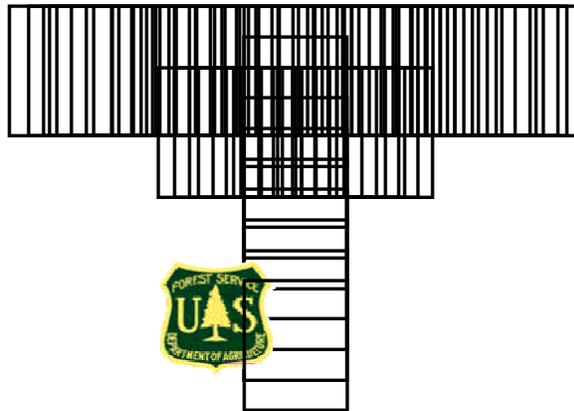


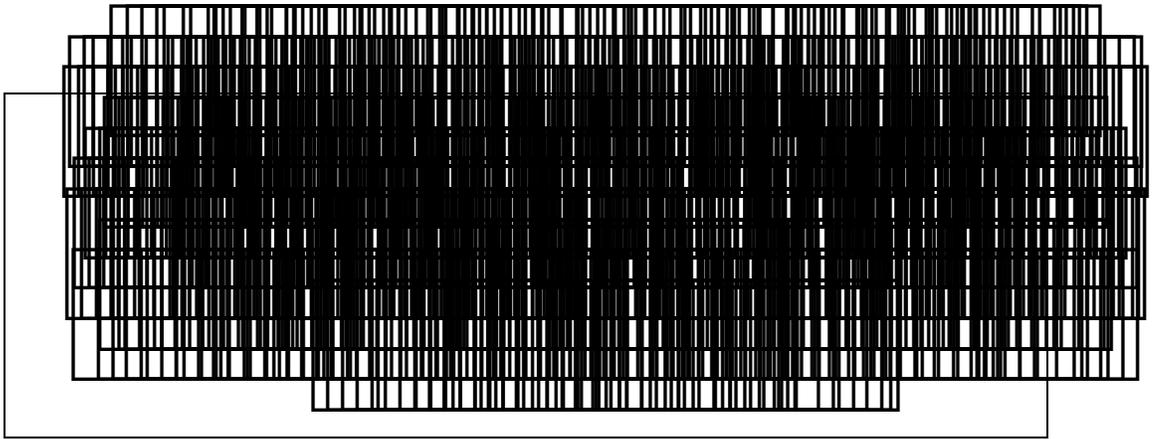
Decision Notice
And
Finding of No Significant Impact

Kisatchie National Forest
Travel Management Project

Claiborne, Grant, Natchitoches, Rapides, Vernon, Webster, and Winn Parishes in Louisiana



November 2007



DECISION

My decision is to implement the travel management actions of **Modified Alternative 5**. My decision results in a motorized transportation network of over 2000 miles of roads and 264 miles of trails open to the public and providing motorized access across forest lands. The majority (238 miles) of the trail system will be designated open year round.

This is a two-part decision: Part A specifies compliance with the National Travel Management Rule (36 CFR §212.51). Motor vehicle use off designated roads and trails and outside designated areas is prohibited by 36 CFR §212.13. Part B provides the Kisatchie National Forest travel system, including mileage of roads and trails, seasons of use and vehicle types allowed based on the Forest's Travel Analysis and public involvement.

Part A: Amends (Amendment #7) the Revised Forest Land and Resource Management Plan for the Kisatchie National Forest (Forest Plan) to prohibit motorized travel off designated routes forestwide (Appendix A1, EA). Exemptions from the designated motorized uses pursuant to 36 CFR §212.51 include the following vehicles and uses, exclusively.

1. Aircraft;
2. Watercraft;
3. Over-snow vehicles.
4. Limited administrative use by the Forest Service;
5. Use of any fire, military, emergency, or law enforcement vehicle for emergency purposes;
6. Authorized use of any combat or combat support vehicle for national defense purposes;
7. Law enforcement response to violations of law, including pursuit;
8. Motor vehicle use that is specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulations.

In addition to the road and trail system, 38 miles of dispersed camping corridors have been designated to be open year-round for highway-legal vehicle use within 100 feet of the road centerline.

