



MOTORIZED TRAVEL MANAGEMENT

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Travel Management

What is Travel Management?

In 2005 the Forest Service issued the Travel Management Rule, a new regulation that requires all 155 national forests in the country to have a system of designated roads, trails and areas for motor vehicle use by vehicle type and, if appropriate, by season of use. This prohibits cross-country motor vehicle travel.

Travel Management was a decision-making process that included significant public involvement and resulted in the publication of a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) that identifies the roads, trails and areas open to public motor vehicle use on every national forest.

On the Lassen National Forest, the Record of Decision for Motorized Travel Management ended this five year process. 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 has begun implementation as of Thursday, May 20, 2010.

Why was Travel Management necessary?

The Forest Service has identified unmanaged recreation — especially impacts from motor vehicles — as one of the major threats facing the nation's forests and grasslands. Unmanaged motorized use has resulted in unplanned roads, trails and riding areas. Use of these routes has caused erosion, watershed and habitat degradation, impacts to wildlife and cultural resources, and conflicts with other types of recreation. Dramatic increases in motor vehicle use and the associated impacts have created management challenges that prompted the Travel Management Rule.

In the right places, and with proper management, motor vehicles, including off-highway vehicles (OHV), are a legitimate and appropriate way for people to enjoy their national forests. Most national forest visitors use motor vehicles to access national forest lands, whether for recreation, camping and hiking, hunting and fishing, commercial purposes, or the many other multiple uses that occur on national forest lands. Motor vehicle use (particularly OHV use) has, however, largely gone unmanaged. The Forest Service will now be managing motor vehicle use more carefully. Doing nothing to address resource damage from cross-country travel would be irresponsible.

The Travel Management process will result in consistent rules for motor vehicle use that improve the management of national forest lands, sustain and protect natural and cultural resource values, enhance opportunities for motorized recreation and access, and preserve areas of opportunities on each national forest for non-motorized travel and experiences.

How was public input used in this decision-making process?

The public was consulted through two rounds of public scoping before the decision making process began. During this period, the public informed us which routes they used to access dispersed recreation areas and what issues were important to them. Two official comment periods followed the release of the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements. All public comments were read and analyzed for issues and information. We provided responses to the comments that that were submitted during these periods.

It may often seem like comments are ignored, but keep in mind that Forest Service decisions are constrained by laws, policies, regulations, directives, and land management plans. Some comments were not relevant to this decision or could not be accommodated due to this framework of laws and regulations. Similarly, comments from different sectors of the public often conflict.

Federal Agency decision making (governed by the National Environmental Policy Act) is not intended to be democratic in the sense of voting for alternatives. Public input is intended to identify significant issues and optimal means of resolving conflicts and meeting goals. The Staff of the Lassen National Forest worked very hard to craft a well-designed plan that met legal obligations and served all sectors of the public while protecting resources.



Forest Access and Recreation

Why is my right to enjoy public National Forest lands being restricted?

Cross country travel by wheeled motorized vehicles was prohibited to protect natural resources from ongoing damage and to reduce conflicts with non-motorized uses of the Forest. Many of the existing routes on the landscape were left over from previous logging or fire-fighting activities. Some were created by off highway vehicle users. These routes had never been added to the official Forest Transportation System and were not being managed to prevent resource damage. With the banning of cross country travel, these routes may only be used by motor vehicles if they are added to our transportation system.

The public helped us identify which of these routes were most important for accessing traditionally-used dispersed recreation areas or for riding long loops on OHVs. If resource concerns did not prevent their addition to the transportation system, they were added.

As a result, once implemented, changes to the Forest Transportation System will provide 142 more miles of roads and trails where OHVs can be ridden legally than if cross country travel were simply prohibited. Approximately 2666 miles (75%) of Forest roads and trails are now open for public use of OHVs. Eventually, as work is accomplished to correct some resource concerns, 2776 miles (78%) of Forest roads and trails will be open for OHV use. On top of that, 3400 miles (95%) of Forest roads are available for public use by highway legal vehicles.

Why are my favorite roads being closed?

Not every route could be added to the Forest Transportation System. Some routes had problems with resource damage or conflicting use that could not be readily corrected, even if we were informed of interest in continuing to use them. Another counter balancing consideration is that the Forest already finds it difficult to pay for needed maintenance; adding more roads only worsens this situation. That said, as many roads as possible were added when the public identified them as useful and other concerns were lacking or could be corrected.

