spur roads to the designated system that have historically served as access to dispersed camping sites (and other activities) on the Williams Ranger District. Adding the 18 miles of road, which is equates to over 70 short spur roads scattered throughout the District, to the road system is expected to reasonably accommodate existing motorized dispersed camping needs with little change from the current use. I also considered the fact that roadside parking is allowed and will continue to be allowed along all open roads unless otherwise prohibited. I concur with the effects analysis in Chapter 3 of the EA that this approach would be sufficient to reduce the potential for resource damage while providing ample opportunities for motorized dispersed camping.

Motorized Big Game Retrieval (MBGR)

Motorized big game retrieval was the most polarizing and controversial topic with the public. Some people wanted MBGR for all species while others commented that it should not be allowed (EA, Appendix 5). In developing the EA we considered a range of alternatives (EA, Sections 2.3 & 2.7), from alternatives that would continue to allow MBGR for all species to an alternative that would not allow MBGR at all. In review of the EA, I find that the Selected Alternative will greatly reduce the potential for resource damage over the current condition. While Alternative 4 would provide the greatest protection, I am fully aware of the impacts of allowing MBGR with this decision (EA, Chapter 3). In addition, the Selected Alternative best

addresses concerns over the restrictions presented in the proposed action. Allowing MBGR for elk only will assist the District in meeting management objectives outlined in the Forest Plan (EA, Sections 3.5 & 3.1). I find the potential impacts are not significant and that the mitigation and monitoring measures incorporated into this decision will adequately reduce the risk of resource damage.

4. Summary of Decision Rationale

In making my decision, I considered the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of implementing the Selected Alternative. The effects are within acceptable limits and will be mitigated by the criteria listed in Section 2.5 of the EA. The Selected Alternative requires these mitigation measures to help ensure protection of scenic resources, soils, watershed conditions, wildlife habitat, cultural resources and other resources. I find the mitigation measures will be effective in avoiding or minimizing environmental harm. These mitigation measures, combined with monitoring, ensure the project's objectives will be achieved in an environmentally sensitive manner.

The Selected Alternative best addresses the project's purpose and need for action and responds best to the issues as a whole. When compared to the other alternatives, the Selected Alternative is the most inclusive and complete with regards to the incorporation of site-specific comments from individuals, advocacy groups, and other government entities. As such, we believe that it achieves the best balance between competing interests.

Hundreds of situation-specific judgments are incorporated into this final decision, reflecting the intent to balance our multiple use and resource protection responsibilities. This alternative will continue to provide for motorized recreation opportunities while protecting the forest resources.

Alternatives Considered

Four alternatives were developed and considered in detail in the EA (Chapter 2, Section 2.3). These are discussed below. Four additional alternatives were considered but dropped from detailed consideration and can be found in Section 2.7 of the EA.

- **Alternative 1 – No Action**

The Council for Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations for implementing NEPA requires a no action alternative be developed as a benchmark from the agency can evaluate the proposed action.

This alternative maintains current management practices and would not implement the travel management rule.

- **Alternative 2 – Proposed Action**

Under Alternative 2 the KNF Forest Plan would be amended to prohibit motorized travel off of designated routes on the Williams Ranger District. Approximately 380 miles of currently open roads would be closed and approximately 16 miles of roads would be added to the designated road system. It would authorize motorized travel on designated short spur roads to access dispersed campsites. This includes adding approximately of 18 miles of roads that have historically served as access to dispersed camping sites (and

other activities) on the District.

Convert 23 miles of existing NFS roads to motorized trails by restricting them to vehicles 50 inches wide or less. Two miles of new motorized trail would be constructed for vehicles 50 inches wide or less.

Allow the limited use of motor vehicles within 200 feet of the following designated routes for the purposes of dispersed camping: 4, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, 41, 42, 44, 48, 56, 57, 71, 74, 76, 90, 100, 105, 108, 109, 110, 115, 122, 124, 129, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 171, 194, 354, 714, 720, 730, 736, 747, 749, 786, and 789. These 220 miles of NFS roads are currently receiving this type of use.

