



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Apalachicola National Forest  
Apalachicola Ranger District    Wakulla Ranger District  
P.O. Box 579                            57 Taff Drive  
Bristol, FL 32321                      Crawfordville, FL 32327  
850/643-2282                            850/926-3561

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File Code:    1950  
Date:            May 1, 2009

Dear Forest Visitor:

The Forest Service is proposing to change the road management objectives of approximately 82 miles of existing low standard roads on the Apalachicola National Forest from “*closed to public use*” to “*open to public use*”. This change would only apply to licensed vehicles and would not affect the current trail system for OHVs. Most of these additions would facilitate hunters getting further away from frequently traveled roads. The roads are located in various locations across the forest (see attached maps). A larger version of the maps will be available for review at each of the Apalachicola NF District Offices and on the NFs in Florida web site:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/florida/apalachicola/resources/projects.php>

At this time I am seeking comments on the proposed action to identify potential issues with the proposal.

Over the last year the Forest Service has been implementing the motorized routes designated in September 2007. Since January 2008 the Forest Service has received 112 user comments regarding specific portions of the newly designated road system. These comments identified numerous problems including roads that were not signed, incorrectly signed, incorrectly mapped, causing resource problems, needed for fishing access, or that should be open to provide better hunter access, especially when hunting dogs are used.

In addition, the Forest Service has been monitoring the newly designated system and identified additional signage and mapping inconsistencies as well as areas where non-compliance has occurred. Most of these concerns are being addressed directly since they do not require a decision through a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Monitoring efforts will continue and are especially important in this early stage of implementation.

Overall, forest visitors, especially hunters, have requested 171 additional miles of roads to be open for licensed vehicle use. Of these, we have identified approximately 82 miles that, based on initial review, do not appear to present management conflicts with known forest resources. The remaining 89 miles included known resource concerns such as sensitive wildlife habitat, sensitive soils, heritage resources, or management conflicts such as wilderness designations.

We have also received requests to close more roads on the forest. There are approximately 1,700 miles of routes not designated for public use on the Apalachicola NF. Approximately 500 miles of these have been identified as needed for future forest management activities. For the remaining 1,200 miles, the Forest is implementing a strategy which involves active closure of non-designated routes that are currently causing resource damage, and relying on natural revegetation from non-use for the remaining routes due to limited budgets. The Apalachicola NF is in the process of actively closing 80 miles of non-designated routes



identified as currently causing environmental damage. Non-designated routes that don't revegetate naturally, or are causing compliance problems will be reviewed during site-specific project development such as timber sales, and treated as needed based on site-specific conditions. As such, decommissioning routes is not specifically addressed in this proposal.

Similarly, I am not considering major changes to the OHV trail system at this time. I believe it is still too early to make decisions on that aspect of the 2007 Route Designation Decision.

Please provide any comments, questions or concerns you have regarding this project by May 29, 2009.

Comments received in response to this letter, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Written comments on this proposal should be sent to: District Ranger, 57 Taff Drive, Crawfordville, Florida 32327, or faxed at (850)-926-1904. Oral or hand-delivered comments must be received within our normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday to Thursday and 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM on Friday, closed on federal holidays. Comments may also be mailed electronically in a common digital format to our office at [comments-southern-florida-apalachicola@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-southern-florida-apalachicola@fs.fed.us).

To obtain additional information about this proposal contact Cathy Briggs at (850) 926-3561.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) will be prepared and circulated for a 30-day Notice and Comment period to those who comment on this proposal or request to receive a copy. The EA will also be posted to the Forest Service web site at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/florida>.

Sincerely,

/s/ *Marcus A. Beard*

MARCUS A. BEARD  
District Ranger