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Environmental Assessment

Forest Plan Amendment #31 – Clarification of Forest Plan Direction Regarding Motor Vehicle Use

Colville National Forest
Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens Counties, Washington

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SUMMARY

The Colville National Forest proposes to amend the 1988 Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (hereafter called the Forest Plan) to clarify management direction to allow motor vehicle¹ use only on designated² roads³, trails⁴, and areas^{5,6}. The project area includes the entire Colville National Forest⁷, located in Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens Counties, in the state of Washington. The purpose of this proposed action is to make the Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan consistent with the USDA-Forest Service's 2005 Travel Management Rule⁸. The 2005 Travel Management Rule allows motor vehicle use only on designated roads, trails, and areas. This action is needed: 1) for the Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan to comply with and be consistent with Federal laws and regulations; 2) for the Colville National Forest to manage motor vehicle use in a manner consistent with the multiple-use goals for long-term land and resource management; and 3) to eliminate public confusion regarding any inconsistency between the Forest Plan and the 2005 Travel Management Rule.

¹ A “motor vehicle” is defined as: Any vehicle which is self-propelled, other than: (1) A vehicle operated on rails; and (2) Any wheelchair or mobility device, including one that is battery powered, that is designed solely for use by a mobility-impaired person for locomotion, and that is suitable for use in an indoor pedestrian area. (USDA Forest Service, 2005)

² A “designated” road, trail, or area is defined as: A National Forest System road, a National Forest System trail, or an area on National Forest System lands that is designated for motor vehicle use pursuant to § 212.51 on a motor vehicle use map. (USDA Forest Service, 2005) See footnotes on pages 23 and 25 for definitions of “National Forest System road” and “National Forest System Trail.”

³ A “road” is defined as: A motor vehicle route over 50 inches wide, unless identified and managed as a trail. (USDA Forest Service, 2005)

⁴ A “trail” is defined as: A route 50 inches or less in width or a route over 50 inches wide that is identified and managed as a trail. (USDA Forest Service, 2005)

⁵ An “area” is defined as: A discrete, specifically delineated space that is smaller, and in most cases much smaller, than a Ranger District. (USDA Forest Service, 2005)

⁶ The following vehicles and uses are exempted from these designations: (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, and (8) Motor vehicle use that is specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulations. These exemptions apply to any discussion in this document regarding motor vehicle use only on a system of designated roads, trails or areas.

⁷ Throughout this document the term “Colville National Forest” refers to both the Colville National Forest, and the portion of the Kaniksu National Forest administered by the Colville National Forest. (Forest Plan FEIS page I consistent with the multiple-use goals for long-term land and resource management -7).

⁸ The term “2005 Travel Management Rule” refers to the Final Rule entitled “*Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use*” published in the Federal Register, Volume 70, Number 216, Wednesday, November 9, 2005. The 2005 Travel Management Rule revised Forest Service regulations regarding travel management on National Forest System lands in the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 36, parts 212, 251, 261, and 295.

The proposed action would allow motor vehicle use only on designated roads, trails, and areas, which may diminish the opportunity for motor vehicle use in Management Area⁹ 6 and 8 portions of the Colville National Forest, particularly with regards to off-road¹⁰ travel. Allowing motor vehicle use only on designated roads, trails, and areas is also expected to reduce motor vehicle impacts to non-motorized recreational uses, soil, water quality, stream bank stability, wetlands and floodplains, fish, wildlife, sensitive plants, heritage resources, and noxious weed management.

In addition to the proposed action, the Forest Service also evaluated the following alternatives:

- **Alternative 1, No Action**

Under the No Action alternative, the Forest Service would not amend the Forest Plan to clarify direction with regards to motor vehicle use. Ambiguity in the current Forest Plan language would remain, and other than seasonal restrictions, Management Areas 6 and 8 would contain no direction with regards to where motor vehicles could go. This may result in difficulty in implementing and enforcing the 2005 Travel Management Rule, and may result in a continuation of geographically unrestricted motor vehicle use in Management Areas 6 and 8 (however, current seasonal restrictions would remain).

Based upon the effects of the alternatives, the responsible official will decide whether or not to amend the Forest Plan to clarify management direction to allow motor vehicle use only on designated roads, trails, and areas. The decision would determine the amended wording to be used in the Forest Plan.

⁹ The Forest Plan provides management prescriptions for specific areas of land called “Management Areas.” A Management Area emphasizes a particular resource, based on the capability of the area. See Forest Plan pages 4-67 through 4-122 for management prescriptions associated with each Management Area for the Colville National Forest.

¹⁰ The term “off-road” refers to possession or use of a motor vehicle not on a **forest road**. A **forest road** is defined as: “a road wholly or partly within or adjacent to and serving the National Forest System that the Forest Service determines is necessary for the protection, administration, and utilization of the National Forest System and the use and development of its resources. (Source: Title 36 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 212.1)

1. INTRODUCTION

Document Structure

The Forest Service has prepared this Environmental Assessment in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations. This Environmental Assessment discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action and alternatives. The document is organized into four parts:

- **Introduction:** The section includes information on the history of the proposal, the purpose of and need for the proposal, and the agency’s proposal for achieving that purpose and need. This section also details how the Forest Service informed the public of the proposal and how the public responded.
- **Comparison of Alternatives, including the Proposed Action:** This section provides a more detailed description of the agency’s proposed action as well as alternative methods for achieving the stated purpose. These alternatives were developed based on significant issues raised by the public and other agencies. This discussion also includes possible mitigation measures. Finally, this section provides a summary table of the environmental consequences associated with each alternative.
- **Environmental Consequences:** This section describes the environmental effects of implementing the proposed action and other alternatives. This analysis is organized by environmental component. Within each section, the affected environment is described first, followed by the effects of the No Action Alternative that provides a baseline for evaluation and comparison of the other alternatives that follow.
- **Agencies and Persons Consulted:** This section provides a list of preparers and agencies consulted during the development of the environmental assessment.

Background

- 1972 Presidential Executive Order 11644 (amended by Executive Orders 11989 and 12608) directed the Forest Service and other Federal agencies to regulate off-road vehicle use on public lands. (Nixon, 1972). The Colville National Forest produced an “Off Road Vehicle Use Management Plan” Environmental Analysis Report in June 1976. The Plan proposed to restrict areas for snowmobiles, motorcycles & trailbikes, and four-wheeled vehicles.
- 1984 Colville National Forest distributed a map entitled “Off Road Vehicle Use Management Plan.” This map identified areas or trails where use by off-road vehicles (defined as: four-wheel vehicles, motorcycles and trailbikes, and snowmobiles) was restricted or prohibited.
- The Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (hereafter referred to as the Forest Plan) was adopted in 1988. The Forest Plan contains Standards and Guidelines, and Management Area prescriptions that provide for multiple-uses of the Forest, including direction that guides motor vehicle use.

- The Forest Plan (pages 5-1, 5-2) contained direction to develop “implementation schedules,” i.e., schedules for specific projects. One such scheduled project was to update/revise the 1984 Off Road Vehicle Use Management Plan, to bring it into compliance with the Forest Plan.
- The Colville National Forest distributed Travel Plan Maps to the public in 1990, 1991, and 1995. These maps showed areas where motor vehicle use was restricted or prohibited, based on Forest Plan direction for Management Areas 1, 3B, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 11. The maps also designated roads and trails open to motor vehicle use in areas where such use was otherwise restricted or prohibited in Management Areas 1, 3B, 4, 6, 8, and 10. The remainder of the Forest, (Management Areas 2, 3A, 3C, 5, and 7) was shown as area open to motor vehicle use, with motor vehicle use of certain roads or trails restricted or prohibited.
- In 2005, the Department of Agriculture revised its regulations regarding travel management on National Forest System lands to clarify policy related to motor vehicle use, including the use of off-highway vehicles¹¹. The rule requires designation of roads, trails, and areas that are open to motor vehicle use, and that designations are to be made by class of vehicle, and, if appropriate, by time of year. The rule prohibits the use of motor vehicles off the designated system, as well as use of motor vehicles on routes and in areas that are not consistent with the designations.
- The National Forest Management Act of 1976 states: “*Resource plans and permits, contracts, and other instruments for the use and occupancy of National Forest System lands shall be consistent with the land management plans.*” Because several Management Area prescriptions in the Forest Plan do not currently state that motor vehicle use will be allowed only on designated roads, trails, and areas, the Forest Plan is not consistent with the 2005 Travel Management Rule; therefore it is necessary to clarify the Forest Plan to ensure consistency with the Rule.

Purpose & Need for Action

The purpose of this proposed action is to make the Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan consistent with the USDA-Forest Service's 2005 Travel Management Rule. The 2005 Travel Management Rule allows motor vehicle use only on designated roads, trails, and areas.¹² This action is needed: 1) for the Colville National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan to comply with and be consistent with Federal laws and regulations; 2) for the Colville National Forest to manage motor vehicle use in a manner consistent with the multiple-use goals for long-term land and resource

¹¹ An “off-highway vehicle” is defined as: Any motor vehicle designed for or capable of cross-country travel on or immediately over land, water, sand, snow, ice, marsh, swampland, or other natural terrain. (USDA Forest Service, 2005)

¹² The following vehicles and uses are exempted from these designations: (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, and (8) Motor vehicle use that is specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulations. **These exemptions apply to any discussion in this document regarding motor vehicle use only on a system of designated roads, trails or areas.**

management; and 3) to eliminate public confusion regarding any inconsistency between the Forest Plan and the 2005 Travel Management Rule.

Proposed Action

The action proposed by the Forest Service to meet the purpose and need is to amend the Colville Land and Resource Management Plan by modifying its text so as to allow motor vehicle use only on designated roads, trails, and areas, thus ensuring compliance and consistency with Federal laws and regulations, consistency with the multiple-use goals for long-term land and resource management, and consistency with the 2005 Travel Management Rule. (See Chapter 2, pages 15-17 for proposed changes to Forest Plan text).

Decision Framework

Given the purpose and need, the deciding official will review the proposed action in order to decide whether or not to amend the Forest Plan to clarify management direction to allow motor vehicle use only on designated roads, trails, and areas. The decision would include the amended text to be used in the Forest Plan.

The decision will also determine whether or not this amendment is a Significant or Non-Significant Forest Plan Amendment under the National Forest Management Act.

Changes to the Forest Plan that are not significant can result from:

1. Actions that do not significantly alter the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management;
2. Moving management area boundaries or changing management prescriptions based on onsite analysis when the adjustments do not cause significant changes in the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management; and
3. Minor changes in standards and guidelines;
4. Opportunities for additional management practices that will contribute to achievement of the management prescription.

The following examples are indicative of circumstances that may cause a significant change to a forest plan:

1. Changes that would significantly alter the long-term relationship between levels of multiple-use goods and services originally projected; and
2. Changes that may have an important effect on the entire Forest Plan or affect land and resources throughout a large portion of the planning area during the planning period.

Public Involvement

In early 2005, public meetings that included motorized and non-motorized recreation enthusiasts, local leaders, and residents were held in several locations to discern where

Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) recreation was both desirable and acceptable. As a result, over 650 miles of existing, open roads were designated for use by all types of motor vehicles on the Colville National Forest.

On October 10, 2006, and January 25, 2007 letters were sent to the Spokane Tribe, the Kalispel Tribe of Indians, and the Tribes of the Colville Indian Reservation, requesting consultation and participation in the process of designating roads, trails, and areas open to motor vehicle use. The Tribes did not respond to the Forest Service's invitations.

The process of designating roads, trails and areas available for motor vehicle use began with meetings in Newport, Spokane, Ione, and Republic beginning in January 2007. These meetings generated a great deal of local public interest in motor vehicle use on the Forest.

The proposal to amend the Forest Plan was first listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions on October 1, 2007¹³.

The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during a scoping and 30-day comment period (36 CFR 215.5) from October 17, 2007 through November 16, 2007. In addition to the legal notice published in the *Colville Statesman-Examiner* newspaper, a letter was sent to the Forest's travel management mailing list (182 addresses). A total of five letters or messages were received in response to the 30-day comment period.

- One reply was from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 10, requesting to be on the project mailing list.
- One reply was from an individual requesting an extension of the comment period. (Other than a statement that an extension would provide participants an opportunity to locate areas of the forest where motorized use would be affected, his letter contained no comments.)
- The remaining three respondents provided comments expressing their concerns with the proposal. (See Issues discussion below).

Issues

The Forest Service separated the issues into two groups: significant and non-significant issues. Significant issues were defined as important adverse effects directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action. Non-significant issues were identified as those: 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan, or other higher level decision; 3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The Council for Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations require this delineation in Sec. 1501.7, "...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)...". Public comments were examined for significant issues, as follows:

¹³In the October 2007 Schedule of Proposed Actions the project was entitled "Forest Plan Amendment – Management of Wheeled Motor Vehicle Off-Road Travel." In the January 1, 2008 Schedule of Proposed Actions, the project title was changed to "Forest Plan Amendment – Clarification of Forest Plan Direction Regarding Motor Vehicle Use."

Table 1: Comment Analysis and Issue Disposition

Name	Organization	Comment Text	Analyst Interpretations/Remarks	Comment Disposition
Alan Dragoo		<p><i>It seems premature to amend the Forest Plan to prohibit motorized cross-country travel before substantially completing the Travel Management Planning process to designate a system of roads, trails and areas open to motorized vehicle use. This amendment should not take effect until that process is complete.</i></p>	<p>The respondent may be suggesting the Forest Plan be amended to change where motorized travel is allowed, prohibited, or restricted, based on public desires as expressed in the motor vehicle use designation process. However, this project's scope is limited to clarifying the Forest Plan; not changing its underlying guidance. Clarifying the Forest Plan prior to designating routes is necessary so as to make the Forest Plan consistent with the 2005 Travel Management Rule. This currently proposed amendment does not preclude amending the Forest Plan later if there is a need to change where motorized use is allowed, prohibited, or restricted..</p> <p>(See also Federal Register page 68278-68279, response to comment, re: Section 212.51: "<i>Since under some land management plans, large areas of NFS lands are open to cross-country motor vehicle travel, the Department expects that some land management plan amendments will be proposed and considered during implementation of the final rule. However, the Department does not believe that the final rule should provide reconsideration of all travel management decisions made in land management plans.</i>")</p> <p>It is possible the respondent is concerned that the Forest Service will not continue the process of designating roads, trails, or areas once the Forest Plan is amended and the initial round of designations is completed. The Colville National Forest is expecting the process of motor vehicle use designations to continue over the long-term. This amendment will have no effect on the duration of the motor vehicle use designation process as there is nothing in this proposed amendment that would preclude designation of more motor vehicle routes or areas in the future.</p>	<p>Not a significant issue. The issue raised here is procedural in nature. If the underlying issue is a desire to change where motorized use is allowed, prohibited, or restricted, such a change is outside the scope of this environmental analysis.</p>

Name	Organization	Comment Text	Analyst Interpretations/Remarks	Comment Disposition
Alan Dragoo (continued)		<p><i>A blanket substitution of "Motor Vehicle Use" in place of "Off-Road Vehicles" is not acceptable, especially in MA-4 and MA-11, where use is prohibited. In the current plan, the term "Off Road Vehicle" generally appears to mean a vehicle being used off of roads or trails (i.e. motorized cross country travel). In the proposed amendment, the term "Motor Vehicle Use" appears to mean all uses of motorized vehicles, on or off roads or trails. There are existing legally designated roads and trails open to motorized vehicle use in MA-4 and MA-11 areas.</i></p>	<p>In the proposed Forest Plan amendment, the term "motor vehicle use" is indeed intended to mean all motorized vehicles. The 2005 Travel Management Rule is written to manage motor vehicle use, therefore the Forest Plan amendment would be clarified so it would be consistent with the 2005 Rule in its use of terminology. [See also Federal Register page 68272: "The final rule addresses all motor vehicle use on NFS roads, on NFS trails, and in areas on NFS lands, from passenger cars to ATVs to motorcycles. The final rule is not limited to OHVs, in part because OHVs are not always clearly distinguishable from passenger vehicles (today the family car may be quite capable of off-highway travel)].</p> <p>With regards to MAs 4 and 11, it has always been the Forest Plan's intent to prohibit motor vehicle travel in these Management Areas (with certain limited exceptions). There are no trails in MA 4 or MA-11 authorized to be open to motor vehicle use. However, the respondent is technically correct that there are currently forest roads open to motorized vehicle use in MA-4 and MA-11. An analysis was conducted utilizing GIS technology which found 17 roads with segments currently open to motor vehicle travel in MA 4 or MA-11. The only open road in MA-4 is Road 1935000, which runs through the edge of the Bunchgrass Meadows proposed Research Natural Area. There is currently a proposal to formally establish this RNA which would amend the Forest Plan and move the MA-4 boundary so that Road 1935000 would be entirely outside MA-4. All open road segments in MA-11 are either short dead-end spurs, or roads along the MA-11 boundary, and all may be classified as mapping precision errors (i.e., the road or the closure on the road is not mapped correctly, or the MA-11 boundary is not mapped precisely enough to exclude the road). It is expected that these errors will be corrected when the Forest Plan is revised. The bottom line is we do not expect to close any roads associated with MA 4 or MA-11 as a result of this Forest Plan amendment.</p>	<p>Given that the Forest Service does not expect to close any roads associated with MA 4 or MA-11 as a result of this Forest Plan amendment, there is no issue applicable to this environmental analysis.</p>

Name	Organization	Comment Text	Analyst Interpretations/Remarks	Comment Disposition
David Heflick	Conservation Northwest, and The Lands Council	<p><i>The proposed language would ... effectively defeat a key objective of the current language: to make it clear that within areas of the forest in which ORVs are allowed, there is a spectrum of appropriateness ranging from "discourage off-road vehicle use" to "[o]ff-road vehicle use is appropriate."</i></p> <p><i>By striking the phrases "prohibit or restrict," "limited to," "discouraged," "closures may be implemented," and "limited to existing travelways" from the language pertaining to ORV use in MA1, MA3-B, MA10 and globally replacing those phrases with "allow motor vehicle use only on designated roads, trails, and/or areas" removes the implication that ORV use should be more restricted and limited in these sensitive areas and can be immediately curtailed if damage to (or risk of damage to) resources becomes apparent.</i></p>	<p>The respondent is concerned that the Forest Plan would lose the "guidelines" part of "Standards and Guidelines." The problem with the current "guideline" language is much of it is ambiguous, and we want to minimize how much of this ambiguity is carried forward. The Forest Service feels it is unnecessary to retain off-road vehicle or motor vehicle guidance in all cases, because when designating roads, trails, or areas for motor vehicle use, the overall prescription for each Management Area provides sufficient guidance. It should also be noted that "guidance" language was originally proposed to be retained for several management areas (MA-2, 3C, 6), and "guidance" language would also be retained for MA-10 in response to this comment.</p>	<p>Because the overall prescription for each management area would continue to provide sufficient guidance, it is not expected that there would be any routes or areas designated open that would not have been allowed previously. Thus no significant issue is identified in this comment.</p>
David Heflick (continued)		<p><i>The proposed global replacement of "off-road vehicle" with "motor vehicle" significantly blurs the line between ORVs (and their potential for adverse impacts) and standard vehicles. ORVs and the designation of ORV routes have significantly more impacts than standard motor vehicles and the designation of open roads:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• The ability of ORVs to illegally travel off the designated route is magnitudes greater than the ability of standard motor vehicles to do the same.</i> <i>• A newly designated ORV route system will increase ORV use on the designated roads by a much greater extent than it will increase standard motor vehicle use.</i> <i>• While a certain percentage of any user group will conduct themselves in an illegal or inappropriate fashion, the damage caused by illegal ORV use is, as a rule, much higher than the damage caused by renegade operators of standard motor vehicles.</i> <p><i>Therefore, regulations pertaining to the use of ORVs on the forest need to be kept clearly distinct from regulations pertaining to standard motor vehicles.</i></p>	<p>Where it is appropriate to differentiate between different classes of vehicles, this will be done during the designation process. (36 CFR 212.51: <i>"Motor vehicle use on National Forest System roads, on National Forest System trails, and in areas on National Forest System lands shall be designated by vehicle class and, if appropriate, by the time of year by the responsible official...."</i></p> <p>The 2005 Federal Travel Management regulations are written to address motor vehicles, rather than off-road or off-highway vehicles, in a manner that specifically addresses the "blurred line." (See Federal Register page 68265, Response to comments, <i>Need for Revised Rule: "In addition, the line between highway vehicles and OHVs has blurred. Vehicles created for specialized off-road use, such as military vehicles, are now marketed and purchased as family cars."</i>) One of the purposes of this Forest Plan amendment is to achieve consistency between the Travel Management regulations and the Forest Plan.</p>	<p>There are several issues contained in this comment:</p> <p><i>"ORVs and the designation of ORV routes have ... impacts..." and "A newly designated ORV route system will increase ORV use on the designated roads..."</i></p> <p>Because this Forest Plan amendment would not designate any off-highway vehicle routes, consideration of impacts associated with designation of off-highway vehicle routes is outside the scope of this environmental analysis.</p> <p>Because these issues are outside the scope of this environmental analysis, there are no significant issues identified.</p>