Allow the limited use of motor vehicles within one mile of all designated system roads (except where prohibited) to retrieve a legally hunted and tagged elk during the warmer months of September and October. MBGR is only allowed between 10 am and midnight each day during hunts occurring prior to the fourth Thursday of October. Only one vehicle would be allowed for Motorized Big Game Retrieval (MBGR) per harvested animal. A minimum number of trips are to be used to accomplish the retrieval, and the route taken is to be safe and relatively direct, minimizing negative resource impacts. MBGR would not be allowed in existing off road travel restricted areas, or when conditions are such that travel would cause damage to natural and/or cultural resources. Motorized vehicles would not be permitted to cross riparian areas, streams and rivers except at hardened crossings or crossings with existing culverts

- **Alternative 3**

Alternative 3 would amend the KNF Forest Plan to prohibit motorized travel off of designated routes on the Williams Ranger District. This action would close approximately 380 miles of currently open roads and add approximately 16 miles of roads to the designated road system.

It would also add approximately 18 miles of short spur roads to the designated system. These routes have historically served as access to dispersed camping sites (and other activities) on the District.

The limited use of motor vehicles within one mile of all designated system roads (except where prohibited) to retrieve a legally hunted and tagged elk during **all** elk hunting seasons as designated by the Arizona Game and Fish Commission, and for 24 hours following the end of each season would be allowed. Only one vehicle (one trip in and one trip out) would be allowed for Motorized Big Game Retrieval (MBGR) per harvested animal. Hunters will be required to use the most direct and least ground disturbing route in and out of the area to accomplish the retrieval. MBGR would not be allowed in existing off road travel restricted areas, or when conditions are such that travel would cause damage to natural and/or cultural resources. Motorized vehicles would not be permitted to cross riparian areas, streams and rivers except at hardened crossings or crossings with existing culverts.

- **Alternative 4**

Alternative 4 would also amend the KNF Forest Plan to prohibit motorized travel off of designated routes on the Williams Ranger District. Approximately 415 miles of currently open roads would be closed and approximately 16 miles of roads would be added to the designated road system.

It would add approximately of 18 miles of short spur roads to the designated system. These routes have historically served as access to dispersed camping sites (and other activities) on the District.

The use of motor vehicles off the designated road system for the purposes of big game retrieval would be prohibited.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

I find the Selected Alternative is consistent with applicable federal, state, and local laws and requirements for the protection of the environment and with agency policy and direction. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA. The Selected Alternative is also consistent with the 1988 Land Management Plan for the Kaibab National Forest, as amended.

I have reviewed the environmental effects described in the EA and evaluated whether the Selected Alternative constitutes a significant effect on the quality of the human environment or whether the environmental impacts would be significant based on their context and intensity as defined by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) using the criteria in the implementing regulations (40 CFR 1508.27).

I have determined that the implementation of the Selected Alternative will not result in any anticipated effects that exceed the level at which a significant effect on the human, biological, or physical environment in terms of context or intensity would occur. Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered. Beneficial effects have not been used to balance, mask, or off-set adverse effects because there are no significant adverse effects. The adverse effects from the Selected Alternative are expected to be minor. The effects are not highly uncertain and do not involve unique and unknown risks. The action will not, in relation with other actions, cause cumulatively significant impacts.

Context

The project is site-specific and by itself, does not have international, national, region-wide or statewide importance (EA, Chapters 1 & 2). The short- or long-term effects from this project are local (EA, Chapter 3).

Environmental Impacts

For this project there are no known significant irreversible resource commitments or irretrievable losses of timber production, recreation opportunities, wildlife habitats, or soil productivity. The environmental assessment provides sufficient information to determine that this project will not have any significant adverse impacts and that implementation of the Selected Alternative will be beneficial to natural and cultural resources (EA, Chapter 3).

Public Health and Safety

The project activities will comply with all state and federal regulations. There are no adverse effects expected to public health or safety under any of the Alternatives (EA, Chapter 3 Section 3.12).

