



Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5) ***Five-Forest Over-Snow Vehicle Use Designation Analysis***

General Talking Points

Updated December 12, 2014

- The Lassen, Tahoe, Eldorado, Stanislaus, and Plumas National Forests are beginning an analysis, based on Subpart C of the Travel Management Rule, to allow, restrict or prohibit over-snow vehicle (OSV) use through the designation of roads, trail and areas on National Forest System Lands. These analyses will support the decisions to designate over-snow vehicle use on National Forest System roads, trails, and areas on National Forest System lands. In addition, the national forests will combine the analysis needed for OSV use designations with analysis to formalize the identification of National Forest System Snow Trails that will be groomed for OSV use.
 - Subpart C of the Travel Management Rule is undergoing a revision; a Notice of proposed rule was published in the Federal Register on June 18, 2014, and comments from the public were requested at that time. As described in detail in the proposed rule, the Forest Service is complying with a March 29, 2013 court order to amend the agency's travel management rule related to over-snow vehicle use.
 - A notice of the final rule is anticipated to be published in the Federal Register no later than January 31, 2015. Public comments that were received on the proposed rule will be discussed and responded to in the Federal Register notice, once available.
 - Once Subpart C of the Travel Management Rule is finalized, each Forest will ensure their process and analysis conforms to the requirements of the final rule.
- An over-snow vehicle is defined as “a motor vehicle that is designed for use over snow and that runs on a track or tracks and/or a ski or skis, while in use over snow” (36 CFR §212.1).
- These forests are undertaking the Subpart C analysis in order to:
 - provide a manageable system of trails and areas designated for over-snow vehicle use, consistent with and to achieve the purposes of Travel Management Regulations at 36 CFR part 212;
 - ensure that over-snow vehicle use is well managed to promote safety of all users, minimize impacts natural resources, and minimize conflicts among the various uses
- These forests are also undertaking the analysis to identify and formalize the system of over-snow vehicle trails that will be groomed to meet the terms of a court-required settlement agreement.
 - The court settlement agreement (Case 2:11-cv-02921-MCE-DAD) was filed on August 26, 2013 between Snowlands Network, Winter Wildlands Alliance, and Center for Biological Diversity (Plaintiffs), the United States Forest Service (Defendant) and the International Snowmobile Manufacturer's Association, et al. (Defendant-Intervenors).
 - The court settlement agreement was the result of lawsuit filed by the Plaintiffs on November 3, 2011 (Case 2:11-at-01586) alleging violation of the National Environmental Policy Act.

- The project will undergo analysis under NEPA which provides opportunities for input from local communities, local government, and all interested parties.
- Each of the five forests is currently in the “Pre-NEPA” stage and are considering their current over-snow vehicle management and use, and examining any need for changes. Each forest will develop a proposed action for analysis based on those considerations.
- The Lassen National Forest will begin their NEPA analysis first, followed by the Tahoe, Eldorado, Stanislaus, and Plumas National Forests. Each Forest will prepare a separate Environmental Impact Statement.
- The start of the NEPA process for each of the five forests will be separated by several months.
- Due to staffing constraints at individual forests, the Regional Office, with the help of Forest Service employees from an “enterprise team” (TEAMS Enterprise Unit), will conduct the NEPA analysis in close coordination and assistance with staff from each of the five national forests.
- The Forest Service’s goal in designating over-snow vehicle use is to ensure that the use of over-snow vehicles is well managed to promote the safety of all users, minimize impacts to natural resources, and to minimize conflicts among the various uses. Once the NEPA decisions for the designation of roads, trails and areas have been issued over-snow vehicle use that is inconsistent with the designations would be prohibited under 36 CFR part 261.
- These designations will apply to the lands on each of these five national forests that receive adequate snowfall for over-snow vehicle use to occur.
- Currently, the five national forests manage approximately 1,000 miles of groomed OSV trails. These estimates, by forest, are currently being validated and refined utilizing Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and will be updated, if needed, once this validation step is completed.

National Forest	Groomed Miles of OSV Trails (Approximate)
Eldorado	50
Lassen	400
Plumas	200
Stanislaus	60
Tahoe	300

There are financial limitations on the size of each forest’s snow trail grooming program and the frequency at which the grooming occurs. This is because each forest’s current snow trail grooming program is funded by the State of California. These funds are not likely to substantially increase in future years.

Forests also manage un-groomed snow trails and areas open to off-trail cross-country over-snow vehicle use.

- The environmental impact statement for each forest will consider the issues and concerns that the public helps us identify as part of the public scoping process. In addition, we will also consider potential effects on National Forest System natural and cultural resources (including soil, water ,

and wildlife), public safety, provision of recreational opportunities, access needs, conflicts among uses of National Forest System lands, the need for maintenance and administration of roads, trails, and areas; and the availability of resources for that maintenance and administration.

- The analyses the Lassen, Tahoe, Plumas, Eldorado, and Stanislaus National Forests are undertaking are confined to the analysis needed to designate over-snow vehicle use and identify and formalize the system of groomed snow trails. This analysis is not a comprehensive winter recreation planning effort.
- Once decisions are made for each forest, these would apply only to the use of OSVs on each forest. No designation of non-motorized trails or areas would result. Non-motorized winter recreational opportunities would be considered in the analysis, but only to the extent that requires analysis and disclosure of the effects of designating OSV uses and grooming on non-motorized recreational opportunities.
- The designations resulting from these analyses will apply only to the use of over-snow vehicles.
- The following over-snow vehicle uses would be exempt from the prohibitions resulting from the designations:
 - (1) Limited administrative use by the Forest Service;
 - (2) Use of any fire, military, emergency, or law enforcement vehicle for emergency purposes;
 - (3) Authorized use of any combat or combat support vehicle for national defense purposes;
 - (4) Law enforcement response to violations of law, including pursuit; and
 - (5) Over-snow vehicle use that is specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulations.
- The Forest Service will recognize valid existing rights in making designations at the local level.
- Opportunities for public input will be provided during the public scoping period and after the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. There will also be a pre-decisional objection period after the release of the Final Environmental Impact Statement prior to issuing a final Record of Decision.
- Public, community, Tribal and local government participation and input is essential for the project's success.
- Final Records of Decision for each of the five national forests will be issued by the Forest Supervisors. These decisions will:
 - Identify a complete, manageable, and enforceable system of snow trails and areas designated for over-snow vehicle use;
 - Identify over-snow vehicle use restrictions and prohibitions; and
 - Identify those snow trails, from the complete system of snow trails, where grooming for over-snow vehicle use will occur.
- Each decision will allow the Forest Service to produce an over-snow vehicle use map for each of the five national forests similar to the existing motor vehicle use map for each forest. The maps will be made available to the public on the national forest websites and at local offices.