

Decision Notice
& Finding of No Significant Impact
Revised Land and Resource Management Plan
Amendment 5 for 2005 OHV Rule Consistency

USDA Forest Service
National Forests in Florida

Baker, Columbia, Franklin, Lake, Leon, Liberty, Marion, Putnam, Okaloosa, Santa Rosa,
Wakulla, and Walton Counties, Florida

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

Background

During the revision of the Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) in 1999, The National Forests in Florida laid the groundwork for planning a designated off-highway vehicle (OHV) trail system in areas of the forest deemed to be of priority concern based on the sensitive soils, vegetation, and wetlands, increasing urbanization, heavy recreational use, extensive archeological resources, and other resource concerns. A Forest-wide Standard was included in the Plan (AC-2) that set up these “restricted areas” of concern and called for a public involvement process to collaborate with a variety of user groups to identify and designate a system of roads and trails for access. Maps of the Restricted Areas for each forest were included in Appendix A of the Revised Forest Plan. Under the 1999 LRMP, motorized use would continue on existing routes in the “unrestricted area”

The November 2005 Final Rule on motor vehicle access requires each National Forest to designate roads, trails, and areas open to motor vehicle use. The restricted areas set up in the Forest Plan are now superseded by the new rule. In effect, the rules for designating roads, trails, and areas in the previously restricted areas will now apply to the entire forest. The Forest Service is proposing to amend the 1999 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the National Forests in Florida to be consistent with the new Forest Service rule for providing motor vehicle access to National Forests.

Decision

Based upon my review of all alternatives, I have decided to implement Alternative 2 (Modified Proposed Action). This alternative will update the 1999 LRMP to allow for the designation motorized routes forest-wide, including the areas previously referred to as the “unrestricted areas”. This amendment will make the 1999 LRMP consistent with the 2005 OHV Rule.

When compared to the other alternatives this alternative will make the 1999 LRMP consistent with the 2005 OHV Rule, provide for improved protection of forest resources, and improve the overall recreation experience on the forest.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered 2 other alternatives. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA on pages 6.

Alternative 1

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, the current 1999 Revised LRMP would not be amended.

Alternative 3

This alternative would modify the Unrestricted areas to keep the restricted areas boundary in place but limit future motorized access in the unrestricted portion of the forest.

Public Involvement

The proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions beginning in March 2006. A letter was mailed on April 15, 2006 notifying 275 individuals, groups and other agencies of our intention and requesting any comments or potential issues on the proposed amendment by May 15, 2006. We received four timely written responses. An Environmental Assessment was made available for a 30-day comment period on June 30, 2006. Comments received are summarized in the Environmental Assessment.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

1. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action.
2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety, because this amendment is for a programmatic LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal, and implementation is expected to improve public health and safety by establishing a system of maintained and signed trails on the forest (see EA page 7).
3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because this amendment is for a programmatic LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal. (see EA page 7).
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. It is expected that users will become accustomed to a managed trail system, and a designated system will reduce the current level of environmental impacts (see EA page 7).

5. The effects analysis indicates the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk (see EA page 7).
6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because this amendment is for a programmatic LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal and the effects of a designated system are generally expected to be positive (see EA page 7).
7. The cumulative impacts are not significant (see EA page 7).
8. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, because this amendment is a for a programmatic LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal and is expected to result in fewer impacts to cultural or historical resources (see EA page 7).
9. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973 this amendment is for a programmatic LRMP and not a site-specific project proposal (see EA page 7).
10. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

NFMA Significance: This amendment is not a significant change in the Florida Revised Forest Plan. The determination that this is a non-significant amendment is made in accordance with the regulations in 16 USC 1604(f)(4), 36 CFR 219.10(f), and the Forest Service Manual 1922.5, Land and Resource Management Planning, Amendments. This plan amendment meets the criteria for a non-significant amendment because these changes will not “significantly alter the long-term relationship between levels of multiple-use goals and objectives originally projected...[or] have an important effect on the entire forest plan or affect resources throughout a large portion of the planning area during the planning period (FSM 1922.52)

Implementation Date

Implementation of this decision may occur after seven calendar days following publication of the legal notice of this decision in the Tallahassee Democrat.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 217. Any appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9, and be filed in duplicate with the Regional Forester within 45 days after the date of the published legal notice. Appeals should be sent to the following address:

Amended Pages

Deleted language is indicated by a ~~strike through~~. Additions are indicated by **bold** font.

