

Chapter 2. The Alternatives

Introduction

This chapter describes and compares the alternatives considered for the Modoc National Forest Motorized Travel Management EIS. It describes both alternatives considered in detail, and those eliminated from detailed study. The end of this chapter presents the alternatives in tabular format so that the alternatives and their environmental impacts can be readily compared.

Based on the issues identified through public comment on the Proposed Action, the Forest Service developed three alternative proposals that achieve the Purpose and Need differently than the Proposed Action. In addition, the Forest Service is required to analyze a No Action Alternative. The No Action, Proposed Action, and other action alternatives are described in detail below.

How the Alternatives Were Developed

The four action alternatives represent a wide range of perspectives designed to address the significant issues as described in the Purpose and Need (Chapter 1).

Refining Alternatives Submitted by the Public During Scoping

During the 30-day public scoping process, alternatives were submitted for consideration by three groups. After the scoping period concluded, the Forest Service reviewed and gave due consideration to their proposals. The resulting alternatives incorporate these and other proposals and information offered by the public and the work of the Interdisciplinary Team.

Also important in this process was the information gathered by the Forest Service in its consultation and discussions with tribal representatives, local counties, interested individuals, and Forest Service employees. State and Federal agencies advised the Forest Service during the process through numerous informal contacts. During the scoping period, the Forest received additional information internally that was incorporated into the Proposed Action. First, it was determined that the 44N08 and 44N01 roads that go from the Glass Mountain Pumice Mine to County Road 97 are not safe for use by off-highway vehicles (OHVs) because of the high volume and low visibility of large trucks that use the road. The Forest is proposing to close these 1.45 miles of road to use by OHVs; other vehicles will still be allowed to use the road. Second, a seasonal closure was initially proposed from November 1 through March 31 in bald eagle winter roost areas as required in the Modoc Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP). After additional scoping, the Forest realized that in most cases this guideline can be implemented; however, there is one bald eagle roost area directly adjacent to the community of Tionesta. System roads 44A19D, 44A19C, 44N19, 44N20 and 44N04Y are within this area. These roads have been open to public use with no discernable disturbance to the bald eagle during their wintering period. Bald eagles that roost there have become habituated to vehicular traffic. If these roads are seasonally closed, the inhaling community of Tionesta would be affected. As a result, the Forest is proposing a site-specific, non-significant amendment to the Modoc Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) to the bald eagle winter roost guidelines that would allow for vehicle use year-round in this specific eagle roost area on designated roads within that area. All other roads in bald eagle winter roost areas would have the seasonal closure implemented as directed by the LRMP. An update notice was sent out to the public regarding seasonal closures in the Tionesta area and published in the newspapers of record the week of July 21, 2008. The scoping period to comment on these changes was extended until August 8, 2008 and three

additional comments were received but did not vary from the scope of the other comments received.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

Four action alternatives (Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and 5) and a No Action Alternative (Alternative 1) are analyzed in detail in this FEIS. The No Action Alternative represents the continuation of cross-country travel, including continued use of all unauthorized routes by motor vehicles. This alternative serves as a baseline for comparison among the alternatives, and is required by the implementing regulations of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The planning area for the alternatives includes National Forest System lands on the Modoc National Forest. It does not include any private, state, or other Federal lands.

Each alternative assumes that other adjacent Federal lands, such as those administered by the Bureau of Land Management, would be managed according to existing management plans and applicable Federal laws. Each alternative also assumes that private lands will meet applicable state and Federal land-use regulations.

Monitoring

Monitoring is critical for evaluating the effectiveness of management decisions, the accuracy of analysis assumptions, and conclusions. Monitoring of road and trail conditions is required, and must meet regional and national standards. If monitoring determines additional resource damage is occurring, steps to prevent further damage may be appropriate. If the mitigations are not effective or are not possible, road or trail closures may be required, and may require additional NEPA analysis. Condition surveys are performed on all ML 3, 4, and 5 roads every five years, with approximately 20 percent completed each year. Condition surveys are performed on ML 1 and 2 roads based on a relatively small random sample generated by the Forest Service Washington Office. In addition to the formal condition surveys, the Forest will monitor road conditions continually as they are driven for other purposes. As problems are identified, they will be addressed as resources allow, and appropriate management actions (such as emergency closures) will be undertaken in accordance with law, regulation, and policy.

