

Recreation ^{g/}

Recreation can be more than just camping, fishing and hiking. Research has shown that people choose a specific setting for each of these activities in order to realize a desired set of experiences. For example, camping in a large, undeveloped setting with difficult access and few facilities offers a sense of solitude, challenge and self-reliance. In contrast, camping in a setting having easy access and highly developed facilities offers more comfort, security and social opportunities.

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) offers a framework for understanding these relationships and interactions. This analysis uses ROS to analyze and compare the effects of constructing a transmission line in three possible locations or not constructing one at all. It also takes a look at what the effects would be on implementing the Tres Piedras Connection. The spectrum is divided into six major classes for Forest Service use. Table 27 describes the ROS designations found in the transmission line proposed corridors.

Table 27. Description of Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) designations

ROS	Description
Semiprimitive Motorized (SPM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate probability of experiencing solitude, closeness to nature, tranquility. High degree of self-reliance, challenge and risk in using motorized equipment. Predominately natural appearing environment. Low concentration of users but evidence of other on trails. • Minimum on site controls and restrictions present but subtle. • Vegetative alterations very small in size and number, widely dispersed, and visually subordinate.
Roaded Natural (RN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to affiliate with other users in developed sites but with some chance of privacy. Self-reliance on outdoor skill of only moderate importance. Little challenge and risk. • Mostly natural appearing environment as viewed from sensitive roads and trails. • Interaction between users at campsites is of moderate importance. • Some obvious onsite controls of users. • Access and travel is conventional motorized including sedan, trailers, RVs and some motor homes. • Vegetation alterations done to maintain desired visual and recreation characteristics.
Rural (R)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to observe and affiliate with other users is important as is convenience of facilities. Self-reliance on outdoor skills of little importance. Little challenge and risk except for activities such as downhill skiing. • Natural environment is culturally modified yet attractive (i.e. pastoral farm lands). Backdrop may range from alterations not obvious to dominant. • Interactions between users may be high as is evidence of other users.

ROS	Description
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obvious and prevalent onsite controls. • Access and travel facilities are for individual intensified motorized use.

The end product of recreation management is the experience people have. The key to providing the experience opportunities is the setting and how it is managed. ROS looks at a number of desired experiences or setting indicators to classify an area. They include:

- Access includes type and mode of travel. Highly developed access generally reduces the opportunities for solitude, risk and challenge. However, it can enhance opportunities for socializing and feelings of safety and comfort.
- Remoteness refers to the extent to which individuals perceive themselves removed from the sights and sounds of human activity. A lack of remoteness is important for some setting experiences.
- Naturalness refers to the degree of naturalness of the setting; it affects psychological outcomes associated with enjoying nature. This indicator is portrayed by using a compatible visual quality objective for each setting.
- Facilities and site management refers to the level of site development. A lack of facilities and site modifications can enhance feelings of self-reliance and independence, and can provide experiences with a high degree of naturalness. Highly developed facilities can add feelings of comfort and convenience and increase opportunities for socializing.
- Social encounters refers to the number and type of other recreationists met along travel ways or camped within sight or sound of others. This setting indicator measures the extent to which an area provides experiences such as solitude or the opportunity for social interaction. Increasing the number of visitors to an area changes the kind of recreation experience offered, attracting new users and causing others to leave.
- Visitor impacts refers to the impacts of visitor use on the environment.
- Visitor management includes the degree to which visitors are regulated and controlled as well as the level of information and services provided for visitor enjoyment.

Affected Environment

Recreation within the analysis area is limited to mostly hunting, firewood gathering, piñon nut collecting and all-terrain-vehicle (ATV) use. Over the last 75 years, various activities requiring the use of motorized vehicles have historically occurred in the area. Almost 47 miles of paved highway (U.S. 285 and NM 567) run through the study area and a considerable network of 620 miles of unpaved road also exists. The Carson Forest Plan designates areas on the forest where use of vehicles off of designated roads is restricted. National Forest System lands within the study area are open to off-road-vehicle travel. Public access to and around any of the alternative utility corridors is basically unlimited. Motorized travel is restricted on BLM lands to existing roads and trails.