Name	Organization	Comment Text	Analyst Interpretations/Remarks	Comment Disposition
David Heflick (continued)		<i>The proposed language should be tightened to make it clear that the allowable “cross country travel” in dispersed camping sites is limited solely to ingress/egress and that travel <u>between</u> dispersed sites, as well as ORV play activities within the site, is prohibited.</i>	The phrase “solely for the purpose of dispersed camping” already addresses this concern. (This wording came directly from the 2005 Travel Management regulations. See 36 CFR 212.51(b).) While we agree that the intent of the rule is to restrict motorized use for dispersed camping <i>primarily</i> to ingress and egress, modifying the wording risks unintended consequences. For example, if we restrict use of motor vehicles to ingress and egress, it could prohibit people from parking their vehicles off the road, or storing food or sleeping in their vehicles in their campsite.	The Forest Service believes the language in the regulations is sufficiently clear, and regulations currently exist to take enforcement actions against people causing resource damage. There is no significant issue identified in this comment.
David Heflick (continued)		<i>In addition, it would be helpful to indicate that only certain segments of designated routes, rather than an entire route, will be designated for this extremely limited off-road travel.</i>	The Travel Management regulations allow segmentation of routes in the designation process. [see 36 CFR 212.5(a)(2)(ii and iii): <i>Roads, or segments thereof, may be restricted to use by certain classes of vehicle or types of traffic... .</i> ,” and “ <i>Roads, or segments thereof, may be closed to all vehicle use... .</i> ”] Therefore, it is unnecessary to add additional language to the Forest Plan to allow route segmentation with regards to off-road travel for the purpose of dispersed camping.	There is no significant issue identified in this comment.
David Heflick (continued)		<i>We request that the CNF completely eliminate the following proposed language: Use of a road or trail that is authorized by a legally documented right-of-way held by a State, county or other local public road authority. This clause touches on legal issues and controversies (such as those related to R.S. 2477) that are well beyond the scope of a forest plan.</i>	The purpose of including this provision is to be consistent with the Travel Management Rule. The Travel Management Rule specifically included this text in its definitions of National Forest System road and National Forest System trail, and it would be inconsistent for the Colville National Forest to exclude it in its Forest Plan. Including the term “legally documented” in the definition does in fact leave determination of legal right-of-way to higher legal authorities.	Debate over what constitutes a “legally documented right-of-way and what specific rights it conveys is outside the scope of the Forest Plan amendment.
Jeff Lambert	Spokane Mountaineers, Inc.	<i>Comments are exactly the same as David Heflick’s (above), except that the following sentences are added at the end of the 4th paragraph: We believe that the adjective “discourage” is a poor use if more specific descriptions of the allowable activity can be provided.</i>	We agree that the word “discourage” is ambiguous and unnecessary, which is why it is proposed to be deleted from the amended Forest Plan language. The overall prescription for Management Area 1 provides sufficient guidance (e.g., “ <i>Manage for a Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized recreation setting. A Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS class may be allowed when compatible with maintaining integrity of habitat.</i> ”)	There is no adverse effect identified in this comment; therefore there is no significant issue.

Name	Organization	Comment Text	Analyst Interpretations/Remarks	Comment Disposition
Jeff Lambert (continued)		<i>We prefer that those areas be designated for no motorized with the very specific exception described.</i>	<p>We'll assume the respondent intends that "those areas" refers to Management Areas 1, 3B, and 10 described in his next paragraph; and that "the very specific exception described" refers to provisions in Management Area 1, 3B, and 10 prescriptions that describe the conditions under which motor vehicle use would be allowed in these management areas.</p> <p>With regards to MAs 1, 3B, and 10, sufficient language that describes when motorized use is appropriate would be retained. For example: MA-1: <i>"Manage for a Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized recreation setting. A Semi-Primitive Motorized ROS class may be allowed when compatible with maintaining integrity of habitat."</i> MA-3B: <i>"Designated areas or travel routes can be open for motorized recreation activities when use is compatible with the overall recreation and wildlife management objectives,"</i> and <i>"All existing roads will be closed except Forest Road 2054."</i> MA-10: <i>"Off-Road <u>Motor</u> vehicles are limited to existing travelways except for snowmobiles."</i></p>	Issue disposition is the same as for David Heflick's first comment (above).

Although there were no significant issues identified from the comments received during the public comment period, the Forest Service is keenly aware that changes limiting where people can recreate with motor vehicles is an important issue. The Forest Service compared the amended Forest Plan text with the existing text, and identified Management Areas where there might be an important change in motorized recreational use. The analysis is summarized in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Analysis of Change

Forest Plan Reference	Effect of Change
MA-1 Old Growth Dependent Species Habitat	Motor vehicle use is currently allowed, but only where such use is compatible with maintaining integrity of habitat. Under the amendment, motor vehicle use would still be allowed, but only where deemed appropriate under MA-1 Standards and Guidelines (i.e., where such use is compatible with maintaining integrity of habitat). There would be no meaningful effect to recreational motor vehicle use.
MA-2 Caribou Habitat	Motor vehicle use is currently allowed, but only where such use maintains caribou habitat integrity. Under the amendment, motor vehicle use would still be allowed, and the same guidelines would be retained. There would be no meaningful effect to recreational motor vehicle use.
MA-3A Recreation	For Management Area 3A, use of motor vehicles off of roads is allowed only on designated trails or areas. The proposed change would clarify this direction. There would be no meaningful effect to recreational motor vehicle use from this clarification.
MA-3B Recreation/Wildlife	Motor vehicle use is currently allowed only where allowed by site-specific direction. The amendment would still allow motor vehicle use only where site-specifically designated. There would be no meaningful effect to recreational motor vehicle use.
MA-3C Downhill Skiing	Motor vehicle use is currently allowed only on designated routes and areas. There would be no meaningful effect to recreational motor vehicle use.
MA-4 Research Natural Area	Off-road vehicle use is already prohibited. Changing to “motor vehicle use is prohibited” would have no meaningful effect to recreational motor vehicle use.
MA-5 Scenic/Timber	The current Forest Plan language states that off-road vehicle use is permitted where designated. The revised language would continue to do the same with regards to all motor vehicles. Despite the fact that interpretation or implementation may change, such change is the result of the 2005 Travel Management Rule, not the result of changing Forest Plan text (i.e., Forest Plan direction would not change). Therefore, there is no meaningful effect to recreational motor vehicle use as a result of the proposed change in Forest Plan text.

Forest Plan Reference	Effect of Change
MA-6 Scenic/Winter Range	Under current Forest Plan wording, other than seasonal restrictions, there is no guidance with regards to where motor vehicles can or cannot go. The implication is that all roads, trails, and areas in the Management Area are open to motor vehicle use outside the winter season. The effect of the amendment would be that motor vehicles would be restricted to designated roads, trails, and/or areas (currently they are not restricted to designated roads, trails, or areas).
MA-7 Wood/Forage	The current Forest Plan language states that off-road vehicle use is appropriate where designated. The revised language would continue to do the same with regards to all motor vehicles. Despite the fact that interpretation or implementation may change, such change is the result of the 2005 Travel Management Rule, not the result of changing Forest Plan text (i.e., Forest Plan direction would not change). Therefore, there is no meaningful effect to recreational motor vehicle use as a result of the proposed change in Forest Plan text.
MA-8 Winter Range	Under current Forest Plan wording, other than seasonal restrictions, there is no guidance with regards to where motor vehicles can or cannot go. The implication is that all roads, trails, and areas in the Management Area are open to motor vehicle use outside the winter season. The effect of the amendment would be that motor vehicles would be restricted to designated roads, trails, and/or areas (currently they are not restricted to designated roads, trails, or areas).
MA-9 Wilderness Management	Motorized and mechanized use is currently prohibited in Wilderness. There would be no meaningful effect to recreational motor vehicle use.
MA-10 Semi-Primitive, Motorized Recreation	Motor vehicles are currently allowed only on existing travelways. Under the amendment, motor vehicles would be allowed only on designated, existing travelways. There would be no meaningful effect to recreational motor vehicle use.
MA-11 Semi-Primitive, Non-Motorized Recreation	Motor vehicles are currently not allowed for recreation. There would be no meaningful effect to recreational motor vehicle use.
Forestwide Standards and Guidelines, Trails #9, and Transportation #8.	This change would move direction from “Trails” to “Transportation.” There would be no meaningful effect to recreational motor vehicle use.

Forest Plan Reference	Effect of Change
<p>MAs 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10. Provision for limited use of motor vehicles solely for the purpose of dispersed camping.</p>	<p>Going off-road with motor vehicles for dispersed camping is not specifically addressed in the Forest Plan, and in practice, motor vehicle access to dispersed camping sites is usually allowed in Management Areas where motorized use is allowed. There is already guidance in the Forest Plan (e.g., INFISH amendment; Standards and Guidelines for Recreation, Fisheries, Soil, Water, and Air; and Best Management Practices) that would limit motor vehicle access to dispersed recreation sites where resource damage would occur. Therefore, there is no meaningful effect to recreational motor vehicle use from amending the Forest Plan to include this provision.</p>

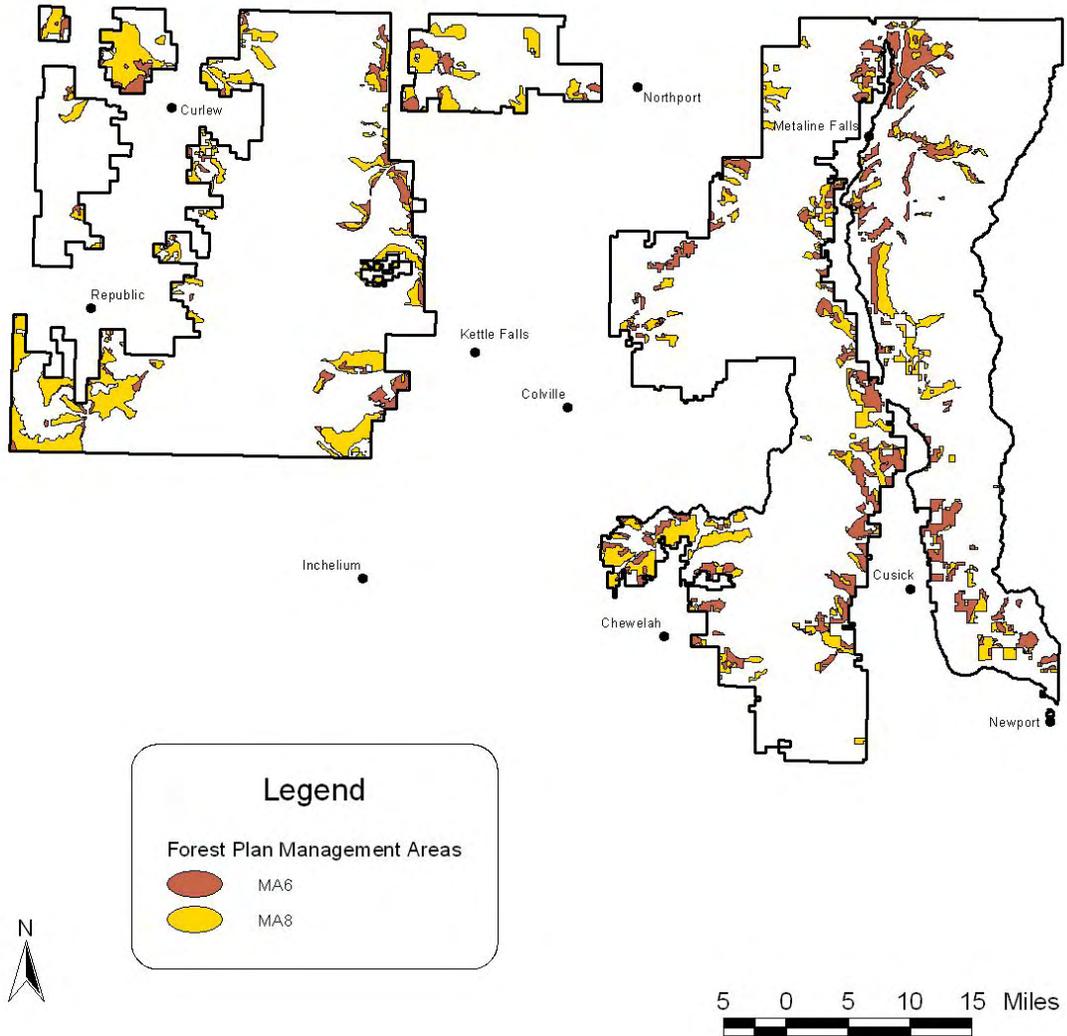
As a result of this analysis, it was determined that changes in Forest Plan text in Management Areas 6 and 8 prescriptions are the only areas where there would be any meaningful effect to recreational motor vehicle users.

The only significant issue is as follows:

Issue: Motor vehicle users, especially recreational off-highway vehicle users, would not be able to travel in as many places as they can now because their use would be restricted to designated roads, trails, and areas within Management Areas 6 and 8 (see Figure 1, below). Currently the Forest Plan does not restrict their use to designated roads, trails, and areas in these Management Areas. This reduction in available motor vehicle use area would diminish the opportunity for motorized recreational use in a portion of the Colville National Forest.

Analysis comparison: Compare the estimated percentage of Management Areas 6 and 8 “used” by people operating motor vehicles. (See discussion on page 25 for explanation of area “used”).

Colville National Forest Management Areas 6 and 8



jp 12/4/2007

Figure 1: Forest Plan Management Areas 6 and 8

2. COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

This chapter describes and compares the alternatives considered for the project. It includes a description of each alternative considered. This section also presents the alternatives in comparative form, sharply defining the differences between each alternative and providing a clear basis for choice among options by the decision maker and the public. Some of the information used to compare the alternatives is based upon the design of the alternative and some of the information is based upon the environmental, social and economic effects of implementing each alternative.

Alternatives

Alternative 1, No Action

Under the No Action alternative, the Forest Service would not amend the Forest Plan to clarify direction with regards to motor vehicle use. Ambiguity in the current Forest Plan language would remain, and Management Areas 6 and 8 would contain no direction with regards to where motor vehicles could go. This may result in difficulty in implementing and enforcing the 2005 Travel Management Rule, and may result in a continuation of geographically unrestricted motor vehicle use in Management Areas 6 and 8 (current seasonal restrictions would remain).

Alternative 2, The Proposed Action:

The proposed action is to amend the Forest Plan to clarify direction with regards to motor vehicle use so as to make the Forest Plan consistent with the 2005 Travel Management Rule. While Forest Plan language would be amended for all Management Areas, the most notable change would be in Management Areas 6 and 8: Direction would be added that would allow motor vehicle use only on designated roads, trails, and areas. Direction with regards to where motorized travel is allowed is currently absent in the Forest Plan for Management Areas 6 and 8. All proposed changes in the Forest Plan are as follows:

Table 3: Proposed Changes in Forest Plan Text

Forest Plan Reference	Current Forest Plan Text	Proposed Change
All Management Areas	Resource Element: <u>Off Road Vehicles</u>	Change the <i>Resource Element</i> from <u>Off Road Vehicles</u> to <u>Motor Vehicle Use</u>
Management Areas 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10	<p>Resource Element: <u>Off Road Vehicles MA-1 (Old Growth Dependent Species Habitat)</u>: Off-road vehicle use will be discouraged. Closures may be implemented as needed.</p> <p>MA-2 (Caribou Habitat): Implement seasonal or permanent closures when key habitats are located within 1/4 mile of open roads or trail and off-road vehicle activities would adversely affect caribou use of these habitats during the normal season of use. Continue use of present snowmobile route over Pass Creek Pass. Close route if caribou are within three miles of the Pass.</p> <p>MA-3A (Recreation): Off-road vehicle use is appropriate only on designated areas or trails.</p> <p>MA-3B (Recreation / Wildlife): Prohibit or restrict motorized vehicle use unless allowed by site-specific off-road vehicle direction. (Continued)</p>	<p>1. Delete all text from <i>Resource/Activity Standards and Guidelines</i> <u>Motor Vehicle Use</u> for Management Areas 1, 3A, 3B, 5, and 7.</p> <p>2. Retain and modify (modifications shown with underline or strikethrough) the following text from <i>Resource/Activity Standards and Guidelines</i> as follows:</p> <p>MA-2 (Caribou Habitat): Implement seasonal or permanent closures when key habitats are located within 1/4 mile of open roads or trails and <u>motor</u> vehicle activities would adversely affect caribou use of these habitats during the normal season of use. Continue use of present snowmobile route over Pass Creek Pass. Close route if caribou are within three miles of the pass.</p> <p>MA-3C (Downhill Skiing): <u>Motor</u> vehicle use is appropriate on designated routes and in designated areas where minimum conflict between users can be assured.</p> <p>MA-6 (Scenic / Winter Range): Seasonal closures may be implemented to provide more use of habitat by big game animals. Seasonal closures will be identified on the <u>Motor Vehicle Use Map</u>.</p> <p>MA-8 (Winter Range): Off-road vehicle use is allowed. Seasonal closures may be implemented. <u>Seasonal closures</u> will be identified <u>on the Motor Vehicle Use Map</u>.</p> <p>MA-10 (Semi-Primitive, Motorized Recreation): <u>Motor</u> vehicles are limited to existing travelways except for <u>over-snow vehicles</u>.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Continued)</p>