Also designated are 47 miles of big game retrieval corridors for ATV¹ use within 300 feet of the centerline of the road or trail. These corridor designations are located in the National Wildlife Management Preserves; big game retrieval can only occur on deer-gun hunting days, currently 9 days, for the sole purpose of big game (deer or hog) retrieval under the following conditions (Mapped in Appendix I, EA).

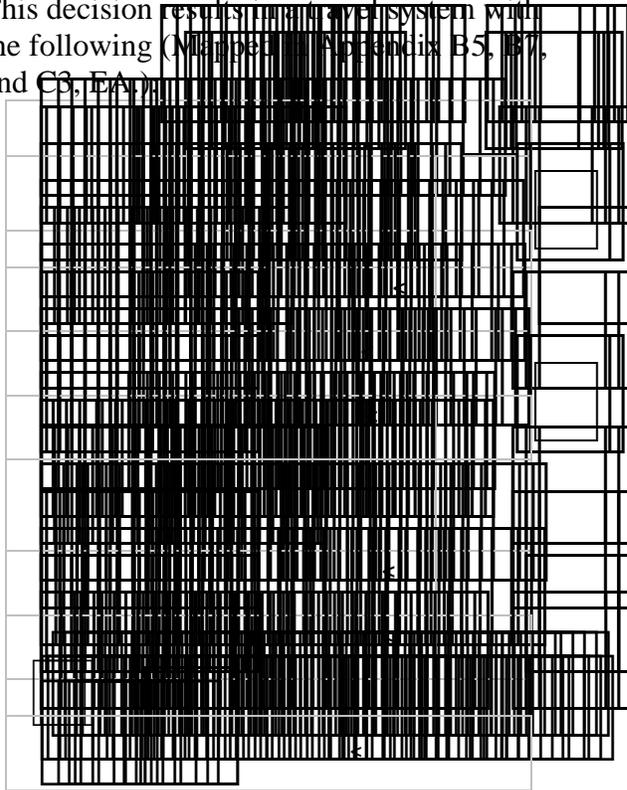
1. No firearms or archery equipment in possession of the retrieval party or on the ATV.
2. No more than one ATV and one helper in the retrieval party.
3. No ATVs may be used to locate or search for wounded game or for any purpose other than retrieval of big game (deer or hog) once they have been legally harvested and located.

Part B: Authorizes the following changes to the Kisatchie National Forest travel system.

- Prohibits nighttime motorized travel from 1 hour after sunset until 1 hour before sunrise on all motorized trails and also on roads designated for vehicles ≤ 50 inches wide.
- Designates 66 miles Breezy Hill motorcycle trail (under construction) open year-round (Mapped in Appendix C3, EA).
- Designates two trail spurs (0.14 miles) to be added to the motorized trail system on the Calcasieu District. (Mapped in Appendix C5, EA.)

¹ The term ATV in this document refers to vehicles ≤ 50 inches wide, usually a 4-wheeler or dirt bike.

This decision results in a travel system with the following (Mappe Appendix B5, B7, and C3, EA).



Temporary trail closures will continue to occur during wet conditions or administratively for prescribed burning, timber harvest, maintenance, etc.

Special event rides, i.e. motorcycle, horseback riding, and bicycling, will continue to be considered under individual written authorizations proposed to and obtained from the appropriate District office.

The EA documenting the environmental analysis of proposed actions for the *Travel Management Project*, Kisatchie National Forest, is available for public review at the Forest Supervisor’s Office in Pineville, Louisiana.

After completion of the decision appeal process, implementation will occur when the Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) is published and made available to the public, estimated to be March 2008. Copies of the MVUM will be available on Kisatchie’s website, <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/kisatchie>, at

each Ranger District office, and at the Forest Supervisor’s Office in Pineville, Louisiana.

