

Regional Guidance & Expectations
Subpart A Travel Analysis
Rocky Mountain Region
December 21, 2012

- A. **Background.** The Forest Service is continuing to implement the 2005 Travel Management Rule. Over the past 7 years (2005-2012) the Forests of the Rocky Mountain Region successfully completed Subpart B, which is a Designation of Roads, Trails and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use to cover every applicable acre of National Forest land they manage. This effort resulted in a set of Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUMs) which prescribe those Forest Service roads where traffic is allowed to occur; and it also resulted in the ban of cross-country travel by off-highway vehicles (OHVs). Forests are now beginning to work on Subpart A, which is a Travel Analysis Process (TAP) which is science based that will inform future travel management decisions, as well as, identify roads that are no longer needed to meet forest resource management objectives. Travel Analysis serves as the basis for developing proposed actions, but does not result in decisions. This will not be a decision document but a science based suggestion of the minimum road system based on current key issues and management options and priorities.

Subpart A analysis is intended to account for benefits and risks of individual roads in the system, and especially account for increasing concerns and affordability. Consideration is given to the need to support existing Forest Plans, and the informing of future Forest plans and resulting projects. All NFS roads, maintenance levels 1-5, must be included in the analysis and should be in conjunction with the Watershed Condition Framework which will provide important information for your work on Subpart A. The expectation is that the WCF process and the TAP will complement each another. The ultimate goal is management and sustainability of a road system that minimizes adverse environmental impacts by assuring roads are in locations only where they are necessary to meet access needs, and can be maintained within budget constraints.

- B. **Agency Direction.** Subpart A Travel Analysis is required by the 2005 Travel Management Rule (36 CFR 212.5). Forest Service Manual 7712 and Forest Service Handbook 7709.55 Chapter 20 provides specific direction, including the requirement to use a six step interdisciplinary, science-based process to ensure that future decisions are based on an adequate consideration of environmental, social and

economic impacts of roads. A recent letter from the Washington Office dated March 29, 2012, provides clarification and additional national direction related to this work, addressing process, timing and leadership expectations. The letter requires documentation of the analysis by a Travel Analysis Report (TAR), which includes a map displaying the roads that can be used to inform the proposed action for recommending the minimum road system and unneeded roads, and other reporting requirements identified in the directives. The WO letter also requires completion of the Travel Analysis Report (TAR) by all units by the end of FY2015. There is no due date to propose actions as a result of the TAR and to implement the minimum road system. Future proposed actions and decisions moving administrative units toward the minimum road system are subject to NEPA compliance and available funding. This “Regional Guidance & Expectations” document supplements the national direction for Subpart A TAPs developed for the Rocky Mountain Region.

C. Geographic Scale. Like smaller scale road analyses (RAPS) that have been underway at the project level, TAPs consider economic, environmental and social effects of roads. Analysis at the smaller project scale, however, cannot adequately address cumulative effects and affordability. Therefore TAPs must be done at a relatively large scale, referred to in this write-up as “Unit Scale.” The minimum scale for a TAP is the district or unit level. It is expected that once work is initiated on a unit (Forest) that all subunits will be completed within a three year timeframe. Then as projects which involve travel (road) decisions are proposed on the unit, additional project level analysis will be required in advance of associated NEPA decisions only if the proposal varies substantially from the Unit Scale TAP which covers it.

D. Process, Review and Approval. Forests Interdisciplinary Teams (IDTs) are expected to conduct their own analyses, with guidance and review by the Regional Office TAP Review Team. Resource specialists from a variety of disciplines such as engineers, botanists, soils scientists, geologists, hydrologists, silviculturalists, biologists, social scientists, recreation planners, landscape architects and economists may be included on an interdisciplinary team to conduct the TAP and TAR. Standard boilerplate, spreadsheets and Executive Summary formats will be developed by the Review team and will be available for incorporation into the TAP reports. Some forests have previously completed extensive work with their own specific spreadsheets and formats and therefore will not be required to use the Regional suggested formats. Final approval will be by the Forest Supervisor, confirming that the analyses report complies with national and regional direction.

The Regional TAP Review Team will consist of Gene Baker (Engineering), Tommy John (Physical Resources), Chris Spori (Recreation) and various other ad hoc members as needed. They will submit their review comments and suggestions to the Regional TAP Steering Team which will be responsible for appropriateness and approval prior to officially conveying them to the Forest. The Regional TAP Steering Team consists of the Directors of Engineering, Renewable Resources, and Recreation.