Amended Forest Plan Page 2-6

Forest-wide Objective #13

Previous Language:

Designate a system of trails and open, classified roads in areas where motorized vehicles and bicycles are restricted (see Access Maps, Appendix A). This process will incorporate existing travelways as much as possible and include public participation and collaboration with local user groups.

Amended Language:

~~Designate a system of trails and open, classified roads in areas where motorized vehicles and bicycles are restricted (see Access Maps, Appendix A).~~ **Designate a system of roads, trails and areas for motor vehicle access.** This process will incorporate existing travelways as much as possible and include public participation and collaboration with local user groups.

Amended Forest Plan Page 3-1

Amended Language

Definitions

Area. Designated areas should have natural resource characteristics that are suitable for cross-country motor vehicle use or should be so significantly altered by past actions that motor vehicle use might be appropriate. While there is no specific acreage limitation, areas should not be large or numerous. They are intended as specific designations covering small places with clear geographic boundaries, rather than entire landscapes.

Amended Forest Plan Page 3-2

Forest-wide Standard AC-2

Previous language:

The following standard, which apply to motorized vehicles and bicycles, will go into effect upon completion of a site-specific designation process. This delayed implementation period will allow time for a system of trails and classified roads to be designated in restricted areas. This process will incorporate existing unclassified roads as much as possible and include public participation and collaboration with local user groups.

AC-2—There are three categories of areas where bicycle and motorized vehicle use varies. These areas are shown on the Access Maps in Appendix A.

1. Areas where motorized vehicles and bicycles are prohibited.
2. Areas where motorized vehicles and bicycles are restricted to open classified roads and designated trails specified for their use.
3. Areas where motorized vehicles and bicycles are permitted to travel on open classified roads, designated trails specified for their use, and unclassified roads.

Amended Language:

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Amended Forest Plan Page 4-53

Management Area Standard 9.2-1

Previous language:

9.2-1 – Restrict motorized vehicles to open, numbered roads and designated trails, administrative use, and activities under contract or permit.

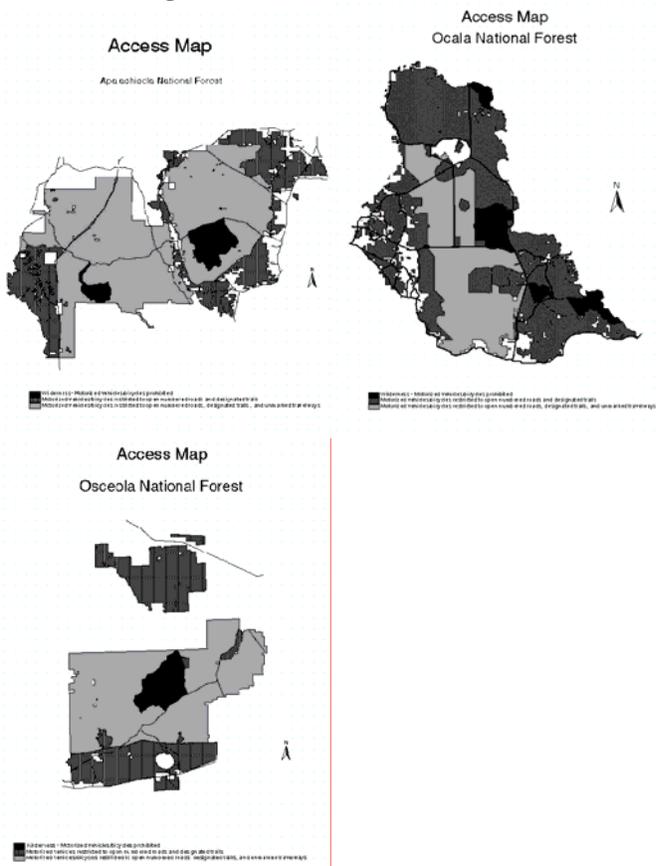
Amended Language:

~~9.2-1—Restrict motorized vehicles to open, numbered roads and designated trails, administrative use, and activities under contract or permit.~~

Amended Forest Plan Page A-3, A-4, and A-5

Appendix A (Access Maps)

Previous Pages:



Amended Pages

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