

Forest-Scale Roads Analysis Report

Mendocino National Forest

January 2003

**United States
Department of Agriculture
Forest Service**

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Executive Summary

Forest-scale roads analysis for the Mendocino NF was conducted between November 2001 and September 2002, pursuant to direction in new road management regulations and policy issued in January 2001.

The findings and recommendations resulting from the analysis are presented in Chapter 2, and the supporting analysis is documented in Appendix 3.

The analysis identified the following seven road management issues, and developed guidelines for addressing them. The issues have been divided into forest-wide issues and localized issues. Forest-wide issues are those that are widespread and substantial, and therefore of greatest importance in shaping an overall strategy for improving the road management situation. Localized issues are important in localized areas or in certain situations, but are not substantial problems when viewed on a Forest-wide basis.

Forest-wide Issues

Affordability – Current and anticipated future funding levels are inadequate to maintain the existing road system in a stable and environmentally sound condition. Strategic use of the limited funding to reduce the maintenance workload will be essential to halt or reverse the degradation of road and environmental conditions.

Access – Road access is essential for the public's use and enjoyment of the Forest as well as for the management, protection, and utilization of forest resources. Unfortunately, it will not be possible to entirely avoid impacts to road access, whether from continued inadequate maintenance or from deliberate changes in management. Road managers and users, working together, face the challenge of minimizing impacts on the quality and quantity of access while improving affordability and resource conditions.

Water Quality and Aquatic Habitat – Certain portions of the existing road system generate sediment that impacts water quality and aquatic habitat. Such impacts are more detrimental when they occur in watersheds that provide habitat for Threatened, Endangered, or Sensitive anadromous fish species.

Terrestrial Habitat – Excessive road density (miles of roads per square mile) in some areas adversely affects the quality of wildlife habitat. This can lead to fragmented habitat and disturbance to the species. Roads also serve as invasion routes for noxious weeds, which can have severe, long-term impacts on ecosystem conditions and processes. Sensitive plant populations located near or adjacent to roads can be impacted by road maintenance, and by dust created from the use of the roads.

Localized Issues

Heritage Resources and Traditional Cultural Uses – Some significant sites are experiencing vandalism that is facilitated by nearby road access. Roads provide access for traditional cultural uses.

Health and Safety – Roads that are located on serpentine or ultramafic rock types may pose a potential asbestos hazard for adjacent campers or residents, road maintenance workers, and others who travel such roads frequently. Some members of the public have expressed concern regarding the effects of inadequate maintenance on safety on certain roads. Native Americans and others who gather plant materials are concerned about potential health effects if herbicides are applied to roadside vegetation.

Effects on Roadless Areas – There are some unclassified roads known to occur within inventoried roadless areas. Forest Service policy requires such roads to eventually be either closed or added to the classified road system. The potential need for new road construction within inventoried roadless areas during our current Forest Plan period is low.

The analysis of these seven issues indicates that current, road-related Forest Plan management direction is generally adequate. It also produced information regarding how to effectively implement that direction. The following are the highlights of the findings and recommendations for addressing the issues:

- The current road system is not affordable under projected funding levels.
- Achieving affordability is key to protecting resources and preserving optimal access for the use and enjoyment of the Mendocino NF.
- It appears that affordability can most feasibly be achieved through the maximum practicable use of wet weather use restrictions, supplemented by closure of about 15% of Maintenance Level 2 (ML2) roads.
- Of the forest uses that depend on road access, recreation has the greatest potential to be impacted by such changes. However, impacts to recreation access can be minimized if the recommended mitigations are implemented.