See volume 2 of this FEIS, Appendix C, Monitoring Plan for more information.

Descriptions Common to All Action Alternatives

This section describes each of the five alternatives considered in detail. The alternatives are described in three parts with the action alternatives having several common factors:

1. Cross-country travel: All of the action alternatives ban cross-country travel.
2. Changes to the existing National Forest Transportation System (NFTS): The alternatives vary in changes to the existing NFTS in terms of vehicle class or season of use.
3. Additions to the NFTS: Alternatives 2, 4, and 5 include unauthorized roads that are proposed for addition to the NFTS. Each of these roads is identified by a unique road number or route ID. All proposed route additions have an assigned maintenance level based on specific road objectives, and any applicable vehicle class or season of use. All of the proposed additions on the Modoc National Forest (MDF) will be ML 2 and open to all vehicles. All proposed routes will receive the appropriate level of routine maintenance such as clearing brush, posting signs, cleaning, clearing debris, etc. Each road, trail, or area is site-specifically addressed in appendices A1 and A2, where site-specific reviews by resource specialists are documented. Resource specialists reviewed all proposed routes to determine site-specific impacts. For some routes, no work beyond routine maintenance is

needed. For one road, SS563, additional work is needed to bring the route up to a safe and environmentally sustainable condition. This work will be done prior to the publication of the Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM).

4. LRMP Amendments: Note LRMP amendments described in the Purpose and Need in Chapter 1 of this document.

Mixed Use on the Forest

Mixed use is defined as the designation of a National Forest System (NFS) road for use by both highway-legal and non-highway legal motor vehicles (FSM 7705). Currently mixed use occurs on ML 2 and 3 roads, and is not regulated. However, mixed use on ML 4 and ML 5 roads is not allowed. On the ML 4 and 5 roads, use is only allowed by highway legal motor vehicles. Mixed-use analysis was done on all of the ML 3 roads (see Appendix N). In addition, the Forest surveyed to determine the number of vehicles using the ML 3 roads, and found use to be very low, averaging 1.8 vehicles per hour. ML 2 roads are rough surface roads that require driving at slower speeds and are therefore suitable for high-clearance vehicles. Surveys were also done on ML 2 roads; the use averaged 1 vehicle per 1.4 days. All ML 2 roads will provide for mixed use unless specifically prohibited.

During open houses, the public asked that we keep as many of the level 3 roads open to mixed use as possible. These roads are used for access to recreations sites, hunting, fishing, and for the most popular activity on the Forest, driving around to enjoy the scenery. Use on this Forest is the lowest in the country. Information from the Modoc County California Highway Patrol and the Forest engineer indicates there have been no accidents on the Forest and there is no accident history involving ATVs on the Forest. Therefore, crash probability is low, and if an accident occurs, the crash severity would be moderate. In the alternatives we have considered allowing a range of 0 to 544 miles of additional mixed use on ML 3 roads. The table below explains maintenance levels for Forest Service roads.

Table 2-1. Maintenance Levels for Forest Service Roads

ML 5
Highest traffic volume and speeds
Typically connect to state and county roads
Culverts for drainage
Usually arterial and collector
May include some developed recreation roads
Usually paved or chip-sealed
ML 4
Subject to requirements of Highway Safety Act
Moderate traffic volume and speeds
May connect to county roads
Culverts provide drainage
Usually a collector
May include some developed recreation roads
ML 3
Low to moderate traffic volumes
Subject to Highway Safety Act

