

Caddo - LBJ National Grasslands Roads Analysis Report Summary

Introduction

A roads analysis makes no decisions nor does it allocate resources for specific purposes. It provides information for decision making by examining important issues related to roads. This analysis will help provide information for proposed management actions that will be considered in subsequent project-scale analyses.

A roads analysis can be conducted at various scales, ranging from this grasslands scale analysis to smaller project-scale analyses. Since this Caddo - LBJ National Grasslands (Caddo-LBJ NG) analysis is a broad grasslands scale analysis, individual roads were not analyzed; however, the grasslands roads system as a whole was reviewed. Site-specific road issues, concerns, and opportunities will be addressed during smaller scale analysis of project proposals.

This grasslands scale analysis addresses the public State, County, and Maintenance Level (ML) 2, 3, 4, and 5 Forest Service roads. Maintenance Level 2, 3, 4, and 5 Forest Service roads provide access for all types of public traffic from high-clearance pick-up trucks to low-clearance passenger cars and large commercial vehicles. ML-2 roads are suitable for use by only high-clearance vehicles and may be seasonally closed. ML-3, 4, and 5 roads are suitable for low-clearance passenger cars. The ML-1 roads and unclassified roads will be analyzed during subsequent site-specific project-scale planning. ML-1 roads are closed roads blocked to all vehicular traffic for a year or more.

Key Analysis Findings

- The LBJ NG is an urban grasslands located close to the Fort Worth - Dallas metroplex.
- All Forest Service arterial and collector roads are in place on the Caddo-LBJ NG.
- The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the 1996 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (the *Plan*) states (p.136):
“With State, County, and Forest Service routes, a transportation system now exists that meets the need for access into most areas... The current inventory contains all arterial and collector roads needed... However, some of these roads exist at a standard lower than needed to meet safety requirements and access needs...”
- Most of the major roads on the grasslands roads¹ system already existed when the federal land purchases comprising the Caddo-LBJ NG began in 1935. Most of these major roads are under County or State jurisdiction and are open to public motorized traffic.
- The State highways and County roads comprise about nine-tenths (89 percent) of the grasslands roads system addressed in this analysis.
- County roads are critical to accomplishing the Forest Service mission. More than one-half (59 percent) of the grasslands roads addressed in this analysis are County roads.
- Only about one-tenth (10 percent) of the grasslands roads addressed in this analysis are Forest Service roads.
- About one-third (30 percent) of the grasslands roads addressed in this analysis are State highways.

¹ “Forest Roads” as defined in Title 23, Section 101 of the United States Code (23 U.S.C. 101), are any roads wholly or partially within, or adjacent to, and serving National Forest System lands and which are necessary for the protection, administration, and utilization of National Forest System lands and the use and development of its resources. (See Appendix L *Glossary* for definitions.)

- Most of the ML-2, 3, 4, and 5 Forest Service roads addressed in this analysis are:
 - ML-2 (suitable for use by only high-clearance vehicles),
 - surfaced with crushed aggregate, and
 - Traffic Service Level D (single use) roads.
- About one-half of the ML-2 FS Roads are Oil & Gas (OGM) roads.
- In the 1970s, the Forest Service discussed road right-of-ways and road maintenance responsibilities with Fannin and Wise Counties. A cooperative agreement concerning road maintenance was proposed. In 1979, the first road cooperative agreement was signed with Fannin County. The cooperative agreement enabled the Forest Service and the County to assist one another with the improvement and maintenance of roads not under their jurisdiction. In 2001, an updated cooperative agreement reflecting the current road names, numbers, and lengths was signed with Fannin County. The current cooperative agreement covers 17 County roads.
- There is no road cooperative agreement on the LBJ NG with Wise County.
- Generally, Forest Service roads are receiving inadequate road maintenance funds. The road maintenance funds available are only approximately 20 percent of the amount of the road maintenance funds needed to maintain the roads to the “objective” maintenance level standards. This indicates there is a backlog of deferred road maintenance to bring Forest Service roads up to the established road maintenance level standards.
- Only about one-fifth (21percent) of the lands within the proclaimed Caddo-LBJ NG boundaries are national grasslands. The national grasslands are scattered and interspersed among private lands.
- Road right-of-ways are needed to provide access to isolated national grasslands tracts. There is no permanent road right-of-way access to tracts in Units 9, 10, 54, and 69A on the LBJ NG in Wise County and to tracts in Units 32, 46, and 49 on the Caddo NG in Fannin County.

