

Supplemental Information Report
North Belts Travel Plan
Helena National Forest
January 2008

Intro

This Supplemental Information Report (SIR) documents the reconsideration of the **North Belts Travel Plan** – Record of Decision (ROD) based on its' final environmental impact statement (*NBelts 2005*) as it compares to the **Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use; Final Rule; November 2005** (*2005 Travel Rule*).

Objective

This SIR helps the responsible official determine if a need for change will be necessary with the *NBelts 2005* and its final environmental impact statement as it relates to the information presented in the *2005 Travel Rule*. This process is guided by the instructions in Section 18 - *Corrections, Supplementation, or Revision of Environmental Documents and Reconsideration of Decision to Take Action* of the Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15. This evaluation focuses on the need to address environmental concerns that have a bearing on the action or its impacts and may address all or a portion of the original decision.

The focal point for this evaluation is to create understanding and clarification between these documents in order to produce the *2005 Travel Rule* "Motor Vehicle Use Map" (MVUM) that reflects designated roads, trails, and areas on an administrative unit or a Ranger District of the National Forest System in a consistent manner. Under Section 212.50 (b) of the *2005 Travel Rule*, the responsible official may incorporate previous administrative decisions regarding travel management made under other authorities...

Under this authority, the responsible official applies FSH 1909.15 Section 18 to evaluate whether new information does indeed change a previous decision that may have a bearing on the action or its impact.

Background

NBelts ROD 2005

The purpose of this travel plan was to determine the future motorized road and trail system, the non-motorized trail system, and snowmobile use areas in the North Belts and Dry Range areas, including potential new routes. It was also to determine the closure methods that would be applied for routes closed year long, the trailheads that would be needed, and road or trail related watershed improvement projects.

This was accomplished with the signing of the ROD in May of 2005. The ROD documents the selection of Alternative 6 with modifications as the preferred alternative for implementation on the Helena National Forest including areas on two Ranger Districts, the Townsend and Helena.

The selected Alternative 6 with modifications was designed to meet the following needs:

- Provide a variety of motorized and non-motorized routes for both public and administrative needs that will prevent or reduce potential unacceptable damage from roads and trails to the area's resources,
- Develop travel maps and respective area signing that are clear and understandable,
- Provide a travel plan that is enforceable,
- Reduce long-term maintenance costs for the area's transportation system, and
- Improve watershed conditions associated with travel routes.

The *NBelts 2005* was found to be consistent with the Helena Land and Resource Management Plan of 1986 as amended e.g. Amendment #20 – Off-Highway Vehicle ROD and Plan Amendment for Montana, North Dakota and Portions of South Dakota.

2005 Travel Rule

The *2005 Travel Rule* was issued because the older regulations allowed, restricted, or prohibited motor vehicle travel when those uses were less widely available, less powerful, and less capable of cross-country travel than today's models. The growing popularity and capabilities of OHVs drove the decision to develop new regulations, so that the Forest Service (FS) can continue to provide these opportunities while sustaining the health of the National Forest System (NFS) lands and resources.

SIR - Scope

To keep this due process focused and on schedule (Travel management, Schedule for Implementation; November 2, 2005, Dale Bosworth), this SIR includes only the existing Forest routes on NFS lands within the *NBelts 2005* decision area on both the Townsend and Helena Ranger Districts on the Helena National Forest and is limited to motor vehicle use from May 15 to December 1. The winter motorized use is not evaluated in the context of this SIR.

An interdisciplinary review was used to help the responsible official determine if there were any substantive or significant differences in the *2005 Travel Rule* as it relates specifically to the summer motorized use within the area of the *NBelts 2005*.

Evaluation of Considered Travel Plan Elements

In this evaluation the key area for comparing consistency lies within 36 CFR 212.51 as revised by the *2005 Travel Rule*. The elements to be evaluated are designation, emergency and other administrative use, time of year or seasonal closure, and motor vehicle access to dispersed camping, and for game retrieval. The following table compares that language.