Because of historic use and current management, most of the study area is considered Semiprimitive Motorized. About one-quarter mile on either side of U.S. 285 and NM 567 is considered to have an ROS designation of Roaded Natural. The areas immediately surrounding the communities of Carson and Ojo Caliente are considered to have an ROS of Rural.

Environmental Consequences

The only setting indicator likely to change if a transmission line is constructed within the study area is Naturalness, which is directly related to visual quality. Effects on visual resources are discussed in the previous section of this chapter.

Alternative Comparison

Visual quality in the majority of the study area that is considered an ROS of Semiprimitive Motorized would experience little change, therefore it is not anticipated the level of recreation experience would move from Semiprimitive Motorized to Roaded Natural if either Alternative B or D were implemented.

The visual quality within both the U.S. 285 and NM 567 corridors would also undergo little change if any of the action alternatives or the option were implemented. The ROS designation within these areas would remain Roaded Natural.

The areas around Carson and Ojo Caliente already have a visual quality of Maximum Modification and would not change under any of the alternatives. Therefore, it is anticipated that the ROS classification of Rural would also stay the same.

Cumulative Effects

Past, present and reasonable activities that contribute to cumulative effects of recreation are those with effects that overlap the effects of each alternative within the study area. The existing Recreation Opportunity Spectrum designations within the study area reflect past and present activities that may cumulatively affect recreation. The following activities are considered in assessing the cumulative effects on recreation.

Past and Present Effects from:

Bark beetle (2002-2003)

“Push” areas

Paved highways

Unpaved roads

Existing power lines

Livestock structures

Development on private lands

Future Effects from:

Bark beetle (5-year forecast)

“Push” areas converting back to natural vegetation

Paved highways

Unpaved roads (continued FP management)

Power lines

Livestock structures (continued FP management)

Development on private lands

The most significant past and present action related to recreation is the existing road system—either formally designated or user-created roads. There is estimated to be 620 miles of dirt roads within the study area. Access to pole sites and the line would be kept to existing roads or two-track utility corridor (MM SW5-6). No additional improved roads would be developed as a result of implementing either Alternatives B or D. It is possible that a couple of miles of two-track could result from construction activities in either alternative. A transmission line in combination with the road system would not change the experience for which recreationists use the study area.

As mentioned in the previous section, *Visual Resources*, the primary source of present cumulative effects on visual resources and, to some extent, recreation is infestation of the *Ips* beetle and its effects on piñon trees. In the study area, mortality of piñon trees from bark beetle is beyond epidemic proportions and may reach close to 100 percent throughout the lower elevations. Lower elevation areas that were once piñon-juniper woodland will convert to only juniper. At a distance, patches or epicenters turn to a rust color that is striking against the landscape. As needles drop, the dominant color changes to that of the trees' branches and trunks—a muted dark brown or gray—that is not as obvious to the viewer.

In 5 to 10 years, dead trees will fall creating gray masses of dead wood. During this period, firewood gatherers are likely to make their way out to areas where piñon mortality is high. It is anticipated that the larger dead trees, especially along existing roads, would be removed for firewood, thus exposing the light brown color of the ground. Fewer piñon trees will reduce plant competition, which may increase the size of remaining trees and increase the amount of grass and other plants. Along with a possible transmission line, the area may seem different to local recreationists, but would not likely prevent them from visiting the area or cause more visitors to come into the area.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

In 1968, Congress enacted the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, establishing a system for preserving outstanding free-flowing rivers. The Forest Service is required to evaluate rivers for potential inclusion to the system by the Secretary of Agriculture pursuant to Section 5(d) of the act. This section of the act states, the “Secretary of Agriculture shall make specific studies and investigations to determine which additional wild, scenic, and recreational river areas within the United States shall be evaluated in planning reports by all Federal agencies as potential alternative uses of the water and related land resources involved.”

The Carson National Forest has conducted a forest-wide assessment of its rivers to determine which have the potential as a wild and scenic river and what would be their potential classification (wild, scenic or recreational). This inventory was performed for the Tres Piedras Ranger District in 1999.

