



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Tonto National Forest

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File Code: 1950/2350

Date: October 22, 2009

Dear Interested Party:

The Tonto National Forest (TNF) is proposing changes to its motorized vehicle travel system. Over the past few decades, the availability and capabilities of off highway vehicles (OHV) has increased greatly. Many more visitors are enjoying recreational opportunities on the national forests. However, the increased OHV use also affects soil, water, wildlife habitat, and other recreational visitors. Today unmanaged recreation, including impacts from OHV use, represents one of [four key threats](#) facing the nation's forests and grasslands.

The proposed changes to the motorized vehicle travel system will allow for sustainable enjoyment and access to the natural and cultural heritage of our landscapes. Unmanaged recreation will be addressed through an appropriately designed network of roads, trails, and facilities as well as field presence to provide quality recreation experiences while reducing the effects of visitor use.

Over the past four years, the TNF has reviewed and evaluated the current road system and worked with many citizens, organizations, and other federal, state and local agencies. Over the next 30 days we will be seeking additional input from the public on these proposed changes before making a final determination on the designated route system. Once a final decision has been made, the TNF will produce an atlas of maps that will show open routes with class of vehicle and, if appropriate, time of year for motor vehicle use. A given route, for example, could be designated for use by motorcycles, OHV, or limited to street-legal vehicles. The maps will be provided free of charge. These maps will serve as the final authority on which routes are open to motorized travel.

Six public open houses are scheduled to explain the process used to review the current route system, the criteria for determining needs for change, and to discuss any issues people may have with the proposed changes. If significant issues are identified during this time, we will develop alternatives to the proposed system. The final designated system may include these alternatives. Dates, times, and locations of the open houses are shown below and on our website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/tonto/travelmgt/index.shtml>.

Background

For many national forest visitors, motor vehicles represent an integral part of their recreational experience. The growing popularity and capabilities of OHV recreation has prompted the Forest



Service to take a closer look at management of OHV use and the designation of motorized routes nationwide.

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. The Tonto National Forest receives a largest number of OHV visits annually of any national forest (over 529,400 visits; English et al 2004). This exponential increase in the popularity and use of OHV has led to increased user conflicts, resource damage, creation of illegal routes, and a demand for routes and areas for motorized recreational use that exceeds what is currently designated. Because of concerns over increased and unmanaged OHV use, in 2005 the Forest Service developed a national travel management policy which requires each administrative unit to designate a system of routes and areas open to the public for motorized travel, and to restrict such travel to only those routes and areas. The policy also requires that the designated system of routes and areas be represented on a *Motor Vehicle Use Map* (MVUM) and be made available to the public free of charge. The MVUM will be the primary source defining which routes and areas are open.

Purpose and Need

A Travel Analysis Process was conducted across the forest using an interdisciplinary team of forest resource specialists working in conjunction with the contracting firm Advanced Resource Solutions (ARS). Based on this analysis and communications with the public, the TNF identified the following needs:

- A quality, non-highway legal motorized recreation opportunity.
- Restoration of soils and vegetation damaged by off highway vehicle use.
- Improved safety on forest roads.
- Protection of cultural resources.
- Designated distance for big game retrieval off forest roads provided it can be done without resource damage.
- Designated dispersed camping locations off forest roads in areas previously been used for this activity.

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

- Avoid impacts to cultural resources
- Provide for public safety
- Provide for a diversity of recreational opportunities
- Ensure adequate access to public and private lands
- 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 National Forest System (NFS) lands
- Minimize conflicts between different classes of motor vehicle uses of NFS lands or neighboring federal lands
- Ensure compatibility of motor vehicle use with existing conditions in populated areas, taking into account noise, emissions, dust, and other effects of that use.
- Maintaining administrative access for fire suppression emergencies and authorized permittees

Proposed Action

The proposed action includes changes to the existing TNF Resource Access/Travel Management (RATM) plan to accommodate the increased recreational demand while protecting natural resources.

The primary changes include:

- Add approximately 300 miles of existing routes to the transportation system: approximately 140 miles would be open to all classes of vehicles and approximately 160 miles would be open to vehicles under 50 inches in width.
- Designate approximately 500 miles of roads that are currently identified for closures, which were never implemented, as open. These roads will be changed from Maintenance Level 1 (to Maintenance Level 2 through 5 or to motorized trail – see brief description of maintenance levels below).

