

Motorized Travel Management

Prohibition of Cross-country Travel and Route Designation



Summary of the Decision

The Context

The rapid expansion of OHV travel on national forests and grasslands has been impacting the natural and cultural resources of federal lands. The former Chief of the Forest Service identified unmanaged recreation - especially impacts from OHVs - as one of the key threats facing the nation's forests today.

On many Federal Lands, unmanaged OHV use has resulted in unplanned roads and trails, erosion, watershed and habitat degradation, and impacts to cultural resource sites. Although the Lassen National Forest has not experienced the same level of unmanaged OHV use as elsewhere, improved management is still necessary to prevent additional impacts. Improved management of wheeled vehicle use on National Forest System lands will allow the Forest Service to enhance opportunities for public enjoyment of the National Forest System, including motorized and non-motorized recreation experiences.

On November 9, 2005, the Forest Service revised its national policy governing the use of wheeled motor vehicles to develop a system of roads, trails and areas designated for motor vehicle travel in order to minimize or eliminate the undesirable impacts from unmanaged motor vehicle travel. This was done by publishing the Final Travel Management Rule (36 CFR 212) in the Federal Register on that date.

Subpart B of the Final Travel Management Rule requires designation of those roads, trails, and areas that are open to motor vehicle use on National Forests. Only roads and trails that are part of a NFTS may be designated for motorized use. Designations are made by class of vehicle and, if appropriate, by time of year.

In this summary document we describe the Decision for Motorized Travel Management (Cross Country Travel Prohibition and Route Designation) that was just finalized.

At the end, we briefly discuss the upcoming Travel Analysis (Subpart A of the Travel Management Rule) that the Lassen National Forest, and all other National Forests in California, will be completing in the next two years.

The Decision

The Record of Decision for Motorized Travel Management ends a 5 year process to designate a baseline Forest Transportation System for motor vehicles on the Lassen National Forest (Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule). Former Supervisor Kathleen Morse signed the Record of Decision on January 28, 2010. It was released to the public on February 9, 2010 and a 45 day appeal period ended Friday March 26, 2010. Butte County, CA appealed the decision on grounds of economic impacts and lack of coordination. The decision was upheld by the Regional Forester, and the Lassen National Forest (**NF**) has begun implementation as of Thursday, May 20, 2010.

The legal document that implements this decision is the Motorized Vehicle Use Map (**MVUM**). It shows which routes are available for use by which types of vehicles. It will be updated annually. Off Highway Vehicles (**OHVs**) that are non-highway legal will only be allowed on Maintenance Level 2 (**ML2**) roads, motorized trails, and a few 3 mile-or-less segments of ML 3 passenger car roads (where engineering analyses indicated motorized mixed use by highway and non-highway legal vehicles was safe and the California Highway Patrol concurred).

What the Decision does: Prohibiting Cross-Country Travel

- The decision prohibits cross-country travel by wheeled motorized vehicles. They must now stay on official Forest Transportation System (**FTS**) roads and motorized trails. This decision supersedes the Temporary Forest Orders to this effect that have been in place for the last three years.

What the Decision does: Road & Trail Additions and Changes

- The decision adds 45.7 miles of motorized trails and 10.3 miles of Maintenance Level 2 (ML2) roads to the FTS. These were previously called “unauthorized routes.” Most were created for timber sales and never added to the FTS nor decommissioned. Some were user-created. The public was extensively consulted about which of these routes had important recreational values. Among those identified by the public, the routes that had no resource concerns, or which had concerns that could be mitigated, were added to the FTS.
- Six miles of ML1 roads, currently closed to vehicular travel, will be opened as motorized trails for all vehicle types.
- 9.3 miles of ML3 roads (not currently available for use by OHVs) will be designated for motorized mixed use and available for OHV riding after placement of signs for safety is completed.
- 79.6 miles of ML3 roads will have their Objective (intended) Maintenance Level changed from ML3 to ML2 in order to eventually save maintenance costs and allow use by OHVs. Maintenance standards and frequency will be reduced and then OHV use will be allowed when the Operational (actual road conditions) Maintenance Level becomes that of ML2 roads. Specifically, road conditions must change sufficiently to slow travel speeds and

allow safe combined use by highway legal and non-highway legal vehicles. In some cases, the roadbed might be intentionally altered to hasten this process or to address resource concerns (for instance, culverts that might clog with less frequent maintenance).

- Road and trail additions and changes have been divided into three categories:
 - Tier 1 = Road/trail additions or changes that require no mitigation and can be made immediately, thus allowing them to be displayed on the 2010 MVUM
 - Tier 2 = Road/trail additions or changes that do require mitigation, thus will be added to subsequent MVUMs in later years after the work is accomplished.
 - Tier 3 = Road/trail additions or changes that the public wanted, but which are sufficiently complex that further analysis and NEPA will be required. We will address these wishes on the part of the OHV riding public as time and resources allow. Examples include the High Lakes and Front Country Plans; the Potato Buttes open riding area; an OHV riding loop around Turner Mountain; single track motorbike trails, road changes requested by adjacent landowners; and others. The public is encouraged to work with us on accomplishing these goals.
- The intent of all these road/trail additions and changes has been to retain access to important dispersed recreation sites and provide expanded OHV loop riding opportunities.

