

Draft TM SEIS – Questions and Answers

Why are you analyzing these 42 routes?

In 2008 the Forest Service designated a system of roads and trails for public wheeled motorized vehicle travel. Parts of the Forest Supervisor's decision were litigated in Eastern District Court of California. In 2011, the Judge found that 42 routes appeared to cross meadows had not been analyzed in light of one standard and guideline in the Eldorado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP). Because of that error, the designation for that portion of the routes that crossed meadows had to be withdrawn until they were analyzed for this standard and guideline.

More specifically, the court directed the FS to reconsider the 2008 decision regarding the meadow crossings on the 42 routes in relation to following Standard and Guideline

“Maintain and restore the hydrologic connectivity of ... meadows by identifying roads and trails that intercept, divert, or disrupt natural surface and subsurface water flow paths. Implement corrective actions where necessary to restore connectivity.”

What is NEPA?

NEPA is short for the National Environmental Policy Act of 1972. It is the process for analyzing proposed ground disturbing activities on Federal lands.

What is a Supplemental EIS?

A supplemental EIS is a document that supplements the original environmental analysis with new information or additional analysis. This Travel Management SEIS is more narrowly focused than the 2008 EIS. This analysis only looks at the sections of the 42 routes that cross meadows that were identified in the Federal Court Order.

What's so urgent? Why are you conducting this Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement now?

We realize that these are very popular public motorized vehicle travel routes and that their closure has an immediate impact on people's ability to enjoy their national forest.

What is the decision making process and timeline?

The Forest Service started the Supplemental EIS in early October, 2012 by releasing a proposed action. Based on the information and ideas learned during scoping from October through December, alternatives to the Forest Supervisor's proposal were developed and an environmental analysis of the proposed action and the alternatives has been conducted. We are releasing the Draft SEIS in February and looking for comments from the public. We are holding public open houses on February 26, March 5 and March 6, 2013. The public comment period ends 45 day following publication of the Notice of availability in the Federal Register. The Forest Supervisor will consider the public comments received and make a final decision.

The Forest's website will be updated with information about upcoming meetings, and other opportunities to get involved including how to have your name added to the email list to receive notifications.

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/eldorado>

Who will decide if a route is reopened or not?

The Eldorado National Forest Supervisor will make the decision.

Do you realize how important these routes are to motorized recreationist?

The Forest Service learned through public involvement for the 2008 Travel Management Plan that the routes involved in this analysis are very important to motorized recreationists. As a result, they were included in the Forest's designated travel system. The court, however, determined that we failed to analyze the routes in light of the Eldorado National Forest Plan and SNFPA standard and guideline 100 as it relates to meadows. The Forest Supervisor will keep in mind the information gained through public involvement in the 2008 travel management planning process as she frames up her new decision.

Do you realize how important meadows are to the ecosystem?

Yes. They are special places and very important to the watershed and for wildlife habitats. The SEIS is very narrowly focused and analyzes what the judge found was missing in our original environmental analysis.

Can she decide to keep a route open that crosses a meadow?

Yes. However, the Forest Supervisor needs to consider the effects of damage to meadows with the objective of minimizing those effects. Fixing the sections of trails where they damage meadows is one way of minimizing the impacts.

How does the Forest Supervisor's Proposed Action differ from the decision made in the 2008 Eldorado National Forest Travel Management FEIS Record of Decision?

The proposed action as revised in the draft SEIS differs from the previous decision only in that a portion of one route would not be reopened and that a Forest Plan Amendment would be included for 18 of the routes to exempt them from meeting Standard and Guideline 100.

How does the Proposed Action in the draft SEIS differ from the Proposed Action presented to the public at the beginning of this process in October 2012?

In response to public scoping, there was a change in the proposal for route 14N39, Richardson Lake Road. The proposed action circulated in October 2012 proposed this route for designation up to Richardson Lake with the portion from Richardson Lake to the top of Sourdough Hill closed to public motorized use. Comments were received that stated the main destination was not just Richardson Lake,

but also the view from the top of Sourdough Hill. In the proposed action carried forward into the draft SEIS, the entire length of route 14N39 is proposed to be designated.