Key Travel Elements

Element/Document	NBelts 2005	2005 Travel Rule
Designation/Restrictions	This decision identified a system of roads, trails, and trailheads for the project area into the future. Cross-country use is restricted with exceptions. See page 2 of the <i>NBelts ROD</i> under the subheading of 'Need'.	The 2005 Travel Rule directs the designation of motorized, open roads, trails, and areas. All other areas beyond designation are prohibited from motorized use; with exceptions. See 36 CFR 212.51 (a).
Emergency and other Administrative Use	This decision does allow access for forest management, administrative uses and for private landowners within the Forest Boundary. See page 2 <i>NBelts ROD</i> .	Under 36 CFR 212.51 (a) uses are exempted from designations include...(4) limited admin. use by the FS, (5) Use of any fire, military, emergency, or law enforcement vehicle for emergency purposes...
Seasonal Closures	Seasonal closures were an intricate part of this decision. See page 11 of the <i>NBelts ROD</i> under 'Travel Map Complexity' and pages 17 & 18 under 'Route Management and Closure Considerations'. Simplify current closure complexity was one of this decision's 'needs' See page 2 of the <i>NBelts ROD</i> .	Closure dates are not specifically delineated in the <i>2005 Travel Rule</i> primarily due to the varying needs for effective closures specific to each Forest. It does leave the flexibility for the responsible official to apply closures by time of year where appropriately needed.
Dispersed Campsite Access	Wheeled motorized vehicle travel for parking or camping is allowed within 300 feet of designated system routes, including roads and trails (unless signed otherwise) as long as: 1) No new permanent routes are created by this activity, 2) No adverse damage to existing vegetation, soil, or water resource occurs, 3) Travel off-route does not cross streams, and 4) Travel off-route does not traverse riparian or wet areas. See p. 7 of the <i>NBelts ROD</i> for examples.	"Agency may include in the designation the limited use of motor vehicles within a specified distance of certain designated routes, and if appropriate within specified time periods, solely for the purposes of dispersed camping..." See 36 CFR 212.51 (b).
Game Retrieval	This decision allows for three additional motorized routes during hunting season as a compromise to game retrieval. The decision did not allow for motorized retrieval off designated open routes... See page 14 of <i>NBelts ROD</i> .	In the same context of dispersed camping (above) it continues with "...or retrieval of a downed big game animal by an individual who has legally taken that animal." The key point is that an agency MAY include retrieval in the designation.

Travel Element Conclusions

DESIGNATION/RESTRICTIONS:

In respect to designation of motor vehicle use, both the *NBelt 2005* and the *2005 Travel Rule* complement each other in that they include the need for identification of open, motor vehicle routes. OHVs must stay on these routes to be in compliance. Therefore, this element does not have a substantial or significant change between the *NBelt 2005* or the *2005 Travel Rule*.

EMERGENCY AND OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE USE:

The *NBelts 2005* addresses other forest management and administrative needs and defers to language in 36 CFR 212 while the *2005 Travel Rule* under 36 CFR 212.51 (a) exempts restrictive language for emergency and administrative uses. The responsible official has the authority in all situations to respond to public and resource needs but must be cautious in its application. Therefore, these applications do not have a substantial or significant change.

SEASONAL CLOSURE:

The *NBelts 2005* specifically addressed a ‘need’ for a less complex travel plan that is easier to understand and to enforce as well as having clearer signing and displaying more obvious identification of road and trail access portals (*NBelts ROD, p. 2*). Seasonal closures were discussed on page 11 of the *NBelts ROD* under ‘Travel Map Complexity’. The *2005 Travel Rule* leaves flexibility to the responsible official to ensure that the use of OHVs on public lands will be controlled and directed so as to protect the resources of those lands but does not suggest any particular dates for potential seasonal closures. The *NBelts 2005* did evaluate and provides that specific seasonal evaluation and therefore does not have a substantial or significant change to that of the *2005 Travel Rule*.

