Frequently Asked Questions

Are these route designations permanent?

Designations of forest system roads and trails may be revised as needed to meet changing conditions, but any designations must involve the public, be coordinated with governmental entities and must be reflected on the Motor Vehicle Use Map.

What are the exceptions to the designated routes use?

The following vehicles and/or uses are exempted from the travel designation:

- Limited administrative use by the Forest Service
- Use of any fire, military, emergency, or law enforcement vehicle for emergency purposes
- Authorized use of any combat or combat support vehicle for national defense purposes
- Motor vehicle use that is specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under federal law or regulation
- Use of a road or trail that is authorized by a legally documented right-of-way held by a state, county, or other local public road authority.

Can OHVs be used for hunting – to retrieve game and access the forest?

As noted above, motorized cross-country riding, including game retrieval, is not allowed on the National Forests & Grasslands in Texas with the implementation of the TMR. However, the existing open road system, which includes roads that are open year round and roads that are open seasonally (see the MVUM for your area of interest), seeks to provide public access to the forest for trucks and other highway-legal vehicles that would provide the hunter with sufficient access for game retrieval. Based on analysis conducted during the TMR NEPA process most areas of the NFGT are within ¼ to ½ mile of an open public road during hunting season.

How can I get a Motor Vehicle Use Map?

Implementation of designated roads and trails forestwide is scheduled to be effective in late Spring of 2008. Maps will be available at the Ranger District office and on the web at: www.fs.fed.us/r8/texas.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I ride my OHV on forest roads?

Only highway-legal vehicles are allowed on roads. Although Texas state statutes prohibit vehicles specifically designated as off-road and that do not pass state vehicle inspection, this can be changed by (1) designating the road as a trail, or (2) designating the road as "mixed-use."

Where can I ride my OHV cross-country?

The Sam Houston National Forest has an 85-mile multiple-use motorized trail open to motor vehicles 50 inches or less in width. The NFGT is working with Texas Parks and Wildlife and Trails Unlimited to explore potential areas for possible future opportunities.

What is National Forests & Grasslands in Texas OHV Policy under the TMR?

Under the TMR all motor vehicle use on the NFGT is limited to designated routes, roads, trails or areas. Cross country (off road) / unrestricted use of motorized vehicles, of any type, are prohibited on the NFGT and violators are subject to legal action (tickets / fines / prosecution etc). Currently, motorized vehicle use is limited to designated roads by street-legal vehicles, except for the designated 85-mile multiple use motorized trail on the Sam Houston NF. This trail is limited to motorized vehicles 50 inches wide or less.

USDA FOREST SERVICE
NATIONAL FORESTS & GRASSLANDS IN TEXAS
SOUTHERN REGION

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National Forests & Grasslands in Texas

Implementing the Travel Management Rule

Restricting Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Use to Designated Routes

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OHV Use on National Forest Land

OHVs are prohibited in the National Forests and Grasslands in Texas except on the designated trail in the Sam Houston National Forest

Background. More Americans than ever are using off-highway vehicles (OHV) to enjoy the outdoors. OHV users account for between 11 and 12 million visits to national forests and grasslands. This is a good thing. In the right places, and managed carefully, motor vehicles are an appropriate use of national forests. However, if not managed carefully, motorized recreation can damage both the land and the resources that visitors come to enjoy.

2005 National Travel Management Rule. In 2005, the Forest Service published a national rule (www.fs.fed.us/recreation/ programs/ohv/) for providing motor vehicle access to national forests and grasslands. The rule requires each national forest and grassland to designate those roads, trails, and areas open to motor vehicle use. Designated routes, trails and areas will be identified on a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM). Motor vehicle use outside of designated routes, trails and areas will be provided for administrative, fire, military, emergency, and law enforcement purposes and for use under Forest Service permit.

In Texas. The National Forests and Grasslands in Texas (NFGT), after public participation through the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) decision making process, has implemented the 2005 Travel Management Rule (TMR). The NEPA process resulted in an amendment to the 1996 Forest Land Management Plan that was finalized in January 2008. The Plan amendment closes all NFGT lands to OHV use, except on designated routes and trails.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are OHVs?

The National Travel Management rule defines OHVs as "any motor vehicle designed for or capable of cross-country travel on or immediately over land, water, sand, snow, ice, marsh, swampland, or other natural terrain." The national policy applies to all classes of motor vehicles except aircraft, watercraft and over-snow vehicles.

Why can't we just leave things the way they are?

Unmanaged OHV used negatively affects wetlands, wildlife habitat, impacts wildlife, erodes soils, causes sedimentation and damages resources. If we do not recognize and react to these impacts now, further resource damage could result in future closure and the lost opportunity to ride.

Why not just designate motorized trails on all the forests?

Because there are so many privately-owned tracts of land within the boundaries of the National Forests in Texas and because much of the soil in East Texas is sandy and prone to erosion, finding suitable areas for designated motorized trails is difficult. Before any trail (motorized or non motorized) can be built, extensive pre-project planning including engineering considerations, archeological surveys and environmental impact analysis has to take place. The NFGT does not have funding to conduct the necessary planning and environmental analysis, nor funding for construction and operation and maintenance of new OHV trails. To help fund the planning, environmental analysis, design, development and construction of new trails and then to assist in operation and maintenance, the NFGT looks for partners such as the Parks Division of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and private user groups for potential funding. Currently, the NFGT is in collaboration with TPWD and a user group for broad-scale analysis of the National Forests in Texas to locate areas of minimal environmental and resource conflicts for potential OHV trail development.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a road?

A motor vehicle route wider than 50 inches, unless identified and managed as a trail. (36 CFR 212.1)

What is a trail?

A route less than 50 inches wide or a route more than 50 inches wide that is identified and managed as a trail that is used for purposes of travel by foot, horseback, or trail vehicles. (36 CFR 212.1) (FSM 2353).

What are the existing prohibitions for motorized use?

The following actions are **prohibited** on the National Forests & Grasslands in Texas pursuant to 36 CFR 261.50(a)(b):

- Operating or possessing a motorized vehicle on forest transportation system road that is closed to traffic by means of a gate, sign, or otherwise blocked by a mound of dirt or other physical means.
- Possessing or operating any motorized vehicle in excess of 50 inches in width on any designated off-road vehicle (OHV) trail.
- Operating on a forest transportation system road any motor vehicle in violation of Texas State Traffic Code.
- Operating or using any internal or external combustion engine on national forest lands without a spark arresting device properly installed, maintained and in effective working order meeting either (1) Department of Agriculture, Forest Service standard 5100-ia or (2) appropriate Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) recommended practice J335(b) and J35(a).
- Operating or using a motor vehicle that emits a noise in excess of 99 decibels at 20 inches from the exhaust outlet in accordance with SAE J1287, June 1990
- Texas Parks and Wildlife has more information on OHVs at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/