

1 Introduction

This report presents the results of forest-scale roads analysis for the Mendocino National Forest (NF). The analysis considered the environmental, economic and social effects of roads that provide access within the Mendocino NF, and produced some suggestions on how best to manage those effects for the public good.

1.1 Background

Forest scale roads analysis is required by regulation and policy changes that went into effect in January 2001. Specific direction for this scale of analysis is set forth in the Forest Service Manual (FSM) 7710.

In addition to requiring this report and specifying its minimum content, that direction requires the analysis to follow a prescribed roads analysis process. This process is described in USDA Forest Service publication FS-643 Roads Analysis: Informing Decisions About Managing the National Forest Transportation System. The process consists of six steps, and is informed by answering a set of questions regarding a range of effects of roads on environmental, social, and economic factors. The six steps of the process are:

1. Setting up the analysis.
2. Describing the situation
3. Identifying the issues
4. Assessing benefits, problems, and risks
5. Describing opportunities and setting priorities
6. Reporting

This report is the culmination of the six-step process for forest-scale roads analysis. Step 1 was initiated early in 2001, but Steps 2 – 5 did not get underway until late 2001.

Public involvement was initiated in December 2001, and continued throughout the process. News releases and mailings went out in December 2001. Public meetings were held in Chico, Ukiah, and Willows in late January and early February 2002. The purpose of these activities was to inform interested people and organizations and to solicit their input to the analysis process. Three newsletters were sent out to interested people and organizations between April and September 2002 to provide updates on the progress of the analysis.

An interdisciplinary team of Forest Service employees conducted the analysis. Disciplines contributing to the analysis include: cartography, hydrology, wildlife and fish biology, botany, transportation planning, archaeology, and recreation management.

1.2 Analysis Process

We began by assessing each of the questions in Publication FS-463 for its applicability at the forest scale and for the Mendocino NF. Not all of the questions are applicable at forest scales, and some that are applicable do not relate to significant issues on this national forest.

After identifying the pertinent questions for informing this analysis, we bundled together those that related to similar issues. This facilitated the integrated analysis of interacting processes and conditions. For example, questions relating to water quality were analysed together with those regarding aquatic habitat. This bundling produced seven broad issues, which are discussed in this report (primarily in Section 2 and Appendix 3).

All road statistics cited are based upon information contained in the Mendocino NF Geographic Information System or INFRA database. Both data sources are fairly accurate and complete with respect to roads under Forest Service jurisdiction or on national forest lands, but are less so for other jurisdictions and ownerships.

Other sources of information include several watershed analyses, the Mendocino NF Forest-wide Late Successional Reserve Assessment, Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP or Forest Plan), and miscellaneous data sources for the various resources. We also relied on the personal knowledge and experience of our employees to fill gaps in formally documented information sources.

For that reason our findings and recommended guidelines for addressing road-related issues focus on roads that are under Forest Service jurisdiction. Nevertheless, some findings and guidelines may be applicable to forest roads that are under County or private jurisdiction, and could form the basis for cooperative efforts between jurisdictions to improve shared road-related problems.

This report provides information pertinent to the management of roads within the wider context of overall management of the Mendocino NF. The guidelines presented in Section 2 are intended to assist road managers to implement existing Forest Plan management direction, or to identify any needed changes in that management direction. Nothing in this report constitutes either a site-specific or programmatic decision subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Rather, the report presents information to be used to help inform such decisions.

1.3 Organization of Report

Section 2 of the report discusses the findings and recommended guidelines for addressing road management issues. For brevity, and to facilitate future reference, only the conclusions and recommendations of our analysis are presented there. Supporting information is presented in Appendix 3. Section

2 is intended to satisfy two of the four minimum components of this required forest-scale report (FSM7712.13b – 2):

Item b: Provide guidelines for addressing road management issues and priorities related to construction, reconstruction, maintenance and decommissioning.

Item c: Identify significant social and environmental issues, concerns, and opportunities to be addressed in project level decisions.

Section 3 of the report discusses coordination with other government agencies and jurisdictions during this forest-scale analysis, a third of the four minimum components of this report (FSM7712.13b – 2d).

Following the main body of the report are several appendices that provide supplemental information.

- Appendix 1 is a summary of public involvement.
- Appendix 2 discusses the process used to identify key routes.
- Appendix 3 contains the detailed discussions of the analyses of each of the seven issues. This is where to find the reasoning and factual information which support the conclusions and recommendations presented in Section 2.
- Appendix 4 is glossary of technical and bureaucratic terms that may not be familiar to some readers.
- Appendix 5 is a set of maps that are referred to in the report and appendices. These 11” x 17” pages were packaged separately to simplify collation during reproduction of the report. Included in this appendix are six maps (Plates 1-6) that display the location and management objectives of all roads under Forest Service jurisdiction. These maps are intended to satisfy, in snapshot form¹, another of the four minimum components of this report (FSM7712.13b – 2a).

¹ The actual information upon which these snapshots are based is stored and managed in electronic form in the Mendocino NF GIS and INFRA database.