Forest Plan Reference	Current Forest Plan Text	Proposed Change
<p>Management Areas 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10 (Continued)</p>	<p>MA-3C (Downhill Skiing): Off-road vehicle use is appropriate on designated routes and in designated areas where minimum conflict between users can be assured.</p> <p>MA-5 (Scenic / Timber): Off-road vehicle use permitted as designated in off road vehicle implementation schedule.</p> <p>MA-6 (Scenic / Winter Range): Seasonal closures may be implemented to provide more use of habitat by big game animals.</p> <p>MA-7 (Wood / Forage): Off-road vehicle use is appropriate as designated in off road vehicle implementation schedules.</p> <p>MA-8 (Winter Range): Off-road vehicle use is allowed. Seasonal closures may be implemented. Closures will be identified in the Forest Travel Management Implementation Schedule.</p> <p>MA-10 (Semi-Primitive, Motorized Recreation): Off-road vehicles are limited to existing travelways except for snowmobiles.</p>	<p>3. Add the following text to <i>Resource/Activity Standards and Guidelines, Motor Vehicle Use</i>, for Management Areas 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10:</p> <p>MA-10: Allow motor vehicle use only on designated roads, and trails; however... (plus all of the text following “however” in the first paragraph below, and all of the text in the second and third paragraphs below).</p> <p>MA-10: Allow motor vehicle use only on designated roads, trails, and areas; however the following vehicles and uses are exempt from these designations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aircraft • Watercraft • Over-snow vehicles • Limited administrative use by the Forest Service. • Use of any fire, military, emergency, or law enforcement vehicle for emergency purposes. • Authorized use of any combat or combat support vehicle for national defense purposes. • Law enforcement response to violations of law, including pursuit. • Motor vehicle use that is specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulations. • Use of a road or trail that is authorized by a legally documented right-of-way held by a State, county or other local public road authority. <p>Use by over-snow vehicles is allowed except where such use is restricted or prohibited; however, the following uses are exempt from restrictions and prohibitions on use by over-snow vehicles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited administrative use by the Forest Service. • Use of any fire, military, emergency, or law enforcement vehicle for emergency purposes. • Authorized use of any combat or combat support vehicle for national defense purposes. • Law enforcement response to violations of law, including pursuit. • Use by over-snow vehicles that is specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulations. <p>Limited use of motor vehicles solely for the purpose of dispersed camping would be allowed within a specified distance of certain designated routes, as determined in conjunction with the designation of routes open to motor vehicle use.</p>

Forest Plan Reference	Current Forest Plan Text	Proposed Change
<p>Management Areas 4, 9, and 11</p>	<p>MA-4 (Research Natural Area): Off-road vehicle use is prohibited.</p> <p>MA-9 (Wilderness): Off-road vehicle use is prohibited.</p> <p>MA-11 (Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized Recreation): Motorized equipment can be used for construction and maintenance of trails. Motorized vehicles such as all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles and motorcycles are not allowed for recreation.</p>	<p>1. Retain and modify (modifications underlined) the following text from <i>Resource/Activity Standards and Guidelines</i> as follows:</p> <p>MA-4 (Research Natural Area): <u>Motor</u> vehicle use is prohibited.</p> <p>MA-11 (Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized Recreation): Motorized equipment can be used for construction and maintenance of trails. Motor vehicles such as all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles and motorcycles are not allowed for recreation.</p> <p>2. Add the following text to <i>Resource/Activity Standards and Guidelines</i>, Motor Vehicle Use for Management Areas 4 and 11:</p> <p>The following vehicles and uses are exempt from the motor vehicle use prohibition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aircraft • Use of any fire, military, emergency, or law enforcement vehicle for emergency purposes. • Authorized use of any combat or combat support vehicle for national defense purposes. • Law enforcement response to violations of law, including pursuit. • Motor vehicle use that is specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulations. • Use of a road or trail that is authorized by a legally documented right-of-way held by a State, county or other local public road authority. <p>3. Retain and modify (modifications underlined) the following text from <i>Resource/Activity Standards and Guidelines</i> as follows:</p> <p>MA-9 (Wilderness): <u>Motor</u> vehicle use is prohibited, <u>except as authorized by Federal Law or regulation.</u></p>
<p><i>Forestwide Standards and Guidelines, Trails #9</i></p>	<p>Designate areas for off-road vehicle (ORV) use through the Forest Travel Implementation Schedule and in conformance with ROS designations for specific areas. Manage ORV use to minimize resource damage and to promote public safety.</p>	<p>Delete #9 from Trails section; Replace with change to <i>Forestwide Standards and Guidelines, Transportation #8</i> (see below).</p>
<p><i>Forestwide Standards and Guidelines, Transportation #8</i></p>	<p>Develop and implement a forest-wide travel management schedule.</p>	<p>Change the text in Transportation #8 as follows:</p> <p><u>Designate roads, trails, and areas for motor vehicle use through the Motor Vehicle Use Map and in conformance with ROS designations for specific areas. Manage motor vehicle use to minimize resource damage and to promote public safety.</u></p>

Alternatives Not Considered in Detail

Other than the No Action alternative, the only alternative that would avoid the potential adverse effect to motorized recreational users would be to amend the Forest Plan as proposed except with no changes to Management Areas 6 or 8 Standards and Guidelines. This alternative will not be considered in detail because its effects would not be substantially different from the No Action alternative, and it would fail to meet the purpose and need of making the Forest Plan consistent with the 2005 Travel Management Rule.

Comparison of Alternatives

This section provides a summary of the effects of implementing each alternative. Information in the table is focused on activities and effects where different levels of effects or outputs can be distinguished quantitatively or qualitatively among alternatives.

Table 4: Alternative Comparison

		No Action	Proposed Action
Effect to Motor Vehicle Recreationists: Compare the estimated percentage of Management Areas 6 and 8 “used” by people operating motor vehicles. (See discussion on pages 25 for explanation of area “used”).		25-30% of Management Areas 6 and 8 would be “used” by people operating motor vehicles	18% of Management Areas 6 and 8 would be “used” by people operating motor vehicles
Effects to other Resources: Compare effects with regards to resources potentially adversely affected by use of motor vehicles off of open roads.	Non-motorized Recreation	Management Areas 6 and 8 would not have off-road and closed-road motorized use reduced, and the most heavily used areas (for example, North Fork Chewelah Creek or Calispell Creek areas) would continue to be unattractive for non-motorized recreational activities.	Areas that currently have heavy off-road motorized use would have such use reduced as the 2005 Travel Management Rule is implemented. These areas (for example, North Fork Chewelah Creek or Calispell Creek areas) may become more attractive for non-motorized recreational activities. However, if some user-created motor vehicle trails become designated routes in the future, there still would be areas heavily used by motor vehicles, and these areas would continue to be unattractive to non-motorized recreational users.
	Human-Caused Forest Fires	In Management Areas 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, 5, 7, and 10 (approximately 79% of the Colville National Forest open to motor vehicle use), the potential for human-caused fires would be reduced in areas away from the designated system because use of motor vehicles would occur only on or in the immediate vicinity of designated roads, trails, and areas. The potential for human-caused fires would not be reduced in Management Areas 6 and 8 (approximately 21% of the Colville National Forest open to motor vehicle	In Management Areas 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10 (100% of the Colville National Forest open to motor vehicle use), the potential for human-caused fires would be reduced in areas away from the designated system because use of motor vehicles would occur only on or in the immediate vicinity of designated roads, trails, and areas.

		use) since motor vehicle use would not be effectively restricted to the designated system.	
	Law Enforcement	Taking no action may limit the Forest Service’s ability to enforce the Travel Management Rule across the entire Colville National Forest. Enforcement of motor vehicle use rules and regulations will continue to be difficult for Forest Service officials.	If the Forest Plan is amended, with the 2005 Travel Management Rule applied in a consistent manner across the Forest, and with improved signing, a Motor Vehicle Use Map, and official Closure Orders, the ability to enforce rules and regulations is expected to improve considerably.
	Soils	<p>Adverse impacts to soils (exposure to erosion, compaction, mixing, displacement) would likely increase in Management Areas 6 and 8, resulting in decreased soil productivity and increased sediment delivery to lakes and streams. The number of user-created trails is expected to increase, as is the area of wetlands and meadows damaged.</p> <p>In areas where use is already high, continued or increased use of motor vehicles off-road is expected to have noticeable impacts to soils, especially in motor vehicle “play” areas such as wet meadows, road cuts and embankments, or dispersed camping areas. These high use areas would be expected to expand as off-highway vehicle use increases; therefore the areas with noticeable impacts to soils would also expand. In high use areas in close proximity to lakes and streams, loss of productivity and soil erosion may have important localized adverse impacts to water quality and fisheries.</p> <p>The places where soils are impacted in Management Areas 6 and 8 may be more severely affected than before, due to more concentrated motor vehicle use and increased use in wetland and riparian areas.</p>	Impacts to soils from motor vehicle use off of roads and trails would be substantially reduced, and the expansion of adverse soil impacts would not occur. Wetlands and riparian areas, where rutting of wet soils is presently occurring, would benefit most from implementing the Travel Management Rule forest-wide. Sediment into lakes and streams from eroded soil would decrease as vegetation recovers.
	Aquatic Resources	Continued and perhaps increased unrestricted motor vehicle use off of roads in Management Areas 6 and 8 is expected to continue and increase the adverse impacts to aquatic resources. Water quality and fish habitat would continue to be degraded by sediment contributions from the combination of livestock use and motor vehicle use.	Use of motor vehicles off of roads would decrease; adverse effects to aquatic resources would be reduced. Reduction in erosion and sediment may be substantial in the most heavily used areas.
	Wildlife	<p>The effects of un-regulated motor vehicle use off of forest roads on wildlife species of interest fall into three basic categories:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Disturbance and/or displacement of the species from suitable habitat(s) 	<p>The potential effects of increased regulation of motor vehicle use across the Forest are as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reduced potential for disturbance and/or displacement of the species from suitable habitat(s) during

	<p>during critical time periods that could potentially affect the ability of individual animals to reproduce or survive. This would also include the loss of individual animals through illegal hunting or trapping.</p> <p>2. Damage to important habitats or habitat components that are essential for the species, potentially eliminating the species from certain areas and affecting the overall distribution of the species on the Forest.</p> <p>3. Destruction or removal of critical habitat components (snags and downed logs) in excess of those required to meet Forest Plan objectives and/or standards.</p>	<p>critical time periods that could affect the ability of individual animals to reproduce or survive. This would also include fewer losses of individual animals through illegal hunting or trapping.</p> <p>2. Reduced potential for damage to important habitats or habitat components that are essential for the species, potentially affecting the presence of the species at certain sites and/or the overall distribution of the species on the Forest. Conversely, the potential for the Forest to repair existing damage and/or restore desirable site conditions increases.</p> <p>3. Reduced potential for the destruction or removal of critical habitat components (snags and downed logs) required to meet Forest Plan objectives and/or standards. The Forest’s ability to meet desired future conditions and existing standards is improved.</p>
Sensitive Plants	Sensitive plant populations would be adversely affected as motor vehicle use off of roads increases, especially in expanded areas of concentrated use.	Motor vehicle use off of roads would be substantially reduced, thus avoiding adverse impacts to sensitive plants, especially in wetland and riparian areas where most sensitive plants occur.
Heritage Resources	With increased off-road use in Management Areas 6 and 8, occurrence of people finding, exploring, and damaging heritage sites is likely to increase in these two Management Areas. Chances of irreversible and irretrievable damage to sites that could qualify for the National Register of Historic Places would increase in Management Areas 6 and 8.	The occurrence of people finding heritage sites would be reduced. Chances of irreversible and irretrievable damage to heritage sites would be reduced across the Forest.
Noxious Weeds	Transport of noxious weed seed to off-road and closed road areas by motor vehicles would continue. Continued unrestricted motor vehicle use in Management Areas 6 and 8 will introduce noxious weeds into new areas as motor vehicle use expands. Species of weeds new to the Colville National Forest would likely be introduced into areas that are off of open roads, thus increasing the chances that new weed species could become well established (due to difficulty in detecting and treating weeds away from open roads). Since new weed infestations would be more difficult to detect, more expensive to treat, and treatments less effective, it is expected that weed proliferation would be greater than if motor vehicle use is	Disturbance to vegetation and soil would be reduced, and introduction of noxious weed seed by motor vehicles would be reduced. Reducing motor vehicle use off of roads and on closed roads will reduce the potential for weeds to spread beyond locations where they are already present. In areas where use of motor vehicles off of roads or on closed roads is not yet widespread, curtailing such motor vehicle use would slow the rate and extent of weed spread.

		<p>allowed only on designated routes, trails, and areas.</p>	
	<p>Range Management</p>	<p>In Management Areas 6 and 8, vegetation would continue to be trampled by motor vehicles used off of roads, trails through natural barriers would continue to proliferate, and damage to fences or other range improvements would continue. Gates would continue to be left open in all management areas, but this impact would be more important in Management Areas 6 and 8 because pasture gates not along open roads would continue to be left open in locations where they are more difficult to monitor and close. In Management Areas 6 and 8, grazing cattle could be harassed or disturbed both along open roads and trails, and in areas off of designated roads and trails.</p>	<p>Forage vegetation would be less often damaged by motor vehicle use off of roads or trails, natural barriers would not be compromised by use of motor vehicles off of roads, and damage to fences and other range improvements would be reduced when motor vehicle use is allowed only on designated roads, trails, and areas. Gates would likely still be left open, but this would occur primarily along open roads and trails where monitoring and re-closure would be more easily accomplished. Livestock grazing along designated open roads and trails would still be subject to disturbance from motor vehicle use, but animals grazing away from designated routes would encounter fewer motor vehicles so would be subject to less disturbance and harassment.</p>

3. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This section summarizes the physical, biological, social and economic environments of the affected project area and the potential changes to those environments due to implementation of the alternatives. It also presents the scientific and analytical basis for the comparison of alternatives presented in the chart above.

The proposed action is programmatic in scope; therefore effects analysis will be more general than would be expected for traditional site-specific projects. Because the proposed Forest Plan amendment would not designate any roads, trails, or areas open (nor would this amendment close any areas to motorized use by not designating roads, trails, or areas open), analysis of designating any particular roads, trails, or areas open or closed will not be discussed: What will be discussed are the effects associated with changes in Forest Plan direction. The most substantial effects would be associated with changing the Forest Plan so that motor vehicle use can be restricted to designated roads, trails, and areas in Management Areas 6 and 8. The remaining changes in Forest Plan text, while they would clarify the Forest Plan and make it consistent with the Travel Management Rule, would have little if any meaningful effect on resources or people using the Forest. Direction for all other Management Areas would be essentially the same as it is currently, and when implemented via the 2005 Travel Management Rule and Motor Vehicle Use Map, no meaningful changes in motor vehicle use of these areas is expected as a result of the Forest Plan amendment.

Motorized Recreation

Management Direction

Current Forest Plan standards and guidelines include:

Trails 9 (Forest Plan page 4-37) - *Designate areas for off-road vehicle (ORV) use through the Forest Travel Implementation Schedule and in conformance with ROS (Recreation Opportunity Spectrum) designations for specific areas. Manage ORV use to minimize resource damage and to promote public safety.*

Trails 10 (Forest Plan page 4-37) - *Ensure ORV use, including over-snow type, is managed to mitigate their impacts on other resources, promote safety of users, and minimize conflicts with other uses.*

Existing Condition (Forest-Wide)

Motorized recreation is rapidly increasing on the Colville National Forest (i.e., “Forest”). Motor vehicle use includes not only highway-legal vehicles, but non-highway-legal vehicles such as dirt bikes, 4-wheel all terrain vehicles, and over-snow vehicles¹⁴). The increasing motor vehicle use on the Colville National Forest appears to be consistent with state and national trends, which indicate use increasing at a very rapid rate (Cordell et al., 2005). Motor vehicle use is increasing both on-road and off-road¹⁵.

¹⁴ The term “over snow vehicle” is defined as: A motor vehicle that is designed for use over snow and that runs on a track or tracks and/or a ski or skis, while in use over snow. (USDA Forest Service, 2005)

¹⁵ The term “on-road” refers to possession or use of a motor vehicle on a **forest road**. The term “off-road” refers to

In many areas of the Forest, motor vehicle use is not well controlled and is not consistent with Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines. While some roads and trails are currently designated for motor vehicle use, there are no areas designated for motor vehicle use through a Forest Travel Plan or Motor Vehicle Use Map (i.e., Implementation Schedule), and motor vehicles are using certain areas in the absence of such designations. As a result, in some portions of the Forest, motor vehicle use is not being managed to minimize resource damage, to promote public safety, or to minimize conflicts with other uses.

Off-road motor vehicle use presently occurs most often in areas with road or trail access and where terrain and vegetation allow. Use tends to be in high elevation open areas and low elevation terrain, often in proximity to open roads and dispersed campsites. Certain areas of the Forest, notably North Fork Chewelah Creek and Calispell Creek drainages, are receiving very heavy off-road use, with user-created motor vehicle trails common across open and sparsely timbered areas and in old timber sale areas. These trails often occur in riparian areas. People are increasingly finding ways to get around road closures to use closed National Forest System roads¹⁶, and temporary¹⁷ roads and skid trails that remain after timber sales. Throughout the Colville National Forest, and in particular in high-use areas, people are creating new routes, sometimes with the use of mechanized equipment (including bulldozer in at least one instance).

During hunting seasons, people tend to drive open and closed roads, trails, and user-created routes with various types of vehicles to look for game; then some hunters use off-highway vehicles to go off road to retrieve game.

During weekends, particularly holiday weekends (Memorial Day, July 4, and Labor Day), use tends to be family-oriented recreation, using off-highway vehicles to explore roads and trails, and to “play” on any open terrain that presents a challenge to their driving skills (might include hill or road bank climbing, or “mudding”). Where use is relatively light (e.g., most of Republic Ranger District, west side of Three Rivers District), people tend to stay on roads; where use is heavier, off-road use tends to increase.

Motorized recreational use is heaviest in the south-east portion of the Forest, which is nearest the large population center (Spokane). Heavy use also occurs in other portions of the Forest where roads provide easy access to dispersed camping sites, or where desirable off-road motor vehicle use opportunities exist (areas of favorable access, terrain, and vegetation). Notable use areas include Middle Fork Calispell Creek, North Fork Chewelah Creek, Deadman Creek, North Fork Mill Creek, LeClerc Creek/Hanlon area, Calispell Peak, North Baldy, and South Baldy areas.

possession or use of a motor vehicle not on a **forest road**.

¹⁶ A National Forest System Road is defined as: A forest road other than a road which has been authorized by a legally documented right-of-way held by a State, County, or other local public road authority.

¹⁷ A “temporary road or trail” is defined as a road or trail necessary for emergency operations or authorized by contract, permit, lease, or other written authorization that is not a forest road or trail and that is not included in a forest transportation atlas. (USDA Forest Service, 2005)

Dispersed campsites occur along many County Roads on the National Forest, along Maintenance Level-3 roads, and intermittently along many Maintenance Level-2 roads¹⁸. The heaviest dispersed camping use occurs where main roads provide access to level ground or stream-side areas. Vehicle access to dispersed camping sites is usually on short user-created roadways that allow the user to get their vehicle off the constructed road and into their campsite. The campsite is usually within sight of the main roadway, but far enough away to reduce the impacts of noise and dust from passing vehicles. It is not uncommon for recreational off-highway vehicle use to occur on National Forest System lands adjacent to dispersed campsites.

Unregulated motor vehicle use is causing adverse impacts to National Forest resources, including noise and disturbance to non-motorized recreationists; soil erosion; impaired water quality; damaged stream banks, wetlands, and meadows; degraded fish habitat; disturbance to seclusion-dependent wildlife species; damage to sensitive plants; introduction of noxious weeds; and damage to or removal of cultural resources. Previously such damage was localized and often tolerated; however, with increasing levels of motor vehicle use, especially off-road motor vehicle use, resource damage is increasing.

