



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Coronado National Forest
Santa Catalina Ranger District

5700 N. Sabino Canyon Road
Tucson, Arizona 85750
Phone (520) 749-8700
FAX (520) 749-7723

File Code: 1950/7700
Date: May 1, 2012

SCOPING NOTICE

PROPOSED CHANGES TO MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM SANTA CATALINA RANGER DISTRICT

Dear Friends and Neighbors of the Coronado National Forest:

I am writing today to make you aware of proposed changes to the motorized transportation system on the Santa Catalina Ranger District (District) in Pima, Pinal, and Cochise counties, Arizona (see enclosed map, Figure 1). The system that is currently in place evolved over the past 25 years according to direction in the Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan; 1986, as amended).

We are currently conducting a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review of a proposal to make specific changes to the system. The first step of the process is “scoping”, during which we ask the public to help us identify issues, concerns and reasonable alternatives to the proposed action.

In March 2009, I advised you of an earlier proposal for changes to the system in a Scoping Notice. Your comments were received, analyses were conducted, and a pre-decisional Environmental Assessment (EA) was released for public comment in August 2010. As we reviewed the comments on the EA, we realized that our proposed action needed refinement. Hence, our proposed action has changed, and this Scoping Notice shares those changes with you. I am again asking for your comments on our latest proposal. Information on how you can comment or obtain further information is provided at the end of this notice.

I want to emphasize that this specific NEPA review will focus *only* on proposed changes to the transportation system that is already in place on the District. It will not disclose the impacts of past, present, or future actions related to all roads that comprise the current system. Instead, the NEPA impacts analysis will evaluate potential effects from proposed changes to specific roads listed in Table 2 at the end of this notice. The overall net increase in miles of roads on the District, if the proposed action is approved, would be 17.57 miles. Motor vehicle use off the designated system would be prohibited, except as identified on a revised Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM). Additional details about the changes are provided below.

The proposed changes on the Santa Catalina District are responsive to the findings reported in a Transportation Analysis Plan¹ (TAP; August, 2009), which documents the adequacy of the

¹ The Transportation Analysis Plan is an integrated approach to transportation planning that evaluates both authorized open National Forest System Roads (NFSR) as well as unauthorized roads. The TAP is not a NEPA document; it is intended to complement or support, rather than replace or preempt NEPA reviews and decisions. The Santa Catalina TAP is available at the District Office.

current District motorized transportation system to meet Forest administrative and user needs and the need for new or enhanced protection of natural resources and cultural resources. The purpose of the proposal is to comply with the requirements of Subpart B of 36 CFR 212, Travel Management, regarding the designation of roads, trails and areas for motor vehicle use on National Forests and Grasslands.

Types of changes that may be made to a Forest or Grassland transportation system include the following:

- (1) Adding specific unauthorized roads² to the National Forest System (NFS) roads database (INFRA), thereby, legitimizing their use as part of the District motorized transportation system;
- (2) Removing NFS roads from INFRA (i.e., decommissioning) as identified in the TAP;
- (3) Adding specific NFS roads to INFRA as identified in the TAP;
- (4) Closing or otherwise obliterating unauthorized roads by the use of signing, physical barriers and other methods that deny access for motorized use;
- (5) Revising designated uses, seasonal closures, and/or maintenance levels (MLs) assigned to NFS roads (e.g., from “open to the public” to “restricted to administrative or permitted use only”);
- (6) Adding or removing motorized and non-motorized trails; and/or
- (7) Designating roads or removing corridors where motorized travel would be allowed within 300 feet of certain designated routes for the sole purpose of dispersed camping.

The following sections provide you with information about transportation management on the Forest and District; Travel Management legislation; the project location; Forest Plan transportation management direction; and details of the proposed action.

BACKGROUND

Travel Management Rule

Visitors to National Forests and Grasslands share a common interest in the enjoyment of outdoor recreation in a natural setting. The Forest Service currently manages more than 300,000 miles of roads and 35,000 miles of trails nationwide to provide visitors with motorized access to recreational amenities, motorized access to those who use NFS lands under special authorizations, such as grazing or operation and maintenance of communication sites; and administrative access to agencies for fire and land management activities.

Until recently, accessibility to National Forests and Grasslands and their amenities was the primary reason for motor vehicle use. However, in the past few decades, recreational use of off-highway vehicles (OHVs) has become another popular reason for motorized travel on NFS lands.

