

DECISION MEMO

AMENDMENT TO THE MANTI-LA SAL NATIONAL FOREST
LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

CONCERNING

ALLOWED USE OF NATIONAL RECREATION TRAILS
ON THE PRICE RANGER DISTRICT

Manti-La Sal National Forest
Ferron/Price Ranger District

Location of Proposed Action

Two National Recreation Trails (NRT's) are designated on the Manti-La Sal National Forest. Both are located on lands administered by the Ferron/Price Ranger District. The Forks of Huntington NRT is located in T15S, R6E and R7E, Salt Lake Meridian in Emery County, Utah. The Fish Creek NRT is located in T11S and T12S, R5E and R6E, Carbon, Sanpete, and Utah Counties, Utah.

Decision to be Implemented

It is my decision to amend the Manti-La Sal Land and Resource Management Plan and amend the Forest Travel Plan to allow mechanized use, including bicycles or game carts, of the Fish Creek NRT; foot and horseback travel will continue to be authorized. All forms of motorized use will continue to be prohibited yearlong. The Forks of Huntington NRT will continue to be closed to all motorized and mechanized use; including bicycles and game carts. Both semi-primitive recreation use areas which contain these two NRT's will continue to be closed yearlong to all motorized use.

This decision is based on the following rationale:

- * Both NRT's continue to represent outstanding trail opportunities of the Forest Development Trail System.
- * Both NRT's are reasonably accessible from nearby population centers.
- * The Forks of Huntington NRT cannot be accessed by connecting trails at any point along its length other than at its current termini.
- * C Canyon Ridge, Johnson Ridge, and Silver Creek provide access to the Fish Creek NRT and are open to bicycle use under the current Forest Travel Plan.

* Topographic relief inherent to this area of the Wasatch Plateau presents a historic and ongoing challenge to trail construction and maintenance. Most non-motorized trails constructed in this area of the Ferron/Price Ranger District climb steep grades, pass through rock ledges and contour around steep cliffs. These beautiful natural features effectively limit their use to foot and horseback travel, providing a more "primitive" recreation experience, even though they are technically "open" to bicycle use under the Forest Travel Plan.

* The Fish Creek NRT is a notable exception to this construction challenge. This ten-mile trail climbs only 1108 feet between its termini on North Skyline Drive and Fish Creek Trailhead west of Scofield Reservoir. Trail grades are generally 5 percent or less. Sight distances are generally 1/4 mile or greater. Trail bridges have been constructed to provide easy access where the trail crosses the drainage and to minimize impact to riparian vegetation.

* Fourteen other non-motorized, single-track trails comprising 50 miles are "open" to foot, horseback, and bicycle use under the Forest Travel Plan in this area of the Ferron/Price Ranger District. Only 3 of these trails (15 miles) can be effectively traveled by bicycle users.

* Allowing bicycle use of the Fish Creek NRT is consistent with Forest Service Manual policy direction to diversify trail opportunities (FSM 2303.03). Bicyclists, hikers, and horseback riders will be provided with a quality recreation experience. Each of these modes of travel can be cumulatively accommodated within the capabilities of the land.

* The Forks of Huntington NRT has trail sections with restrictive sight distances, steep side slopes and intersecting seeps and springs. Angler use of this trail to access fishing areas along the Left Fork drainage is high. Public needs and land management objectives would not be met by adding bicyclists to the recreational mix.

* The Forks of Huntington NRT is currently being planned for a two-mile extension to the Miller Flat Road (Forest Development Road 50014). Completion of this project will provide unrestricted public access to the western terminus of this trail and enhance the outstanding foot, horseback and fishing experience already present.

The following monitoring measures would be implemented with this decision:

- * Forest Service recreation managers and technicians would monitor use of the Fish Creek NRT to determine the overall mix of trail users and to recognize and mitigate possible trail conflicts. They would also determine if use is occurring within the capabilities of the land and recommend adjustments to the trail network as necessary.

Appropriate corrective actions would be taken to mitigate identified user conflicts or unacceptable resource damage. Corrective actions could even include revisiting this decision.

Reasons for Categorically Excluding This Action

I have decided that this action can be categorically excluded from documentation in an Environmental Impact Statement or Environmental Assessment for the following reasons:

- * Amending the Forest Plan and Forest Travel Plan to allow mechanized use of the Fish Creek NRT is an action which does not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment as described in the Revised Policy and Procedures for Implementing the National Environmental Policy Act and Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15.
- * This action falls within FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30, section 31.2, category 3. Category 3 allows approval, modification, or continuation of minor special uses of National Forest System lands that require less than five contiguous acres of land. Use of the Fish Creek NRT will be modified, with no proposed change in the physical environment of the facilities involved.
- * Amending the Forest Plan and Forest Travel Plan to allow mechanized use of the Fish Creek NRT is a non-significant decision as described under 36 CFR 217.4.
- * This action is consistent with objectives for the Forest Development Trail System as specified in FSM 2353.02, effective July 8, 1994. Specifically, this action will (1) provide a trail-related recreation opportunity that serves public needs and meets land management and recreation policy objectives; and (2) provide a trail recreation opportunity emphasizing the natural setting of the National Forest consistent with land capability.
- * As required by Section 30.5 in the Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook; no extraordinary circumstances were identified by the Forest Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) during scoping as potentially having effects which may significantly affect the environment.

Public Involvement

Public participation was solicited for this proposal as required by NEPA. Letters describing and refining this proposed action were mailed in March and June, 1993. A final scoping letter was mailed in December 1994 to all those previously responding. A total of 33 responses were received during the comment periods.

Comments can be summarized as 51 percent in favor of allowing bicycle use of both NRT's, 40 percent opposed to bicycle use of either trail and 9 percent with a mixture of opinions or non-committal.

This proposed action has also been included on the Forest's quarterly schedule of proposed actions which is mailed to approximately 130 individuals and organizations. The project file contains the names and addresses of those contacted during the scoping periods.

Findings Required by Other Laws

This decision has been developed in compliance with NEPA provisions as required under 40 CFR 1500.

Implementation Date

A summary of this decision will appear as a legal notice in the Sun Advocate (Price, Utah) newspaper in April, 1995. Copies of this Decision Memo will be mailed to those who expressed interest in this proposed action by participating in the scoping process. It is my intention to implement this decision in June, 1995.

Appeal Opportunities

This decision is not subject to appeal under 36 CFR 215 as it falls within a category of actions excluded from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. It is also not subject to appeal under 36 CFR 217 as it constitutes a non-significant amendment to the Forest Plan.

Contact Person

For additional information concerning my decision or the Forest Service appeal process, please contact Ranger Jankiewicz or myself at the Price Ranger District Office, or Forest Supervisor's Headquarters, 599 West Price River Drive, Price, Utah 84501, or by telephone at 801-637-2817.



AARON HOWE
ACTING FOREST SUPERVISOR
MANTI-LA SAL NATIONAL FOREST

MARCH 31, 1995

Date