The Colville National Forest has approximately 4,387 miles of National Forest System roads, and over 300 miles of unauthorized roads¹⁹. (Source: Forest Scale Roads Analysis Report, CNF, 2005). National Forest System Roads are classified by Maintenance Level, as displayed in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Miles of National Forest System Roads by Maintenance Level

Maintenance Level (ML) ²⁰	Miles
<u>ML-1</u> : Assigned to intermittent service roads during the time they are closed to vehicular traffic. The closure period must exceed 1 year. Basic custodial maintenance is performed to keep damage to adjacent resources to an acceptable level and to perpetuate the road to facilitate future management activities. Emphasis is normally given to maintaining drainage facilities and runoff patterns. Planned road deterioration may occur at this level. Roads receiving Level 1 maintenance may be of any type, class, or construction standard, and may be managed at any other maintenance level during the time they are open for traffic. However, while being maintained at level 1, they are closed to vehicular traffic, but may be open and suitable for non-motorized uses.	1845
<u>ML-2</u> : Assigned to roads open for use by high clearance vehicles. Passenger car traffic is not a consideration. Traffic is normally minor, usually consisting of one or a combination of administrative, permitted, dispersed recreation, or other specialized uses. Log haul may occur at this level.	2170

¹⁸ See Table 5 below for definition of road Maintenance Levels.

¹⁹ The term “unauthorized road” refers to a road that is not a forest road or a temporary road and that is not included in a forest transportation atlas. (Source: Title 36 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 212.1)

²⁰ Source for Maintenance Level definitions: Forest Service Handbook 7709.58, 12.3, 2.

<u>ML-3</u> : Assigned to roads open and maintained for travel by a prudent driver in a standard passenger car. User comfort and convenience are not considered priorities. Roads in this maintenance level are typically low speed, single lane with turnouts and spot surfacing. Some roads may be fully surfaced with either native or processed material.	346
<u>ML-4</u> : Assigned to roads that provide a moderate degree of user comfort and convenience at moderate travel speeds. Most roads are double lane and aggregate surfaced. However, some roads may be single lane. Some roads may be paved and/or dust abated.	17
<u>ML-5</u> : Assigned to roads that provide a high degree of user comfort and convenience. These roads are normally double lane, paved facilities. Some may be aggregate surfaced and dust abated.	9
TOTAL MILES	4387

Currently the Colville National Forest has 2,542 miles of National Forest System roads open to highway-legal motor vehicle use (except when seasonal or special road closures are in effect). The open road total does not include State or County Roads within the National Forest. Of the 2,542 miles of National Forest System roads open to highway-legal motor vehicles, approximately 650 miles are currently open to all classes of motor vehicles, including vehicles that are not highway-legal (Source: 2007 Interim Motor Vehicle Use Map). In addition, 158 miles of National Forest System trails²¹ are open to motor vehicle use (Source: *Motor Vehicle Use Map Development in Support of the Travel Management Rule*, 6/19/2007).

For the purposes of analysis, a rough calculation was done to quantify the percentage of the Colville National Forest that is immediately affected by motor vehicle use. There are currently 2,700 miles of National Forest System road and trail open to motor vehicles. If a 600 foot wide corridor is assumed (300 feet on either side of the road, i.e., immediate foreground), 196,000 acres are immediately affected (i.e., “used”) by motor vehicle users on currently open roads and trails. The Colville National Forest contains approximately 1,100,000 acres, so the proportion used by motor vehicle recreationists is approximately 18%. It is estimated that at most about 5% of the Forest is used by motor vehicles operated off of open forest roads or trails. Adding motor vehicle use on forest roads and forest trails (18%) to motor vehicle use off of forest roads (5%) results in not more than about 23% of the Forest “used” by motor vehicle recreationists.

The Colville National Forest is actively working with motor vehicle user-groups and the interested public to identify additional roads, trails, and areas where non-highway-legal vehicle use would be allowed. The Forest expects to open several hundred additional miles of road to all classes of motor vehicles in 2008, and other routes are being considered for designation in the years ahead.

²¹ A “National Forest System trail” is defined as: A forest trail other than a trail which has been authorized by a legally documented right-of-way held by a State, County, or other local public road authority. (USDA Forest Service, 2005)

Existing Condition (Management Areas 6 and 8)

Forest Plan Management Areas 6 and 8 (i.e., the Management Areas where there may be a meaningful effect from this proposed Forest Plan amendment) encompass 201,303 acres, approximately 18% of the Colville National Forest. This area contains 485 miles of road currently designated open to highway-legal motor vehicle use (except when seasonal or special road closures are in effect), 168 miles of which are designated open to all classes of motor vehicles including those that are not highway-legal. There are currently four miles of National Forest System trail open to motor vehicle use in Management Areas 6 and 8.

As stated above, the Colville National Forest expects to open additional routes to all classes of motor vehicles in 2008 and beyond; many of these routes are in Management Areas 6 and 8.

For the purposes of analysis, a rough calculation was done to quantify the percentage of Management Areas 6 and 8 currently “used” by motor vehicles. In Management Areas 6 and 8 there are currently 489 miles of National Forest System road and trail open to motor vehicles. If a 600 foot wide corridor is assumed (300 feet on either side of the road, i.e., immediate foreground), 35,563 acres are “used” by motor vehicle users on currently open roads and trails. Management Areas 6 and 8 contain 201,303 acres, so the proportion used on open roads and trails is approximately 18% of Management Areas 6 and 8.

Additionally, there are 357 miles of closed National Forest System roads in Management Areas 6 and 8. The Forest Service has conducted surveys on approximately 49% of these Maintenance Level-1 road miles and found that about 15% had evidence of motor vehicle use. If it is assumed that this sample represents all Maintenance Level-1 roads in Management Areas 6 and 8, then 15%, or approximately 54 miles, would have motor vehicle use. Applying the same formula as for open roads (in the paragraph above), use of Maintenance Level-1 roads would add approximately 3,900 acres “used” by motor vehicle users, or an additional 2% of Management Areas 6 & 8.

There are also portions of the Management Area 6 and 8 that are currently being used by motor vehicles off of roads and trails. While the acreage affected by such use is not known, it is roughly estimated, on an average basis, not more than about 5% to 10% of Management Area 6 and 8 are being “used” by motor vehicles traveling off of roads.

Totaling motor vehicle use on open roads and trails (18%), on closed roads (2%) and off of roads (5-10%), the percentage of Management Areas 6 and 8 “used” by motor vehicles is estimated to be between 25% and 30%. It is recognized that there are areas (e.g., North Fork Chewelah Creek drainage) “used” at a considerably higher percentage.

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, the Forest Service would not amend the Forest Plan to clarify direction with regards to motor vehicle use. Ambiguity in the current Forest Plan language would remain, and other than seasonal restrictions, Management Areas 6 and 8 would contain no direction with regards to where motor vehicles could go. The 2005

Travel Management Rule would still be put into effect; however, the Forest Plan would not be consistent with the 2005 Travel Management Rule, which may make effective implementation of the Rule difficult, particularly in Management Areas 6 and 8. This may result in a continuation of geographically unrestricted motor vehicle use in Management Areas 6 and 8 (however, current seasonal restrictions would remain in effect). Motor vehicle users desiring to use Management Area 6 and 8 lands, including those using closed roads or driving off-road, will continue using these areas as they have in the past.

When the Forest Service implements the 2005 Travel Management Rule, it is expected to be reasonably effective in allowing motor vehicle use only on designated roads, trails, and areas in Management Areas 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, 5, 7, and 10. However, without amending the Forest Plan, implementing the 2005 Travel Management Rule in Management Areas 6 and 8 may not be effective, and could result in no effective restrictions with regards to where people can drive their motor vehicles. Management Areas 6 and 8 could, in effect, become areas where motor vehicle use is not geographically restricted. This could result in an increase in off-highway vehicle use in the 200,000 acres of Management Areas 6 and 8 as motor vehicle recreationists who do not want to drive only on designated routes and areas are displaced from the 760,000 acres of Management Areas where motorized use is allowed only on designated routes and areas.

The effect on motorized recreationists would be a reduction in the area in which they can operate their motor vehicles. This reduction in use would include discontinued use of user-created trails, unless such trails are added to the designated road and trail system.

The percentage of Management Areas 6 and 8 “used” would remain in the range of 25% to 30% [open road use (18%) plus closed road use (2%) plus off-road use (5%-10%)], or may increase slightly if motor vehicle users are displaced from other Management Areas and increase their use of Management Areas 6 and 8.

Applying the same calculation as above for percentage of the entire Colville National Forest “used,” assuming motor vehicle use off of roads or on closed roads would continue only in Management Areas 6 and 8 (18% of the Colville National Forest), motor vehicle use off of open National Forest System roads and trails would decline by about three percent, from about 5% to about 2% of the Colville National Forest used by motor vehicles off of designated roads and trails. This motor vehicle use off of designated roads or trails would be entirely in Management Areas 6 and 8.

Forest Plan standards requiring that areas for off-road vehicle use be designated through a Forest Travel Plan or Motor Vehicle Use Map (i.e., Implementation Schedule) would not be met in Management Areas 6 and 8, and motor vehicles would continue (and likely increase) use in areas in the absence of such designations. As a result, in an increasing proportion of Management Area 6 and 8 areas of the Forest, motor vehicle use would not be managed to minimize resource damage, to promote public safety, or to minimize conflicts with other uses.

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Effects

The Proposed Action is to amend the Forest Plan to clarify direction with regards to motor vehicle use so as to make the Forest Plan consistent with the 2005 Travel Management Rule. While Forest Plan language would be amended with clarifying language for all Management Areas, the only meaningful change would be in Management Areas 6 and 8.

In all Management Areas of the Colville National Forest where motor vehicle use is allowed (Management Areas 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10), motor vehicle use would be allowed only on designated roads, trails and areas. In Management Areas other than 6 and 8, allowing motor vehicle use only on designated roads, trails and areas is, for all practical purposes, already consistent with the Forest Plan²². While the places where motorized recreationists can go will be reduced, this effect is from implementing the 2005 Travel Management Rule with a change in how the Forest Plan is implemented, not the result of amending the Forest Plan. Amending the Forest Plan as proposed would change Forest Plan direction for Management Areas 6 and 8, and would have the effect of enabling the 2005 Travel Management Rule to be put into effect, thus reducing the places where motorized recreationists can go. Forest Plan standards requiring that areas for off-road vehicle use be designated through a Forest Travel Plan or Motor Vehicle Use Map (i.e., Implementation Schedule) would be met in all Management Areas including Management Areas 6 and 8. As a result of the Forest Plan Amendment and implementation of the 2005 Travel Management Rule, motor vehicle use would be better managed across the Forest to minimize resource damage, to promote public safety, or to minimize conflicts with other uses.

As in the No Action alternative described above, the effect on motorized recreationists would be a reduction in the area in which they can operate their motor vehicles. All “areas” (places other than designated roads and trails) in Management Areas 6 and 8 would be closed to motorized use. If the Forest Plan is amended and the 2005 Travel Management Rule put into effect, approximately 357 miles of closed National Forest System roads would no longer be available for motor vehicle use in Management Areas 6 and 8, at least until a portion of these routes are proposed, evaluated, and approved for designation as motorized roads or trails, scheduled for late 2008 or beyond. The reduction in places where motor vehicles could go would only affect users of vehicles capable of traveling on closed roads or off-road, since no roads open to highway-legal vehicles are currently being proposed for closure in Management Areas 6 and 8 under the ongoing travel management process.

If about 25-30% of the MA 6 & 8 area is currently being “used” (see Existing Condition discussion above), and if Maintenance Level-1 roads and motor vehicle use off of roads are no longer available, the area available to motor vehicle operators within Management Areas 6 and 8 would be reduced by about 7%-12%, to approximately 18% (currently

²² It is noted that previously (1990, 1991, and 1995 Travel Plan Maps) the Forest Plan was implemented such that motor vehicle use was allowed only on designated roads, trails, and areas was applied only in Management Areas 1, 3B, and 10. Management areas 2, 3A, 3C, 5, 6, 7, and 8 were treated as open areas with certain roads or trails restricted.

open Maintenance Level 2-5 roads). However, when a portion of the Maintenance Level-1 roads and trails are added to the designated-open motor vehicle use system, some of this reduced area will again be available.

If the Forest Plan is amended and motor vehicle use is effectively confined to designated roads, trails, and areas, the percentage of the entire Forest "used" by motor vehicle operators would decrease from about 23% to approximately 18%. In the future, when closed roads, user created trails, or new trails are added to the designated system of roads, trails, and areas, it is expected that the percentage of the forest used by motor vehicle use would again increase by a few percentage points.

This reduction in places where motor vehicles can go will affect some hunters and firewood gatherers, and to a lesser extent, people who gather berries, mushrooms, or other forest products. Many hunters use motor vehicles during hunting, in that they drive while looking for game. The majority of this activity is on ML 2-5 (open) roads; however, some "road hunting" is on ML-1 (closed) roads or off-road. Use of off-highway vehicles in conjunction with hunting is increasingly popular. Allowing motor vehicle use only on designated roads, trails, and areas will reduce the places hunters can drive. For those hunters unwilling or unable to walk or ride horseback to the places they would otherwise drive, this impact will be viewed by them as substantial.

Firewood gatherers are currently prohibited from driving their vehicles off of open roadways, or gathering firewood more than 200 feet from open roads. Therefore, allowing motor vehicle use only on designated routes should not adversely affect firewood gathering. However, it is recognized that some wood gathering is done by people driving off-road or on closed roads. This unauthorized activity may still occur, or may be reduced, depending on the level and effectiveness of enforcement efforts.

People who gather berries, mushrooms, or other forest products will be little affected because most use open roads for access to gathering areas. Those few people who drive on closed roads or off-road for gathering will have fewer areas to which they can drive.

Since there would be a reduction in the places motorized recreationists would be able to go within Management Areas 6 & 8, it must be assumed that they would go elsewhere. An underlying assumption is that the majority of recreational motor vehicle users want to ride where such use is legal and authorized. Therefore, it is expected that most motor vehicle users displaced from Colville National Forest lands where use is more restricted than previously (including Management Area 6 and 8 lands) will increase their use of National Forest roads, trails and areas that are designated open for such use. Because it is unknown how many recreational motor vehicle users would be displaced, and that the designated-open forest road and trail system is currently expanding by an unknown amount (thus increasing the capacity to absorb displaced motorized recreationists), it is not possible to estimate the magnitude or importance of the increase in use that would result from displacing motor vehicle users caused by the proposed Forest Plan amendment.

Over-snow vehicle use would not be affected by the proposed Forest Plan amendment. The 2005 Travel Management Rule allows travel with over-snow vehicles except where

such use is restricted or prohibited. This is consistent with the current Forest Plan direction in which motor vehicles (which includes over-snow vehicles) are prohibited in Management Areas 4, 9, and 11, and are restricted in Management areas 2, 3C, 6, and 8. Over-snow vehicles are currently restricted in Management Areas 6 and 8 during the winter season (December 1 to March 31)²³. This Forest Plan Amendment does not propose any meaningful changes with regards to these prohibitions or restrictions. Under the proposed Forest Plan amendment, over-snow vehicles would be **exempt** from direction that would allow motor vehicle use only on designated roads, trails and areas, in Management Areas 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10.

Cumulative Effects

The cumulative effects area is defined as all of Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille Counties (including lands of all ownerships). This area was chosen because people who use the Colville National Forest for motor vehicle-based recreation are expected to continue to use the areas with which they are familiar, even if displaced from a portion of the Colville National Forest. It is also expected that people will use lands and road systems owned and managed by all public agencies in the area in which they are accustomed to using. Although it is not assumed that private lands are used extensively by the public for motorized recreation, the effect of displacing motorized recreationists from portions of the National Forest may affect private landowners as motorized recreationists look for new places to drive their vehicles. While it is likely that some motor vehicle users from the Spokane or other portions of Washington would be displaced to areas outside the three Colville National Forest counties, for the purposes of cumulative effects analysis, it is assumed that most of the people displaced from one Colville National Forest area will stay near the place they are accustomed to using within the three northeast Washington counties.

Cumulative effects analysis will consider the direct and indirect effects of the proposed actions described above, and add those effects to the effects of past, present, and foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions.

The direct and indirect effects of the proposed action include reducing the places motor vehicles can go in Management Areas 6 and 8, and displacing to other areas those motor vehicle users who do not want to be confined only to the designated system.

Past, present, and foreseeable future actions related to motor vehicle recreation include the following:

- The 2005 Travel Management Rule would be put into effect. This will allow motor vehicle use only on designated roads, trails, and areas, across all portions of the Colville National Forest where motor vehicle use is allowed. The direct effect of

²³ The Forest Plan restrictions relating to over-snow vehicle use are as follows: Management Area 6 - "Seasonal closures may be implemented;" and "Roads open for public use will be minimized on big game range with the objective not to exceed 1.5 miles of open roads per square mile on deer winter range or 0.4 miles of open roads per square mile on elk winter range and mule deer winter range in Ferry County, averaged over a three square mile area during the season of use." (Forest Plan, page 4-98 and 4-100). Similar language is given for Management Area 8 (Forest Plan page 4-106 and 4-108).

this action will be to reduce the area where people can drive their motor vehicles, particularly their off-highway vehicles (over-snow vehicles would be excluded from this effect). This effect is the same as that caused by the proposed Forest Plan amendment (meaningful effects would be confined to Management Areas 6 and 8), but over an area 2.5 times larger (including primarily Management Areas 2, 3A, 3C, 5, and 7, which total approximately 720,000 acres). The entire Colville National Forest has approximately 2,542 miles of road open to motorized travel, approximately 650 of which are open to all vehicles including those not highway-legal. It is expected that several hundred additional miles of road would be made available to all motor vehicles in 2008, with many (perhaps several hundred) additional miles of road and trail being considered later in 2008, 2009, and beyond. There are currently no designated “areas” proposed where motor vehicle use would be allowed.

- All three counties (Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille Counties) are in the process of designating many County Roads that lead up to and into the Colville National Forest open to all motor vehicles. This action is expected to expand the areas where non-highway-legal vehicles can go, but may also have the effect of taking motor vehicle users into portions of the National Forest where there are no routes designated for non-highway-legal vehicle use.
- Sales of recreational motor vehicles are expected to continue to increase, and their use on the Colville National Forest is expected to continue to increase.

The cumulative effect of reducing places in Management Areas 6 and 8 where people can use motor vehicles and displacing those vehicles to other places, implementing the Travel Management Rule across the Colville National Forest, opening County Roads that provide additional access for all motor vehicle users to the Colville National Forest, and the continued increase in popularity of recreational motor vehicles, the results are expected to be:

- Increased use on roads and trails where motor vehicle use is allowed on the National Forest. It is not possible to quantify this increase because it is not known how many miles of road and trails will eventually be designated open to all motor vehicles. As more miles of road and trail are designated open, more miles would be available to absorb the increase in use, and less use per mile would occur. With 2,516 miles of Maintenance Level 2-3 roads, 1,845 miles of Maintenance Level-1 roads, and an unknown amount of unauthorized or user-created roads and trails potentially available for off-highway vehicle use, it is expected that displaced use can be absorbed with little cumulative impact.
- Increased use of roads and off-road areas on lands of all ownerships as people are displaced from areas they like to use on the National Forest. Landowners who do not want motorized use on their lands would incur additional enforcement actions and costs (gates, signs, fences, enforcement personnel). It is not expected that this would be a large effect because most people who use National Forest lands do so because they do not want to use other lands for their recreational activities (because of respect for private lands, or they do not want to risk being in violation of rules or restrictions unknown to them).