Modifications Made to the Original Alternative 5 include:

Add two trail spurs on the Calcasieu District	The spur at Hare Scramble Corner on the Evangeline Unit will be open year-round to motorcycles. The spur at the end of Iron Bridge Road on the Vernon Unit will be open year-round to all vehicles ≤ 50 inches wide.
C024A	Open year-round to highway-legal vehicles (HLV). There is a culvert at the stream crossings and no known mussel beds are located downstream.
E024K	Close year-round. Grown-up and not navigable.
C067C and C067D	Close year-round. Upstream from Louisiana pearlshell mussel beds.
W106C and W039C	Open year-round to HLV. Accesses private land.
K14G, K16F, K26E, K26D	Change from open to ATVs Oct – Jan to open to ATVs Oct – Dec to coincide with hunting season and be consistent with the other seasonal roads within the National Red Dirt Wildlife Management Preserve.
K08E,F; K48E; K49D,E,J,K,N; K70A,C,H,S; K69G; K711,M	Change from open to ATVs Oct – Jan to open to ATVs year-round.
K06B; K07H; K09Q; K33K; K35F; K35H; K36A; K37D; K57F; K60H; K62A,B; K63C,D,E; K69D; K70F,G; K71J	Close to all motor vehicles year-round.
W021E; W025K; W58A,E,G,I,J, K; W059J; W064G,N,H,I	Close to all motor vehicles year-round.

REASONS FOR THE DECISION

After comparing it to the other alternatives, I selected Modified Alternative 5 because it meets the purpose and need (EA, §1.4, p. 1-2) for this project and, overall, best addresses the issues (EA, §1.10, p. 1-5) as described below.

Part A

1. Complies with the National Travel Management Rule, prohibiting cross-country motorized travel forestwide and designating motorized routes and corridors.
2. Offers different kinds of travel opportunities that address Issue 1 access concerns (EA, §3.1) by providing big game retrieval corridors and camping corridors. Any hunter, including elderly hunters or hunters with disabilities, will be able to retrieve big game (deer or hog) with an ATV within these designated corridors. The conditions for big game retrieval are consistent with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries vehicular game retrieval policies in the state Wildlife Management Areas.

The designated camping corridors will provide the dispersed recreationists areas where they will be able to drive their highway-legal vehicle and park and camp.

3. Addresses overall resource concerns by eliminating off-trail motorized use; thereby, reducing disturbance and potential displacement of wildlife (EA, §3.4 and §3.6), reducing potential impacts to heritage resources (EA, §3.5), and reducing soil and water damage from unauthorized motorized travel (EA, §3.3 and §3.4).
4. Provides good off-highway vehicle recreation opportunities that are compatible with the environmental

setting, minimizes off-road vehicle effects on the land and resources (EA, Chapter 3), promotes public safety (EA, §3.10), and minimizes conflicts with other uses of the Forest (Forest Plan Guideline FW-342).

Part B

1. Offers different kinds of travel opportunities that address Issue 1 access concerns (EA, §3.1) by providing a system of roads for ATV use during deer hunting season. Any hunter, including elderly hunters or hunters with disabilities, will be able to ride their ATVs down these designated roads, park alongside the road, and hunt. In addition, trail riders' needs will be better met by designating all trails open year-round except the Sandstone Trail, which will remain closed January – April.
2. Addresses maintenance issues (EA, §3.2, Table 3-3) by closing 644 miles of low-standard logging roads year-round, and reducing travel to seasonal use on 332 miles of roads and 36 miles of trails. Closing or reducing travel to seasonal use on some of the interior dead-end roads that are deteriorating, providing redundant access, or causing resource concerns best addresses the issue of increasing maintenance needs and the expected available financial resources for maintenance and administration (Issue 2). Although an additional 222 miles of logging roads will be closed, reasonable and sufficient access will remain with an average walking distance within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of a road or trail (2.9 mi/mi² route density) (EA, §3.1).
3. Addresses sedimentation concerns (Issue 3) in the Louisiana pearlshell mussel (LPM) watershed (EA, §3.4, Table 3-7) by closing a total of 86 miles of roads year-round to public use in the LPM watersheds.

4. Addresses socio-economic concerns (Issue 4) by providing developed and dispersed recreation visitors different motorized opportunities to pursue. Cross-country riders will be expected to use the designated trails on the Forest. Restricting motorized use to designated routes will change where visitors drive and ride, but the other recreation opportunities will remain unchanged and numbers of visitors and visitor spending in the local communities are not expected to change. (EA, §3.9)
5. Addresses overall resource concerns by minimizing motorized travel in the Louisiana pearlshell mussel watersheds, eliminating night riding, and reducing off-trail motorized use on the Forest. In general, these changes will reduce disturbance and potential displacement of wildlife (EA, §3.4 and §3.6), and soil and water impacts will be less with reduced number of motorized stream crossings (EA, §3.3 and §3.4).
6. Provides good off-highway vehicle recreation opportunities that are compatible with the environmental setting, minimizes off-road vehicle effects on the land and resources (EA, Chapter 3), promotes public safety (EA, §3.10), and minimizes conflicts with other uses of the Forest (Forest Plan Guideline FW-342).