Typically connect to arterial and collectors roads
Combination of dips and culverts provide drainage
May include some dispersed recreation roads
Potholing or washboarding may occur
ML 2
Low traffic volume and low speed
Typically local roads
Connect collectors or other local roads
Dips are the preferred drainage treatment
Not subject to Highway Safety Act
Surface smoothness is not a consideration
Not suitable for passenger cars
ML1
Vehicular traffic is eliminated, including administrative traffic
Physically blocked or entrance is disguised
Not subject to Highway Safety Act
Maintenance done only to minimize resource impacts

Seasonal Closures for All Alternatives

In the past, seasonal closures have been issued and enforced. Currently, there are no seasonal restriction closures in place on the Forest, although there are several standards and guidelines in the Modoc LRMP that indicate where closures may be beneficial.

Seasonal closures in this document are proposed for three of the four action alternatives. Most of the closures are weather related and are proposed because of the effects of rain and snow events on clay soils and the resulting damage to roads. The table below shows the closure name, date, and the reason for the closure. A variation of these closures is common to all three of the alternatives where seasonal closures are proposed. Only one closure date per road would be applied.

Table 2-2. Seasonal Closure Type and Dates

Closure name	Closure date	Closure type
SC1	11/1-3/31	bald eagle winter roost
SC2	11/1 - 4/30	wet weather
SC3	12/1-4/30	wet weather
SC4	12/16-4/30	wet weather
SC5	2/15-4/30	wet weather

Alternative 1: No Action

The No Action Alternative provides a baseline for comparing the other alternatives. Under the No Action Alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. No changes would be made to the current NFTS, and no cross-country travel prohibition would be put into place. The Travel Management Rule would not be implemented, and no MVUM would be produced. Motor vehicle travel by the public would not be limited to

designated routes. Unauthorized routes would continue to proliferate and have no status or authorization as NFTS facilities.

1. **Cross-country Travel:** Motor vehicle travel off designated NFS roads and NFS trails by the public would continue except as currently prohibited by Forest order. A total of 1,609,466 acres are currently open to cross-country travel.
2. **Changes to the existing NFTS:** No changes would be made to the existing NFTS or to current LRMP direction. No seasonal restrictions exist under current management plan direction.
3. **Additions to the NFTS:** There would be no additions to the existing NFTS.

Alternative 2: The Proposed Action

The Proposed Action was created by the Interdisciplinary Team using input from the public regarding the inventoried unauthorized routes. It includes the prohibition of cross-country motorized travel, proposed changes to the existing NFTS, and the additions to the NFTS as described in the Notice of Intent (NOI) published May 12, 2008 (Volume 73, Number 92).

1. **Cross-country travel:** This alternative would prohibit motor vehicle travel off the designated NFTS roads by the public, except as allowed by permit or other authorization.
2. **Changes to the existing NFTS:** Close approximately 6 miles of 46B29HB (along Boles Creek between Clear Lake and Steel Swamp) to public motorized use.

Proposed seasonal restrictions: Seasonal restrictions on 336 miles (213 routes) of NFS roads due to weather-related road restrictions. There would be three weather-related closure dates and one related to bald eagle winter roosting. The roads seasonally closed for bald eagle winter roost requirements total approximately five miles, with the remainder of closures being weather related.

Table 2-3. Alternative 2—Seasonal Closures Grouped By Date (proposed addition of unauthorized routes)

Group name	Date closed	Miles	Number	Type
SC1	11/1-3/31			
SC2	11/1-4/30			
SC3	12/1-4/30	9.44	23	weather & road condition
SC4	12/16-3/31	10.36	51	weather & road condition
Total		20	74	

Table 2-4. Alternative 2—Seasonal Closures Grouped by Date (existing NFTS roads)

Group name	Date closed	Miles	Number	Reason
SC1	11/1-3/31	4.85	2	bald eagle
SC2	11/1-4/30	14.25	15	weather & road condition
SC3	12/1-4/30	178.13	83	weather & road condition
SC4	12/16-3/31	115.23	113	weather & road condition
Total		312.46	213	

Changes in class of vehicles: There are currently 3,764 miles of level 2 roads open to the public for mixed use. Mixed use is defined as the designation of an NFS road for use by both highway-legal and non-highway legal motor vehicles (FSM 7705). Alternative 2 proposes to change the class of vehicle on 138 additional miles of ML 3 roads to allow for mixed use. It would restrict use to highway vehicles only on approximately 1.45 miles of 44N08 and 44N01 roads near Glass Mountain Pumice Mine for public safety caused by potential interaction with the large haul trucks from the mine.