Non-Motorized Recreation

Existing Condition

Non-motorized recreation includes such activities as mountain biking, hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, camping, hunting, fishing, bird watching, and nature photography. All these activities require motor vehicle use to get to the activity area, but the activities themselves (with the exception of hunting, photography, and bird watching for some individuals) are usually considered non-motorized. Camping may be a base for motorized recreational activities, but may also be an activity associated with non-motorized use of the National Forest.

Recreationists pursuing non-motorized activities usually desire quiet and solitude, and consider motor vehicle use, particular noisy motor vehicles (e.g., dirt bikes), to be an intrusion into their National Forest experience.

All of the Colville National Forest is open to non-motorized recreation. Several Management Areas (4, 9, and 11) prohibit motor vehicle use, so people using these areas can expect relative quiet and solitude. Of the Management Areas where motor vehicle use is allowed, Management Areas 3A, 5, 6, 7, and 8 contain the majority of the roads available to motor vehicles; thus non-motorized recreationists can expect the presence of motor vehicles, including associated dust, noise, and disturbance, and are tolerant of occasional motor vehicle use. However, in the areas most heavily used by motorized recreationists (for example, North Fork Chewelah Creek, Calispell Creek areas), it is likely that non-motorized recreationists are disturbed to the point that some go elsewhere for their recreational activities.

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, non-motorized recreation is expected to continue as it does currently in most areas. Because motorized recreational use is expected to continue to increase, it is expected that places that are currently heavily used for motorized recreation will continue to be unattractive for non-motorized recreational activities. Also, as motorized recreational use continues to increase, areas of heavy motorized use are expected to expand, thus decreasing the area attractive for non-motorized recreational activities.

For Management Areas 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, 5, and 7, areas that currently have heavy off-road motorized use would have such use reduced as the 2005 Travel Management Rule is implemented. Management Areas 6 and 8 would not have off-road and closed-road motorized use reduced, and the most heavily used areas (for example, North Fork Chewelah Creek or Calispell Creek areas) would continue to be unattractive for non-motorized recreational activities.

Proposed Action

Under the proposed action, it is expected that motorized use of closed roads and off-road areas would be reduced in all Management Areas that allow motor vehicle use, with

much of this use displaced to the designated open roads and trails. The more popular of these roads and trails may have increased motorized use, increasing dust, noise, and disturbance for those who desire quiet and solitude. Some people engaged in non-motorized recreational activities may abandon favorite places, or shift their use to non-motorized areas.

Areas that currently have heavy off-road motorized use would have such use reduced as the 2005 Travel Management Rule is implemented. These areas (for example, North Fork Chewelah Creek or Calispell Creek areas) may become more attractive for non-motorized recreational activities. However, if some user-created motor vehicle trails become designated routes in the future, there still would be areas heavily used by motor vehicles, and these areas would continue to be unattractive to non-motorized recreational users.

Cumulative Effects

The cumulative effects area is defined as all of Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille Counties (including lands of all ownerships). Non-motorized recreation occurs in many areas off of National Forest System lands, including people's own private land or that of a friend or acquaintance, private timber company lands, State of Washington lands, County or local community lands, Tribal lands, and lands administered by other federal agencies (e.g., Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service). One of the effects of the Forest Plan amendment would be to restore or sustain non-motorized recreational opportunities on National Forest System lands. This expected effect would be that of people changing where they elect to pursue non-motorized recreational activities on the National Forest, rather than choosing to go off the National Forest. Therefore, it is not expected that restoring or sustaining non-motorized recreational opportunities on National Forest System lands would have any meaningful influence on non-motorized recreational use off of the National Forest.

Public Health and Safety

Existing Condition

Motor vehicle use, including use of off-highway vehicles, is presently occurring on roads, trails, and off of roads and trails.

In most cases, motor vehicle use on forest roads is very light; however, certain times and places may have activities (e.g., commercial use of forest roads) that increase traffic levels substantially. For example, a timber sale may increase traffic, including logging trucks, substantially on a haul route; or in a popular recreational area, the traffic on weekends, particularly holiday weekends, may increase substantially.

There are certain public safety risks associated with motor vehicle use on forest roads due to factors such as: limited sight distances; roads that are not signed for curves or speed limits; uneven travel surfaces; and natural hazards (e.g., rocks, fallen trees, or fallen branches). Factors that increase safety risk when mixed traffic²⁴ is present include:

²⁴The term "mixed traffic" refers to highway-legal and non-highway-legal vehicles using the same road at the same time.

increased volume of traffic; possible presence of unlicensed or under-aged drivers; possible disregard for speed limits or other traffic safety rules.

Motor vehicle use on roads in some cases includes mixed traffic (i.e., highway legal vehicles and non-highway-legal vehicles on the same road). Mixed traffic is of particular concern because motor vehicle collisions that occur in mixed traffic situations tend to be more severe than collisions that occur between motor vehicles of similar size and weight, or single-vehicle accidents. As part of the process of designating roads where all vehicles are allowed, the Colville National Forest is conducting a Motorized Mixed Use Analysis. This process examines the public safety hazards associated with mixed use on all roads considered for use by all vehicles, and the findings are considered in the decision whether to open a route to mixed use. This process is expected to reduce, but not eliminate, the public safety risk associated with opening up a road to use by all types of motor vehicles.

Motor vehicle use of trails mostly occurs on designated motorized trails (e.g., Batey-Bould ORV Trail). While motor vehicle traffic is usually light, it can increase substantially on weekends, especially holiday weekends. Compared to roads, the total volume of traffic on trails is usually less, and there is no mixed traffic. Hazards associated with trails include uneven terrain, limited sight distances, frequent natural hazards (rocks, fallen trees and branches, and trees in close proximity to the trail), and presence of non-motorized users (horseback riders, hikers, mountain bikers, etc.).

Motor vehicle use off of roads is very light in most areas of the Forest, but there are areas where use is concentrated and heavy at times. Off-road areas have numerous hazards, including uneven or mountainous terrain; variable surfaces (ranging from firm soil, to rocky, sandy, dusty, or muddy surface conditions); narrow user-created trails with occasional short sight-distances or blind junctions; unpredictable and unmanaged hazards (e.g., rocks, cliffs, steep slopes, downed trees, branches); and unmarked man-made hazards such as mine shafts or range fences.

All three counties (Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille Counties) with Colville National Forest lands have passed ordinances that would allow mixed traffic on many of their roads that lead to and into the National Forest. The Counties are also encouraging motor vehicle use on the National Forest to promote tourism and recreation-associated income for the counties. These county efforts may increase motor vehicle use of forest roads, trails, and off-road areas.

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, the Forest Plan would not be amended, but the 2005 Travel Management Rule would be implemented. Motor vehicle use would be allowed only on designated roads, trails, and areas. In Management Areas 6 and 8 implementation of the Travel Management Rule is expected to be ineffective because the Travel Management Rule would not be consistent with the Forest Plan. In these two management areas, motor vehicle use could occur anywhere that vegetation and terrain will allow.

Motor vehicle use in Management Areas 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, 5, 7, and 10 would no longer be allowed off of the designated system. This would concentrate, thus increase, motor vehicle use on the designated open routes. However, motor vehicle use in Management Areas 6 and 8 would not be effectively restricted to designated routes. This may increase motor vehicle use off of roads in Management Areas 6 and 8, as motor vehicle users who desire to go off of roads are displaced from the other management areas. The overall result is expected to be an increase in traffic on the roads and trails designated open, and perhaps an increase in motor vehicle use off of roads and on closed roads in Management Areas 6 and 8. Thus there would be an increase in motor vehicle collision risk on roads and trails resulting from increased traffic volume and increased mixed motor vehicle use (on roads), and an increase in collision risk from the increase in use of motor vehicles off of open roads and trails.

Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, the Forest Plan would be amended, thus enabling the 2005 Travel Management Rule to be implemented in all Management Areas on the Colville National Forest. Motor vehicle use would be allowed only on designated roads, trails, and areas, thus reducing use of motor vehicles off of roads or trails.

The effect of implementing the Travel Management Rule across the Forest would be to concentrate motor vehicle use onto the roads, trails, and areas that are designated open. This would increase traffic on roads and trails, and much of this increased traffic would occur on roads with mixed motor vehicle use. Because the volume of motor vehicle use on roads and trails would increase, the incidence of motor vehicle collisions is expected to increase, probably more so than under the No Action alternative. Severity of collisions may also increase, as more non-highway-legal vehicles would be on roads where mixed traffic would be allowed.

Cumulative Effects

The cumulative effects area is defined as all of Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille Counties (including lands of all ownerships). This area was chosen because people who use the Colville National Forest for motor vehicle-based recreation are expected to continue to use the areas with which they are familiar, even if displaced from a portion of the Colville National Forest. The primary effect with regards to public health and safety is to shift use of motor vehicles from off-road areas, thereby increasing use of forest roads and trails. When this increased use is combined with mixed traffic, risk of vehicle collisions is expected to increase. Because this shift in use is from one portion of the National Forest (off road) to another (on roads and trails), there is no expectation that there would be any change in use or collision rates off of the National Forest. While it is recognized that the risk of vehicle collisions overall would increase due to the national trend of ownership of off-highway vehicles increasing and Counties promoting use of County and forest roads by all types of vehicles, the increase in collisions risk on forest roads and trails does not contribute to any overall increase in public safety risk anyplace other than on the National Forest.

Human-Caused Forest Fires

Existing Condition

Human-caused forest fires occasionally occur on the Colville National Forest. Some of these fires are associated with people using motor vehicles, either from the vehicle itself (potentially from the exhaust system, including the catalytic converter), or from the vehicle users (campfires, smoking).

Open roads and trail surfaces are generally void of vegetation; road shoulders and dispersed camping areas often have vegetative conditions conducive to fire starts; closed roads have variable vegetative conditions (ranging from bare ground to highly flammable vegetative materials; and places off of roads or trails frequently have highly flammable vegetative materials. Response time for fire fighters is often faster along open roads because people do not have to walk into fires, and fire fighting is more effective along the open road system, because fire engines with water and hoses can be more readily utilized. Therefore, fires that occur along or near open roads often have less potential for becoming large fires than do fires that occur away from open roads.

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, the Forest Plan would not be amended, but the 2005 Travel Management Rule would be implemented. Motor vehicle use would be allowed only on designated roads, trails, and areas, or in corridors where vehicle access to dispersed camping is allowed, except that in Management Areas 6 and 8 implementation of the Travel Management Rule is expected to be ineffective because the Rule would not be consistent with the Forest Plan. In these two management areas, motor vehicle use could continue to occur anywhere that vegetation and terrain will allow.

In Management Areas 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, 5, 7, and 10 (approximately 79% of the Colville National Forest open to motor vehicle use), the potential for human-caused fires would be reduced in areas away from the designated system because use of motor vehicles would occur only on or in the immediate vicinity of designated roads, trails, and areas. The potential for human-caused fires would not be reduced in Management Areas 6 and 8 (approximately 21% of the Colville National Forest open to motor vehicle use) since motor vehicle use would not be effectively restricted to the designated system.

Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, the Forest Plan would be amended and the Travel Management Rule would be implemented Forest-wide. Motor vehicle use would be allowed only on designated roads, trails, and areas, or in corridors where vehicle access to dispersed camping is allowed.

In Management Areas 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10 (100% of the Colville National Forest open to motor vehicle use), the potential for human-caused fires would be reduced in areas away from the designated system because use of motor vehicles would occur only on or in the immediate vicinity of designated roads, trails, and areas.

Cumulative Effects

The cumulative effects area is Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille Counties, which is where local fires fighting resources (federal, state, tribal and rural fire organizations) cooperate to suppress local fires.

Hundreds of forest fires occur across the cumulative effects area each year. These fires result from a variety of natural and human causes, with lightning being the most frequent fire cause. The cumulative effect of reducing the incidence of human-caused fires on the National Forest away from the designated road/trail/area system would be a small (at most, a few percent) reduction in total fire starts. However, prevention of any fire that could become a large forest fire is an important benefit.

Law Enforcement

Existing Condition

Currently, Forest Service officials are considerably limited in the effectiveness of enforcing motor vehicle use rules and regulations. This is because Orders (i.e., Prohibitions in Areas Designated by Order under Title 36 Code of Federal Regulations part 261, Subpart B) limiting use of closed roads or off-road areas are infractions, and as such, due to workload priorities of the U.S. Attorney's Office and federal courts, are considered low priority offenses. There are several legal issues that limit enforcement actions; lack of clear Forest Plan direction contributes to the problem.

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, the existing condition will continue in Management Areas 6 and 8. Enforcement of motor vehicle use rules and regulations will continue to be difficult for Forest Service officials.

Under the No Action alternative, it is expected that the 2005 Travel Management Rule would be applied in all Forest Plan Management Areas, but enforcement will be ineffective in Management Areas 6 and 8. Where the Rule is applied effectively, enforcement of travel management is expected to be more effective than is the current situation. However, having some Management Areas where the Travel Management Rule is enforceable, and other Management Areas where the rule is not enforceable may lead to confusion as the public will not know where motor vehicle use is allowed only on designated routes or areas, and where such use is not restricted. When such confusion exists, enforcement of motor vehicle restrictions across the entire Forest becomes difficult because the courts tend to excuse violations when people cannot easily distinguish where varying rules apply on the ground. Thus, taking no action to amend the Forest Plan to enable application of the Travel Management Rule on the Management Areas 6 and 8 portion of the Forest may limit the Forest Service's ability to enforce the Travel Management Rule across the entire Colville National Forest.

Proposed Action

The Forest Plan, the 2005 Travel Management Rule, improved signing in the forest, issuance of the Motor Vehicle Use Map, and promulgation of official Closure Orders all

work together to enable enforcement. If the Forest Plan is amended to clarify direction with regards to motor vehicle use with the 2005 Travel Management Rule applied in a consistent manner across the Forest, and with improved signing, a Motor Vehicle Use Map, and official Closure Orders, the ability to enforce rules and regulations is expected to improve considerably.

Soils

Existing Condition

Motor vehicle use occurs on a variety of soil surfaces, including gravel and native surface roads, constructed trails, user-created trails, dry soils, and wet or moist soils. Soil impacts include both on- and off-site impacts. On-site impacts reduce productivity of the impacted soil, primarily from compaction and displacement. Off-site impacts include rutting, and increased runoff and erosion; these have a minimal impact on soil productivity but often impact other resources like fish habitat and water quality. Activities of concern include those that displace, compact, or expose soil to erosion.

Motor Vehicle Use on Existing Roads and Trails

Motor vehicle use on roads and constructed trails normally has little on-site soil impact. With all roads and constructed trails, displacement, compaction, and loss of productivity occurred when the road or trail was built, so further impact to site productivity does not occur.

Continued motor vehicle use on roads and constructed trails may have some off-site impacts. Paved and gravel roads are, by design, very resistant to erosion. Native surfaced roads and trails are designed and constructed to withstand motor vehicle use with little impact to soils. However, some segments of native surface roads have weak soils when wet: Motor vehicle use causes rutting, which in turn can lead to water flow down the road rather than across the road, thus mobilizing sediment and delivering sediment to lakes and streams. Another important impact of rutting road surfaces is the cost of restoring the road surface when the road dries out. Many trails also have segments with weak wet soils which results in muddy or rutted sections. On National Forest System trails, these wet trail segments are often re-routed or reinforced as the needs is identified and funding becomes available.

Motor Vehicle Use on User-Created Trails and Play Areas

Motor vehicle use on user-created trails has greater impacts to soils than use on constructed roads and trails. User-created trails often, though not always, occur where there is already a “footprint” i.e., old skid trails, closed roads, temporary roads, abandoned trails, or livestock trails. Where user-created trails are on old roads or trails, most on-site impacts have already occurred, so additional motor vehicle use has little additional impact. However, where new trails are created, soil is compacted and disturbed, thus reducing soil productivity.

User-created trails and play areas increase runoff and erosion. Motor vehicle use on these sites removes vegetation or keeps vegetation from becoming re-established, thus keeping soil exposed to erosion. User-created trails and play areas compact the soil,

increasing runoff and erosion, which may end up as sediment in lakes and streams. Often user-created trails are steeper than designed roads and trails, increasing erosion rates and creating gullies. Some play areas include seasonally wet areas and wet meadows, increasing erosion considerably.

At the Forest scale, loss of soil productivity due to motor vehicle use of user-created trails and play areas is of little consequence because use is dispersed. But in heavily used areas (e.g., North Fork Chewelah Creek and Calispell Creek areas) this loss of soil productivity may be measurable, i.e., a noticeable percentage of the total soil surface. It is unlikely, however, that except in a few very concentrated locations, this detrimental impact would approach the Forest Plan standard of 20% detrimental soil impact (Forest Plan, page 4-50).

Dispersed Motor Vehicle Use – Not on Roads or Trails

Motor vehicle use sometimes occurs where there are no trails or roads; for example, around meadows and camping areas. When soils are dry, impacts of such use are dependent on the amount of use. Where only one or a very few motor vehicle passes occur, the soil is compacted slightly, but not enough to cause detrimental compaction²⁵. Vegetation and duff layers are not destroyed or displaced (or if they are, they recover quickly), so soils are not exposed to erosion. Such cross-country motor vehicle use has little impact to soils. However, where cross-country driving becomes concentrated with many passes occur over the same ground, compaction may become detrimental, vegetation, duff, and upper soil horizons may be removed, and soil productivity degraded, similar to that described above for user-created trails.

Motor Vehicle Use in Wet Areas

Motor vehicle use on wet soils may occur either where there are road and trails, or in areas where there are no roads or trails. Using motor vehicles in wet soils (mud) is especially attractive to some motor vehicle users. When soil is wet, it has less strength than when dry. Motor vehicles sink into the soil, causing rutting, damaged vegetation, mixed soil layers, mixed vegetation and soil, displaced soil, and soil exposed to erosion. Often wet exposed soil has a high percentage of very fine soil particles, which are easily eroded and transported by water to lakes and streams.

The Colville National Forest has many areas with seasonally or perennially wet soils. An assessment was done to evaluate the proportion of the Forest where wet soils are most likely to occur, and whether these soils occur proportionately more or less in Management Areas 6 and 8. This analysis tallied acres in four landtype associations where wetlands tend to occur due to relatively impervious soil layers (Landform B – lacustrine benches and deposits; Landform I – glaciated mountain slopes; Landform L – glacial moraines; and Landform O – valley bottoms, outwash). These four landtypes totaled 59% of the Forest, and 54% of Management Areas 6 and 8. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that wet soils are likely to occur in Management Areas 6 and 8 in approximately the same proportion as for the entire Forest. However, in looking at a

²⁵ Detrimental compaction is defined as: (1) Volcanic Ash/Pumice Soils – An increase in soil bulk density of 20 percent or more over the undisturbed level. (2) Other Soils – An increase in soil bulk density of 15 percent or more over the undisturbed level, a macropore space reduction of 50 percent or more, and/or a reduction below the 15 percent level as measured by an air permeameter. (USDA Forest Service, 1988a)

visual display for the Forest, it appears that landtypes likely to contain wet soils cover a higher proportion of the east half of the Forest than the west half, and cover a higher proportion of Management Areas 6 and 8 on the east half of the Forest than on the west half.

Motor vehicle use in wetlands and wet meadows is occurring on the Colville National Forest. These areas appear to recover quickly because the vegetation responds quickly due to the moisture present in these soils. However, where motor vehicle use occurs in wet meadows, soil productivity is degraded because soil layers have been mixed, soil pore space has been reduced thus reducing water holding and infiltration capacities, and soils have been exposed to erosion. Meadow soils often have small particle sizes (silts and clays), and are thus easily transported by water to lakes and streams which are often closely associated with wetland areas.