Unique Characteristics of the Area

I find there will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the Williams Ranger District such as historic or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, floodplains, wild and scenic rivers, Wilderness areas or ecologically critical areas. The Selected Alternative will have no adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic places, and there is no loss of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources (EA, Chapter 3 Section 3.6). Implementation of the Selected Alternative will not negatively or adversely affect Sycamore Canyon or Kendrick Mountain Wilderness areas (EA, Chapter 3 Section 3.1). The Selected Alternative is also not likely to adversely affect any ecologically critical areas important to any Management Indicator Species nor any Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive Species found on the District (EA, Chapter 3 Section 3.5).

Controversy

I recognize that elements of the Selected Alternative have generated controversy; however, there is no substantiated scientific controversy over the effects as described. The protection of natural and cultural resources as well as the opposing opinions related to the motorized recreation opportunities and non-motorized recreation opportunities were addressed during alternative development (EA, Chapter 1 Section 1.9).

Uncertainty

The effects analyses in Chapter 3 of the EA show the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. Mitigation measures, management requirements, standard practices, and monitoring will ensure effects are within the expected parameters (EA, Chapter 2 Sections 2.5 & 2.6).

Precedent

I find that implementation of the Selected Alternative is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects. Making changes to the designated system of roads based on the need to reduce adverse resource impacts does not establish a precedent for future actions or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. Procedures are in place to periodically revise the MVUM to accommodate changes to the designated system as a result of future management decisions. Any future actions that alter the designated road system, alter motorized big game retrieval restrictions or affect motorized dispersed camping opportunities will have to be evaluated under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for significant effects.

Cumulative Effects

The Selected Alternative was evaluated in the context of other past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions (Appendix 4). When considering other activities within the area affected, the cumulative effects of implementing the Selected Alternative are anticipated to be minor and are not likely to impede the attainment of Forest Plan goals and objectives (EA, Chapter 3). This action does not result in cumulatively significant effects.

Properties on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places

I find that the action will have no adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. (EA, Chapter 3 Section 3.6). The State Historic Preservation Office concurred with these findings on May 18, 2010.

Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species (TES)

A Biological Assessment (BA) and Biological Evaluations (BE) were completed for this project.

The BA (documented in the project record and summarized in EA Section 3.5) determined that the Selected Alternative will *not likely jeopardize the continued existence* of California condors. The action *may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect* Mexican spotted owls, Mexican spotted owl critical habitat, Sonoran Desert Area bald eagles, and black-footed ferrets. Other species listed under the Endangered Species Act and identified by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service for Coconino or Yavapai Counties would not be affected by the project because the Williams Ranger District is either outside of their range and/or the District lacks suitable habitat. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) concurred with these effects determinations (FWS letter of concurrence, June 3, 2010).

The BE completed for plant species determined that the proposed action will have No Impact upon plant species listed as sensitive. The wildlife BE determined that the proposal will have No Impact upon the majority of the Forest's sensitive species and May Impact individuals of some species but is not likely to cause a trend towards Federal listing or result in loss of viability in the planning area for other species. Species specific information is included within the BE (project record and summarized in EA Sections 3.3 and 3.5).

I concur with the determinations made within these documents.

Violations of Federal, State, or Local Law or Requirements

The action will not violate Federal, State or local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. The action is consistent with the Kaibab Forest Plan, as amended with this decision. The Kaibab National Forest conducted extensive government to government consultations with all concerned tribes (EA Section 4.1).

Summary

I find that the decision and Environmental Assessment are in compliance with all Federal, State, and local environmental protection laws. Based on the EA and the above considerations, I find that the Selected Alternative is not a major action and it will not constitute a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, it does not require the preparation of an environmental impact statement.

Administrative Review (Appeal) Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to regulations at 36 CFR 215. Those who provided comments during the comment period are eligible to appeal the decision under the regulations.