The table below lists the vehicle class changes proposed under Alternative 2.

Table 2-5. Alternative 2—Proposed Changes in Vehicle Class (allowing mixed use on level 3 roads)

Miles	Number of Routes
138	23

Note: See appendix A for a list of all routes.

- Additions to the NFTS:** This Alternative proposes to add approximately 336 miles (1,154 routes) of existing, inventoried unauthorized routes to the NFTS as level 2 roads. There would be approximately 20 miles of these roads that would have seasonal restrictions. The following summary table shows the miles and types of roads, by district, to be added into the National Forest Transportation System. A complete table with each road listed is located in Appendix A, Route Analysis.

Table 2-6. Alternative 2—Miles of Unauthorized Road Added to the NFTS, by District

Miles of Unauthorized Road Added	District
40	Warner Mountain
21	Big Valley
93	Doublehead
185	Devils Garden
336	Total

Of the 1,154 roads proposed to be added in Alternative 2, the majority of the roads are spur roads and under a quarter of a mile in length. Table 1-1 in chapter 1 of this document shows the distribution of road lengths.

Alternative 3

Alternative 3 responds to the issues of cost, maintenance, inventoried roadless areas, quiet use, and natural resource impacts by prohibiting cross-country travel without adding any new facilities to the NFTS. This alternative also provides a baseline for comparing the impacts of other alternatives that propose changes to the NFTS in the form of new roads. None of the currently unauthorized roads would be added to the National Forest System under this alternative.

- Cross-country Travel:** Motor vehicle travel off the designated NFTS roads by the public, except as allowed by permit or other authorization, would be prohibited.
- Changes to the existing NFTS:** Only those seasonal restrictions as specified in the MDF LRMP and contained in existing Forest orders would be continued. Currently, there are no seasonal restriction closures in place on the Forest. No changes to vehicle class are proposed in this Alternative.

3. **Additions to the NFTS:** There would be no additions to the existing NFTS.

Alternative 4

Alternative 4 was developed as a modified version of an alternative submitted during scoping by a coalition of environmental groups. Alternative 4 responds to issues of inventoried roadless areas, quiet use, and natural resource impacts. It does not add routes where resource concerns were raised internally and externally.

1. **Cross-country Travel:** Motor vehicle travel off the designated NFTS roads by the public, except as allowed by permit or other authorization, would be prohibited.
2. **Changes to the existing NFTS:** Close approximately 6 miles of 46B29HB (along Boles Creek between Clear Lake and Steel Swamp) to public use to protect heritage resources.

Proposed Seasonal restrictions: There would be four weather-related closures and one related to bald eagle winter roosts. System roads 44A19D, 44A19C, 44N19, 44N20, and 44N04Y east of Tionesta would be excluded as stated in the Proposed Action. The table below shows weather-related seasonal restrictions on an additional 15 miles of proposed routes, 419 miles on NFS roads, and approximately 5 miles for bald eagle winter roost requirements.