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Alternative 1 - No Action

The proposed action would not occur. Motorized route and area designations would remain as they currently exist. There would be no changes to the travel management system. I did not choose this alternative because compliance with the National Rule would not be met.

Alternative 2 – (Motorized off-route travel prohibited forestwide)

This alternative has the least amount of changes while still complying with the National Rule. Designated motorized routes and areas would not change. Alternative 2 proposes to:

- Prohibit motorized travel off the designated routes forestwide.
- Prohibit night-riding from 1 hour after sunset until 1 hour before sunrise.

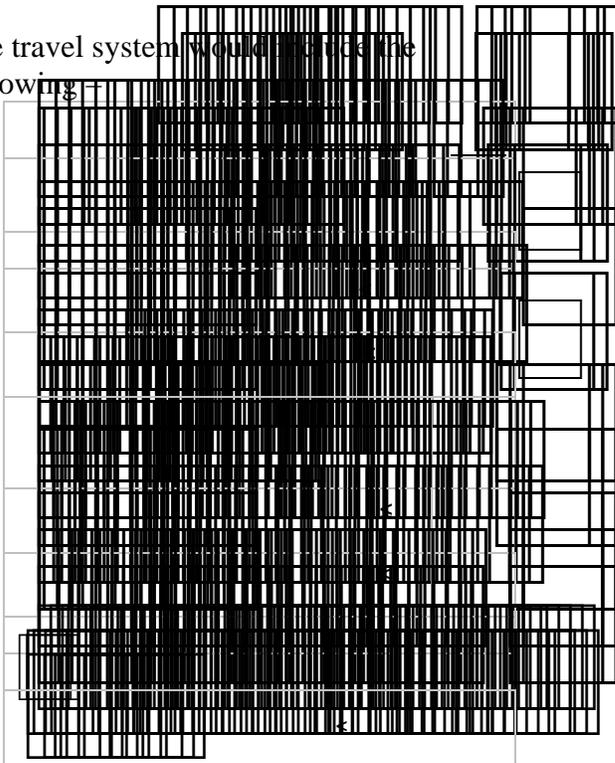
I did not choose Alternative 2 because it does not address the issues regarding different types of access needs (Issue 1), maintenance needs (Issue 2), or resource impacts in the Louisiana pearlshell mussel watershed (Issue 3).

Alternative 3 – Modified Proposed Action (See Appendix F of the EA for changes from the initial scoping proposal, February 2006)

This alternative proposes changes to road designations resulting from the travel analysis described in §1.7 of the EA. Alternative 3 proposes to:

- Prohibit motorized travel off the designated routes forestwide.
- Prohibit night-riding from 1 hour after sunset until 1 hour before sunrise.
- Add 6 miles of dispersed camping corridors open year-round for highway-legal vehicles within 100 feet of centerline of road.

The travel system would include the following:



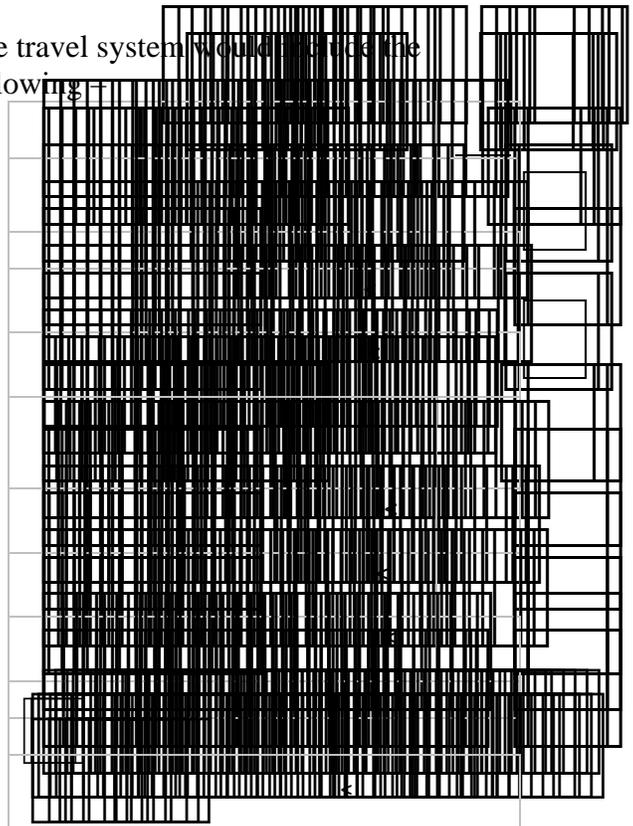
I did not choose this alternative because it does not sufficiently address dispersed recreation access (Issue 1) or resource impacts to the Louisiana pearlshell mussel watershed (Issue 3).

Alternative 4 – (Reduced motorized use in mussel watersheds)

This alternative would reduce miles of roads open for motor vehicles within the Louisiana pearlshell mussel watersheds and address other road comments received during scoping (See Appendix F). Alternative 4 proposes to:

- Prohibit motorized travel off the designated routes forestwide.
- Prohibit night-riding from 1 hour after sunset until 1 hour before sunrise.
- Add 6 miles of dispersed camping corridors open year-round for highway-legal vehicles within 100 feet of centerline of road.
- Close 43 miles of the Livingston (Catahoula District) multiple-use trail January - March.

The travel system would include the following:



I did not choose this alternative because it does not adequately address dispersed recreation access (Issue 1) or meet the needs of the trail riders.

Alternative 5 – (Designate big game retrieval corridors for ATVs in NWMPs and ATVs on logging roads closed to highway-legal vehicles)

This alternative would open some closed roads for ATV use during deer hunting season, and provide corridors for big game retrieval with an ATV in the Catahoula and Red Dirt National Wildlife Management Preserves (NWMP). All trails would be open year-round except the Sandstone Trail would be closed January - April.

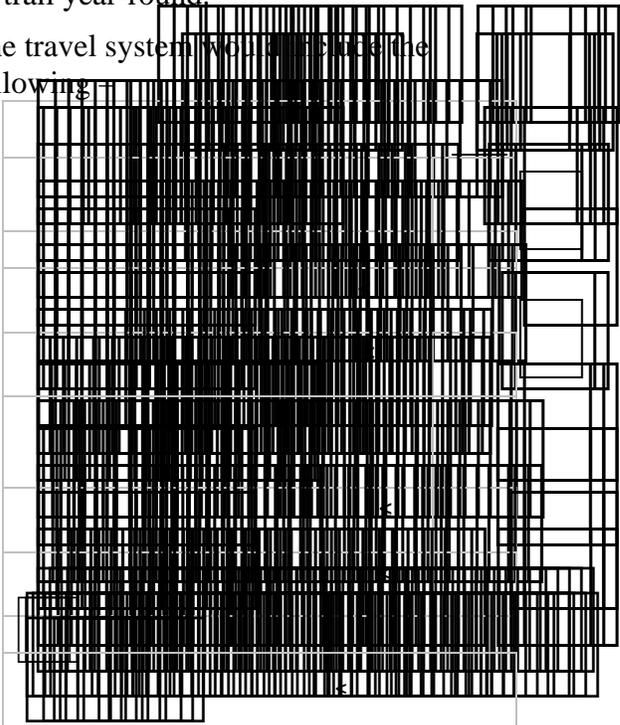
Alternative 5 proposes to:

- Prohibit motorized travel off the designated routes forestwide.
- Prohibit night-riding from 1 hour after sunset until 1 hour before sunrise.
- Add 6 miles of dispersed camping corridors open year-round for highway-

legal vehicles within 100 feet of centerline of road.

- ~~Add 47 miles~~ of big game retrieval corridors for ATV use within 300 feet of centerline of the trail. These corridor designations are located in the National Wildlife Management Preserves; and big game retrieval could only occur on deer-gun hunting days, currently 9 days per year. (Mapped in Appendix I.)
- ~~Open 66 miles~~ Breezy Hill motorcycle trail year-round.