DISPERSED CAMPSITE ACCESS:

The decision to allow access to dispersed camp sites within 300 feet of an open motorized route and the clarifying descriptions as outlined on page 7 of the *NBelts 2005* does complement and meet the direction from the *2005 Travel Rule*. The *2005 Travel Rule* leaves the discretion up to the responsible official within a specified distance but to use sparingly. Therefore, the *2005 Travel Rule* does not have a substantive or significant change to this element and is indeed more flexible to allow for better site-specific needs that the responsible official can apply. The *NBelts 2005* does meet and gives site-specificity as intended by the *2005 Travel Rule*.

GAME RETRIEVAL:

The *NBelts 2005* does meet the intent as directed from the *2005 Travel Rule* in that access is up to the responsible official on what they need to do or not to do regarding game retrieval. The added specificity that opened three additional routes during hunting season in lieu of permitting off route retrieval off designated routes within the *NBelts* area meets *2005 Travel Rule* direction, therefore does not have a substantive or significant change; mainly due to the *Travel Rule* flexibility for the responsible official to use.

2005 Travel Rule Monitoring

The responsible official shall monitor the effects of motor vehicle use on designated roads and trails and in designated areas under the jurisdiction of that responsible official, consistent with the Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the Helena National Forest, as appropriate and feasible.

This process will use an adaptive management approach, supported by monitoring, as an ongoing part of travel management. Revisions to designated roads, trails, and areas as well as motor vehicle use for dispersed camping will be applied as needed to meet

changing conditions or needs. These revisions shall be made in accordance with the requirements for public involvement (212.52), coordinated with other governmental entities (212.53), and using the criteria for designation (212.55). These changes shall be reflected on the MVUM made available to the public at the Forest Supervisor's Office and appropriate Ranger Districts as well as the Forest website.

Summary of Conclusions

In context to motorized use of the existing Forest transportation system, the key elements of this evaluation were:

- Designation/Restrictions,
- Emergency and other Administrative Use,
- Seasonal Closure,
- Dispersed Campsite Access, and
- Game Retrieval.

The intent for both the *NBelts 2005* and the *2005 Travel Rule* is to continue providing opportunities for OHV use in a manner that minimizes resource impacts and conflict among uses in regard to the increasing popularity of OHVs. Specifically in regard to the above elements, the *NBelts 2005* and the *2005 Travel Rule* are very similar in nature and direction and do not present a substantive or significant difference.

Submitted and Reviewed by:

Steve Wyatt – Special Uses

Michael Cole – Townsend District Ranger

Denise Pengeroth – Wildlife

Dwight Chambers – Appeals/Litigation

Charlie McKenna – Engineer

Dave Payne – Recreation Planner

Beth Ihle – North Belts Travel Team Leader/Zone Mineral Program

Jan FauntLeRoy – Forest NEPA/FOIA Coordinator

Decision

Upon reviewing the information presented in this evaluation regarding the *NBelts 2005* and the *2005 Travel Rule*, I find that there are neither substantial or significant differences as to designation/restrictions, emergency and other administrative use, seasonal closures, dispersed campsite access, and game retrieval. I believe the needs outlined in the *NBelts 2005* would continue to be improved and protected as directed from the *2005 Travel Rule*.

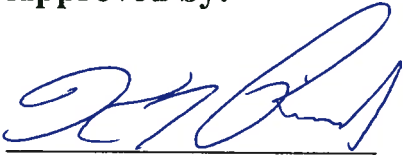
Furthermore, through the monitoring expectation as described above, I believe with the ongoing coordination and cooperation with the interested publics and other government entities, as practical, that the MVUM required by the *2005 Travel Rule* will meet the needs of the area's resources, public uses, and Forest administration.

An adaptive management approach based on monitoring and continued public input will be used in making appropriate changes to the MVUM. Route designations will be monitored for effectiveness and the MVUM will be revised as necessary. Minor modification such as incorrect road location will be made administratively. Temporary

closures such as spring break-up or unacceptable resource damage will still be implemented as needed using Prohibitions at 36 CFR 261.

In respect to the evidence presented in this evaluation, I conclude that a correction, supplement, or revised FEIS for the *NBelts 2005* is not needed. The intent of the *2005 Travel Rule* is being met.

Approved by:



KEVIN T. RIORDAN
Forest Supervisor
Helena National Forest

DATE: February 1, 2008