Table 2-7. Alternative 4—Seasonal Closure Grouped by Date (proposed addition of unauthorized routes)

Group name	Date closed	Miles	Number	Reason
SC1	11/1-3/31			
SC2	11/1-4/30			
SC3	12/1-4/30	6.13	18	weather & road condition
SC4	12/16-3/31	9.14	47	weather & road condition
	Total	15.27	65	

Table 2-8. Alternative 4—Seasonal Closure Grouped by Date (existing NFTS roads)

Group name	Date closed	Miles	Number	Reason
SC1	11/1-3/31	4.85	2	bald eagle
SC2	11/1-4/30	14.25	15	weather & road condition
SC3	12/1-4/30	178.13	83	weather & road condition
SC4	12/16-3/31	115.23	113	weather & road condition
SC5	2/15-4/30	112.17	57	
	Total	424.63	270	

Changes in class of vehicles: There are currently 3,764 miles of level 2 roads open to the public for mixed use. Mixed use is defined as the designation of an NFS road for use by both highway-legal and non-highway legal motor vehicles (FSM 7705). Alternative 4 would not add any routes for mixed use. It would restrict use to highway-legal vehicles only on approximately 1.45 miles of 44N08 and 44N01 roads near the Glass Mountain Pumice Mine. This is for public safety concerns caused by potential interaction with large haul trucks from the mine.

3. **Additions to the NFTS:** The Forest is proposing to add approximately 286 miles of existing unauthorized routes to the system as ML 2 roads. Approximately 15 miles of these roads would have seasonal restrictions. The following summary table shows the miles and types of roads, by district, to be added into the National Forest Transportation System. A more complete table with each road listed is included in Appendix A, Route Analysis.

Table 2-9. Alternative 4—Miles of Road Added to the NFTS, by District

Miles of Unauthorized Road Added	District
32	Warner Mountain
20	Big Valley
85	Doublehead
149	Devils Garden
286	Total

Alternative 5

Alternative 5 responds to the issue of access and motorized recreation opportunity, while protecting the environment. It was developed as a modified version of an alternative submitted by a recreation use group and public comments. During scoping, the MDF also received recommendations for additional mixed use that would better provide for access and motorized recreation opportunity.

1. **Cross-country travel:** Motor vehicle travel off the designated NFS roads and NFS trails by the public would be prohibited except as allowed by permit or other authorization.
2. **Changes to the existing NFTS:** Close approximately 6 miles of 46B29HB (along Boles Creek between Clear Lake and Steel Swamp) to public use to protect heritage resources.

Proposed seasonal restrictions: There would be seasonal restrictions on 307 miles of NFS roads due to weather restrictions: one season for wet weather closures and one season related to bald eagle winter roosting. The roads seasonally closed for bald eagle winter roost requirements total 5 miles and exclude system roads 44A19D, 44A19C, 44N19, 44N20, and 44N04Y east of Tionesta as stated in the Proposed Action. These roads will not have winter roost restrictions.

Table 2-10. Alternative 5—Seasonal Closure Grouped by Date (proposed addition of unauthorized routes)

Group name	Date closed	Miles	Number	Reason
SC5	2/15-4/30	19.8	74	weather & road conditions
	Total	19.8	74	

Table 2-11. Alternative 5—Seasonal Closure Grouped by Date (existing NFTS roads)

Group name	Date closed	Miles	Number	Reason
SC1	11/1-3/31	4.85	2	bald eagle
SC5	2/15-4/30	307	211	weather & road conditions
	Total	312.46	213	

Changes in class of vehicles: There are currently 3,764 miles of level 2 road open to the public for mixed use. Mixed use is defined as the designation of an NFS road for use by both highway-legal and non-highway legal motor vehicles (FSM 7705). Based on input from the public during scoping, Alternative 5 proposes to change the vehicle class on 513 additional miles of ML 3 roads to allow for mixed use. The 44N01 road would not be recommended for inclusion due to safety issues related to the Glass Mountain Pumice Mine. Alternative 5 would restrict use on this 1.45 miles of 44N08 and 44N01 roads to highway-legal vehicles only. The table below lists the vehicle changes proposed under Alternative 5.

Table 2-12. Alternative 5—Summary of NFTS Routes Proposed for Mixed Use

	Miles	Number of Routes
Alternative 5	544	197

Note: See Appendix A for a complete table of all routes.