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, the 2005 Travel Management Rule would be implemented utilizing current Forest Plan direction. It is expected that motor vehicle use would be allowed only on designated routes Management Areas 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, 5, 7, and 10. In Management Areas 6 and 8 where there is no Forest Plan direction that would restrict where people can operate motor vehicles, people would continue to operate motor vehicles as they are currently, may increase their off-road use due to the increasing popularity of off-highway vehicles, and may increase off-road use as they are displaced from other Management Areas where they would be effectively restricted to designated roads and trails.

Because use of vehicles off-road in Management Areas 6 and 8 would continue or increase, adverse impacts to soils (exposure to erosion, compaction, mixing, displacement) would likely increase, resulting in decreased soil productivity and increased sediment delivery to lakes and streams. The number of user-created trails is expected to increase, as is the area of wetlands and meadows damaged.

Looking at the Forest as a whole, this increased use of vehicles off-road would have little cumulative effect, because the Forest has 200,000 acres of Management Area 6 and 8 over which to disperse this activity. However, in areas where use is already high, continued or increased use of motor vehicles off-road is expected to have noticeable impacts to soils, especially in motor vehicle “play” areas such as wet meadows, road cuts and embankments, or dispersed camping areas. These high use areas would be expected to expand as off-highway vehicle use increases; therefore the areas with noticeable impacts to soils would also expand. In high use areas in close proximity to lakes and streams, loss of productivity and soil erosion may have important localized adverse impacts to water quality and fisheries.

The portions of the Forest where the Travel Management Rule would be effectively implemented (Management Areas 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, 5, 7, and 10) would have reduced motor vehicle use off of roads, and more motor vehicle use on roads and trails where impacts to soils are substantially less. The net result of less motor vehicle use off of roads and trails in portions of the Forest, and increased motor vehicle use off of roads in

Management Areas 6 and 8 would likely be a net decrease in acres of soil impacts, but the places where soils are impacted in Management Areas 6 and 8 may be more severely affected than before, due to more concentrated motor vehicle use and increased use in wetland and riparian areas.

Proposed Action

The proposed action would clarify the Forest Plan so that the 2005 Travel Management Rule could be implemented on the entire Colville National Forest. Motor vehicle use would be allowed only on designated roads, trails, and areas.

Impacts to soils from motor vehicle use off of roads and trails would be substantially reduced, and the expansion of adverse soil impacts would not occur. Wetlands and riparian areas, where rutting of wet soils is presently occurring, would benefit most from implementing the Travel Management Rule forest-wide. Vegetative cover would be expected to recover, gradually in areas of dry soil, quickly in wetlands and riparian areas, thus reducing the area of soil exposed to erosion. Compacted areas would not recover quickly (deeply compacted areas take many years, i.e., decades or centuries, to decompact), but the creation of newly compacted areas would diminish substantially. Soil productivity would not decline, and heavily used areas would start to recover. Sediment into lakes and streams from eroded soil would decrease as vegetation recovers.

Cumulative Effects

The cumulative effects area is defined as the Columbia,, Kettle, Sanpoil, Colville and Pend Oreille River drainages, including all area that drains water from the Colville National Forest into these river systems. This area was chosen for cumulative effects analysis because effects to soils are primarily felt in the aquatic systems as soil compaction affects water infiltration, and soil erosion affects sediment delivery to streams.

When looking at lands of all ownerships in the cumulative effects area, there are many activities that also cause soil compaction and soil erosion. Homes, roads, agriculture, and logging all affect soil compaction and erosion. Soil impacts on the National Forest are limited to not more than 20% of an activity area²⁶, and activity areas on the National Forest are probably occupy less than 50% of the total National Forest land area; therefore not more than 10% of the National Forest has adverse soil impacts. When the National Forest impact is compared to soil impacts on lands of other ownership, the total impact to soils on the National Forest is relatively small.

The primary soil impact of this Forest Plan amendment would be to prevent further soil impact from use of motor vehicles off of roads. Considering that soil impacts from all activities on National Forest System lands are relatively small when compared to lands of all ownerships in the Columbia, Kettle, Sanpoil, Colville, and Pend Oreille River drainages, preventing further soil impact from use of motor vehicles off of roads is important in some localized places, but is cumulatively of little consequence.

²⁶ Source: Forest Plan page 4-50.

Aquatic Resources (Water Quality, Stream Channel Stability, Wetlands and Floodplains, Fisheries)

Existing Condition

The Colville National Forest has many miles of streams (intermittent, permanent non-fish bearing, and permanent fish bearing streams), as well as lakes and wetland meadows. While many aquatic areas are in good condition, there are several major contributors to aquatic system degradation, including non-motorized recreational use, cattle grazing, and motor vehicle use.

The Colville National Forest has several streams that are listed by the State of Washington as water quality impaired (called “Category 5” streams). Listings are due to coliform bacteria, temperature, turbidity (water clarity), dissolved oxygen, ph (acidity), heavy metals, and exotic species. The Colville National Forest does not currently have any streams listed by the State as water quality impaired due to sediment; however, this non-listing was due to rule interpretation rather than lack of water quality problems. It is possible that certain streams may be listed as Category 5 due to sediment in the future.

Motor vehicle use, especially in combination with non-motorized recreational use and cattle grazing, contributes to water quality issues (primarily coliform bacteria, sediment, turbidity, and temperature) by diminishing vegetative cover, baring soil to erosion, and creating and sustaining trails into, through, and near riparian areas. Trails created or sustained by motor vehicles perpetuate cattle access to riparian areas in active allotments, thus influencing sediment, turbidity, water temperature, and coliform bacteria levels in lakes and streams.

The Colville National Forest has two functional municipal watersheds²⁷: North Fork Sullivan Creek, supplying the community of Metaline Falls; and East Deer Creek, supplying the community of Orient. The East Deer Creek watershed is reported to have motor vehicle use to the degree that it may be adversely affecting water quality (primarily by contributing sediment to the stream system). North Fork Sullivan Creek appears to have little motor vehicle use since the drainage is mostly inaccessible to motor vehicles.

Many streamside areas and lakes are used for non-motorized recreational activities; in some places this use is sufficiently heavy to cause exposed and compacted soil, resulting in soil erosion and sediment added to aquatic systems.

The Colville National Forest also has much of its land occupied by livestock grazing allotments. In many areas, livestock grazing also contributes sediment to aquatic systems. In some places, this contribution is substantial; in other places it is not.

²⁷ The Forest Plan lists a third municipal watershed, Cedar Creek, supplying water to the community of Ione. Several years ago, Ione converted to a well system. The community is no longer dependent on surface water, and Cedar Creek is not currently functioning as a municipal watershed.

Most areas of the Forest where motor vehicles are allowed, have motor vehicle use that crosses streams or occurs near streams, lakes, meadows, or other wetland areas. Occasional road or trail crossing by motorized vehicles, particularly on constructed roads and trails, has little impact on aquatic resources, because small, infrequent pulses of dust, dirt, or other sediment is easily washed through the system. However, some areas (for example North Fork Chewelah Creek and Calispell Creek drainages), have heavy off-road motorized use, with trails that occur in close proximity to and repeatedly cross streams. Many of these same areas also have heavy dispersed camping and livestock use in or near riparian areas. Some of these areas are so heavily affected by these uses (singly or in combination) that stream banks have been exposed, eroded, or knocked down. This removes stream bank vegetation and exposes banks to erosion and bank sloughing, adding substantial amounts of sediment, and causing the stream to become wider and shallower. Some areas are reported to have user-constructed dams (to create either stream crossing structures or swimming holes) that fail during high water flows, adding large amounts of sediment to the aquatic system.

Wetland meadows are present mostly in the eastern portion of the Colville National Forest. Some of the more heavily used areas include these meadows, and recreational motorized use of wet meadows for mud play is increasing. Motorized use of wetland meadows has been observed to turn portions of green grassy meadows into deeply rutted mud. While it may appear that wet meadows revegetate more rapidly than other areas, disturbance and soil exposure is unattractive, creates sediment that may be washed into streams, creates places easily invaded by noxious weeds, degrades native plant populations (including species on the Regional Forester's sensitive plants list), destroys soil structure which degrades water holding and infiltration capacity, and destroys or modifies habitat for amphibians and other species of wildlife that live in or use meadows. Compaction and disruption of the hydrologic system may remain for many years following meadow damage by motor vehicles.

Heavy motorized use off of roads and trails removes vegetation, baring soil to erosion. Eroded soil, particularly if near streams or lakes, becomes sediment, that when added to aquatic systems can degrade water quality and fish habitat. Degraded fish habitat is of particular concern. Sediment fills the spaces between particles of gravel and cobble, which smothers fish eggs and reduces protective cover for newly hatched fish. Sediment also fills or reduces the depth of pools, which reduces winter fish survival. Degraded fish habitat can reduce numbers and/or sizes of fish, and may favor eastern brook trout at the expense of native trout species. The degree of fish habitat degradation is highly variable across the Colville National Forest. Some areas, such as North Fork Chewelah and Calispell Creeks currently have degraded fish habitat due to the combination of livestock grazing, motor vehicle use, and non-motorized recreational use.

Westslope cutthroat and interior redband trout and pygmy whitefish are listed as sensitive species on the Colville National Forest. The primary habitat of the pygmy whitefish is within Bead and Sullivan Lakes with some spawning activity occurring within Harvey Creek, an inlet to Sullivan Lake. Westslope cutthroat and interior redband trout are found in various streams throughout the forest. Stream spawning and rearing habitat for these trout subspecies and pygmy whitefish are adversely affected by sediment introduced by

motorized vehicles at crossings and other locations adjacent to the streams. Lake habitat for pygmy whitefish appears to be unaffected by motor vehicle use.

Bull trout are listed as Threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Colville National Forest manages for bull trout by managing for high quality habitat for all native trout species. Bull trout habitat occurs in many places on the Colville National Forest in fish habitat areas that are currently or formerly connected directly or indirectly to the Columbia River. Across the Forest, trout habitat is adversely affected, including in LeClerc Creek, by sediment contributed by motorized use. LeClerc Creek has been identified as a Priority Watershed on the Colville National Forest, primarily due to its quality of habitat for bull trout. In LeClerc Creek, sediment that is introduced by motor vehicle use is at stream crossings mostly upstream of bull trout use areas, and tends to be small sediment contributions (i.e., small in magnitude). But because of the importance of this habitat, this small magnitude impact is considered to be fairly important. Neither North Fork Chewelah Creek nor Calispell Creek (used as examples of heavy motor vehicle use off of roads throughout this document) would have bull trout habitat affected as they are not connected to the Pend Oreille River due to natural and man-made fish passage barriers.

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, the 2005 Travel Management Rule would be effectively implemented on all Management Areas except 6 and 8. For Management Areas other than 6 and 8, water quality and aquatic habitat, and thus compliance with the Forest Plan Inland Native Fish Strategy, would improve (USDA Forest Service, 1995a). Because Management Areas 6 and 8 comprise approximately 18% of the Forest, and other Management Areas open to motor vehicle use comprise approximately 71% of the Forest, there would be a net improvement in aquatic habitat when considering the Colville National Forest as a whole.

Motor vehicle use would not be effectively restricted to designated routes in Management Areas 6 and 8. Use of motor vehicles off of roads may increase in Management Areas 6 and 8 as people are displaced from the other Management Areas. This continued and perhaps increased unrestricted motor vehicle use off of roads in Management Areas 6 and 8 is expected to continue and increase the adverse impacts to aquatic resources. In these areas, Inland Native Fish Strategy riparian goals may not be met. Water quality and fish habitat would continue to be degraded by sediment contributions from the combination of livestock use and motor vehicle use.

Management Areas 6 and 8 are winter range areas. They are winter range areas because they tend to be warmer and have less snow cover in the winter season. Because these areas tend to be warmer and drier than the rest of the Forest, these areas tend to be more open with less tree cover, and therefore more accessible to motor vehicle use off of roads. These cool, moist areas are attractive to many species of wildlife, domestic grazing animals, and motorized and non-motorized recreationists. In these drier, more open areas, aquatic resources are more important than in other portions of the Forest because they offer cool, moist refuge in landscapes that are otherwise hot and dry during the

summer months. Therefore, adverse impacts to aquatic resources in Management Areas 6 and 8 may be more important than similar impacts in other portions of the Forest.

Proposed Action

2005 Travel Management Rule would be effectively implemented in all management areas. Use of motor vehicles off of roads would decrease; adverse effects to aquatic resources would be reduced; and Inland Native Fish Strategy goals would be better achieved. Reduction in erosion and sediment may be substantial in the most heavily used areas.

Designated roads and trails would be more heavily used as motor vehicle use is displaced from off-road areas. There may be a very slight increase in sediment from this increased use, but roads and trails tend to be more resistant to erosion than off-road areas, so added sediment would be slight. The combined effect of reducing motor vehicle use off of roads and increasing use on roads and trails would be a substantial net reduction in aquatic impacts.

Cumulative Effects

The cumulative effects area is defined as the Columbia, Kettle, Sanpoil, Colville, and Pend Oreille River systems, including all streams that drain water from the Colville National Forest into these river systems. Water coming off the National Forest is of varying quality, ranging from excellent to heavily impaired.

Implementing the 2005 Travel Management Rule under either the No Action or Proposed Action scenarios would improve water quality and aquatic habitat as discussed above (the Proposed Action more so than the No Action alternative). However, when looking at stream systems as a whole, there are numerous contributors to water quality degradation that do not originate on the National Forest. These mostly occur downstream of the National Forest, so water that originates as good or excellent quality (or in some cases as degraded) from the headwaters on National Forest System Lands often passes through lands of other ownership as it moves down stream. As water passes downstream, it tends to increasingly degrade due to many factors, including increased road density, increased proximity to agricultural lands, and increasing numbers of homes on septic systems. Contributions to water quality problems by water originating on the National Forests is small by comparison; therefore improvements in the quality of water originating from the National Forest will have little cumulative impact to overall water quality in most stream systems feeding the Columbia, Kettle, Sanpoil, Colville, and Pend Oreille River systems, and will have negligible beneficial impacts to the same rivers.

Wildlife (Management Indicator Species, Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species)

Existing Condition

The existing condition for various species of wildlife found on the Colville National Forest is described in the report “*Terrestrial Wildlife: Management Indicator Species; Other Species of Concern; and Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species*” by

James McGowan, Wildlife Biologist, Colville National Forest. This report is incorporated by reference. The report describes habitat requirements, Management Direction, how motor vehicle use might affect the species, and how each alternative would affect each wildlife species discussed.

Deer and Elk (Management Indicator Species): The primary issue relating to deer and elk winter range conditions relative to this analysis is motorized access. The Forest Plan prescribes specific open road density standards for deer and elk winter range (Management Areas 6 and 8) during the winter season because regulation of motor vehicle access within these areas is important to maintain adequate habitat security, especially during the winter months when disturbance by people and/or vehicles can require deer and elk to use their stored nutrient reserves at higher than normal rates. Seasonal and permanent road closures in designated big game winter range areas are utilized as a management technique to limit and control the amount of disturbance experienced by wintering deer and elk. During other times of the year, the presence of people and vehicles is a factor in the distribution and rate of spread of noxious weeds, which adversely impact big game winter range by displacing more desirable plant species and reducing overall forage availability.

Pileated Woodpeckers (Management Indicator Species): The issue relative to this analysis is the way each alternative impacts the Forest's ability to maintain desired habitat conditions within the pileated woodpecker Management Requirement areas²⁸. It is primarily tied to public access for firewood gathering.

Barred Owls (Management Indicator Species): As with the pileated woodpecker, public access for firewood gathering is the primary issue relative to this analysis because it can impact the Forest's ability to maintain desired habitat conditions within Management Area 1 areas.

Marten and Northern Three-toed Woodpeckers (Management Indicator Species): Public motorized access has bearing on the management of snags and downed logs in marten/three-toed woodpecker Management Requirement areas.

Beaver (Management Indicator Species): Motorized access adjacent to streams and ponds potentially impacts the Forest's ability to manage beaver habitat.

Blue Grouse (Management Indicator Species): The Forest Plan contains standards and guidelines designed to protect winter and brood habitat for blue grouse. It requires maintenance of hiding cover around at least 50 percent of the perimeter of springs or other water sources, with no breaks in cover exceeding 600 lineal feet along the waters edge. These conditions could be impacted by motor vehicle use off of roads.

²⁸During the development of the Forest Plan, the Regional Forester directed that specific management requirement areas be established to address the habitat needs of wildlife species dependent on old growth/mature forest. Indicator Species dependent on old growth/mature forest specifically addressed by the Forest Plan were barred owl, pileated woodpecker, pine marten, and northern three-toed woodpecker. See Forest Plan Appendix K for more discussion of this topic.

Franklin's (Spruce) Grouse (Management Indicator Species): Motor vehicle use off of roads could potentially impact establishment of lodgepole pine stands following timber harvest and/or fire.

Other Woodpeckers (Management Indicator Species): The Forest Plan, as amended by the Eastside Screens, requires retention of sufficient snags to provide for 100% of potential populations of cavity excavating species. In practice, this has resulted in prescribed snag retention levels of a minimum of four large snags per acre. Downed log densities should be managed to provide a minimum of 20 logs (at least six feet long and > 12 inches diameter) within mixed conifer stands, and 6 logs in ponderosa pine stands. The maintenance of these habitat conditions for woodpeckers is strongly tied to public access for firewood gathering.

Large Raptors and Great Blue Heron (Management Indicator Species): Motorized public access has the potential to affect the Forest's ability to maintain suitable nest and roost trees and maintain minimal disturbance levels near nests.

Northern Bog Lemming (Management Indicator Species): This species occurs in high elevation bogs, meadows, and riparian areas (spruce-fir communities), and is known from only a few locations on the Colville National Forest. Because it occurs in very limited areas, motorized access adjacent to suitable streams and other areas potentially impacts the Forest's ability to maintain habitat for this species.

Waterfowl: Motorized access adjacent to streams, ponds, and wetlands potentially impacts the Forest's ability to manage waterfowl habitat.

Migratory Landbirds: Motor vehicle use off of roads has the potential to affect migratory bird habitat by removing suitable nesting and roosting vegetation and disturbing nesting birds during critical time periods.

Gray Wolf (Threatened Species): Motorized public access potentially affects the use and availability of habitats and the distribution of wolves and their prey within the Colville National Forest.

Grizzly Bear (Threatened Species): Motor vehicle use off of roads has the potential to disturb and/or displace grizzly bears.

Canada Lynx (Threatened Species): Current information suggests that lynx might not directly avoid or be displaced by most low-use forest roads; however motorized access can still negatively affect lynx by allowing human disturbance in denning habitat and increasing access for incidental or illegal hunting or trapping. Plowing or packing snow on roads or snowmobile trails in winter may allow competing carnivores to access lynx habitat thus increasing competition for prey. Uncontrolled public motor vehicle use affects the Forest's ability to maintain desirable road densities within lynx habitat.

Woodland Caribou (Endangered Species): Appendix I of the Forest Plan identified four objectives for management of caribou habitat:

- a. Produce a proper mix of seasonal habitats needed to support the Forest's share of a recovered caribou population,
- b. Protect caribou habitat from destruction or adverse modification (fire, insects, disease, etc.),
- c. Protect caribou from harassment and/or human caused mortality, and
- d. Participate in caribou technical committees and recovery programs.

Of these 4 management objectives, Objective c is potentially influenced by motor vehicle use off of roads.

Northern Leopard Frog (Sensitive Species): Motor vehicle use off of roads in riparian areas in the Pend Oreille valley could potentially damage habitat for this species and/or affect its distribution.