The travel system would include the following:



I did not choose this alternative because additional comments received during the 30-day notice and comment period were better addressed in the selected Modified Alternative 5.

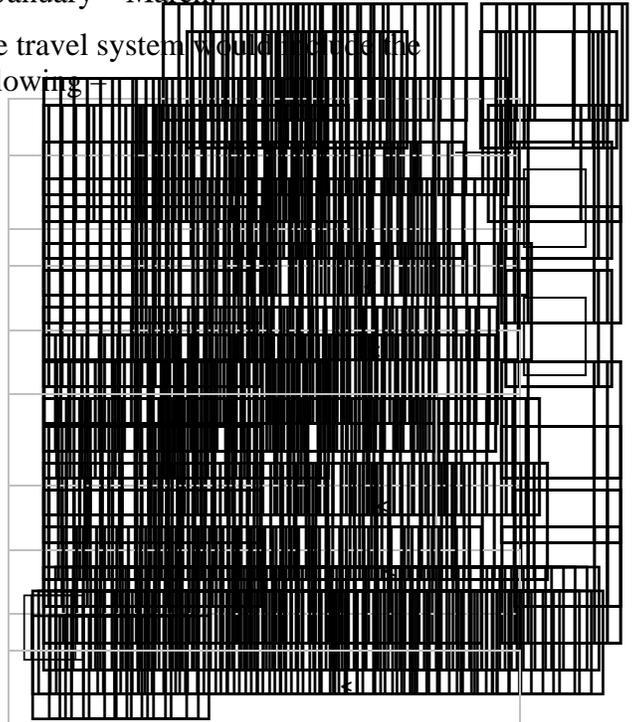
Alternative 6 – (Designate ATV use instead of highway-legal vehicle use on logging roads)

This alternative would increase mileage of roads designated for seasonal ATV use and close all trails January – March. Alternative 6 proposes changes to:

- ~~Prohibit~~ motorized travel off the designated routes forestwide.

- ~~Prohibit~~ night-riding from 1 hour after sunset until 1 hour before sunrise.
- ~~Add 6 miles~~ of dispersed camping corridors open year-round for highway-legal vehicles within 100 feet of centerline of road.
- ~~Close 111 miles~~ of designated trails January – March.

The travel system would include the following:



I did not choose this alternative because the seasonal trail closures do not meet the needs of the trail riders.

ALTERNATIVES ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED STUDY

1. ~~Alternatives~~ were proposed for **establishing more and different types of trails** on the Forest. Comments from the public were received requesting more ATV trails on the Winn, Caney, and Kisatchie Ranger Districts. Trails for 4X4 (jeeps), dune buggies, and wider utility vehicles were also requested.

I did not consider these alternatives in detail because the Forest does not have the capability to do more at this time. Limited resources and the backlog of trail construction require me to closely

evaluate the development of more trails. Approximately 75 miles of motorized trails are currently in the process of being constructed that will add to the 189 miles of existing system trails.

2. An alternative was proposed to offer **special use permits to allow people with disabilities and seniors to use their ATV to hunt and/or retrieve game on the Forest**. Many commented that the Kisatchie should allow big game retrieval for those possessing the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) Physically Challenged Hunter permit.

I did not consider this alternative in detail because the Forest Service does not issue special use permits for activities based on the characteristics of individuals. The selected alternative offers all hunters many ways – whether on foot or by motorized vehicle – to access the National Forest.

3. An alternative was proposed to **designate all woods roads and trails open May through December and closed the remainder of the year**. These designations would include all routes currently closed except for those in select administrative and special use areas, which would remain as currently designated. The maintained infrastructure roads would remain open year-round to highway-legal vehicles as they are now. The objectives of this proposal would be to provide simplicity for the user and for enforcement and to address hunting access needs, while reducing potential soil and water resource damage during a usually wet time of year.

I did not consider this alternative in detail because Forest Plan management objectives could not be effectively achieved by designating all logging roads the same. Resource concerns are

not being adequately addressed in this alternative.

4. Alternatives were proposed that **included additional big game retrieval corridors areas** exceeding those proposed in Alternative 5. One alternative proposed big game retrieval areas in the National Wildlife Management Preserves that totaled approximately 50,000 acres. Another alternative proposed additional big game retrieval corridors outside of the National Wildlife Management Preserves that were designated along approximately 300 miles of roads.