- Additions to the NFTS:** The Forest is proposing to add approximately 336 miles of existing unauthorized routes to the NFTS as ML 2 roads. Approximately 20 miles of these roads would have seasonal restrictions. The following summary table shows the miles and types of roads, by district, to be added into the National Forest Transportation System. A complete table with each road listed is included in Appendix A, Route Analysis.

Table 2-13. Alternative 5—Miles of Unauthorized Road Added to the NFTS, by District

Miles of Unauthorized Road Added	District
40	Warner Mountain
21	Big Valley
93	Doublehead
185	Devils Garden
336	Total miles

Comparison of Alternatives

Chapter 3 describes the environmental consequences of the alternatives in detail. This section of Chapter 2 compares the alternatives by summarizing key differences between the alternatives and providing a summary of the effects analysis for all alternatives.

Table 2-14. Summary Comparison of Alternatives

	Alternative 1 No Action	Alternative 2 Proposed Action	Alternative 3 CC Restriction	Alternative 4 Resource	Alternative 5 Recreation
Cross-country Travel	Yes	No	No	No	No
Proposed Miles and Number of Unauthorized Routes Added to NFTS	0	336 Miles 1,154 Routes	0	286 Miles 1,025 Routes	336 Miles 1,154 Routes
Miles of Seasonal Closures on Roads Proposed to be Added	0	20 Miles	0	15 Miles	20 Miles
Miles and Number of NFTS Roads Proposed for Seasonal Closure	0	312 Miles 213 Routes	0	425 Miles 270 Routes	312 Miles 213 Routes
Current NFTS Mixed Use Miles (ML 2 roads)	3,764 Miles	3,761 Miles	3,764 Miles	3,761 Miles	3,761 Miles
Additional Mixed Use Miles Proposed (ML 3 roads)	0	138 Miles	0	0	513 Miles
Total of Mixed Use NFTS and Proposed (ML 2 & ML 3 roads)	3,764 Miles	3,899 Miles	3,764 Miles	3,764 Miles	4,292 Miles

Table 2-14 above shows the major differences between the alternatives: (1) prohibition of cross-country travel; (2) addition of unauthorized routes to the NFTS; and (3) changes to the existing NFTS that include seasonal restrictions, and that provide for mixed use on ML 3 routes.

Alternative 1 provides for the continuation of cross-country travel. This alternative has the greatest potential to create harm to the natural, physical, and cultural resources. Conversely, it provides the greatest opportunity for motorized recreation. However, this alternative does not meet the requirement of the Travel Management Rule. Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and 5 prohibit cross-country travel and potentially reduce harm to the natural, physical and cultural resources.

Alternative 1 would provide continued use of unauthorized routes as they are currently used. Potential harm to natural, physical, and cultural resources would continue. Alternative 3 would not add any unauthorized routes. Over time these routes would passively restore themselves; however, these routes would no longer be available for motorized recreation. Many of these routes have been used for over 40 years. Alternatives 2, 4, and 5 propose to add between 286 and 336 miles of unauthorized routes to the NFTS. This represents approximately 68 percent of the inventoried unauthorized routes on the Forest. An Interdisciplinary Team review determined that this level of addition would not harm the resources or environment in a substantial way. Any routes of concern were eliminated from consideration for addition to the NFTS. Using monitoring guidelines in the LRMP, the Forest will evaluate the proposal over time and make adjustments as appropriate.

Alternatives 1 and 3 do not provide for seasonal restrictions that would reduce motor vehicle use on roads during wet weather, which would in turn, reduce damage caused by this use.

Alternatives 2, 4, and 5 do provide for seasonal restrictions; this would help reduce damage to roads and reduce road maintenance costs. Protection is also provide for bald eagle during the winter roost season.

