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News Release

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U.S. Forest Service Seeks Comments on Over-Snow Vehicle Proposal

WASHINGTON, June 13, 2014 – The U.S. Forest Service has published a Federal Register Notice seeking public comment on a proposal that would help standardize where and when over-snow vehicles, such as snowmobiles, are used on national forests and grasslands.

“Over-the-snow access and recreation is an appropriate use of public lands, and we strive to offer a variety of opportunities for that,” said U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell. “We believe it is essential that the public be engaged in decisions regarding travel management on the forests and grasslands, and we encourage the public to review the proposal and provide comments to help improve the final rule.”

Motor vehicle use on national forests and grasslands is governed by the Travel Management Rule which provides for a system of roads, trails and areas that are designated for motor vehicles. Over-snow vehicles—vehicles designed for use over snow and that run on a track and/or a ski or skis—are currently treated differently from other motor vehicles by giving forest and grassland supervisors the discretion to develop a similar system for over-snow vehicles. In 2013, a federal court ruled that this violates Executive Order 11644, “Use of off-road vehicles on public lands.” The court ordered that the Forest Service must regulate over-snow use, but does have the discretion to determine where and when over-snow vehicle use can occur on agency lands.

In response accordance with the court’s ruling, the Federal Register notice proposes amending the existing Travel Management Rule to establish consistent guidance for how forests and grasslands decide the appropriate use for over-snow vehicles. Over-snow vehicles are used for recreational purposes as well as work tasks that include gathering firewood or subsistence hunting.

The Federal Register Notice for the proposal is scheduled to be published Wednesday, June 18, 2014. The public will have 45 days from the date of publication in the Federal Register to comment on the proposed revisions. The Forest Service intends to publish the final rule change by Sept. 9, 2014.

Nationally, the Forest Service manages over 200,000 miles of roads and 47,000 miles of trails that are open to motor vehicle use. The roads and trails vary greatly, from single-track trails used by motorcycles to roads designed for high-clearance vehicles such as logging trucks.

The mission of the U.S. Forest Service, an agency of the Department of Agriculture, is to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The agency manages 193 million acres of public land, provides assistance to state and private landowners and maintains the largest forestry research organization in the world. Public lands the U.S. Forest Service manages contribute more than \$13 billion to the economy each year through visitor spending alone. Those same lands provide 20 percent of the nation's clean water supply, a value estimated at \$7.2 billion per year. The agency also has either a direct or indirect role in stewardship of about 80 percent of the 850 million forested acres within the U.S., of which 100 million acres are urban forests where most Americans live.

For more information about today's release see <http://www.fs.fed.us/publications/over-snow-vehicle-faqs.pdf>

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