Eared Grebe (Sensitive Species): Motor vehicle use off of roads adjacent to suitable lakes could damage suitable habitat and/or displace this species.

Sandhill Crane (Sensitive Species): Motor vehicle use off of roads within riparian areas along the major river corridors and large wet meadows has the potential to damage habitat and displace sandhill cranes.

Bald Eagle (Sensitive Species): Uncontrolled motor vehicle use near nests and/or roosting areas has the potential to disrupt nesting activities and displace bald eagles.

Peregrine Falcon (Sensitive Species): Motor vehicle use off of roads near cliff nesting sites could be disruptive to peregrine falcon nesting activities.

California Wolverine (Sensitive Species): Land use activities may impact wolverine habitats. In practice, activities that promote or maintain abundance and diversity in small mammal populations and healthy big game winter ranges will favor wolverine use. The retention of undisturbed habitat adjacent to managed timber stands and travel corridors will enhance wolverine movements through managed areas.

Common Loon (Sensitive Species): Because loons are very susceptible to disturbance during the breeding season, human disturbance is considered one of the limiting factors to successful loon nesting in Washington.

Townsend's Big-eared Bat (Sensitive Species): Uncontrolled motor vehicle use near bat habitat features has the potential to disturb and/or displace big-eared bats during critical time periods.

Great Gray Owl (Sensitive Species): Motor vehicle use off of roads can potentially disrupt great gray owl nesting activities and/or displace these birds from suitable habitat.

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, the existing ambiguity in Forest Plan direction, and lack of direction regarding motor vehicle use in Management Areas 6 and 8, would continue

to affect the Forest’s ability to regulate motor vehicle traffic off of forest roads. Based on the above species discussions, the effects of un-regulated motor vehicle use off of forest roads on wildlife species of interest fall into three basic categories:

1. Disturbance and/or displacement of the species from suitable habitat(s) during critical time periods that could potentially affect the ability of individual animals to reproduce or survive. This would also include the loss of individual animals through illegal hunting or trapping.
2. Damage to important habitats or habitat components that are essential for the species, potentially eliminating the species from certain areas and affecting the overall distribution of the species on the Forest.
3. Destruction or removal of critical habitat components (snags and downed logs) in excess of those required to meet Forest Plan objectives and/or standards.

The following table (Table 6) summarizes the potential effects of the No Action alternative on each species discussed in this analysis with respect to the three basic categories presented above. The effects are generalized because neither specific locations nor levels of off-highway vehicle use have been assessed in this analysis. It is assumed under this alternative that off-highway motorized vehicle use will continue across the Forest and the level of use will continue to grow, potentially impacting additional areas on the Forest. Without additional regulation, existing problem areas and impacts will remain, and over time the cumulative effect is that the existing problems will worsen.

Table 6: Wildlife Effects Summary for the No Action Alternative

Species	Expected Effects of the No Action Alternative
Deer & Elk	1 – Displacement/disturbance of animals during critical winter and/or calving/fawning time periods. 2 – Loss of winter range forage due to the introduction and spread of noxious weeds.
Pileated Woodpeckers	3 – Loss of snags necessary for nesting, roosting and foraging.
Barred Owls	1 – Displacement or disturbance during nesting periods. 3 – Loss of snags necessary for nesting, roosting, and foraging.
Marten & Three-toed Woodpeckers	3 – Loss of snags and downed logs necessary for nesting, roosting, and foraging.
Beaver	2 – Soil compaction and other damage to riparian areas
Blue Grouse	2 – Soil compaction, loss of cover, and other damage to riparian areas.
Franklin’s (Spruce) Grouse	2 – Damage to lodgepole pine regeneration in following timber harvest and/or fire.
Other Woodpeckers	3 – Loss of snags and downed logs necessary for nesting, roosting, and foraging.

Large Raptors & Great Blue Heron	1 – Displacement or disturbance during nesting periods.
Northern Bog Lemming	2 – Soil compaction, loss of cover, and other damage to riparian areas.
Waterfowl	2 – Soil compaction, loss of cover, and other damage to riparian areas.
Migratory Landbirds	1 – Displacement or disturbance during nesting periods. 2 – Soil compaction, loss of cover, and other damage to riparian areas. 3 – Loss of snags necessary for nesting, roosting and foraging.
Gray wolf	1 – Displacement/disturbance of prey animals. 1 – Displacement/disturbance from suitable habitats.
Grizzly Bear	1 – Displacement/disturbance from suitable habitats. 2 – Soil compaction, loss of cover, and other damage to riparian areas.
North American Lynx	1 – Displacement/disturbance from suitable habitats. 2 – Snow compaction allowing additional competition from bobcats and coyotes.
Woodland Caribou	1 – Displacement/disturbance from suitable habitats.
Northern Leopard Frog	2 – Soil compaction, loss of cover, and other damage to riparian areas.
Eared Grebe	2 – Soil compaction, loss of cover, and other damage to riparian areas.
Sandhill Crane	2 – Soil compaction, loss of cover, and other damage to riparian areas.
Peregrine Falcon	1 – Displacement/disturbance from suitable habitats.
California Wolverine	1 – Displacement/disturbance from suitable habitats.
Great Gray Owl	1 – Displacement or disturbance during nesting periods. 2 – Soil compaction, loss of cover, and other damage to riparian areas affecting prey availability.

Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action alternative, the Forest Plan would be amended to clarify direction regarding motor vehicle use within all Management Areas and allow the 2005 Travel Management Rule to be placed in effect Forest-wide. Under this rule, motorized vehicle use would only be allowed on designated roads and trails. This would reduce the overall miles of motor vehicle routes currently on the Forest and the overall acreage currently impacted by that use.

The overall effects of reduced use of motor vehicles off of roads on the Forest are improved habitat conditions for most species of wildlife. The potential for disturbance and habitat degradation will be reduced and opportunities to restore or enhance habitat conditions through other projects will be improved. Using the same basic effect

categories displayed for the No Action alternative, the potential effects of increased regulation of motor vehicle use across the Forest are as follows:

1. Reduced potential for disturbance and/or displacement of the species from suitable habitat(s) during critical time periods that could affect the ability of individual animals to reproduce or survive. This would also include fewer losses of individual animals through illegal hunting or trapping.
2. Reduced potential for damage to important habitats or habitat components that are essential for the species, potentially affecting the presence of the species at certain sites and/or the overall distribution of the species on the Forest. Conversely, the potential for the Forest to repair existing damage and/or restore desirable site conditions increases.
3. Reduced potential for the destruction or removal of critical habitat components (snags and downed logs) required to meet Forest Plan objectives and/or standards. The Forest’s ability to meet desired future conditions and existing standards is improved.

The following table (Table 7) summarizes the potential effects of the Proposed Action alternative on each species discussed in this analysis with respect to the three basic categories presented above. As with the No Action alternative, these effects are generalized because neither specific locations nor levels of motor vehicle use off of roads have been assessed in this analysis. It is assumed that public compliance and enforcement will both be sufficient to achieve the desired objectives, and that uncontrolled vehicle use will be reduced over time. It is further assumed that the Forest will pursue opportunities to repair and restore damaged areas once uncontrolled motor vehicle use is eliminated, so the overall cumulative effect over time will be improved habitat conditions and better achievement of Forest Plan desired conditions and compliance with existing standards and guidelines.

Table 7: Wildlife Effects Summary for the Proposed Action

Species	Expected Effects of the No Action Alternative
Deer & Elk	1 – Reduced displacement/disturbance of animals during critical winter and/or calving/fawning time periods. 2 – The rate of spread of noxious weeds into winter range areas will be reduced.
Pileated Woodpeckers	3 – Better retention of snags necessary for nesting, roosting and foraging.
Barred Owls	1 – Less displacement or disturbance during nesting periods. 3 – Better retention of snags necessary for nesting, roosting and foraging.
Marten & Three-toed Woodpeckers	3 – Better retention of snags and downed logs necessary for nesting, roosting, and foraging.
Beaver	2 – Reduced soil compaction and other damage to riparian areas.

Blue Grouse	2 – Reduced soil compaction, loss of cover, and other damage to riparian areas.
Franklin’s (Spruce) Grouse	2 – Reduced potential for damage to lodgepole pine regeneration in following timber harvest and/or fire.
Other Woodpeckers	3 – Better retention of snags and downed logs necessary for nesting, roosting, and foraging.
Large Raptors & Great Blue Heron	1 – Less displacement or disturbance during nesting periods.
Northern Bog Lemming	2 – Reduced soil compaction, loss of cover, and other damage to riparian areas.
Waterfowl	2 – Reduced soil compaction, loss of cover, and other damage to riparian areas.
Migratory Landbirds	1 – Less displacement or disturbance during nesting periods. 2 – Reduced soil compaction, loss of cover, and other damage to riparian areas. 3 – Better retention of snags necessary for nesting, roosting and foraging.
Gray wolf	1 – Less displacement/disturbance of prey animals. 1 – Less displacement/disturbance from suitable habitats.
Grizzly Bear	1 – Less displacement/disturbance from suitable habitats. 2 – Reduced soil compaction, loss of cover, and other damage to riparian areas.
North American Lynx	1 – Less displacement/disturbance from suitable habitats. 2 – Reduced potential for snow compaction allowing additional competition from bobcats and coyotes.
Woodland Caribou	1 – Less displacement/disturbance from suitable habitats.
Northern Leopard Frog	2 – Reduced soil compaction, loss of cover, and other damage to riparian areas.
Eared Grebe	2 – Reduced soil compaction, loss of cover, and other damage to riparian areas.
Sandhill Crane	2 – Reduced soil compaction, loss of cover, and other damage to riparian areas.
Peregrine Falcon	1 – Less displacement/disturbance from suitable habitats.
California Wolverine	1 – Less displacement/disturbance from suitable habitats.
Great Gray Owl	1 – Less displacement/disturbance from suitable habitats. 2 – Reduced soil compaction, loss of cover, and other damage to riparian areas affecting prey availability.

Cumulative Effects:

The cumulative effects areas are the ranges of the affected wildlife species populations that use the Colville National Forest.

The effects discussed above include disturbance, damage, or destruction/removal of habitat. There are numerous other activities that occur across lands of many different ownerships that also cause disturbance, damage, or destruction/removal of habitat for these wildlife species, including (but not limited to) motor vehicle use, logging, firewood gathering, non-motorized recreation, grazing, and wildfires. The proposed action would reduce disturbance, damage, or destruction/removal impacts to every species described above.

When looking at the overall habitat of each species, most would not be affected in any meaningful way by reducing motor vehicle use off of roads. Approximately 18% of the Colville National Forest is within 300 feet of an open forest road or trail, and it is estimated that at most only 5% of the Forest is used by motor vehicles operated off of open forest roads or trails. This leaves at least 77% of the forest not immediately affected by motor vehicle use. If the Forest Plan is amended and motor vehicle use is effectively confined to designated roads, trails, and areas, the percentage not immediately affected would increase to approximately 82%. In the future, when closed roads, user created trails, or new trails are added to the designated system of roads, trails, and areas, it is expected that the percentage of the forest not affected by motor vehicle use would again drop by a few percentage points. When looking at the overall habitat of each species, this change attributable to this proposed Forest Plan amendment is not cumulatively important.

However, meadow-dependent species are exceptions. The northern bog lemming and the northern leopard frog have limited range in the vicinity of the Colville National Forest. The northern bog lemming occurs in high elevation bogs, meadows, and riparian areas, and the northern leopard frog has been located only in riparian areas near the Pend Oreille River. Habitat for these species is limited, and motor vehicle use in wetland meadows or riparian areas is potentially very damaging to this limited habitat. Implementation of the Travel Management Rule would reduce use of motor vehicles in wetland meadows and riparian areas. Reduction of impacts to these limited habitats may be an important measure in the conservation of these species because high quality habitat on lands of other ownerships may be very scarce.

Sensitive Plants

Existing Condition

Sensitive plant species are those species that (1) have appeared in the Federal Register as proposals for classification and are under consideration for official listing as endangered or threatened species (2) are on an official State list, or (3) are recognized by the Regional Forester to need special management in order to prevent their placement on Federal or State lists. There are 45 sensitive plant species that are documented or suspected to occur across the Colville National Forest. More species occur in moist or wet habitats than in dry sites.

Management Areas 6 and 8 tend to be lower elevation and drier sites, where relatively few sensitive plant species occur on the Colville National Forest. The exceptions are meadows and riparian areas, where sensitive plants are being adversely affected by use of motor vehicles off of roads. Meadows, in particular, include several sensitive species, including grape ferns or moonworts (*Botrychium hesperium*, *B. paradoxum*, and *B. pedunculatum*), blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium septentrionale*), adders-tongue (*Ophioglossum pusillum*), and pussytoes (*Antennaria parvifolia*). Kidney-leaved violet (*Viola renifolia*) is another species where motor vehicle-caused damage is known to be occurring. Motor vehicle use is likely damaging individual plants, local populations of plants, and plant habitat, though none are known to be affected to the degree that they appear headed toward federal or state listing.

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, the 2005 Travel Management Rule would be implemented where enabled by current Forest Plan direction. Implementation of the Travel Management Rule in Management Areas 6 and 8 may not be effective because there is no current Forest Plan direction that would enable restricting motor vehicle use to designated roads, trails, and areas.

It is expected that motor vehicle use off of roads would be substantially reduced outside Management Areas 6 and 8. Impacts to sensitive plants would be reduced as a result. However, motor vehicle use off of roads in Management Areas 6 and 8 would continue and likely increase. Sensitive plant populations would be adversely affected as motor vehicle use off of roads increases, especially in expanded areas of concentrated use. It is not known whether increased motor vehicle use off of roads would push any sensitive plants toward federal or state listing because it is not possible to identify the exact locations where future use might expand.

Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, the Forest Plan would be clarified so as to enable the 2005 Travel Management Rule to be effectively implemented Forest-wide. Motor vehicle use off of roads would be substantially reduced, thus avoiding adverse impacts to sensitive plants, especially in wetland and riparian areas where most sensitive plants occur. It is expected that most sensitive plant impacts would be avoided, so none would be pushed toward federal or state listing.

Cumulative Effects:

The cumulative effects area is the range of the affected sensitive plant species populations that inhabit the Colville National Forest.

The effects of using motor vehicles off of roads include disturbance, damage, or destruction/removal of habitat. As discussed for wildlife (above), there are numerous other activities that occur across lands of many different ownerships that also cause disturbance, damage, or destruction/removal of habitat for these plant species, including (but not limited to) motor vehicle use, logging, firewood gathering, non-motorized

recreation, grazing, and wildfires. The proposed action would reduce disturbance, damage, or destruction/removal impacts to every species described above.

As with certain wildlife species, the effect to meadow-dependent plant species may be of the greatest importance. For the meadow/riparian dependent species described above, habitat is limited, and motor vehicle use in wetland meadows or riparian areas is potentially very damaging to this limited habitat. Implementation of the Travel Management Rule would reduce use of motor vehicles in wetland meadows and riparian areas. Reduction of impacts to these limited habitats may be an important measure in the conservation of these species because high quality habitat on lands of other ownerships may be less common than on the National Forest.

Heritage Resources

Existing Condition

Heritage resources include American Indian religious or cultural sites, archaeological sites, and historic properties or areas. These resources occur throughout the Colville National Forest.

With regards to archaeological or historic sites, there are no sites on the Colville National Forest on the National Register of Historic Places; however, all archaeological or historic sites are considered to be National Register-eligible until they are evaluated. Because few sites have been evaluated, any damage or loss is considered an adverse and irreversible impact to heritage resources. Resources at risk include (but are not limited to) homesteads, cabins, mines/prospects, sawmills, Civilian Conservation Corps camps, Native American campsites, and lithic scatters.

Motor vehicle use, particularly off-road use, is enabling people to explore an ever-increasing proportion of the National Forest, thus allowing people to encounter an increasing number of heritage sites. When people find heritage sites, some will remove artifacts, damage cultural materials, and otherwise compromise archaeological integrity which could lead to reduced historical value to society.

The Management Area 6 and 8 portion of the Forest is generally lower elevation and has a milder climate than the rest of the Forest. Because these areas tend to have less snow cover and a longer growing season, they would be expected to have had more human use and therefore a higher occurrence of heritage sites than the rest of the Forest.

With regards to Native American cultural resources, tribes have certain rights to hunt, fish, and gather on the National Forest. Tribal members currently use motor vehicles in the exercise of these rights. It is expected that for hunting, fishing, and gathering, tribal members (like the recreating public) use motor vehicles on open roads, on closed roads when there is opportunity to do so, and off of roads when terrain, and vegetation are conducive to motor vehicle use.

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, it is expected the 2005 Travel Management Rule would be implemented in the absence of the Forest Plan being amended, resulting in motor vehicle use off of roads reduced on much of the Forest, but may result in increased motor vehicle use in Management Areas 6 and 8.

Reduced motor vehicle use off of roads in Management Areas 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, 5, 7, and 10 would likely result in less heritage site discovery, therefore less damage to sites in these management areas than is occurring currently. But with increased off-road use in Management Areas 6 and 8, occurrence of people finding, exploring, and damaging heritage sites is likely to increase in these two Management Areas. Because these are the lower elevation, milder climate areas, presumed to have the most heritage sites, any decrease in site discovery and damage in the higher elevation portions of the Forest may be offset by increases in discovery and damage in Management Areas 6 and 8. In the case of heritage impacts, however, the avoidance of impact in one area cannot compensate for an impact that occurs in another area because any loss is irreversible and irretrievable. Chances of irreversible and irretrievable damage to sites that could qualify for the National Register of Historic Places would increase in Management Areas 6 and 8.

Implementation of the Travel Management Rule would affect motor vehicle access for tribal members' hunting, fishing, and gathering. This would apply only in Management Areas where motor vehicle use is allowed, and where the Travel Management Rule would be effectively implemented (Management Areas 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, 5, 7, and 10). Tribal members would be able to drive motor vehicles on designated roads, trails, and areas, but would not be able to drive off the designated system without first obtaining written authorization. In some instances, the effect would be to restrict tribal members' use of motor vehicles for hunting, fishing, or gathering if they desire to drive off of the designated system and are denied written authorization. In other instances, the effect would be the inconvenience associated with obtaining the written authorization necessary for motor vehicle use off of the designated system. In Management Areas 6 and 8 where the Travel Management rule would not be effectively implemented, tribal members may be able to use motor vehicles off of designated routes and areas without the need to obtain written authorization.

Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, it is expected that motor vehicle use off of roads would be substantially reduced across the Colville National Forest. Overall the occurrence of people finding heritage sites would be reduced. Chances of irreversible and irretrievable damage to heritage sites would be reduced across the Forest.

The effect on tribal members' hunting, fishing and gathering, would be the same as described above for the No Action alternative, except that the effects would apply in all Management Areas where motor vehicle use is allowed (Management Areas 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10).

Cumulative Effects:

The cumulative effects area for heritage resources is the Okanogan Highlands province. This area was chosen because of similarities in landforms, vegetation, history, and cultural uses across the Okanogan Highlands.

Actions that affect heritage sites, besides motor vehicle use off of roads, include any activity that results in people going off of the open road system, such as hunting, berry picking, and logging. The adverse effects to heritage sites (described above) include discovery of previously unknown sites, removal of artifacts, damage to sites, and compromised site integrity.