² An unauthorized road, as defined in 36 CFR 212, is “a road that is not a Forest road or a temporary road and that is not included in a Forest transportation atlas”. These are not designated NFSRs and are not maintained. Motor vehicle operators on these roads and trails are subject to citation.

In 2004, more than 11 million people used OHVs on National Forests and Grasslands³, more than double their estimated use in 1972.

Given the dramatic increase in OHV use on Federal lands, it is obvious that there is a need to protect natural resources from damage by motorized vehicles. Forest Service motorized travel regulations issued before the increase in OHV use and advances in OHV technology no longer offer effective controls. To address outdated guidelines, in 2005 the Forest Service published final travel management regulations (Travel Management Rule or TMR; *Federal Register* Vol. 70, No. 216; Nov. 9, 2005, pages 68264 through 68291).

The TMR clarifies current Forest Service policy regarding motor-vehicle use and provides management direction that allows sustainable access by motor vehicles, including OHVs, on National Forests and Grasslands. It requires that each National Forest and Grassland designate roads, trails, and areas that are open to motor vehicle use by class of vehicle and, if appropriate, by time of year. It prohibits the use of motor vehicles on NFS lands not designated for motorized travel. The TMR requires that motorized transportation systems on National Forests and Grasslands be documented in a MVUM that is made available to the public free of charge and updated annually.

Until the TMR was enacted, cross-country (i.e., off-road) motorized travel was permitted on many National Forests. However, cross-country motorized travel has been restricted on the Coronado since 1986 by direction in the Forest Plan. One exception is the Forest Plan provides for off-road vehicle travel up to 300 feet on both sides of designated roads for the purpose of parking or dispersed camping. Despite this restriction, past and continuing motor vehicle use off of designated roads in some areas of the Coronado has resulted in significant resource damage and created many unauthorized roads. The TMR prohibits continued use of unauthorized roads unless they are added to the NFS roads database.

Some Forest Service units, such as the Coronado, had an established motorized transportation system prior to enactment of the TMR. These units are not required by the TMR to change their existing system. Furthermore, previous travel management decisions are considered in the TMR as having been incorporated into each designated system without additional or retroactive transportation analysis and NEPA review.

Because the Santa Catalina District already had a motorized transportation system in place before the TMR was codified, a NEPA review of the original system was not required prior to our first MVUM being issued in May 2011. However, when the District proposes to add or remove NFS roads to/from its motorized transportation system, change use designations, and other related travel management actions decisions that will affect the content of the MVUM, a NEPA compliance review must be completed (36 CFR Subpart B §212.52).

PROJECT LOCATION

The Santa Catalina Ranger District is located in southeastern Arizona. Nearby communities include Tucson, Oro Valley, Catalina, Oracle, Vail, Summerhaven, and Benson. The District

³ http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/ohv/ohv_use.pdf

covers approximately 265,146 acres in one Ecosystem Management Area (EMA)⁴: the Santa Catalina EMA (see Figure 1). The total District acreage includes both the Santa Catalina and the Rincon Mountains.

FOREST PLAN DIRECTION

The Santa Catalina District motorized transportation system currently depicted on a MVUM illustrates the established system as it has evolved over the past 25 years, in accordance with direction in the 1986 Coronado Forest Plan. It includes the following classifications:

Roads Open to Highway-Legal Vehicles Only: These are roads open only to motor vehicles licensed under state law for general operation on all public roads.

Roads Open to All Vehicles: These roads are open to all motor vehicles; including smaller off-highway vehicles that may not be licensed for highway use (but not to oversized or overweight vehicles under state traffic law).

Seasonal Designations: These apply to roads or trails that are open only during certain months of the year.

Dispersed Camping: Cross-country (off-road) motor vehicle travel is allowed within a specific distance from a road for the sole purpose of dispersed camping.

The Coronado Forest Plan was amended in August 2010 to incorporate TMR direction prohibiting motorized vehicle use off the Forest's designated motorized transportation system. Amendment direction is as follows:

Motor vehicle use off the designated system of roads, trails, and areas is prohibited, except as identified on a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM).

If a decision is made to approve all or part of the proposed action described below, the MVUM will be updated to reflect the resulting designated system of roads and trails available for motorized use.