- E. **Information Systems.** Analysis will be based upon field-verified spatial data (GIS, or Geographic Information System road and trail layers), and official tabular data (from I-Web, the corporate Forest Service data base) as applicable. ARC Map products will be included as a part of all completed Unit Scale TARs, and will be provided to the Regional Office TAP review team as a part of the final Travel Analysis Report.
- F. **Access.** As prescribed by 16USC532 the Forest Roads and Trails Act TAPs should identify an adequate system of roads to provide for intensive use, protection, development, and management of National Forest System lands. Though not required, motorized trails can also be included in this analysis at the discretion of the forest unit. As such, they should address user safety and environmental impacts, and provide for an optimum balance of access needs and cost. Unneeded, temporary and unauthorized routes should be recommended for decommissioning. TAPs should identify an acceptable level of passenger car access to priority high level developed recreation areas which have been previously designated in the Recreation Alignment Process to remain into the foreseeable future, and also provide reasonable consideration for dispersed uses, such as driving for pleasure. Still it may be that a substantial amount of dispersed use will have to be accessed only by high clearance vehicles, depending upon available road maintenance funding. TAPs should support current Forest Plan direction and anticipate future Forest Plan analysis needs. As unit scale TAPs are completed associated MVUMs must be reviewed, proper NEPA decisions made and subsequent corrections made to assure that the MVUM is in agreement with the Unit Scale TAP.
- G. **Environmental.** TAPs are expected to especially focus on at risk and impacted watersheds as identified in the recently-completed Watershed Condition Framework. Especially where high road densities on National Forest lands are a major factor in causing these watersheds to be at risk or impaired excess mileage should be recommended for decommissioning. Also it should be recognized that some roads are poorly located and should therefore be eliminated, but at the same time new roads

might be needed to replace these and provide essentially equivalent access in better locations.

H. Financial. Units should consider all expected sources of funding available to maintain the road system to appropriate standards, and include all costs that are required to comply with applicable Best Management Practices (BMPs) for their maintenance. Include associated bridge maintenance and annualized replacement costs (based upon type and length) as well. Units must balance the costs of maintaining the recommended system such that the recommendation is not expected to result in accrual of deferred maintenance on roads and bridges once the TAP is implemented (i.e. there should be a zero balance between anticipated maintenance revenue and anticipated maintenance cost on an annual basis). It is recognized that expected funding might not be available to cover the minimum road system needed at the objective maintenance levels desired. However a reasonable financial strategy is needed, including possibly reducing operational maintenance levels of some roads, changing roads to trails, and placing more roads into storage, in order that the entire system can be managed so as not to compromise safety, environmental or other impacts beyond an acceptable level of risk.

Across all categories of National Forest land the focus of this analysis should not be primarily on disinvestment, i.e. reducing passenger car roads to high clearance roads in order to meet funding constraints. Roads with minimal maintenance have the high likelihood, at least for those roads located relatively low in the watershed, of creating additional siltation impacts. Therefore a better strategy is to recommend roads not required for current operations but which may be needed at some time in the future for seasonal or intermittent closure, or “storage”, in order to more effectively protect the surrounding soil and water resources, as well as their associated dependent biotic resources. As a goal, the total mileage of high clearance roads should not increase from the amount in the current system to the scenario showing affordable operational maintenance levels applied to the proposed minimum road system suggested in the TAP report. Concurrently the number of roads identified to be placed in storage would likely increase from the current level.

Finally it should be noted that similar to the road system the trail system is also strapped to meet its maintenance budget. Therefore all types of maintenance funding as well as work priorities need to be considered before making recommendations for roads being converted into trails.

I. Public Involvement and NEPA Requirements. Opportunities for public involvement are an integral part of the travel analysis process. TAPs have been determined to not be NEPA decisions; they are science-based analyses that are intended to inform future travel management decisions. Travel analysis serves as the basis for developing proposed actions, but does not result in decisions. Still the public is interested in the work of TAP, so as stated in the directives when appropriate, obtain input from external groups, other members of the public, and other governmental agencies. The goal is to gain the benefit of input that might be provided but not at the expense of allowing individual groups to drive the process.

J. Products. All final products are to be posted on an internal website or on the “O” drive available for access by other Forests and the Regional Office. As a minimum the final product should consist of the following items:

- 1) A Travel Analysis Report (TAR) summarizing the process, the level of public involvement and the information about the analysis as it relates to the criteria found in 36 CFR 212.5(b)(1);
- 2) A list of the recommended Minimum Roads to be included in the system and to be covered by Road Maintenance Objectives (RMOs) signed by the appropriate line officer;
- 3) A list of roads to be proposed for decommissioning;
- 4) A spreadsheet summary of benefits and risks for each road in the system;
- 5) A map displaying all system roads that differentiates between those roads which will potentially remain and those that might be removed or changed. The map will be used to inform future proposed actions subject to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance;
- 6) A standardized Executive Summary that includes pertinent information of process, results, maintenance cost considerations and effects.
- 7) Signature sheets with dates, indicating preparation and review officials, and Approval by the Forest Supervisor.

K. Schedule and Completion Dates.

The Chief’s letter dated March 29, 2012 directs that the Travel Analysis Report (TAR) described above must be completed on all units by the end of FY2015. Beyond FY2015, no CCM funds may be expended on National Forest System roads (maintenance levels 1-5) that have not been included in a TAP.

The proposed schedule for the Rocky Mountain Region is as follows:

All Forests are to reply back to the RO with their intended schedule for completion of each unit TAP, whether it by district or forest.

FY13 List Forests or Districts that plan to complete TAP this FY

FY14 List Forests or Districts that plan to complete TAP this FY

FY15 List Forests or Districts that plan to complete TAP this FY