Why can I no longer ride my OHV on any gravel road in the National Forest?

Even before the Travel Management Decision, OHV riding was not allowed on all gravel Forest Service roads. Safety comes first. High quality gravel roads that are annually maintained for passenger cars allow travel speeds that are generally inappropriate for mixed use by both highway legal vehicles and non-highway legal vehicles.

In some cases, engineering safety analysis indicated that safety concerns could be reduced on short segments of high quality gravel roads through signs. These cases have been designated for motorized mixed-use to create longer OHV riding routes and loops.

The Lassen National Forest also chose to begin reducing maintenance levels on nearly 80 miles of these passenger car gravel roads. As the road surface roughens and travel speed become slower, use by both highway legal vehicles and non-highway legal vehicles will be allowed.

Did the Forest provide any new OHV opportunities?

Once implemented, changes to the Forest Transportation System will provide 142 more miles of roads and trails where OHVs can be ridden legally than if cross country travel were simply prohibited.

Changes in the Forest Transportation System also will add 404 more miles of OHV riding loops (greater than 20 miles long) than were previously available.

How will this affect dispersed camping experiences?

National Forests are special in that visitors have the ability to choose whether to camp in a developed campground or more rustically in the general forest area. Although we are making changes, visitors will continue to have motorized access to much of the national forests through a designated system of roads, trails and areas, as well as having foot, horseback and bicycle access. The Lassen National Forest solicited extensive input from the public regarding routes that were not yet part of the Forest Transportation System, but which accessed traditionally-used dispersed camping and recreation areas. These routes were added to our transportation system unless they had resource concerns or conflicting uses that could not be corrected.



Motor Vehicle Use Maps

What is an MVUM?

“MVUM” is an acronym for “Motor Vehicle Use Map.” It is commonly pronounced “em-vum.” The MVUM is the legal document that stipulates which roads and trails are designated for motor vehicle use, by what type of vehicle, and in some cases, what time of year.

Forests often have more than one MVUM to cover the entire Forest. Every Forest will update its MVUM annually. It will be available to the public free of charge.

Why will the MVUM be revised annually?

The Travel Management Decision is the starting point for designing a road system that protects resources and serves the public. It resulted from an extremely complex, expensive and lengthy process that could not address all road issues. Many changes we wanted to make were simply too complicated to include in this decision and required more detailed analyses. As the public helps us make future changes to the road system, these will be reflected each year in a revised MVUM.

Also, this decision adds new roads and trails to the transportation system and changes the maintenance level of others. Often this requires work such as sign placement, barriers, or drainage work that may take several years to accomplish. These roads and trails will show up on the revised MVUMs as the work is completed.

How are these maps different from other maps that show Forest roads?

MVUMs will be printed in black and white and will not show NFS roads and NFS trails where motor vehicle use is not allowed. They also will not show topographic lines or streams. The design was kept intentionally simple to focus on roads and trails where motor vehicle use is allowed.

Why do I need a visitor map, or topographic map, when the MVUM is free?

The MVUM is not intended to be a navigational tool. It also does not display all the features shown on a visitor map or topographic map. The single purpose of the MVUM is to identify those National Forest System roads, trails, and areas that are open to the public for motor vehicle use.

Does the MVUM also show mechanized and non-motorized trails and over-snow uses?

The MVUM shows only those National Forest System roads and trails that are designated for motor vehicle use. Some seasonal closures illustrated on the MVUM are intended to keep wheeled vehicles from damaging groomed snowmobile trails. Over-snow vehicles, however, are regulated through a separate winter recreation map.

How many MVUM's are there for the Lassen National Forest?

In order to show sufficient detail, the Forest will be covered by eight MVUMs, printed double sided on four sheets of newspaper stock. Each map's legend will include a schematic showing the coverage of each of the eight maps. This schematic also is posted on the web site where the maps can be downloaded.

Where can I get a MVUM?

Each national forest or grassland posts its MVUM on their website: The Lassen National Forest web site is: www.fs.usda.gov/lassen. Hard copies are also available at each Ranger District office and Forest Supervisor's office.

Forest MVUMs are also available online at:

http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/ohv/ohv_maps.shtml

How can I get a road/trail added to the MVUM?

Contact the Recreation, Planning, or Engineering Staff at your local Ranger District or the Forest Supervisor's Office. Contact information is listed at the bottom.



Other Details

How far can I park off a designated road or motorized trail?