Williams Ranger District Travel Management Project
Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact

The appeal must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, express delivery or messenger service) with the appropriate Appeal Deciding Officer. Submit appeals to:

Corbin L. Newman Jr., Regional Forester
Appeal Deciding Officer
333 Broadway SE,
Albuquerque, NM 87102
Fax: (505) 842-3173
Email: appeals-southwestern-regional-office@fs.fed.us

If hand delivered, the appeal must be received at the above address during business hours (Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. MDT) excluding holidays. Electronic appeals must be submitted in a format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Adobe (.pdf), or Word (.doc). The appeal must have an identifiable name attached to it. Verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic appeals.

Appeals, including attachments, must be in writing, fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14, and filed (postmarked) within 45 days following the date this notice is published in the *Arizona Daily Sun*. This publication date is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. When using the electronic mailbox, you will receive an automated reply if the message is received. If you do not receive this automated reply, it is the responsibility of the appellant to ensure the appeal is received by the deadline. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframes provided by any other source.

Individuals or organizations who submitted comments during the comment period specified at 215.6 may appeal this decision.

Implementation

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact:

Paul Hancock, South Zone NEPA Coordinator
Williams Ranger District
742 S. Clover Rd
Williams, AZ 86046
Phone: (928) 635-5649

Signature and Date

I am delegated the authority and am the Responsible Official for the decisions outlined in this Decision Notice. This decision summarizes information described more completely in the Environmental Assessment. For more detailed information, please refer to the EA and project record.

/s/ Michael R. Williams
MICHAEL R. WILLIAMS
Forest Supervisor
Kaibab National Forest

7/9/2010
Date

Appendix 1 – Forest Plan Amendment

Under the National Forest Management Act (NFMA, 16 USC 1604(f)(4), Forest Land and Resource Management Plans (Forest Plans) may “be amended in any manner whatsoever after final adoption and after public notice.”. Federal regulations at 36 CFR 219.14 allow forests to use the provisions of the planning regulations in effect before November 9, 2000 in order to amend forest plans. These regulations state that the responsible official shall 1) Determine whether proposed changes to a land management plan are significant or not significant in accordance with the requirements Forest Service Manual (FSM) 1926.5; 2) Document the determination of whether the change is significant or not significant in a decision document; and 3) Provide appropriate public notification of the decision prior to implementing the changes.

Implementation of Alternative 3 will require a site-specific amendment to the Kaibab National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. My decision will add a Forest Plan standard that will improve the District’s ability to meet the goals and objectives of the Forest Plan.

The need for this amendment, in order to meet the purpose and need for the Williams Ranger District Travel Management Project, was first disclosed in the scoping letter for this project. I have determined that adding the following Forest Plan Standard is insignificant (per FSM 1926.5). I have also determined that based upon the analysis provided in the EA this change in management will have no significant effects. This amendment would not alter the goals, objectives, or the desired outputs of the Forest Plan. Additionally, the Forest Service Handbook indicates that the later the change, the less likely it is to be significant to the current forest plan; the Kaibab National Forest Plan was approved over 21 years ago. The public has been notified of this amendment throughout the NEPA process and it is my decision that a site-specific non-significant Forest Plan amendment be made for the Williams Ranger District.

Site-Specific Forest Plan Amendment

Since the 1988 plan permits cross country travel in most areas of the Williams RD, and does not incorporate the MVUM as the enforcement tool for motorized travel designation, the plan would be amended to implement the MVUM provisions of the Travel Management Rule for the Williams Ranger District.

To provide for consistency between the plan and the Travel Management Rule, the following amendment is made:

Add the following Standard (page 34-1; just above Other Forest-wide Guidelines):

5. Motor vehicle use off the designated system is prohibited on the Williams Ranger District, except as identified on the MVUM.

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Impacts of this Amendment

The direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of this site-specific amendment are disclosed in the Williams Ranger District Travel Management Project Environmental Assessment (July 2010). There are no significant direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts associated with this amendment.