Table 1. Brief description of road maintenance levels

Level 1	Basic custodial care, Administrative Use Only
Level 2	Open, primarily accessible to high clearance vehicles
Level 3	Open, generally suitable to passenger cars
Level 4	Open, moderate degree of user comfort (paved)
Level 5	Open, high degree of user comfort (paved)
Decommission	Closed with restoration
Unclassified	User-created route

- Close approximately 280 miles of NFS roads currently open to motorized travel because of resource damage, redundancy, safety hazards, or because they are not necessary for the use and administration of NFS lands.
- Designate five motorized OHV areas:

Mesa Ranger District	Sycamore OHV Area	approximately 2,390 acres
Mesa Ranger District	Sycamore tot lot	approximately 3 acres
Mesa Ranger District	The Rolls tot lot	approximately 6 acres
Globe Ranger District	Golf Course OHV Area	approximately 20 acres
Globe Ranger District	Pipeline OHV Area	approximately 380 acres

- Designate spur routes to dispersed campsites where practical. Where multiple dispersed camping sites exist within a small area, corridors up to 300 feet off a system road may be designated to provide access to these sites.
- Provide for motorized big game retrieval for elk harvesting in designated game management units off the designated road system.
- Prohibit motorized travel off the designated road system except for the dispersed camping corridors or as provided for big game retrieval.
- Amend the Forest Plan to incorporate the proposed changes to the current system, as follows:
 - o Prohibit motorized travel off the designated road system on all districts.
 - o Delete the list of miles of roads by Maintenance Level (page 10).
 - o Remove references to numbers of acres open and number of acres closed to vehicle travel (page 13).
 - o Change the reference to off-road vehicle (ORV) maps and replace with reference to Motorized Visitor Use Maps (MVUM) (page 38).
 - o Remove all references to routes being open unless posted closed or closed unless posted open and state instead that all routes open to motorized travel will be shown as such on the MVUM unless under a forest closure order (pages 60, 62, 67, 82, 86, 105, 129, 140, 153, 165, 180, 194).

Open House Schedule

You are invited to attend one or more of the following Open Houses to learn more about the Proposed Action. You will be provided an opportunity to make comments. If you need assistance with special needs for the Open Houses, please contact Genevieve Johnson at (602) 225-5213 or email grjohnson@fs.fed.us.

LOCATION	DATE & TIME	LOCATION
Tonto Basin	Wed., 11/4/09 6:30-8:00pm	Tonto Basin Elementary School 445 South Old Hwy 188, (Punkin Center), Tonto Basin
Globe	Thurs., 11/5/09 6:00-7:30pm	Old High School Auditorium 401 High Street, Globe
Cave Creek	Mon., 11/9/09 6:30-8:00pm	Black Mountain Elementary School 33606 N. 60 th Street, Scottsdale
Pleasant Valley	Thurs., 11/12/09 6:00-7:30pm	Pleasant Valley Community Center 47533 Hwy 288, Young
Mesa	Tues., 11/17/09 7:00-8:30pm	Broadway Recreation Center 59 E Broadway Rd, Mesa
Payson	Wed., 11/18/09 6:00-7:30pm	Julia Randall Elementary School 601 S Greenway Parkway, Payson

Comments can be provided at the open houses, or in writing to the addresses provided below. **Comments can best be used if received by December 4, 2009.** Please make your comments as specific as possible. If you provide recommendations for changes to routes or areas, please include route numbers or location descriptions, as well as the reasons for your recommendations.

The information you provide will help identify the need for alternatives to address any significant issues with this proposal. Significant issues are objections to the proposed designations that are specific to the proposal, within the scope of the decision, and not already decided by law or regulation. Issues which are speculative, conjectural, or not supported by evidence are also not considered significant.

After the preferred alternative and any other alternatives have been fully developed, there will be an analysis of the environmental effects of the changes to the existing transportation system. Once the analysis is completed, the description and comparison of all alternatives, along with analyses of their effects, will be available for public comment prior to the final decision.

Decision to Be Made

The TNF Supervisor is the responsible official and will decide whether to designate the system of motorized routes and areas described and analyzed as the preferred alternative, whether to designate a system of motorized routes and areas described in another alternative, or to designate routes and areas from some combination of alternatives. Implementation of the Tonto Travel Management Plan would be effective following the decision and after the close of the appeal period.

Scoping Input Needed

Written or oral comments may be submitted via mail, fax, telephone, or in person at any Tonto National Forest office (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays). If you provide comments to this proposed action, you will receive a copy of the preliminary *Environmental Analysis* (EA) anticipated to be completed in the summer of 2010. In the event that you choose not to comment, but would still like a copy of the preliminary EA, or if you would like to be removed from the mailing list, please contact Genevieve Johnson at (602) 225-5213 or grjohnson@fs.fed.us.

Comments received in response to this scoping notice, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this project and will be available for public inspection. Electronic comments must show name and address of submitter. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under *36 CFR 215*. Additionally, any persons may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the *Freedom of Information Act* (FOIA) permits such confidentiality (*7 CFR 1.27(d)*). Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances. The Forest Service will inform the requestor of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality. Where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requestor that the comment may be resubmitted within 15 days. **Please submit your comments by December 4, 2009.**

Please send all comments to:
USDA Forest Service
Tonto National Forest
ATTN: Travel Management Project Leader
2324 E McDowell Rd
Phoenix, AZ 85006

By fax to:
ATTN: Travel Management Project Leader
(602) 225-5295

By e-mail to:
comments-southwestern-tonto@fs.fed.us

If you have questions concerning this process, please contact Genevieve Johnson at (602) 225-5213.

Sincerely,

/s/ Thomas J. Klabunde (for)
GENE BLANKENBAKER
Forest Supervisor