As directed in the TMR, motor vehicle use in areas off the system depicted on the MVUM is prohibited, with exemptions for the following vehicles and/or uses: 1) aircraft; 2) watercraft; 3) over-snow vehicles; 4) limited administrative use by the Forest Service; 5) use of any fire, military, emergency, or law enforcement vehicle for emergency purposes; 6) authorized use of any combat or combat support vehicle for national defense purposes; 7) law enforcement response to violations of law, including pursuit; and 8) motor vehicle use that is specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulations.

As mentioned earlier, the TMR directs that "the responsible official may incorporate previous administrative decisions regarding travel management made under other authorities, including designations and prohibitions related to motor vehicle use, in designating NFS roads and trails" [36 CFR 212.50 (b)]. Alternatively, responsible officials may choose to reconsider past decisions, with public involvement, as necessary to achieve the purposes of the final rule (70 FR 68269). This means that all roads, trails, and areas that have been designated in the past for

⁴ An EMA is defined as a unique geographic area among the mountain ranges that comprise the Coronado. The Forest Plan has designated specific uses, goals and objectives for management of each EMA and standards and guidelines for conserving resources within each. This approach to natural resource management is intended to sustain ecosystems to meet both ecological and human needs in the future.

motor vehicle use do not have to be reevaluated in the current NEPA review of the proposed action described in this notice. Consequently, our NEPA review will evaluate the potential effects of only those proposed changes to the system that are needed to accommodate administrative and user needs, including resource protection, not any past actions regarding motorized travel.

PROPOSED ACTION

The components of the proposed action are summarized in the attached Table 1. Proposed changes by individual road are listed in Table 2 (attached, along with a glossary of terms). Maps showing the proposed changes are available for public review at the District Office in Sabino Canyon (see address below), at the Forest Supervisor's Office in Tucson (300 West Congress Street), and on the Forest's public website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/coronado>.

The future motorized transportation system on the Santa Catalina District would incorporate the following proposed changes, which, if approved, would appear on the next MVUM:

- 1. Add 5.78 miles of unauthorized roads (i.e., non-NFSRs) to INFRA and designate them as "open to all vehicles (ML 2 through ML 5)".** In general, these roads are needed to provide access for hunting, camping, hiking, OHV travel and other public uses. An NFSR identification number would be assigned to each newly designated road, and they would be classified as ML 2 roads⁵.
- 2. Change the designation of 12.23 miles of NFSRs that are currently "open to all vehicles" to "restricted to administrative or permitted use only".**
- 3. Add 9.79 miles of unauthorized roads to INFRA and designate them as "restricted to administrative or permitted use only".**
- 4. Decommission 0.83 miles of NFSRs that are currently "open to all vehicles (ML 2 through ML 5)".** Motorized access would be physically blocked (e.g., bollards, boulders, berms) and, if necessary, the road prism(s) would be restored to natural conditions to impede motorized use. Their NFSR identification numbers would be removed from INFRA.
- 5. Change the designation of 1.18 miles of NFSRs from "open to all vehicles (ML 2 through ML 5)" to "closed to all motor vehicles (ML 1)".**
- 6. Construct 3.33 miles of new road and add to INFRA and designate them as "open to all vehicles (ML 2).**
- 7. Decommission 14.37 miles of unauthorized roads (i.e. non-NFSR).**

⁵ In general, ML 2 roads are those suitable for high-clearance vehicles and not suitable for passenger vehicles, such as sedans.

8. Eliminate the 300-foot off-road travel corridor along a total of 25.32 miles of NFSRs.

These include all or part of the following NFSRs: 1, 1A, 1B, 1C, 5, 7, 9, 9A through 9H, 10, 11, 12, 14, 19, 21, 35, 607, 625, 750, 807, 4307. Also, the 300-ft camping corridor will be eliminated from a portion of 4408 beginning 0.1 mile north of the private boundary to the end of the road. Incidental parking up to a car-width or up to 30 ft. off these roads would continue to be permissible.

These changes would result in an overall net increase of **17.57** miles of NFSRs (ML 1 through ML 5 and restricted) to the Santa Catalina Ranger District motorized transportation system. If the proposed action is approved, the system would comprise **247.16** miles of NFSRs “open to all vehicles” (ML 2-ML 5); **21.98** miles of closed NFSRs (ML 1); **32.56** miles of NFSRs “restricted to administrative or permitted use only. Motor vehicle use off the designated system would be prohibited, except as identified on the MVUM.

