

## Forest Plan Revision Update

*This is the fourth newsletter in a series addressing comments we received from the public on the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and draft Forest Plan. A number of comments related to roads, access and motor vehicle use were received and are being reviewed. In this issue we'll share information about road and travel management on national forests, and how those efforts relate to Forest Plan Revision.*

There are over 4000 miles of National Forest System (NFS) roads on the Colville National Forest and more than 5000 miles of roads when you include roads that are managed by others (state, county, etc.). It's not surprising that roads, access, and motor vehicle use on the Colville National Forest have been key issues in the Forest Plan Revision since the effort began. These were identified as issues during initial scoping on the project, have been topics of discussion during many public meetings, and have been some of the most commented on concerns by the public in their review of the draft EIS and draft Forest Plan.



**Rodney Smoldon**  
Colville Forest Supervisor

We've heard comments regarding the impacts of roads on natural resources and concerns about the ecological and economic sustainability of the transportation system. Others feel that too many roads are closed to motor vehicles, preventing access into the forest for recreation purposes (especially for the disabled or elderly) and for critical resource management projects such as fire and vegetation management. To respond to these issues and concerns, our obligation is to work through the existing regulations, policy, and direction associated with the transportation system while developing new direction that responds to public comment, the need for access, and our responsibility to care for the land.

Of course, roads, access, and motor vehicle use are not new issues to the National Forest. The existing Forest Plan contains direction pertaining to the transportation system, roads, and off-highway vehicle use. In the decades since the existing Forest Plan has been in place, revised federal regulations, policy, and direction have been developed to address issues related to the transportation system and motor vehicle use on National Forest System lands. The most current regulations developed just over a decade ago are commonly referred to as the Travel Management Rule.

### Travel Management on National Forest System Lands

In 2005, after much study and public input the Forest Service published the Travel Management Rule (TMR), Title 36 Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295 of the Code of Federal Regulations; its goal was to regulate the use of motor vehicles on National Forest System lands while managing the transportation system to balance social, economic, and ecological conditions. The TMR is comprised of three main sections which are identified as Subparts A, B, and C.

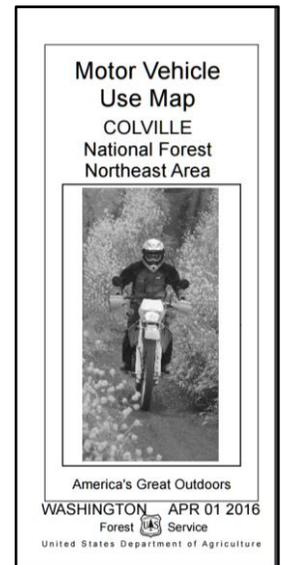
**Subpart A: Administration of the Forest Transportation System-** directs National Forests to identify the most ecologically, economically and socially sustainable transportation system. This is accomplished at both the forest-wide scale and the project level by using a process known as travel analysis. **Travel Analysis Reports** are used to inform decisions regarding roads. A copy of the most recent Forest-wide Travel Analysis Report for the Colville National Forest can be found on our land and resource management webpage at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/land/colville/landmanagement>.



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Recommendations from the **Forest-wide Travel Analysis Report** have been incorporated into the draft Forest Plan in the form of **plan components** which address ecological, economic, and social sustainability of the road system, including road density recommendations for some management areas. These plan components will be used to inform future decisions on roads at the project level. Any decisions regarding specific roads will be accomplished at the project level, as has been done in the past.

**Subpart B: Designation of Roads, Trails and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use**- requires National Forests to designate a system of roads, trails, and areas that are open to motor vehicle use for both off-highway and highway-legal vehicles on a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM). The premise of the rule is that roads, trails, and areas are closed to motor vehicle use unless designated as open on the MVUM. The Colville National Forest began a collaborative process of designating roads and trails open to motor vehicle use in 2005 and continues to modify its [MVUM](#) annually to reflect decisions that have been made regarding the transportation system and its uses. For example, the South End Motorized Recreation Management Project (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=27398>) and its 2014 decision has improved the system of designated routes for motor vehicle use, managed dispersed camping sites, and rehabilitated resource damage linked to motor vehicle use. Other projects tied to restoration and vegetation management objectives often make decisions regarding roads which are in turn reflected on the MVUM. While the draft Forest Plan addresses suitability of roads and motor vehicle use in the different management areas, it does not open or close any roads or change current designations for motor vehicle use.