What the Decision does: Additional Seasonal Restrictions

- Restricts wheeled vehicle use on 275 more miles of roads to provide for enhanced and safe winter recreation use.
- Restricts motor vehicle use of 88 miles of roads during wet weather to prevent road degradation and erosion.
- Allows motorized access to 12 miles of roads (SW of Goumaz Campground) only during hunting season in order to provide non-motorized recreational opportunities the remainder of the year.
- Restricts motorized access to 2 miles of road (29N21Y) to protect Spotted Owl nesting.
- Publishes the dates of all seasonal restrictions on the MVUM.

What the Decision does: Miscellaneous

- Vehicles will not be allowed to leave the designed system for hunting or big game retrieval.
- Vehicles will not be allowed to leave the designated system to scout for firewood, but will be allowed to leave the road to haul cut firewood out of the forest.
- Vehicles may park no more than one vehicle length off designated roads or motorized trails.

Implementation

The Forest Service recognizes that Travel Management Decisions implement a large change in motorized vehicle use on National Forest Lands. The analyses that lead to the Lassen NF Decision on Travel Management were complex and will take time to implement completely and accurately. Implementation will be a multi-year process. Please note that:

- The MVUM is the legal document for determining whether a road is available for use. It's features include:
 - Few symbols and simple legends
 - Printed on newspaper stock
 - Free distribution
 - Revised and updated annually in the Spring
- Signs will be placed showing which roads are available for motorized use and by which types of vehicle, but this will take time to accomplish. The Lassen NF is starting this program in the summer of 2010.
- Over the coming years, the Lassen NF also intends to explore various other means of communicating which roads and trails are available for motorized use, by which type of vehicle, and during what time of year. Possibilities include colored user maps with more features, web-based user-created maps, or GPS location systems.

Law Enforcement: A 3-part Strategy

The multi-year implementation process also is reflected in the Lassen NF Law Enforcement Strategy for Travel Management. Elements of this three pronged strategy include:

Engineering

- Install signs, both directional and informational, to assist the public with staying on designated roads and trails.
- Install barricades, gates, and other natural obstacles as needed.
- Design road and trail improvements and facilities to facilitate public understanding.

Education

- Make motor vehicle use maps (MVUMs) readily available to public and distribute them widely.
- Ensure all employees understand the Travel Management Decision so they can inform members of the public with whom they interact.
- Use a multi-media approach to public education, especially prior to and during periods of high use.

- Conduct outreach activities in local communities, at schools, and with special interest groups.
- Solicit volunteers and interest groups to assist with promoting compliance.

Enforcement

- Enlist cooperation from OHV riders regarding needed education, changes in regulations, or improvements in the FTS.
- Enlist help from the general public about problem areas or resource damage.
- Initially emphasize warnings and education for violations.
- Cite for repeat offenders.
- Cite egregious offenders (for instance, intentional resource or property damage).
- Continue enforcing of all existing OHV laws and regulations.

Subpart A of the Travel Management Rule

- Region 5 (California) of the USDA Forest Service stipulated that all National Forests in the Region would implement Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule (a Cross-Country Travel Prohibition and Route Designation) before Subpart A (Travel Analysis). This choice resulted from a funding agreement with California agencies that had a time-line for completing the route designation process.
- Subpart A is not a NEPA decision-making process like Subpart B was. It is an internal analysis of the entire road system that will produce recommendations about a desired future FTS. Public involvement in the process will be less formal.
- The product of this analysis will be a document called a “**TAP**” (Travel Analysis Process). It will serve the Lassen NF as a guide for future road decisions, but it will not dictate such decisions. Future road decisions will be made on a case by case basis with further NEPA analyses and opportunities for public input.
- The TAP will (1) identify a minimum road system needed for public and administrative uses, (2) describe and evaluate trade-offs with potentially desirable roads in excess of this minimum system, (3) identify roads for decommissioning (including priorities and timeframes), and (4) evaluate unneeded roads that might be converted to other uses.
- The Lassen National Forest completed a Draft TAP in 2008 that incorporated extensive public input. It was used to inform our unauthorized route selections and road system changes in the just completed Motorized Travel Management Decision. Some process and documentation revisions may be incorporated into our Draft TAP before it is finalized to complete the requirements of Subpart A of the Travel Management Rule.
- All the Forests in Region 5 (California) have begun the process of Travel Analysis. Contact your local National Forest or the Regional Office if you have further questions.

For Further Information

Analysis and Decision Documents:

The Final Environmental Impact Statement & Appendices, the Record of Decision and a map of the Selected Alternative are available at the Lassen NF web site at:

www.fs.usda.gov/lassen/

Motor vehicle use map (MVUM):

This set of 8 maps, printed double-sided on 4 sheets, will be available on the web site above and in hard copy at the Lassen NF Supervisor's office in Susanville or at the three Ranger Districts. See addresses below.

Individuals who may be contacted include:

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