Management of roads, trails and areas that are within the Forest boundary but not considered to be NFS land is not a component of the proposed action. The presence of these roads, trails, and areas and any proposed changes to them by other entities will be included in the cumulative impacts analysis of the NEPA review. Private landowners and other agencies have been and will continue to be consulted with during future transportation management planning. Non-motorized recreation activities (e.g., hiking, horseback riding) are also not part of the proposed actions, but will be considered during cumulative impacts analysis. In accordance with the TMR, past management decisions related to motorized travel on the District do not require additional NEPA review.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Since 2006, the Forest’s travel management planning process has included many opportunities for public involvement. Four open-house meetings were held to advise the public in Tucson, Safford, Sierra Vista, and Douglas about the process, providing an opportunity for folks to view maps showing existing motorized-use and to solicit input regarding unique recreation opportunities, specific vehicle-class opportunities, access to significant-use locations, dispersed camping opportunities, and environmental and/or safety concerns related to specific roads. Also, the Forest Supervisor informed 12 Native American tribes in writing about the travel management planning process and advised them of their opportunity to comment [letter dated May 18, 2007, from (former) Forest Supervisor Jeanine Derby].

Many public meetings have been held to date as an element of the Forest plan revision process. Travel management was discussed at these meetings, and public input received in regard to travel management was considered in the development of the proposed action. As mentioned earlier, a Scoping Notice was issued for public comment in March 2009; however, details of the proposed action have changed over time.

Distribution of this revised Scoping Notice is the next step of public involvement in the NEPA process. Comments received during scoping will be reviewed and used by Forest resource specialists to analyze project effects, and as necessary, to develop mitigation measures, issues and alternatives. Recent opportunities for public involvement have included a collaborative process to develop alternatives to the proposed action and directed by the U.S. Institute for Conflict Resolution. The objective of the collaborative process is to reach consensus on changes

to the designated road system and, if necessary, to develop an alternative to our proposed action. Future opportunities for public comment will be offered with the release of the pre-decisional EA and afterward, when a decision is signed.

OPPORTUNITY TO COMMENT

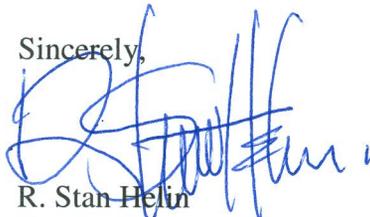
The Forest Service values public input as part of its NEPA process. You are encouraged to submit comments regarding the proposed action and the scope of the NEPA analysis of this project, including those related to alternatives and issues to be addressed⁶. To receive full consideration and to best assist the Forest Service in this NEPA review, your comments should be submitted within 90 days from receipt of this notice. However, public comments about the project may not be considered by the Forest until a revised pre-decisional EA is released for public comment in accordance with regulations at 36 CFR 215.

Written comments may be sent by U.S. mail to Mr. Joshua Taiz, Travel Management Project Leader, Santa Catalina Ranger District, 5700 N. Sabino Canyon Rd., Tucson, AZ 85750; by facsimile to "ATTN: Santa Catalina Travel Management NEPA" at (520) 749-7723; and by electronic mail (email) to comments-southwestern-coronado@fs.fed.us with "Santa Catalina Travel Management NEPA" in the subject line. Email comments may be sent in the body of the message, in rich text format (.rtf) or in Microsoft Word format (.doc or .docx). Comments may also be submitted to http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=36561 by selecting "Comment on Project" in the blue "Get Connected" box. This site also offers you to elect to receive electronic updates about this project by selecting the "Subscribe to Email Updates" link.

Please direct telephone comments to Mr. Joshua Taiz at (520) 749-7703 during regular business hours, which are 7:30 a.m. through 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding Federal holidays. You may also provide in-person comments to me or my staff at the District Office.

Questions about the NEPA process may be directed to Ms. Andrea W. Campbell, Forest NEPA Coordinator, at (520) 388-8352.

Sincerely,



R. Stan Helin
District Ranger

⁶ Comments and personally identifying information associated with them, such as names and addresses, become part of the administrative record of this NEPA review. They may be made available to a third-party upon request under the authority of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). If you do not want personal information to be released in response to a FOIA request, you may choose not to include it with your comments. Or, you may request an exemption from FOIA with your comment submittal. Should you choose the latter, you will be informed by the Forest Service whether or not your request qualifies for an exemption. If it does not, you will be offered an opportunity to resubmit your comments without personal information or to withhold them.

