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**Date:** July 1, 2016

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

The Bessey Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands is proposing to increase the allowable width for the designated motorized trail system to vehicles 64 inches wide or less. The purpose of the project is to improve motorized recreational opportunities by allowing more UTVs on the Bessey Ranger District's designated motorized trail system. The enclosed attachment describes the project's details.

We request your comments on this project. To be most helpful, please send your comments by August 8, 2016.

Please send comments by one of the following methods:

**Email:** lbeaton@fs.fed.us (with "Motorized Trails" in the subject line)

**Mail:** Motorized Trail Width Project  
Bessey Ranger District  
PO Box 39  
Halsey NE 69142

**Hand-delivered:** Stop by our office from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday excluding Federal holidays.

**Oral comments:** Please call Loren Eaton at (308) 533-8107 to arrange an appointment.

Project documents are available for review at the Bessey Ranger District, or on the forest's website at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/nebraska/landmanagement/projects>.

For technical questions on this project, please contact Loren Eaton at (308) 533-8107. For questions related to the NEPA procedures, please call Julie Bain, District Ranger, at (308) 533-8115.

I look forward to your comments on this project.

Sincerely,

JULIE BAIN  
District Ranger

Enclosure



# Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands

## Bessey Ranger District

### Motorized Trail Width Project

#### Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is to improve motorized recreational opportunities by allowing more UTVs on the Bessey Ranger District's designated motorized trail system. As such, there is a need for a change in motorized designation for the trails and for wider "jump ups".

#### Location

This project is located on the Bessey Ranger District throughout the Dismal River ATV trail system as shown on attached map.

#### Existing Condition

The motorized trails in the Bessey Ranger District are designated as open to vehicles 50" wide or less. This designation was originally made in 2009 during implementation of the Travel Management Rule. At that time, ATVs and UTVs were commonly within that size, and fewer UTVs were produced and sold than are today. In 2013, the district revised its motorized designations, but did not propose any changes to the allowable vehicle width on the motorized trails.

Since 2009, the technology for off-highway vehicles has advanced. Manufacturers have developed wider UTVs, which are increasingly popular. On weekends, approximately 30 percent of the vehicles at the district are UTVs. UTVs are safer for transporting young children and easier and less physical to drive than ATVs.

The footprint of the district's motorized trails are already wide enough to accommodate larger vehicles (Figure 1).



Figure 1: A 60-inch wide UTV easily fits on the existing trail.

The “jump-ups” are the places where motorized trails cross the fencelines of livestock grazing allotments. The district has ten jump-ups. The metal jump-ups allow off-highway vehicles to cross but serve as cattle guards for livestock. The jump-ups are 52 inches wide so that vehicles 50 inches or less can pass (Figure 2).



Figure 2: A 60-inch wide UTV cannot fit through the existing jump-ups.

Gates exist at six of the ten of the jump-ups. Figure 3 shows a jump-up (at right), sized for vehicles 50 inches or less, and a gate (at left), used for emergency vehicles and cattle.



Figure 3: A gate and a jump-up.

When cattle are not grazing on the forest, district staff leave the gates open so that off-highway vehicles can drive through it. When livestock are on the forest, the district has had to lock the gates to keep people from using them. Riders frequently leave the gates open, which results in cattle roaming in areas where they are not supposed to be.

Sometimes, when riders encounter places they cannot pass, they take matters into their own hands. District staff regularly need to repair cut fences (Figure 4) and posts that have been removed so that wider vehicles can pass (Figures 5, 6). Sometimes people take another way out, and end up driving illegally down State Spur 86B, which is dangerous.



Figure 4: The fence at the right of the photo was cut to allow wider vehicles to pass.



Figure 5: The tracks shown are from a 60-inch UTV and it would not fit through the opening.



Figure 6: Someone winched the post out of the ground so that a wider vehicle could fit through.

## Desired Condition

The following desired conditions are taken from the 2009 Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) for the Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands:

*Goal 2.a:* Improve the capability of the Nation's forests and grasslands to provide diverse, high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities.

*Objectives:* 6. Provide nonmotorized and motorized trails for a wide variety of uses and experiences.

7. Manage trail systems to minimize conflicts among users (LRMP, p. 1-4).

*Goal 4.a, Objective 1:* Within 5 years, identify travel opportunities and restrictions, including designating motorized travelways and areas, to meet land management objectives. Provide reasonable access for use of the national grasslands and national forests (LRMP, p. 1-8).

*Infrastructure Use and Management, Guidelines:*

7. As opportunities allow, install gates along all existing fences at intervals to provide reasonable access.

8. Install all gates so they are easily opened and closed by all users.

9. Install cattle guards or hinged metal gates on popular and designated travel routes (LRMP, p. 1-30).

The 2005 Travel Management Rule defines a trail as follows:

Trail. A route 50 inches or less in width or a route over 50 inches wide that is identified and managed as a trail. (36 CFR 212.1)

## Proposed Action

To meet the purpose and need, the Forest Service proposes the following.

- 1) Issue a special designation to allow vehicles 64 inches or less on the existing motorized trails. The special designation would appear on the next printed and electronic versions of the MVUM (motor vehicle use map), anticipated in 2017. The special designation would apply to all the trails currently designated for vehicles 50-inches wide or less (see attached map).
- 2) Replace the ten existing jump ups with wider, dome shaped ones. In addition to accommodating vehicles up to 64-inches wide, the dome shape allows for safer travel. The current jump-ups have sharp angles that sometimes cause people to tip over backwards. Replacing a jump-up involves digging the existing one out and setting the new one on the ground. The posts holding the fence and the gates need to be dug out and moved.
- 3) Install 10-foot panel gates next to the jump-ups to replace gap gates where they exist, which will allow for easier access in rescue situations, trail maintenance and repair, and livestock crossing.
- 4) Cut trees where needed to ensure that vehicles 62-inches can pass (Figure 7).



Figure 7: An example of a place where a tree would be cut to allow a wider vehicle to pass.

## Categorical Exclusion

We anticipate this project will be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement under the following category:

- (1) Construction and reconstruction of trails. (36 CFR 220.6 (e)(1))

This category is appropriate because the trails already exist and are physically wide enough to accommodate vehicles up to 64 inches. The trails are already designated for motorized use; this would simply change the width of vehicle allowed.

