

DECISION NOTICE AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

AMENDMENT OF CORONADO NATIONAL FOREST LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN TO BE CONSISTENT WITH TRAVEL MANAGEMENT RULE

**USDA Forest Service
Coronado National Forest
All Districts
Cochise, Graham, Pima, Pinal and Santa Cruz Counties, Arizona
Hidalgo County, New Mexico**

August 2010

BACKGROUND

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Coronado National Forest has completed an environmental assessment (EA) that discloses the potential impacts of a proposed action to amend the Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) so that it is consistent with the recent Forest Service Travel Management Rule (TMR) (36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295).

Forest Plan

The Forest Plan is a document that serves as a programmatic framework for Forest management and for public use of National Forest System (NFS) lands. It provides guidance for the planning and design of site-specific actions to be undertaken by the Forest and other parties, as authorized by the Forest, but does not authorize, fund, or approve implementation of any project or activity. Thus, the proposed amendments to the Plan will not authorize or mandate any ground-disturbing actions that could impact the environment. The Forest Plan is posted on the internet on the Forest's public website¹.

Travel Management Rule

The TMR clarifies policy related to motor-vehicle use and provides management direction for providing sustainable access for motor vehicles, including off-highway vehicles, on national forests. Some national forests and grasslands already have established systems of roads, trails and areas designed and managed for motorized use. The TMR does not require them to change existing plans. The TMR also considers previous travel management decisions as incorporated into the designated system without further NEPA review.

The TMR requires each national forest and grassland to establish a designated motorized travel system and for that system to be documented on a publicly available Motor-Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) that will be updated annually. The MVUM also documents the specified distance along certain designated routes within which there may be limited use of motor vehicles, solely for dispersed camping or big game retrieval [36 CFR 212.51(b)]. Once an MVUM is published,

¹ http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/coronado/forest/documents/cnfplan/cnf_lrmp_with_2005_amendments_current05212007-optimized.pdf.

motor vehicle uses that are inconsistent with designations are prohibited (36 CFR 261.13). The MVUM will be available to the public at no charge at each Ranger District office on the Forest.

Purpose and Need

The Forest already has a designated motorized travel system in place on all Districts; it is based on direction provided in the Forest Plan. Prior to implementing the TMR, the Forest needs to amend the Forest Plan to align its direction with TMR direction. This is because, as currently written, Plan direction includes exceptions that contradict the TMR or specific direction regarding off-road travel for parking and camping that must be changed. For example, while motor-vehicle use on the District is currently limited to roads designated as “open”, the Forest Plan allows motor-vehicle use on roads “not posted as closed”.

Currently, the Forest Plan allows motor-vehicle travel off designated NFS roads across the Forest up to a distance of 300 feet (ft) for parking and camping. Forest resource specialists have identified a need to restrict off-road camping and parking in some areas for resource protection and administrative reasons. To meet this need, Forest Plan direction regarding 300-ft off-road travel must be removed and replaced with direction that refers motor-vehicle users to the MVUM, which will illustrate the permissible distances for off-road parking and camping on a site-specific basis on each District.

ALTERNATIVES EVALUATED IN THE EA

Two alternatives were evaluated in the EA: the proposed action and no action.

Proposed Action

Following are the amendments to the Forest Plan that comprise the proposed action:

- Current direction that allows motorized travel on any roads that are not posted as closed and allows motorized use of hiking trails in some areas will be removed.
- Current direction that allows motor vehicles to pull off roads to a distance of 300 feet for parking and camping will be removed.
- New direction regarding motor-vehicle use on the Forest will be added to the Plan as follows: *Motor vehicle use off the designated system of roads, trails, and areas is prohibited, except as identified on a Motor-Vehicle Use Map (MVUM).*
- An Off Road Vehicle (ORV) Area Map will be removed from the Plan.

No Action

The no-action alternative provides a baseline against which the impacts of the proposed action may be compared. If no action is taken, the Forest Plan would not be amended, as described above.

DECISION AND RATIONALE

As the Responsible Official, I have decided to approve the proposed action, which comprises the non-significant amendments to the Forest Plan described above.

My decision is based on the findings of impacts analyses conducted by Forest resource specialists and a Finding of Non-Significant Amendments (FONSA) made by the Forest Planner, both of which are disclosed in the EA; and the need for action to align Forest Plan direction with the TMR. Documentation supporting the EA and FONSA is filed in the administrative record of this NEPA review.

Copies of the EA and DN/FONSI are available at the Coronado National Forest Supervisor's Office, 300 West Congress Street, Tucson, Arizona, during business hours, which are Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. through 4:30 p.m., excluding Federal holidays. For additional information or to request a copy of the EA, contact Ms. Laura White, Travel Management Program Leader, on (520) 388-8419 and lwhite@fs.fed.us or Ms. Jennifer Ruyle, Forest Planner, on (520) 388-8351 and jruyle@fs.fed.us. The EA and DN/FONSI are also available for public review on the Forest's public website².