Application of Significance Criteria

The Forest Service Land and Resource Management Planning Manual (FSM 1926.5) provides a framework for consideration when determining if a proposed change to a Forest Plan is not significant or significant. The proposed amendment is not significant because it does not significantly alter the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management or significantly alter the long-term relationship between levels of multiple-use goods and services originally projected (dispersed Recreation Visitor Days) for the Kaibab National Forest (AMS 1986)

This standard will improve the District’s ability to meet the resource goals and objectives of the Forest Plan. The original EIS for the forest plan recognized that “ORV use will increase and future closures or restrictions may be needed for protection of natural resources” (p. 104). The 1988 Forest Plan, as amended, provides direction to “Establish off-road vehicle [ORV], (corrected to off highway vehicle [OHV]) closures as needed to maintain other resource objectives. Manage OHV use to provide OHV opportunities while protecting resources and minimizing conflicts with other users” (Kaibab Forest Plan p. 18).

The proposed amendment will allow the Williams Ranger District to provide ample services, including opportunities for recreational activities (EA, Chapter 3). The 36 CFR 212.51(a) exemptions allow the District to authorize exceptions for permitted activities and administrative uses which mitigate potential effects to other uses and management objectives of the Forest Plan.

Conclusion on Significant or Non-Significance

Based on the criteria set forth in FSM 1926.51 and 1926.52, I have determined that this amendment is not significant because it will not significantly alter the multiple-use goals and objectives in the plan. Although this amendment applies to the entire Williams Ranger District, the change affects only a small proportion of recreation use (see Chapter 3 of the EA).

Corrections to the Forest Plan

The following direction regarding off-highway vehicle use in the forest plan would be corrected in the Forest Plan (including changing terminology from ORV to OHV throughout). This does not constitute an amendment because the intent of the forest plan direction is not being changed.

Change the following:

Public Issues and Management Concerns – Dispersed Recreation (page 11)

Additional areas are closed to off-road highway vehicle use to protect sensitive soils, vegetation and important aquatic habitats, except as identified on the MVUM.

Table 7. Acres Closed to Off-Road Highway Vehicle Use, Except as Identified on the MVUM. (Page 11)

Acres Closed	This Plan (as amended)	Previous Plan
	Acres Closed 560,305	Acres Closed 11,392
These figures do not include acres of classified wilderness also closed to ORV OHV use or significant landforms on the Forest effectively closed because of rough terrain.		

Management Direction – Goals – Outdoor Recreation (page 18)

Establish off-road highway vehicle (~~ORV~~OHV) closures as needed to maintain other resource

objectives. Managed ~~ORV~~OHV use to provide ~~ORV~~OHV opportunities while protecting resources and minimizing conflicts with others.

Guidelines for Recreation Resource Operations and Improvements (page 41)

3. Monitor off ~~road~~-highway vehicle (~~ORV~~OHV) use; prevent resource damage and user conflicts.
8. Prohibit competitive ~~ORV~~OHV events.

Chapter 4 - Management Direction

These additional guidelines apply only to resource operations and improvements in GAs 2, 10, and 13:

Guidelines for Timber Resource Operations and Improvements: (page 43)

12. Salvage stands, or parts thereof, that are moderately or severely damaged by dwarf mistletoe, insects, fire, or windthrow using the uniform shelterwood or clearcutting with planting methods; restrict ~~ORV~~ OHV use during stand re-establishment.

Guidelines for Facility Operations and Improvements: (page 47)

1. Transportation Facilities includes roads, motorized trails, and user created wheeltracks. Guidance for other trails is in the Recreation Resource Operations.
3. Obliterate all temporary roads and skid trails; restrict ~~ORV~~ OHV use ~~until revegetated~~.

Guidelines for GA 1, 2 and 3 (page 39)

1. Identify, describe, and geographically locate existing conditions in the implementation land area, regarding:
 - z. Off ~~road~~-highway vehicular closure areas.

Guidelines for Recreation Resource Operations and Improvements: (page 41)

3. Monitor off ~~road~~-highway vehicle (~~ORV~~OHV) use; prevent resource damage and user conflicts.
8. Prohibit competitive ~~ORV~~OHV events.

Glossary: Off ~~road~~-highway Vehicle - *Any motor vehicle designed for or capable of cross country travel on or immediately over land, water, sand, snow, ice, marsh, swampland, or other natural terrain.*