

File Code: 1950

Date: JUL 1 2009

Dear Reviewer:

Enclosed for your review and comment is the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Emmett Ranger District (RD) "E" Area Motorized Wheeled Vehicle Travel Management Project. The project area encompasses approximately 241,293 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands in the Middle Fork Payette and South Fork Payette subbasins, about 47 miles north of Boise, Idaho. The EA and accompanying maps are also available at the Boise NF Web site (<http://fs.usda.gov/boise>).

Scoping for this project began in December 2008 and our records indicate that you had expressed an interest in this project at that time. Therefore, I am now notifying you of the 30-day opportunity to comment under 36 CFR 215. The purpose of this comment period is to provide you and other members of the public the opportunity to comment on the proposal before I make a decision.

Background

In 2004, the Chief of the Forest Service cited four major threats to NFS lands. One of these threats included "unmanaged outdoor recreation." To address this issue, the Forest Service developed a national strategy to evaluate recreational motor vehicle use on NFS lands. The strategy would help resolve issues such as damage to wetlands, wildlife habitat and fragile soils, disturbance to wildlife, spread of noxious weeds, and conflicts between recreationists. Following a national public comment process, this strategy was then formalized as new national travel management regulations and published as a "final rule" in the Federal Register in 2005. The final rule revises several regulations to require designation of roads, trails, and areas for motor vehicle use on National Forests and National Grasslands. To meet the direction and intent of the Forest Service Travel Management Rule (TMR), every National Forest and Grassland unit is to develop or revise their travel management plan for motorized vehicle use by 2009.

Currently, motorized wheeled-vehicle travel on the Emmett RD within "C" Travel Management areas is designated to specific roads and trails (see 2000 Boise National Forest Visitor/Travel Map). Because these roads and trails have been designed, and because motorized travel off designated routes is not allowed, no action is required to comply with the TMR for "C" areas. However, within "E" areas, which are located entirely on the east side of the Emmett RD, motorized, wheeled-vehicle use is allowed on both established, but currently unauthorized routes as well as on Forest Service designated routes. To comply with the TMR in these areas, I need to designate roads and trails for motorized, wheeled-vehicle use.

Alternatives and Decisions to be Made

The three alternatives analyzed in detail in the EA include Alternative A (no action - maintain the current situation), and two "action" alternatives designed to meet the requirements of the TMR. These alternatives were developed and/or refined in part through earlier public comment.

Because of the size of the project area and the number of routes to be considered, large-scale maps displaying specific routes designated under each "action" alternative are posted on the Boise NF Web site (<http://fs.usda.gov/boise>). These maps (approximately 34 x 44 inches) are also available in hard copy and on CD at the Emmett RD office (1805 Highway 16, Emmett, ID 83617; 208-365-7000) and the Garden Valley Ranger Station (1219 Banks-Lowman Highway, Garden Valley, ID 83622; 208-462-3241).



Bull Creek and Silver Creek Summit Trails

When we “scoped” this project in December 2008, I included a proposal to designate motorized vehicle use and rehabilitate the Bull Creek (NFS trail 102006) and Silver Creek Summit (NFS trail 044006) trails to correct resource damage. Since then, I have decided instead to incorporate the existing motorized designation of these trails, together with the existing Special Order closure established for resource protection, in this analysis and decision for “E” areas. I chose this approach because, after further reflection, I realized that proposed rehabilitation activities, and any proposed changes to the types of motorized use allowed, are outside the scope of the “E” area analysis.

The proposed rehabilitation activities, and any proposed changes to the types of motorized use allowed, for the Bull Creek (NFS trail 102006) and Silver Creek Summit (NFS trail 044006) trails will be evaluated in a separate EA. We are developing this separate EA, and I anticipate it will be available for your review and comment later this summer.

How to Comment on the “E” Area EA

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of a legal notice in the *Emmett Messenger-Index*. Comments will be most helpful if they identify the specific actions you think are needed, why those changes should be made and how such a change would better meet your interests. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the only means for calculating the comment period for this analysis.

Written comments must be submitted to: Emmett District Ranger, Emmett RD, 1805 Highway 16, Room 5; Emmett, ID 83617; or by fax to 208-365-7037. The office hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments must be provided at the Emmett RD office during normal business hours via telephone 208-365-7000] or in person.

Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), and Word (.doc) to comments-intermtn-boise-emmett@fs.fed.us. Please put “Emmett Motor Vehicle Travel Environmental Analysis” in the subject line of e-mail comments. Comments must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic comments.

Those who provide comments or otherwise express interest during this comment period are eligible to appeal the decision pursuant to the 36 CFR regulations and the April 24, 2006, order issued by the U.S. District Court for the District of Montana in Case No. 03-119-M-DWM. Each individual or representative from each organization that provides comment or otherwise expresses interest in the project must either sign the comments or otherwise verify identity in order to attain appeal eligibility.

For further information, please call the Emmett Ranger District at 365-7000 or visit the Boise National Forest Web site at <http://fs.usda.gov/boise>.

Sincerely,



JOHN R. ERICKSON
District Ranger

Enclosure

CWeiland:al