### **Subpart C: Use by Over-Snow Vehicles (OSV)**

*(revised in February 2015)* addresses over-snow motorized use of trails, roads and areas on NFS lands and requires the agency to designate routes and areas where OSV use is permitted on an OSV Use Map. Although the Colville National Forest does not currently publish an OSV Use Map, there are many roads and areas that are open to OSV use along with several routes that are groomed for such uses. Average snow cover, vegetation and terrain features tend to naturally limit the amount of off-road OSV use on the Colville National Forest. In addition, several management areas under the existing Forest Plan such as Wilderness, Research Natural Areas, and Semi-primitive Non-motorized areas are currently closed to OSV use. Similarly, the draft revised Forest Plan also addresses suitability of winter motorized uses in different management areas. Subject to site specific concerns such as big game winter range,

OSV use would be suitable in Backcountry Motorized, Focused Restoration and General Restoration Management Areas, but would not be suitable in Wilderness, Recommended Wilderness, Research Natural Areas, or Backcountry Management Areas. When completed, the suitability analysis contained in the revised Forest Plan will inform the implementation of the Subpart C and the development of the Colville National Forest's OSV Use Map. Groomed snowmobile routes will continue to be depicted on separate maps since these can change from season to season.

### **Relationship between Travel Management and the Forest Plan**

**Revision**--As discussed above, the draft revised Forest Plan does not make any specific decisions regarding the designation or closure of existing roads for motor vehicle use. The draft revised Forest Plan helps guide the Colville National Forest in its continuing implementation of the Travel Management Rule and provides direction regarding the management of the transportation system. The goal of the Colville National Forest's travel management process is to create a safe and sustainable road and trail system that provides recreational opportunities and appropriate access while protecting forest resources.



## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Q. Will the proposed land management plan close roads to motor vehicle use?**

No, the revised Forest Plan itself will not close roads to motor vehicle use. It does, however, provide resource and transportation system management direction (desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, and suitable uses) that would be used to help inform future project level decisions on whether existing roads should remain open or be closed to motor vehicle use.

### **Q. Why would the Forest Service close roads or change a roads maintenance level?**

The Forest Service closes roads and trails for a variety of reasons, such as seasonal closures for wildlife habitat protection, natural resource protection, hazardous conditions, or when the road has become impassable. Roads that are excess to needs for public or administrative access that are impacting resources may also be closed or decommissioned. Availability of funding for annual maintenance, amount of use, and condition of roads are also factors that are taken into account when considering maintenance levels and the potential needs for road closures.



### **Q. What is the process the Forest Service follows to make changes to the transportation system?**

Every project has a unique purpose, scope, and scale, so the process can vary. Most of our projects are focused on vegetation management, others on restoration, and sometimes projects focus on recreation and access. In general, a similar process for planning and making changes to the transportation system is followed:

- *Assess existing conditions and determine purpose and need for change.*
- *Review existing national, regional, state, and local regulations, policy, plans and direction.*
- *Review the current Forest Plan for direction.*
- *Develop a travel analysis report as required for the project based on the Forest-wide Travel Analysis Report.*
- *Conduct scoping to identify concerns and issues.*
- *Conduct environmental analysis as required to address any anticipated effects.*
- *Conduct motorized mixed-use (safety) analysis if road is going to be considered for mixed highway-legal and off-highway vehicle use.*
- *Develop road management objectives which describe how the road will be operated and maintained.*
- *Conduct any required actions such as mitigations or monitoring.*
- *Reflect any changes on the Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM).*

### **Q. Does the draft revised Forest Plan designate specific routes for motor vehicle use including off highway vehicle use?**

The draft revised Forest Plan provides strategic vision and guidance regarding the transportation system and identifies areas where motor vehicle use is suitable, but it does not specifically change existing designations or designate new routes for motor vehicle use. However, it does contain an objective to increase the number of roads designated for motorized mixed use which would allow for highway-legal and off-highway vehicles. The purpose of this objective is to create loop-riding opportunities, connect camping areas, or connect communities with the Forest. In general, the process outlined above under "What is the process the Forest Service follows to make changes to the transportation system?" would be followed to implement any additional designations.



### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

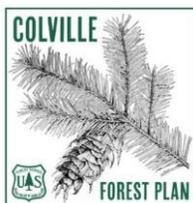
Amy Dillon-Team Leader  
(509) 684-7211

Debbie Kelly- Public Affairs Lead  
(509) 664-9247

Email: [colvilleplanrevision@fs.fed.us](mailto:colvilleplanrevision@fs.fed.us)

Project Website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/colville/plan-revision>

Postal Mail: Forest Plan Revision Team, Colville National Forest,  
765 South Main Street, Colville, WA 99114



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