It is expected that the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forest (west of the Colville National Forest), and the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (east of the Colville National Forest) will also implement the 2005 Travel Management Rule in the next few years, thus restricting use of motor vehicles off of designated roads, trails, and areas. Motor vehicle use on private lands is also restricted in that it is unlawful to operate a nonstreet licensed vehicle on certain types of private roads or trespass on private property unless the landowner has authorized such use.²⁹ It is not known if any other public land agencies, will restrict motor vehicle use off of open roads or trails.

Hunting, gathering, logging, and other activities will continue across the Okanogan Highlands area, so heritage sites will continue to be discovered, artifacts removed, and sites damaged or compromised. Reducing motor vehicle use off of designated routes on the Colville, Okanogan and Wenatchee, and Idaho Panhandle National Forests will have an important effect in preserving heritage resources in that the rate of site discovery, and therefore the rate of site damage, will be slowed and damage reduced when compared to the current situation.

Noxious Weeds

Existing Condition

Many noxious weed species are present in areas of the Colville National Forest. They most often are present along road shoulders, but may occur anywhere vegetation has been removed, soil has been disturbed, or where soil or moisture limit the ability of native plants to fully occupy the site. Noxious weeds are present in most areas where motor vehicles are driven.

Many weeds are labeled as “noxious” because when present in abundance they are ecologically or economically harmful. (USDA Forest Service, 1988a). The areas most susceptible to weed infestation are disturbed soils, particularly on dry sites that do not naturally revegetate quickly; open areas with little shade; and semi-shaded disturbed sites. Many species of weeds prefer heavily disturbed or dry sites, but there are several weed species (e.g., hawkweeds) that readily invade moist sites with adequate sunlight; i.e., meadows, especially where such sites have been disturbed. Heavily shaded, undisturbed sites usually are free of noxious weeds.

²⁹ Revised Code of Washington 46.09.115(1)(3) and (4).

The areas where weeds tend to occur most often are also the areas with the most motor vehicle use; i.e., roads shoulders, dispersed camping sites, open sparsely vegetated slopes.

Motor vehicles are one of the primary vectors (i.e., transport mechanisms) for noxious weed seeds. Seeds and plant fragments get caught on motor vehicles; and seeds are included in mud and dirt carried by motor vehicles. The seeds, plant parts, dirt, or mud can fall off the motor vehicle in the course of use, allowing noxious weeds to become established in new locations. Noxious weed transport via motor vehicles can occur over great distances as motor vehicles can pick up weed seeds or plant parts from another location, the vehicle can then be driven or transported on a trailer or pickup truck, and the seeds then dropped on the National Forest. While the Forest Service encourages people to reduce transport of noxious weeds through signing and other educational efforts, the Forest Service has no means to require that recreational motor vehicles be free of noxious weeds prior to entering the National Forest.

Weeds are most easily detected and treated when they occur along open roads and trails. When detected early, weeds are often treated inexpensively and effectively. Weeds that occur off open roads and trails are often not detected until they are well established, the infested area is large, and treatment is often much more expensive (and often less effective), especially when weeds must be hand-pulled or when herbicides must be applied by specialized off-highway vehicle, horseback, or backpack methods.

The more important effect of allowing motor vehicle use only on designated roads, trails, and areas would be to reduce the threat of introducing new noxious weed species to off-road or closed-road areas of the Forest. Early detection and rapid response is recognized as a key strategy in containing or eradicating new weed infestations. (USDA Forest Service, 2005a). New weed infestations in off-road and closed road areas are considerably more difficult to monitor, detect, and treat unless found in their early stages.

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, it is expected that geographically unrestricted motor vehicle use in Management Areas 6 and 8 would continue. Motor vehicle users desiring to use Management Area 6 and 8 lands, including those using closed roads or driving off-road, will continue using these areas as they have in the past, and would continue to expand the area used as people explore new areas and the number of motorized recreationists increases over time.

Because motor vehicle use would not be effectively restricted in Management Areas 6 and 8, transport of noxious weed seed to off-road and closed road areas by motor vehicles would continue. Although noxious weeds are already present in most areas where motor vehicle use presently occurs, continued unrestricted motor vehicle use in Management Areas 6 and 8 will introduce noxious weeds into new areas as motor vehicle use expands. Species of weeds new to the Colville National Forest would likely be introduced into areas that are off of open roads, thus increasing the chances that new weed species could become well established (due to difficulty in detecting and treating weeds away from

open roads). Since new weed infestations would be more difficult to detect, more expensive to treat, and treatments less effective, it is expected that weed proliferation would be greater than if motor vehicle use is allowed only on designated routes, trails, and areas.

Proposed Action

Amending the Forest Plan as proposed would change Forest Plan direction for all Management Areas including Management Areas 6 and 8, and would have the effect of enabling the 2005 Travel Management Rule to be put into effect, thus allowing motor vehicle use only on designated roads, trails, and areas. It is expected that motor vehicle use off of roads and on closed roads would be substantially curtailed. As a result, disturbance to vegetation and soil would be reduced, and introduction of noxious weed seed by motor vehicles would be reduced.

Because noxious weeds are already present in most areas where motor vehicle use occurs, and because there are other mechanisms that contribute to weed infestation, reducing motor vehicle use off of roads and on closed roads will reduce the potential for weeds to spread beyond locations where they are already present. In areas of the Forest where use of motor vehicles off of roads or on closed roads is already heavy, the reduction in weed spread would not be very important; however, in areas where use of motor vehicles off of roads or on closed roads is not yet widespread, curtailing such motor vehicle use would keep weeds from spreading as rapidly or extensively.

Cumulative Effects:

The cumulative effects area for noxious weeds is the Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille Counties. This area was selected because it is the area of jurisdiction of County Weed Control Boards for the three counties that encompass the Colville National Forest.

Although motor vehicle use is one of the more important contributors to noxious weed spread, it is recognized that there are other mechanisms that disturb soil and vegetation (e.g., fires, wildlife, erosion, livestock, wind uprooting trees), and other vectors for seed transport (e.g., wind, animal fur, animal droppings). Reducing motor vehicle-caused soil and vegetation disturbance and seed transport would only reduce, but not eliminate, the proliferation of noxious weeds.

Reducing the proliferation of noxious weeds on the National Forest will have little cumulative effect on reducing noxious weeds in the three Counties since the mechanisms of disturbed soil and weed seed transport are common in the non-National Forest portions of the Counties, and there are several areas in the Counties off the National Forest that are already heavily infected with noxious weeds.

Range Management

Existing Condition

Livestock grazing allotments cover much of the Colville National Forest. Forage upon which livestock depend occurs primarily in meadows, open hillsides, in recently burned or logged areas, and along roads. Many of these forage-producing areas are the same

areas used by motorists who drive off of roads. Motor vehicle use off of roads can adversely affect grazing resources by trampling vegetation, creating trails through natural barriers (thus allowing cattle access to lakes, streams, or other areas where cattle use is not desired), damaging fences or other range improvements, by leaving gates open (thus allowing cattle to go outside their pasture or allotment), or by motor vehicle users harassing or disturbing grazing animals.

There have been reports of motor vehicle use in meadows to such an extent that forage available for cattle grazing in certain localized areas has been severely reduced. In some grazing allotments meadows provide a major proportion of the available forage, so reduced forage in meadows is a serious adverse impact to the affected permit holders.

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, the Forest Plan would not be amended. The 2005 Travel Management Rule would be implemented across the Colville National Forest, except that implementation in Management Areas 6 and 8 would not be effective. As a result, motor vehicle use off of roads, and impacts associated with such use, would be reduced in Management Areas 1, 2, 3A, 3B, 3C, 5, 7, and 10, but would continue or increase in Management Areas 6 and 8.

In Management Areas 6 and 8, vegetation would continue to be trampled by motor vehicles used off of roads, trails through natural barriers would continue to proliferate, and damage to fences or other range improvements would continue. Gates would continue to be left open in all Management Areas, but this impact would be more important in Management Areas 6 and 8 because pasture gates not along open roads would continue to be left open in locations where they are more difficult to monitor and close. In Management Areas where motor vehicle use would be confined to designated routes, grazing animals would be disturbed less because there would be less livestock/motor vehicle interaction. In Management Areas 6 and 8, grazing cattle could be harassed or disturbed both along open roads and trails, and in areas off of designated roads and trails.

Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, the Forest Plan would be amended which would enable effective implementation of the 2005 Travel Management Rule in all areas of the Colville National Forest. Forage vegetation would be less often damaged by motor vehicle use off of roads or trails, natural barriers would not be compromised by use of motor vehicles off of roads, and damage to fences and other range improvements would be reduced when motor vehicle use is allowed only on designated roads, trails, and areas. Gates would likely still be left open, but this would occur primarily along open roads and trails where monitoring and re-closure would be more easily accomplished. Livestock grazing along designated open roads and trails would still be subject to disturbance from motor vehicle use, but animals grazing away from designated routes would encounter fewer motor vehicles so would be subject to less disturbance and harassment.

Cumulative Effects:

The cumulative effects area is all of the grazing allotments on the Colville National Forest.

Effects on range management from motor vehicle use (described above) include trampling of range grasses, breaching barriers through creation and maintenance of trails, damage to fences and other range improvements, opening of pasture gates, and disturbance or harassment of grazing animals. Other activities that have the same or similar effects include logging (breached barriers); prescribed fires or wildfires (breached barriers, damaged improvements); non-motorized recreationists and hunters (damage to range improvements, pasture gates left open, and disturbance or harassment of grazing animals).

However, motor vehicle use is most commonly associated with these adverse effects. Wildfires are infrequent and there is often money available to repair wildfire damage to barriers and range improvements. Prescribed fires and logging are also infrequent and include provisions to avoid adverse impacts to range management to repair damage to barriers or improvements. Non-motorized recreationists and hunters cause the same effects, but to a much smaller degree. Therefore, confining motor vehicle use to designated routes should cumulatively reduce effects to grazing permittees substantially.

Conflicts with Objectives of Other Land Management Plans, Policies, and Controls

Existing Condition

All three counties (Ferry, Stevens, and Pend Oreille Counties) have designated open to all motor vehicles many County Roads that lead up to and into the Colville National Forest. This action is expected to expand the areas where off-highway vehicles can go, but may also have the effect of taking motor vehicle users into portions of the National Forest where there are no routes designated for use by all motor vehicles. This could result in confusion or frustration (i.e., “conflict”) on the part of non-highway-legal motor vehicle users who find themselves at the end of a county road with no place to go on the National Forest, and additional enforcement work for the Forest Service officials.

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, the Travel Management Rule would be implemented, but it could not be effectively enforced on Management Areas 6 and 8. Many of the county routes open to all motor vehicles provide access to Management Area 6 and 8 portions of the Forest. The problem of non-highway-legal motor vehicle users finding themselves at the end of a county road with no place to go on the National Forest would not occur in Management Areas 6 and 8 as motor vehicle use in these management areas would not be restricted to designated roads and trails; therefore the “conflict” would be less than under the Proposed Action.

Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, the Travel Management Rule would be effectively implemented in all Management Areas. When users of non-highway-legal motor vehicle users find themselves at the end of an open county road on National Forest where there is no designated open road, trail, or area, they would not be able to continue their motor vehicle use onto the National Forest. Frustration and confusion (i.e., “conflict”) would be greater under the proposed action than under the No Action alternative because the restriction on motor vehicle use would apply to all Management Areas.

Other Topics

Topics where meaningful effects are not expected, and therefore will not need detailed effects analysis include:

Timber Vegetation: Timber vegetation (i.e., forest trees) is little affected by motor vehicle use. Individual trees or small pockets of trees may be damaged or weakened by mechanical damage or compacted soils. But the forest as a whole is not affected in any meaningful way by the decision whether to amend the Forest Plan to allow the Travel Management Rule to be implemented.

Forest Fuels: Forest fuel refers to dead or live vegetation that may be consumed by a fire. Forest fuels may be moved or displaced by motor vehicle use, but the quantity and arrangement of forest fuels would be little affected, whether the Forest Plan is amended or not.

Air Quality: Motor vehicles produce exhaust emissions and create air-borne dust when operated on dry road, trail, or soil surfaces. Motor vehicle use on roads often produces more dust than on trails or off of roads. However, dust and vehicle exhaust in the Forest environment is usually localized in extent, short-lived, and well-dispersed within a large airshed area. Because the total number of motor vehicles operating on the National Forest is not expected to change as a result of the decision to amend the Forest Plan, the quantity of vehicle exhaust and dust is very small at the airshed scale, and there is not expected to be any meaningful difference between the alternatives, air quality effects are very limited and are not important in the decision to be made.

Visual Quality: Motor vehicle use has little impact on overall visual quality. There may be localized visual impacts resulting from damaged vegetation or exposed soil, but these are isolated, localized impacts. It is recognized that where motor vehicle use turns a green meadow into a mud bog, the visual impact is severe at that location.

Under the No Action alternative these visual impacts to could continue in Management Areas 6 and 8, while the Proposed Action would reduce or eliminate impacts associated with motor vehicle use that damages vegetation or soils.

Economics: The proposed Forest Plan amendment would affect whether people drive their motor vehicles only on designated roads, trails, or areas, or whether they drive off of open roads or trails. The decision is not expected to have any meaningful effect on how many people use the National Forest for motorized recreation, or how many days they spend recreating on the National Forest: Therefore, there would be no meaningful economic impact associated with the Forest Plan amendment.

Prime Farmland, Rangeland, Forest Land: Prime farmlands, rangelands, and forest land occur on the Colville National Forest (USDA Forest Service, 1988a). Agency direction in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, 65.21 is concerned primarily with conversion of prime farmland, rangeland, and forest lands to other land uses. Because this forest plan amendment would not result in any farmland, rangeland, or forest land conversion to other land uses, discussion of effects to prime lands is not needed.

Unique Characteristics of the Geographic Area: Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, 05 identifies areas such as historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas as examples of areas that may contain unique characteristics.

Effects to historic or cultural resources (pages 55-57), prime farmlands, and wetlands and discussed above.

There are no “park lands” on the Colville National Forest.

The Kettle River is proposed as a Recreational River under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act; however, the length of river that actually flows through Colville National Forest System lands is negligible, and very little Colville National Forest land is within ¼ mile of the Kettle River. There are no known activities related to motor vehicle use on the Colville National Forest that have an effect on the values which caused the river to be proposed for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic River System.

Research Natural Areas (proposed or established) are present on the Colville National Forest. The Forest Plan currently contains language that prohibits use of motor vehicles off of roads in Management Area 4; this would not change under the No Action alternative. The Proposed Action would modify the language slightly, but would still prohibit motor vehicle use in Management Area 4. The intent, to prohibit motor vehicle use off of roads in Research Natural Areas would be the same with either alternative.

Inventoried Roadless Areas are “other areas” that may be considered to have “unique characteristics.” The Colville National Forest Plan recognizes 18 Inventoried Roadless Areas, several of which contain “travelways” open to motor vehicle use under the Forest Plan. Several additional areas (now called “potential

wilderness areas” in Forest Service directives)³⁰ are currently being considered for addition under the ongoing Forest Plan revision.

Under the No Action alternative, trails within Management Areas that allow motor vehicle use in Inventoried Roadless Areas could remain open to motor vehicle use; motor vehicle use off of the designated system would not be allowed, except in Management Areas 6 and 8 where motor vehicle use off of roads would not be effectively prohibited. (A small portion of Inventoried Roadless Areas contain Management Area 6 and 8 lands.)

As in the No Action alternative, trails open to motor vehicle use within Inventoried Roadless Areas could remain open to motor vehicle use under the Proposed Action; however, use of motor vehicles off of the designated system would be effectively reduced, including Management Area 6 and 8 lands.

It should be noted that use or presence of motor vehicles does not affect whether an area meets the criteria for inventory as “potential wilderness.” Neither the No Action alternative nor the Proposed Action would have any effect on these roadless/potential wilderness characteristics. The effect of reducing use of motor vehicle off of roads would not be on the area’s classification, but on some people’s expectations for solitude, quiet, etc. in inventoried roadless areas.

Environmental Justice/Civil Rights: Environmental Justice means that, to the greatest extent practicable and permitted by law, all populations are provided the opportunity to comment before decisions are rendered on, are allowed to share in the benefits of, are not excluded from, and are not affected in a disproportionately high and adverse manner by, government programs and activities affecting human health or the environment (USDA, 1997). In examining the proposed action, the environmental effects, and public comments received, there is no indication of any disproportionately high or adverse effect to Indian tribes, low income populations, or minority populations.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination in Federal program delivery, employment, and housing. It is the policy of the Forest Service that the Responsible Official review proposed actions for civil rights impacts, and either prepare a civil rights impact analysis and statement of its findings for any proposed policy or organizational action which may have a major civil rights impact, or document the determination that a civil rights impact analysis and a statement of findings are not needed. Review of the proposed action, the environmental effects, and the responses to scoping indicate no disproportionate impacts to women, minority groups, or low income people, and no major civil rights or social impacts associated with the proposed action. Therefore, a civil rights impact analysis and statement of findings are not required.

³⁰ See Forest Service Handbook 1909.12, Chapter 70 for characteristics that determine whether an area may be included as potential wilderness.

4. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

The Forest Service consulted the following individuals, Federal, state and local agencies, tribes and non-Forest Service persons during the development of this environmental assessment:

Interdisciplinary Team: This environmental analysis was conducted by an interdisciplinary analyst in lieu of an Interdisciplinary Team, in consultation with resource specialists, (see FSH 1909.15, 12.2). Participants in the analysis were as follows:

- James Parker, Analyst, Environmental Coordinator, Colville National Forest
- James McGowan, Wildlife Biologist, Colville National Forest
- Steve Kramer, Archaeologist, Colville National Forest
- Debbie Wilkins, Recreation Assistant, Newport and Sullivan Lake Ranger Districts
- Carmen Nielsen, Outdoor Recreation Planner, Three Rivers and Republic Ranger Districts
- Tom Shuhda, Fisheries Biologist, Colville National Forest
- Karen Honeycutt, Fisheries Biologist, Three Rivers and Republic Ranger Districts
- Kathy Ahlenslager, Botanist, Colville National Forest
- Ginger Gilmore, Civil Engineering Technician, Colville National Forest
- Mike Mumford, Zone Law Enforcement Officer (Newport)
- Joe Crowder, Zone Law Enforcement Officer (Republic)
- Charline Deese, Civil Engineering Technician, Colville National Forest
- Craig Newman, Recreation, Engineering, and Lands Staff Officer, Colville National Forest
- Travis Fletcher, Range/Noxious Weeds Program Coordinator, Colville National Forest
- Nancy Glines, Soil Scientist, Colville National Forest
- Jennifer Hickenbottom, Hydrologist, Colville National Forest

Federal, State, and Local Agencies:

- Mike LeTourneau, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 10, requested to be on the project mailing list.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was consulted regarding effects to Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive species. Concurrence with the findings of the Biological Evaluation was received on April 1, 2008.

Tribes:

The Spokane Tribe, the Kalispel Tribe of Indians, and the Tribes of the Colville Indian Reservation, were sent letters requesting consultation and participation in the process of designating roads, trails, and areas open to motor vehicle use. The Tribes did not respond to the Forest Service's invitations.

Others:

The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during a scoping and 30-day comment period (36 CFR 215.5) from October 17, 2007 through November 16, 2007. In addition to the legal notice published in the *Colville Statesman-Examiner* newspaper, a letter was sent to the Forest's travel management

mailing list (182 addresses). Four letters or messages were received in response to the 30-day comment period. Respondents were:

- Don Anderson (requested an extension of the comment period).
- Alan Drago (provided comments).
- David Heflick, Conservation Northwest, and The Lands Council (provided comments).
- Jeff Lambert, Spokane Mountaineers, Inc. (provided comments).

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