Coronado National Forest

Santa Catalina, Douglas, Nogales,
Safford, and Sierra Vista Ranger Districts

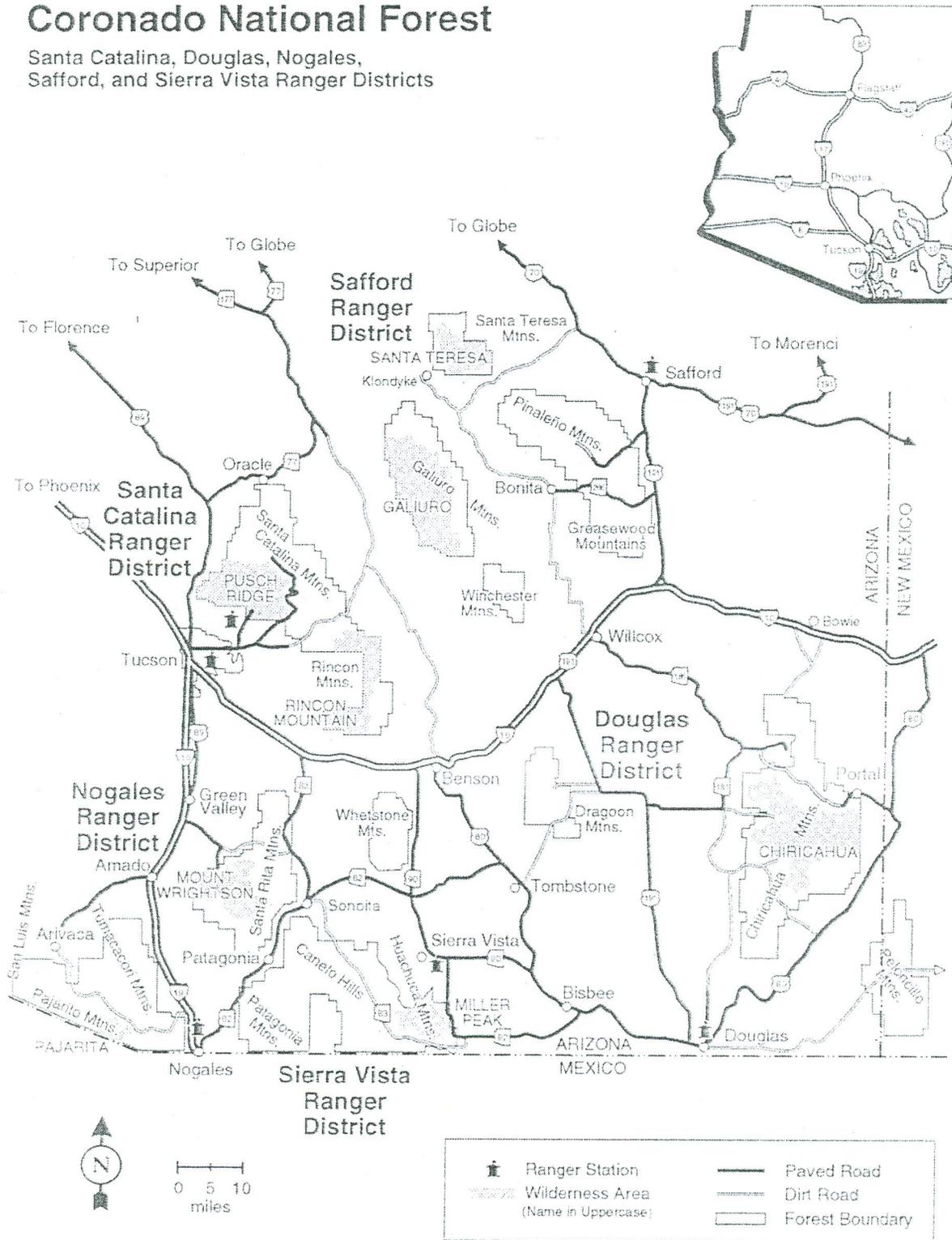


FIGURE 1. Location of Santa Catalina Ranger District, Coronado National Forest.