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The public was first notified about the proposal to amend the Forest Plan for consistency with the TMR when it was listed on a Schedule of Proposed Actions on the Forest's public website³ in April 2010.

On May 21, 2010, a Scoping Notice was distributed to 295 parties, providing details about the proposed action and asking for public input to the NEPA review. Two comment letters were received (Project Record Item 3). Their content was considered by Forest resources specialists in modifying the proposed action and in the impacts analysis disclosed in the EA.

A Legal Notice of Decision will be published in the *Arizona Daily Star* newspaper. The Legal Notice officially begins a 45-day period during which the public has an opportunity to appeal this decision.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

After thorough consideration of the impact analyses reported in the EA and comments received during this NEPA review, I determined that the proposed action to amend the Forest Plan will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and that they do not, either individually or cumulatively, comprise a major Federal action. I have approved a Finding of No Significant Amendments. For these reasons, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not necessary. My determination is supported by the following findings:

1. The proposed action is administrative in nature and will not authorize any ground-disturbing activities that will adversely affect public health and safety. On the contrary, clarification of management direction regarding motor-vehicle use on the Forest would decrease confusion among Forest users as to appropriate locations where motorized vehicles may access Forest amenities and engage in motorized recreation. This, in turn, may reduce the potential for accidents and injury as a result of motor-vehicle use and decrease damage to resources.
2. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the geographic area such as

² www.fs.fed.us/r3/coronado/forest/projects/enviro/environ.shtml

³ <http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/forest-level.php?110305>

proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. No ground disturbing activities are associated with this action; therefore, historic, cultural, or other land resources will not be affected.

3. There were two comment letters during the scoping period, and neither letter indicated a controversy regarding the effects of the project.
4. The proposed action is administrative in nature and will not authorize any ground-disturbing activities that will result in effects that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.
5. The action is not likely to establish precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. Management direction for motor-vehicle use on National Forest System lands is already established in the Travel Management Rule (TMR). The proposed amendments are intended to align Forest Plan direction with the TMR direction, thus, eliminating the potential for confusion among Forest users about appropriate motorized use of the Forest. The action does not change or redefine the process or the role of any management document, including those related to travel management.
6. The proposed action is administrative in nature and will not authorize any ground-disturbing activities that will result in adverse effects to the environment. Because of the lack of adverse effects from this action, there is no likelihood of cumulative effects with other past, present and future actions on the Forest.
7. The proposed action is administrative in nature and will not authorize any ground-disturbing activities that will adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.
8. The proposed action is administrative in nature and will not authorize any ground-disturbing activities that will adversely affect endangered, threatened, and proposed species; and designated and proposed critical habitat that have been listed under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.
9. The proposed action is administrative in nature and will not authorize any ground-disturbing activities that will violate Federal, State, or local law or requirements for the protection of the environment.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

National Forest Management Act

The National Forest Management Act requires (16 USC §§ 1600-1614, August 17, 1974) requires the Forest Service to review every proposed action for consistency with the goals, standards and guidelines of the governing Forest Plan. This action is proposed to amend the Plan for consistency with the Travel Management Rule (see below), and is consistent with all other elements of the Plan.

Travel Management Rule

The proposed action aligns Forest Plan direction with the requirements established in the Forest Service Travel Management Rule.

Endangered Species Act

See item 7 under the heading Finding of No Significant Impact.

National Historic Preservation Act

See item 8 under the heading Finding of No Significant Impact.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW AND APPEAL

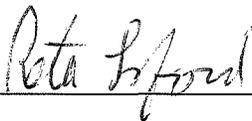
In accordance with the *Optional Appeal Procedures During the Planning Rule Transition Period* (58 FR 58915, Nov. 4, 1993), this proposed action is subject to appeal. A 45-day appeal period will be announced to the public in a Legal Notice that is expected to be published in the *Arizona Daily Star* newspaper on August 9, 2010. Details on how to appeal this decision will be provided in the Legal Notice.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

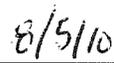
The proposed amendments will become effective seven days after the publication of the Legal Notice of the decision in the *Arizona Daily Star* newspaper.

POINT OF CONTACT

Information about the proposed amendments is available from Ms. Jennifer M. Ruyle, Forest Planner, at (520) 388-8351 or jruyle@fs.fed.us. Information about the Travel Management Rule is available from Ms. Laura White, Travel Management Program Leader, at (520) 388-8419 and lwhite@fs.fed.us. Information about the NEPA review process is available from Ms. Andrea Wargo Campbell, Forest NEPA Coordinator, at (520) 388-8352 and awcampbell@fs.fed.us.



Reta Laford
Acting Forest Supervisor
Coronado National Forest



Date