Other minor changes were made to the original Proposed Action based on a review of information collected and additional field surveys. Roads 8N35, 9N54 and 10N32 were moved to a category of “No Meadows on National Forest Land” since the meadows are located on private property. Routes 14N05 and 14N58 were moved into a category of “Meadows meeting Standard and Guideline 100”, and routes 9N04 (now trail 17E79) and 11N09A were moved to a category of “No Meadows on National Forest Land”.

Why does the Preferred Alternative differ from the Proposed Action presented in October and in the SEIS?

The Forest Supervisor has considered the information presented in the SEIS, including the environmental effects associated with implementing each of the alternatives and identified Alternative 3 as the Preferred Alternative because it reduces effects on meadows.

How can you designate these routes now when you still haven’t determined what your minimum system needs to be as defined in the Travel Management Rule Subpart A?

A Travel Analysis is used to inform Forest Service decision makers about designating roads, trails and areas for motor vehicle use (36 CFR 212 Subpart B) or for identifying the minimum road system (36 CFR 212 Subpart A). A travel analysis will be completed for the 42 routes involved in the SEIS to help inform the Forest Supervisor regarding designation of these routes. A forest scale travel analysis (then referred to as a Roads Analysis) was completed for the primary transportation routes for the Eldorado National Forest in 2003; however, it only analyzed passenger car forest roads (maintenance level 3, 4 and 5) and did not include roads for high clearance vehicles or closed roads (maintenance level 2 and 1 roads), unauthorized routes or motorized trails. That 2003 Roads Analysis recognized that local roads, such as those being analyzed in this SEIS would be addressed in project-level analyses.

Will this be the end of travel management decisions in the Eldorado National Forest?

No. When the original Travel Management decision was made in 2008, the Forest Supervisor said that once the main system was designated routes could still be added or subtracted as situations change. Over the years some routes have been added and some have been deleted. Also, parking for camping and dispersed recreation has been improved in some areas and a few trailheads have been built for equestrians.

Do you have funds for trail improvements?

The Forest Service’s roads and trails budget has not looked good for years. We’ve found that paying for the environmental analysis for road and trails projects is difficult but that there are external sources of funding for project implementation. Both are scarce, but funds for environmental analysis seem to be the most difficult to obtain.

How are projects prioritized?

The Forest Service is required to conduct an environmental analysis for any ground disturbing action we propose on national forest land. The analysis process requires that we form an interdisciplinary team of specialists to determine the effects of the proposal and alternatives. These folks provide an objective, science based analysis of the effects of implementing the project.

The Forest has begun analyses for repairing certain routes, including Barrett 4WD Trail and Strawberry 4WD Trail. We are interested in hearing from you as to which routes you feel should be prioritized. And these projects need to fit into the mix of other Forest projects, such as prescribed burning and other fuels treatments to reduce fire risks, invasive plant eradication or removal, issuance of road easements, correcting other road problems such as poor culverts, failing bridges, etc., ongoing trail maintenance and repair of winter damage, recreation management and administration of existing permits, etc. Take a look at the schedule of propose action on our website to get a better idea of the work we propose to do each year:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/eldorado/landmanagement/projects> .

Now that you are releasing the draft SEIS, what is your expected timeline?

We hope to have a decision by Summer 2013. Past experience has shown that situations develop that stretch the timeline. We know this decision is important and we will make the decision as soon as possible.

A couple of routes go through private land. How can you designate a route through non-national forest lands?

We can't – unless the private landowner has granted the Forest Service an easement for public use of the road.

Will the routes remain closed until the SEIS is completed?

Yes. The portions of the 42 routes that were closed by a court order will remain closed until the SEIS is completed. The final decision to be made after the public comment period will determine when various routes will be opened. At least some of the routes will likely be opened. Opening of any of the routes will occur after the decision and a new Motor Vehicle Use Map is issued.

Where can I get information about which routes are currently closed?

Each Forest Service office has free motor vehicle use maps that show what is currently open. The map is also posted on the forest website.