



File Code: 1950-3

Date: March 13, 2009

**REQUEST FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS**  
**Travel Management Environmental Assessment**  
**Initial Scoping for Proposed Action**  
Please respond by: April 15, 2009

Greetings:

As Forest Supervisor for the Willamette National Forest, I am interested in your thoughts regarding my proposal to implement the Forest Service's National 2005 Travel Management Rule. We have been listening to the public over the last year in the development of this proposal, and we are now ready to begin our environmental analysis of the proposed action.

### **Background**

In 2005, the Forest Service codified a national rule prohibiting motorized travel off of designated routes (Travel Management: Designating Routes and Areas for Motorized Use; 36 CFR 212, 251, 261, 295). The Rule requires National Forests to publish a "Motor Vehicle Use Map" (MVUM) designating a system of roads and trails open to motorized travel by class of vehicle and time of year.

Currently, the Willamette National Forest has approximately 4,320 miles of roads and 70 miles of trails managed as open to motor vehicles. Across the forest, motorized access off of these designated routes is currently allowed in some places, though vegetation and topography naturally restrict this type of travel. The Environmental Analysis will focus on the implementation of the Travel Management Rule by limiting motorized travel to the designated system of roads and trails, while continuing to provide motorized access for dispersed camping in a manner that protects natural and cultural resources.

### **Purpose and Need**

The purpose of this project is to provide a motor vehicle transportation system consistent with the existing management direction of the Willamette National Forest LRMP that fulfills the requirements of the Travel Management Rule. The resulting transportation system will address current and anticipated needs, offer a variety of recreation opportunities, prohibit motorized use off designated routes, balance management considerations with recreation opportunities and commercial uses, reduce impacts to forest resources, recognize reserved or outstanding rights, and reduce conflicts between recreational uses.

*Meet National Direction:* The intent of the Travel Management Rule is to reduce and prevent adverse resource impacts caused by unmanaged motorized use in order to maintain and protect the health of ecosystems and watersheds. While the final rule recognizes "motor vehicles are a legitimate and



appropriate way for people to enjoy their National Forests in the right places, and with proper management (FR p. 68264),” it also recognizes that unmanaged motorized use can result in negative impacts to natural resources and the experiences of other forest visitors. It was therefore determined that a designated system of routes would be necessary to establish a sustainable balance between providing access for motorized use and protecting resources from impacts related to unregulated motorized use.

The Willamette National Forest is required to meet national direction as published in the Federal Register, 36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, 295. The 2005 Travel Management Rule requires each Forest to designate a travel system to be open to motor vehicle use by vehicle class and time of year. The rule prohibits the use of motor vehicles off of a designated system with some exceptions<sup>1</sup>.

The Rule requires the Willamette National Forest to publish a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) displaying a designated system of routes and access zones. Following the publication of this map, motor vehicle use occurring outside of the designated system will be prohibited.

*Continue to Provide Access to Dispersed Camping Opportunities in a Manner that Protects Resources:* Dispersed campsites are found along every major river corridor and along many upland roads throughout the Willamette National Forest. Visitors access these sites through the use of system roads, non-system routes, by pulling to the side of a system road, and by walking in. The distribution and concentration of these campsites, as well as the types of management in place to protect resources varies by geographic area across the Forest.

The Willamette National Forest needs to provide for continued public access to dispersed (informal) camping opportunities in a manner which protects sensitive resources from impacts associated with unmanaged motorized use.

*Amend the Willamette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) to Provide Consistency with the Travel Management Rule:* Cross-country motor vehicle travel is not a common activity on the Willamette National Forest, as it is limited by steep terrain and dense vegetation. Any motor vehicle activity that causes impacts to natural vegetation, soils, water or cultural sites is illegal. Current direction in the Forest Plan allows cross-country motorized travel on approximately 60% of the land base. (LRMP p. IV-21)

The Travel Management Rule requires that all motor vehicle use off of a designated system of routes and access zones be prohibited. The Forest Plan needs to be amended to prohibit cross-country travel in all Management Areas to provide consistency with the implementation of the Rule through the MVUM (the tool for enforcing the rule).

## **Proposed Action**

In accordance with the Travel Management Rule, the Willamette National Forest proposes to prohibit motorized travel<sup>2</sup> off (off the existing road surface or established path of the trail, in other words cross-country) of a designated system of roads and trails. The proposal also includes the identification of access zones off of this designated travel system where existing routes access dispersed camping sites. Non-highway licensed vehicles will be prohibited on some roads due to safety concerns. Implementation of the Travel Management Rule will apply to all lands in the Willamette National Forest, excluding

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<sup>1</sup> A complete list of exceptions is included in the rule and available on the website. In addition to exceptions for over-snow vehicles and emergency travel off-system, motorized access may also be authorized by written permit.

