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## NEWS RELEASE

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***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

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### **Focus on forest plan revision: access management**

*Note: This is the first in a six-part series. The first five articles will feature one of the five proposed revision topics. The sixth article will provide information about the comment process.*

*Kamiah* – On September 30, 2004, forest supervisors for the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests released a Proposed Action and a Notice of Intent to revise forest plans.

Forest plans provide broad, strategic direction for managing national forest land. Existing plans for the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests are nearly 17 years old.

The forests propose to focus the revision on five topics: access management, aquatic ecosystem conditions, terrestrial ecosystem conditions, noxious weed management and special designations and areas. This article, the first of a six-part series, will focus on the topic of access management.

**Access management.** These two words evoke passionate responses from many national forest users.

The issue and the emotions are not unique to north-central Idaho. Dale Bosworth, Chief of the USDA Forest Service, identified unmanaged recreation, including the use of illegal off-highway vehicle trails, as one of the “four threats” facing the national forest system.

According to Bosworth, unmanaged off-highway vehicle use can have serious impacts including damage to wetlands and wetland species, severe soil erosion and spread of invasive species.

Forest supervisors for the Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests are also concerned about the escalating adverse effects of off-highway vehicle use in the local area.

“The time has come to better manage the use of motorized vehicles,” Clearwater National Forest Supervisor Larry Dawson and Acting Nez Perce National Forest Supervisor Steve Williams said in a joint statement.

Current forest plans allow motorized use on more than 5200 miles of designated roads and more than 1800 miles of designated trails on the two forests.

Cross-country travel is also allowed on hundreds of thousands of acres. A few exceptions exist to protect important wildlife habitat, special recreation areas (such as the Lolo Trail National Historic Landmark), and designated Wilderness.

According to Dawson and Williams, planners in 1987 never envisioned the large increase in demand for motorized recreation opportunities, nor did they anticipate the larger, more powerful off-highway vehicles and snowmobiles that are commonplace today. These machines can traverse terrain once believed to be inaccessible.

In some cases this unforeseen access has resulted in increased damage to sensitive areas, such as meadows and wetlands; a proliferation of user-created trails; soil compaction and erosion; harassment of wildlife; and an increasing number of conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users.

Through the revision process, the forests propose to decide where motorized use, both winter and non-winter, should be allowed within the 27 proposed geographic areas. Separate site-specific analyses would ultimately decide which roads and trails would remain open and which would be closed.

While the proposed action doesn't address a national off-road vehicle proposal to limit off-road vehicle travel to designated routes and trails only, it could become one of the alternatives considered.

Dawson and Williams predict it will be difficult finding an acceptable solution. They expect some individuals will view the proposal with suspicion, believing the agency is trying to keep them out of the forest. Others, they believe, will see the proposal as not restrictive enough.

"We are trying to strike a balance, caring for the land while providing desired motorized recreation opportunities for people," Dawson and Williams emphasized.

Individuals interested in access management can learn more by reading the Proposed Action and Notice of Intent. People are encouraged to study the geographic areas and comment about where they believe motorized use is and isn't appropriate.

Comments regarding the proposal need to be received by December 31, 2004. They will be used to identify issues and craft alternative management scenarios that will be presented in a draft environmental impact statement and draft forest plans..

Information regarding forest plan revision can be obtained from the revision website: [www.fs.fed.us/cnpz](http://www.fs.fed.us/cnpz). Questions can also be directed to local district rangers or the revision team headquartered in Kamiah, Idaho.

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