No drainages within the study area meet the criteria for consideration as potential inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Therefore, none of the alternatives or the option would have an effect on the values of an eligible section of river or stream.

Alternatives B, C and D would tap into an existing 115 kV line that crosses the Rio Grande, one of the first rivers to be designated by Congress under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The Rio Grande Wild and Scenic corridor runs approximately one-quarter mile on either side of the river, from the Colorado line to Embudo Station. Alternative B would tap into the existing line approximately 1.5 miles from the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic Corridor. Alternative C would tap in at the closest point—about 1 mile from the corridor. The tap for Alternative D would be around 4 miles from the corridor. None of the alternatives would have any effect on the Rio Grande's Wild and Scenic designation.

Rails to Trails

Forest Road 557 is located on the abandoned railway bed of the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad (DRGW), also known as the “Chili Line.” The tracks and ties were removed by the DRGW in 1941 following permission given to abandon the rail line from Antonito, Colorado to Santa Fe, New Mexico. Permission to abandon the line was effective September 1, 1941 (Gjevre 1984). The roadbed became an access route to the southern end of the Tres Piedras Ranger District following abandonment and salvage of the tracks and other useable materials.

Prior to the enactment of the Transportation Act of 1920, state and local authorities constrained railroad companies in their efforts to abandon unprofitable tracks. The Interstate Commerce Commission had jurisdiction over abandonment until it ceased to exist following the Interstate Commerce Commission Termination Act of 1995. Since that point in time, the Surface Transportation Board has had jurisdiction over track abandonment. The Chili Line abandonment was done following regulations of the Transportation Act of 1920.

At the point of abandonment, the railroad easement reverted to the landowners. Another option available to railroads in lieu of abandonment is “railbanking.” In railbanking, the railroad maintains ownership of the rail corridor, a third party makes interim use of the rail corridor, and the Interstate Commerce Commission/Surface Transportation Board maintains jurisdiction over the rail corridors. This is pursuant to the National Trail System Act of 1983. The DRGW did not have the option of railbanking at their disposal in 1941.

The DRGW abandoned the Chili Line in September of 1941, and the railroad easement was terminated. Lands within the national forest returned to multiple use management from the single use of railway. The railroad bed has been used to provide vehicular access to a portion of the Tres Piedras Ranger District. The stations on the line, such as Servilleta, Caliente (Taos Junction) and Barranca, were also abandoned.

The Carson Forest Plan, as amended (1986), does not include any foreseeable conversion of the existing Forest Road 557 into a trail under National Trails System Act provisions. In addition, the Bureau of Land Management’s Taos Resource Management Plan does not discuss adapting any portion of the abandoned “Chili Line” railroad bed to a trail.

Environmental Consequences

Alternative Comparison

Alternative A would not change the existing situation of the Chili Railroad Line. The route for Alternative B would not be near the old railroad grade. The existing 25 kV distribution line would be maintained where it crosses the old Chili Line (Forest Road 557). The 25 kV line crossing has existed since about the time abandonment of the railroad line took place. The current line is barely noticeable. Since this portion of the line would not change in Alternative B, this alternative would have no effect on the railroad grade.

Alternative C is the only alternative that would pass over the old Chili Line (Forest Road 557) at the crossing described in the previous paragraph. Since this is the same location where the existing 25 kV line crosses, some additional impacts would occur in that area. An upgraded line

(115 kV with a 25 kV underbuild) would be more noticeable for approximately one-quarter mile in each direction of the road from the crossing.

Like Alternative B, Alternative D would maintain the current 25 kV distribution line where it crosses Forest Road 557. Alternative D would run along Forest Road 285P, which runs parallel to Forest Road 557 to the west. The transmission line would be located in a swale and hidden from view except for one point directly under the existing 115/345 kV corridor. The topography, scattered tree cover and location of the old railroad grade all contribute to hiding this alternative from view from Forest Road 557.

At this time, there is no foreseeable effort to convert this well-used road to a trail. None of the alternatives would preclude Forest Road 557 from being declared a trail some time in the future.