<sup>2</sup> Over the snow vehicles are excluded from this proposed action.

Wilderness and other places where motorized use is currently prohibited through existing management direction.

The Willamette National Forest is applying narrow focus to the implementation of the Travel Management Rule by incorporating past decisions and active management onto the designated motorized travel system. Past decisions related to travel planning and the transportation system will not be revised during this process. Roads and trails currently open to motorized use will remain accessible and will continue to be part of the designated motorized travel system. Roads and trails already managed as closed to motorized use will not be included in the designated travel system.

In accordance with provisions of the Travel Management Rule, and with the objective of minimizing resource damage associated with motorized travel off of designated routes, the proposed action would:

1. Amend the Forest Plan to prohibit motorized travel **off** of a designated system of travel routes in all Management Areas.
2. Identify access zones throughout the Forest in which motor vehicles may travel off of the designated system of roads and trails displayed on the MVUM for the purpose of dispersed camping. Within each zone, motorized travel would be allowed off of the designated system road for the purpose of entering and exiting dispersed campsites within 300' of its centerline. Travel in these zones will only be allowed along existing routes<sup>3</sup> to existing campsites<sup>4</sup>. These zones are identified on the Willamette National Forest Proposed Action map, and a list of routes will be available on the Travel Management website.

Designated access zones are proposed along the following types of roads<sup>5</sup>:

- Roads known to access multiple non-system routes leading to dispersed campsites currently utilized by the public
- Roads with insufficient data to date regarding campsite location that also exhibit low potential for route proliferation off of the designated system.

Hardened, existing sites (including turnouts, pullouts, quarries, and landings) located adjacent to designated routes with no distinct access routes will be considered part of the road prism, allowing for motorized access.

Yearly updates to the MVUM will provide opportunities to include changes regarding dispersed camping access. In the future, some Ranger Districts may use a separate planning process to turn some of the non-system routes accessing campsites into designated system roads. Zones would not apply in these places, and campers would be required to drive only on the roads displayed as open to motor vehicles on the MVUM. Access zones may be added or removed based on site specific decisions.

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<sup>3</sup> *Existing route*: a route with an established history of passenger vehicle use, as indicated by a road-bed width of greater than 50 inches, the predominance of compacted soil, and minimal vegetation growing in the travel way. New resource impacts (indicated by single or double tracks through vegetation) are **not** considered existing routes.

<sup>4</sup> *Existing campsite*: an area obviously used by campers that usually contains a rock fire ring and minimal ground vegetation as the result of motor or foot traffic.

<sup>5</sup> Roads where it is known that there are no dispersed campsites located off of the system were excluded from zone designation.

This project will be implemented with the publication of the Motor Vehicle Use Map (enforcement tool) for the Willamette National Forest in November of 2009.

For public review of the proposed action, a designated system is identified on Willamette National Forest Proposed Action maps. These maps are available at Forest Service offices, and a list of routes can be found at the Travel Management website.

## **Public Involvement**

We are seeking your input to help us analyze the effects of the proposed action for our Environmental Assessment. We welcome your comments anytime during the project; however, **your comments would be most helpful if received by April 15, 2009**. A comment form is attached for your use. We plan to complete an Environmental Assessment by May, 2009. Following the release of the Environmental Assessment we will have a 30-Day Public Comment Period for your review and comment.

**If you would like more information or to discuss the project, please contact Interdisciplinary Team Leader Ryan Brown at (541)782-5211.**

## **How to Provide Comments:**

You can provide comments by filling out the attached Comment Form, writing a letter, or by sending an email or fax.

Please send written comments to:

Attn: Ryan Brown  
Middle Fork Ranger District  
46375 Highway 58  
Westfir, OR 97492  
Fax: (541)782-5336

Or, you can send comments via email to: [rnbrown@fs.fed.us](mailto:rnbrown@fs.fed.us). Electronic comments must be submitted as part of the actual e-mail message, or as an attachment in plain text (.txt), Microsoft Word (.doc), rich text format (.rtf), or portable document format (.pdf). E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed above, or in formats other than those listed or containing viruses, will be rejected.

We look forward to your participation in this important project.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Dallas J. Emch*  
DALLAS J. EMCH  
Willamette Forest Supervisor