Parking is allowed within one vehicle length from the edge of a road or motorized trail surface, when it is safe and does not cause damage to resources or facilities. State laws, signs, and Forest Orders must also be obeyed.

Is a wheelchair a motor vehicle?

A wheelchair or mobility device (including one that is battery powered) that is designed solely for use by a mobility impaired person for locomotion, and that is suitable for use in an indoor pedestrian area, is not considered to be a motor vehicle.

Can I drive off designated roads or motorized trails to retrieve big game during hunting season?

No. One of the reasons for prohibiting cross country travel by motorized vehicles was to reduce harassment of wildlife.

Can I drive off designated roads or motorized trails to cut firewood?

You can drive cross country to retrieve fire wood that you have already cut according to the terms of a valid firewood permit, but you may not use vehicles to scout off the transportation system for firewood or to cut it.

Are there any circumstances when travel by motorized vehicles off designated roads or trails will be allowed?

Yes. As noted above, vehicles may be used off roads and trails to haul out firewood. Some special use permits will allow cross country travel under specific circumstances. Fire-fighters will be allowed flexibility to fight wildfires.

Will Travel Management affect private landowners' access to their private lands?

Valid access rights will remain in effect.

Enforcement

What will be the MVUM enforcement strategy?

The MVUM will be the legally binding enforcement tool for the Travel Management Decision.

We believe that most of our visitors want to do the right thing for the environment and follow the rules. We continue to work with the public, including various organizations and other agencies to gain, maintain and improve compliance with the new motorized route designations. We believe that as our visitors become familiar with the new rules, enforcement of our regulations will improve. However, enforcement is not enough, and we believe that education and awareness also play an important role in gaining visitor compliance. We will look for partnership opportunities and continue to work with existing organizations to increase public awareness of safe and responsible riding on public lands.

What is the fine for violations?

Violations of 36 CFR 261.13 are subject of a fine up to \$5,000 and/or 6 months imprisonment (18 U.S.C. 3571(e)).

Will it be obvious in the Forest which roads and trails are open for motor vehicle use?

Not immediately and not always. The Lassen National Forest has begun placing signs on newly added roads and trails to identify them for use. Some will need periodic replacement. Over time, routes not added to the transportation system will either be blocked with barriers or allowed to grow over.



For the time being, the MVUM is the sole legal source of information regarding which roads and trails are available for motor vehicle use, by which types of vehicles, and in some cases, which time of year.

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. Possibilities include colored user maps with more features, web-based user-created maps, or GPS location systems.

Do forests have enough resources to manage current and anticipated motorized recreation use?

By eliminating cross-country travel and designating a system of roads, trails and areas, National Forests can now focus on Travel Management rather than damage control.

The Future

Will forests be proposing new OHV opportunities?

Some riding opportunities that were identified in the public input stage required environmental and safety analyses that were too complex to include in this decision. The Forest intends to follow up on examining and possibly implementing these projects. Examples include an open riding area at Potato Buttes, plans for OHV use in the High Lakes and Front Country areas of the Almanor Ranger District, road or route changes from Philbrook Reservoir to High Lakes, longer contiguous OHV riding opportunities near Lassen Volcanic Park, and single track motorbike routes.

Will you still be doing partnerships with OHV/Off-road groups?

Yes, definitely. This Travel Management Decision is the starting point for continuing efforts to improve our transportation system for all users. In addition, we are privileged in California to have the California State Parks Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division and their statewide Grants and Cooperative Agreements Program. Through this program the Forest Service along with other federal, state and local agencies will continue to apply for grant funds to help us manage off-highway vehicles use.

How do I go about partnering with the FS now?

Give us a call or stop by an office. Express your interests and inquire about opportunities. Be persistent; many Forest Service staff members are very busy, but we constantly seek ways to collaborate with members of the public. Volunteers are critical to fulfilling our mission in tight economic times. You can also join interest groups (such as OHV riding clubs) that have on-going relationships with the Lassen National Forest. Getting involved through group activities is fun and educational.

More Information

Lassen National Forest
Supervisors Office
2550 Riverside Drive
Susanville, CA 96130
(530) 257-2151

Eagle Lake Ranger District
477-050 Eagle Lake Road
Susanville, CA 96130
(530) 257-4188

Almanor Ranger District
900 E. Hwy 36
Chester, CA 96020
(530) 258-2141

Hat Creek Ranger District
43225 E. Hwy. 299
Fall River Mills, CA 96028
(530) 336-5521