Change in vehicle class as provided for with mixed-use is the final difference between the alternatives. The biggest difference in mixed use opportunities is that Alternatives 2 and 5 provide for mixed use on some or most of our ML 3 roads. Alternatives 3 and 4 only allows for use on ML2 roads but does not provide for mixed use on ML3 roads. Alternative 1 would allow current use to continue unchanged. Based on the Forest engineer’s Mixed-Use Analysis (Appendices N1, N2, and N3), mixed use on the ML 3 routes is acceptable from a user safety perspective. There is no record of any OHV accidents on the Modoc National Forest. The local public also requested that we allow mixed use on these routes to provide loop routes and connected travel across the NFTS. This use would enhance the motorized recreation opportunity expressly requested by recreation users and local government.

Alternatives Considered, but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires Federal officials to rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives, and to briefly discuss the reasons for eliminating any alternatives that were not developed in detail (40 CFR 1502.14). NEPA requires consideration of only those alternatives that would fulfill the Purpose and Need described in Chapter 1. The following describes those alternatives that were considered but eliminated from detailed study, and the rationale for their elimination.

Add all unauthorized routes to the NFTS

This alternative was developed in response to initial comments from the public at open houses held in Modoc County, who told us they did not want us closing any routes or placing any restrictions on their current use of the Forest. This alternative was suggested prior to creation of the Proposed Action. This approach would add all of the unauthorized routes that were inventoried, and not have any seasonal closures. Every level 3 road would be designated for mixed use.

Rationale for elimination: This alternative does not meet the Purpose and Need. Several of the inventoried unauthorized routes have resource conflicts and create a potential for resource damage if added to the NFTS and allowed use by the public. Adding all of the unauthorized routes would not meet the Travel Management Rule criteria of minimizing damage to soil, vegetation, and other Forest resources.

Designate several high-use open areas where use is not restricted to designated routes

Rationale for elimination: The current network of roads across the Forest is extensive, and already provides for a varied motorized use experience. There is not a need to designate open areas when the Forest provides an extensive network of roads available for OHV use already. Such an approach would lead to continued resource degradation and potential safety and use conflicts that the Purpose and Need are intended to address.

Develop and implement a rainfall-based wet weather closure

Rationale for elimination: This does not meet the requirement of the Travel Management Rule to produce a Motor Vehicle Use Map that will be the final product of this process. The MVUM is produced annually, not daily or weekly. It would therefore not allow for the flexibility necessary for rainfall-based closure.

Reduce system road density based on a comprehensive travel analysis

Rationale for elimination: This alternative is outside of the scope of the project because it primarily points to Subpart A of the Travel Management Rule. The Proposed Action implements Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule, which states—

The Responsible Official may incorporate previous administrative decisions regarding travel management made under other authorities, including designations and prohibitions of motor vehicle use, in designating National Forest System roads, National Forest System trails, and areas on National Forest System lands for motor vehicle use under this subpart (36 CFR: § 212.50 (b)).

In addition, the Forest Service Handbook 7709.55, section 10.2, says that “Reconsideration of the entire forest transportation system is not required or appropriate (FSM 7715.1).”

The responsible official has determined that existing NFTS roads and trails would not be considered for repair, reconstruction, or decommissioning, as part of this proposal. Repair and maintenance of the existing NFTS are routine, ongoing activities on national forests, and are typically categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement in accordance with agency policy in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 30, Section 31.12 (4): “Repair and Maintenance of Roads Trails and Landline Boundaries.” Further, consideration of previous decisions in the planning process that led to the development of the Proposed Action determined that the existing NFTS is not necessary for implementing Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule. However, past, present, and future environmental impacts of the existing NFTS are incorporated into cumulative-effects analyses for the Proposed Action and alternatives.

This action is not addressing the creation of a travel management plan, but rather deals specifically with Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule, which provides direction for a system of NFTS roads and trails designated for motor vehicle use, and the prohibition of motor vehicle use off designated roads and trails and outside designated areas. Subpart B is intended to prevent resource damage caused by unmanaged motor vehicle travel by the public. Therefore, any analysis of our existing system and comprehensive changes made to that system are beyond the scope of this analysis.