Grasslands Scale Recommendations and Opportunities

The first priorities for road management are providing for public safety; maintaining roads to provide satisfactory surfacing, drainage, and signs; and protecting resources. The following recommendations and opportunities were developed during this roads analysis process.

1. Road maintenance funding is not always sufficient to maintain roads to desired standards. However, the Forest Supervisor and District Ranger have authority to take actions to deal with inadequate road maintenance budgets, such as reviewing and setting road maintenance priorities, reprogramming funds, entering cooperative agreements, transferring roads to the county or other public agencies, reducing road maintenance levels, and closing or decommissioning roads to more effectively use limited road maintenance funds.
2. Periodically review the road cooperative agreement with Fannin County Commissioners. Consider including Forest Service Roads the County can more easily or better maintain.

Consider proposing a road cooperative agreement with Wise County Commissioners.
3. Acquire permanent road right-of-ways to access tracts in Units 9, 10, 54, and 69A on the LBJ NG in Wise County and in Units 32, 45, 46, 48, and 49 on the Caddo NG in Fannin County.
4. Private landowners have put gates on the following old county roads. These gates block public access to national grasslands.
 - The gate on the Fannin Co 3380 road blocks public access to the national grasslands on the Ladonia Units 45, 46, and 48. The Forest Service has a verbal agreement with the landowner to use the old county road for administrative purposes, but public access is blocked.

- The gate on the Fannin Co 2025 road blocks access from the south to national grasslands on the Lake Fannin Unit 39; however,
 - the Forest Service can access the area from the north using the FS 923 entrance road.
 - Public access to the Lake Fannin Camp is currently blocked by a gate on the FS 923 entrance road. The Lake Fannin Camp is open to the public under an administrative permit to the Lake Fannin Wilderness Park of Texas, Inc.
 - On January 31, 2008, District Ranger James Crooks issued a decision closing the FS 923 road from the Lake Fannin Camp south to the national grasslands boundary to prevent unmanaged recreation use.

5. Our review of the Forest Highways resulted in the following two recommendations.

Caddo National Grasslands

Consider adding 2.9 miles of roads between FM 273 and FM 2554 leading to Lake Fannin. The Forest Highway would follow 0.4 miles of TX-P34 from FM 273 west to FAN-2024, 1.7 miles of FAN-2024 from TX-P34 north to FAN-2035, and 0.8 miles of FAN-2035 from FAN-2024 east to FM 2554. Improvements to the Forest Highway would improve access to the historic Lake Fannin Camp. (Note: The current Fannin County road maps show County Road 2024 includes the section from TX-P34 (Park Road 34) to the Lake Fannin entrance gate on FS 923. This was considered a section of FS 923 in the past.)

LBJ National Grasslands

Consider adding 5.0 miles of roads between FM 730 and WSE-Old Decatur Road. The Forest Highway would follow 3.5 miles of WSE-2461 from FM 730 to WSE-2372 and 1.5 miles of WSE-2372 from WSE-2461 west to WSE-Old Decatur Road. This Forest Highway would connect three Public Forest Service Roads, 900, 904, and 902, to a major County road, the Old Decatur Road, and to a major State highway, FM 730. Improvements to the Forest Highway would improve access to,

- the Black Creek Lake Recreation Area on FS 902,
- the TADRA Point Trailhead and the Cottonwood Lake Recreation Area on FS 900,
- and to the Cross Timbers RNA.

6. Review and use standard road construction designs, drawings, and specifications to implement the *Plan* Forest-wide (FW) 053 Standard, “Design and construct roads... to minimize siltation and maintain to provide surface drainage away from streams and into vegetated buffer strips or other filtering system.”

- Consider establishing silt fencing specifications to protect streams from siltation during ground disturbing activities.

7. Road wing ditches concentrate water flows. The water run-off from one wing ditch can combine with the run-off from other wing ditches to further concentrate water flows in natural drainages. On-the-ground inspections reveal the run-off from road wing ditches can start and increase soil erosion, especially where the run-off reaches stream banks. Review and use standard road construction designs, drawings, and specifications to implement the *Plan* FW-053 Standard, “to provide surface water drainage away from streams and into vegetated buffer strips or other filtering system”. To reduce water flows and run-off from wing ditches, consider,

- spacing wing ditches closer together,
- reducing the run-off from wing ditches by constructing a “J” hook at the outlet end of wing ditches to slow water flow and provide for percolation in a settling basin, and
- other actions as necessary.

8. Review proposed special use roads on-the-ground with interdisciplinary specialists for their recommendations on road location, construction, and maintenance requirements before approving special use permit. Periodically inspect existing special use roads to ensure road maintenance practices protect grasslands resources and provide for public safety.