I did not consider these alternatives in detail because the big game retrieval corridors and areas were not sufficiently limited to be in compliance with the National Rule (36 CFR 212.51(b)).

5. An alternative was suggested to change Alt 3 by: 1) designating all open roads in the Preserves for ATV use October through December and closed the rest of the year to motorized use; 2) designating open roads outside the Preserves to be open May through December; 3) allowing game retrieval in the Preserves only; 4) allowing permits to hunt outside of the Preserves for those having State of Louisiana Physically Challenged Hunter permits; and 5) designating some roads outside of the Preserves for ATV use Oct thru Dec.

I did not consider this alternative in detail because it is very similar to Alternative 5, except that most open roads are open year-round. I found that the range of proposed alternatives contains portions that are similar to this proposal; and therefore, another alternative was not needed.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The proposal was listed in the *Schedule of Proposed Actions* for the Forest beginning February 2006. The initial scoping proposal letter was mailed to approximately 2,000 public contacts and the notice was placed in the newspapers of record in February 2006. Flyers, brochures, and news releases followed requesting review and comment on the Forest's Travel Management proposal. Public meetings were held in June 2006 to clarify issues and explore alternatives. Over 300 comments were received in response to this scoping effort.

A *Travel Management Update* (newsletter) was mailed January 31, 2007 to anyone who commented, attended meetings, or requested to be on the mailing list (approximately 600 mailings). The *Update* discussed the preliminary alternatives, significant issues, alternatives eliminated from further consideration, and projected timeline. Approximately 112 comments were received.

The draft Travel Management Environmental Assessment was mailed to approximately 150 recipients on April 23, 2007 for 30-day notice and comment. The legal notice was published in the *Alexandria Town Talk* on April 26, 2007, and the 30-day notice and comment period officially ended May 29, 2007. Ranger District Open Houses were held May 7, 8, 9, and 10 to provide an opportunity for the public to discuss and ask questions about Kisatchie National Forest's travel management project. Approximately 38 comments were received, which are summarized in Appendix N Response to 30-day Comments in the EA.

Letters, public notices, mailing lists, list of meeting attendees, etc. are available in the project file. (More details on public involvement are disclosed in Appendix D, Public Involvement, in the EA.)

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

I have determined, through environmental analysis, that these actions are not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment and are consistent with the Forest Plan, as amended. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement is not needed. I have based this determination on the analysis documented in the EA, in light of the following factors listed in 40 CFR 1508.27.

1. I have considered both beneficial and adverse effects (EA, Chapter 3) of this action, and this action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. Adherence to specific parameters, standards, guidelines, training, experience, and mitigation measures diminish potential adverse effects. Beneficial effects outweigh any potential adverse effects. Beneficial effects, however, have not been used to offset or compensate for potential adverse effects (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(1)).
2. There will be no significant effects on public health or safety (EA, §3.10 Human Health and Safety). Eliminating motorized cross-country travel will reduce riders' exposure to natural hazards, thereby reducing their chances of having an accident.
3. The unique characteristics of the geographic area, such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically-critical areas will not be affected because restricting motorized vehicles to designated routes and good stewardship will avoid impacts (EA, Chapter 3).
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly

controversial. There is no substantial scientific controversy related to the environmental effects of the selected alternative. (EA, Chapter 3 and Appendix N Response to Comments)

5. The possible effects on the human environment are not highly uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risks (EA, Chapter 3).
6. The action will not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration (EA, Chapter 3).
7. The action is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts (EA, Chapter 3).
8. The actions will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources (EA, §3.5 Heritage Resources).
9. The actions will not adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 because the selected alternative provides needed protection of threatened and endangered species (EA, §3.4 Aquatic Habitat and Threatened, Endangered, Sensitive, and Conservation Species; §3.6 Terrestrial Wildlife and TESC Species, Issue 3, Appendix H Biological Evaluation, Appendix J Botanical Evaluation).
10. The actions do not threaten a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were

considered in the EA (EA, Chapter 1, Chapter 3, and below in Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations).

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Part A

- This decision amends the Forest Plan to prohibit motorized travel off the designated roads, trails, and areas. See Appendix A1 in the EA for a complete list of all changes to the Forest Plan.
- This amendment is not a significant change in the Kisatchie's Revised Forest Plan. The determination that this is a non-significant amendment is made in accordance with the regulations in 36 CFR 219.10(f) (1982), and the Forest Service Manual 1926.5. This plan amendment meets the criteria for a non-significant amendment (FSM 1926.51) because these changes: (1) will not significantly alter the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management (see EA, Sections 1.5 and 1.7, and Chapter 3); (2) will not cause adjustments to management area boundaries or management prescriptions that will cause significant changes in the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management (see EA, Appendices A1 and A2); (3) are only minor changes to standards and guidelines (see EA, Appendix A1); and (4) will provide opportunities for additional projects and activities that will contribute to the achievement of the management prescription(s) (see EA, Appendix A2).

Part A and B

- The actions of the selected alternative are consistent with the intent of the Forest Plan's long-term goals and objectives (Forest Plan, p. 2-1 to 2-7).

The project was designed in conformance with land and resource management plan standards, as amended, and incorporates appropriate land and resource management plan guidelines and standards for recreation, transportation, and resource protection (Forest Plan, pp. 2-7 to 2-74).

- In accordance with FSM 2672.4, a Biological Evaluation (fauna) and Botanical Evaluation (flora) were prepared to evaluate the effects of the planned activities on PETS species. The activities of the selected alternative are not likely to adversely affect any threatened or endangered species. The USDI Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with this determination (Appendix O, EA). The proposed actions are not likely to cause a trend toward federal listing or a loss of viability for any sensitive species.
- The effect of the project actions on Management Indicator Species (MIS) will be beneficial (EA §3.7). Habitat condition should improve with the elimination of motorized cross-country travel.
- This decision is consistent with the National Historic Preservation Act, Executive Order 13175 on Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments. Section 106 review has been completed for one designated trail spur. All other designated routes are within existing road rights-of-ways and are excluded from Section 106 review. Protected heritage sites have been avoided in the designated motorized corridors.
- My decision is based on the analyses documented in the Environmental Assessment, the Biological Evaluation, and the Botanical Evaluation. These analyses show a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a

consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk.

IMPLEMENTATION AND APPEAL RIGHTS FOR PART A

Part A of the decision may be appealed in accordance with 36 CFR 217 (1999) by filing a written notice of appeal, in duplicate, within 45 days of the publication of the legal notice. The appeal must clearly state that it is a Notice of Appeal being filed pursuant to 36 CFR 217. Appeals must meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 217.9.

Appeals must be filed with the Regional Forester for the Southern Region at:

USDA Forest Service
Attn: Appeals Deciding Officer
1720 Peachtree Rd. NW., Suite 811N
Atlanta, Georgia 30309-9102

The appeal may also be faxed to (404) 347-5401 or mailed electronically in a common digital format to appeals-southern-regional-office@fs.fed.us. Hand-delivered appeals must be received within normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., closed on federal holidays.

This decision is effective seven days after publishing the legal notice of this decision in the newspaper of record (*The Town Talk*).

IMPLEMENTATION AND APPEAL RIGHTS FOR PART B

Part B of this decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215.11. A written appeal, including attachments, must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date this notice is published in the newspaper of record (*The Town Talk*). The appeal shall be sent to:

USDA Forest Service
Attn: Appeals Deciding Officer
1720 Peachtree Rd. NW., Suite 811N
Atlanta, Georgia 30309-9102

Appeals may be faxed to (404) 347-5401. Hand-delivered appeals must be received within normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., closed on federal holidays. Appeals may also be mailed electronically in a common digital format to appeals-southern-regional-office@fs.fed.us. Appeals must meet content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14.

If no appeal is received, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may not occur for 15 business days following the date of appeal disposition. (36 CFR 215.9)

CONTACT

For further information on either parts of this decision or the appeal process, contact Cynthia A. Dancak, 2500 Shreveport Highway, Pineville, LA 71360; phone (318) 473-7160.



MARGRETT L. BOLEY
Forest Supervisor
Kisatchie National Forest
2500 Shreveport Highway
Pineville, LA 71360

November 5, 2007

Date