No Action Alternative and Proposed Action

National Forest Road System

The current NFS transportation system consists of approximately 450,000 miles of classified roads, including public roads (54,600 miles), private roads (22,400 miles), and forest management roads (381,500 miles) in and adjacent to National Forests. In addition, the Forest Service estimates that there are at least 60,000 miles of unclassified roads, although the number could be substantially higher. The proposed road management strategy would apply only to forest management roads and not to private, state, or local roads that cross National Forest System lands.

Road: A motor vehicle travelway over 50 inches wide, unless classified and managed as a trail. A road may be classified or unclassified.

Classified road: A road within National Forest System lands planned or managed for motor vehicle access such as state, county, private, permitted, and Forest Service roads.

Unclassified road: A road not intended to be part of, and not managed as part of, the National Forest transportation system such as a temporary road, an unplanned road, an off-road vehicle track, and an abandoned travelway.

In general, the Forest Service constructs or reconstructs only classified roads. The agency may construct temporary roads to facilitate activities, including fire suppression, watershed protection, and fish and wildlife enhancement. Such roads are intended to be closed and access eliminated when the particular activity ceases. Other temporary roads may be constructed by forest users, as authorized by the Forest Service, typically with the contractual obligation to obliterate those roads when the use ceases.

Table 1 describes the NFS transportation system by miles in each category, by region.

TABLE 1: Existing National Forest System Roads (in miles)

Existing NFS Roads	National	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R8	R9	R10
Classified roads	450,000	61,430	43,760	50,750	43,520	48,640	102,090	44,159	52,070	3,814
Public (non-system roads)	54,600	6,750	8,050	1,540	4,350	2,790	5,720	8,690	16,500	269
Private (non-system roads)	22,400	5,280	5,410	210	1,670	1,650	2,470	369	5,270	85
Forest development (system roads)	381,500	50,200	31,300	56,000	38,500	43,500	93,900	36,100	28,200	3,600
Unclassified (non-system roads)	60,000	2,160	14,400	3,990	11,700	7,560	4,450	25	15,000	1,160

R1: Region 1 (Northern) includes National Forests in Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota.
R2: Region 2 (Rocky Mountain) includes National Forests in Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota, Kansas, and Nebraska.
R3: Region 3 (Southwestern) includes National Forests in Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Oklahoma.
R4: Region 4 (Intermountain) includes National Forests in Idaho, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming.
R5: Region 5 (Pacific Southwest) includes National Forests in California.
R6: Region 6 (Pacific Northwest) includes National Forests in Washington and Oregon.
R8: Region 8 (Southern) includes National Forests in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia.
R9: Region 9 (Eastern) includes National Forests in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Missouri, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont, and New Hampshire.
R10: Region 10 (Alaska) includes National Forests in Alaska.

Region 7 no longer exists, having been incorporated into Regions 8 and 9 in 1965.
Numbers may not total due to rounding.
To convert miles to kilometers, multiply by 1.609.

Source: *1999 U.S. Forest Service Report to Congress on Maintenance and Improvement Needs.*

No Action Alternative

The existing road system on NFS lands was largely funded and constructed to develop areas for timber harvesting and the development of other resources. The Forest Service Road Policy currently focuses on road development. This program, articulated in 36 CFR Part 212, allocates road development funds based on relative needs of the National Forests, existing transportation facilities, the value of timber or other resources served, relative fire danger, and comparative difficulties of construction (*see* 36 CFR 212.2(c)).

The current road development policy would continue under the no action alternative. As needs dictated and as funds allowed, the Forest Service would decommission unneeded roads, reconstruct substandard roads, and construct new roads in roaded and in inventoried roadless and other unroaded areas to access timber or other resources. These actions are and remain subject to NEPA analysis requirements.

The impacts of the no action alternative are used as a baseline against which the impacts of the proposed action can be measured. For purposes of analysis of the no action alternative (current program), the Forest Service assumes that road decommissioning would follow recent experience. Table 2 identifies the number of miles of forest management roads that were decommissioned in 1996 - 1998.

In addition, this EA assumes that the information regarding planned road reconstruction and construction gathered in preparation of the *Environmental Assessment for the Interim Rule Suspending Road Construction in Unroaded Areas of National Forest System Land* (*Interim Rule EA*) provides a reasonable estimate of the road reconstruction and construction that would occur annually under the no action alternative. Specifically, Alternative 1 in the *Interim Rule EA* represents current management. The number of road miles affected reflects the total amount of estimated classified and temporary road reconstruction and construction on all NFS lands.

Using data from the *Interim Rule EA*, Table 3 describes the miles and types of roads that the Forest Service assumes would be reconstructed and constructed annually under the current program (the no action alternative). Figure 1 graphically depicts the natural resource purposes for planned road reconstruction and construction.

TABLE 2: Number of Miles of Forest Management Roads Decommissioned in 1996 - 1998

	Total	R 1	R 2	R 3	R 4	R 5	R 6	R 8	R 9	R 10
Decommissioned										
Classified										
1998	1,467	366	7	147	94	50	690	103	8	2
1997	1,343	228	41	392	48	25	551	44	11	3
1996	849	207	35	140	60	41	325	32	5	4
Unclassified										
1998	634	110	111	15	178	34	13	82	56	35
1997	444	30	122	78	56	7	42	81	28	0
1996	593	55	197	60	98	61	5	71	45	1
Total										
1998	2,101	476	118	162	272	84	703	185	64	37
1997	1,787	258	163	470	104	32	593	125	39	3
1996	1,442	262	232	200	158	102	330	103	50	5

R1: Region 1 (Northern) includes National Forests in Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota.
R2: Region 2 (Rocky Mountain) includes National Forests in Colorado, Wyoming, South Dakota, Kansas, and Nebraska.
R3: Region 3 (Southwestern) includes National Forests in Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Oklahoma.
R4: Region 4 (Intermountain) includes National Forests in Idaho, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming.
R5: Region 5 (Pacific Southwest) includes National Forests in California.
R6: Region 6 (Pacific Northwest) includes National Forests in Washington and Oregon.
R8: Region 8 (Southern) includes National Forests in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia.
R9: Region 9 (Eastern) includes National Forests in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Missouri, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont, and New Hampshire.
R10: Region 10 (Alaska) includes National Forests in Alaska.

Region 7 no longer exists, having been incorporated into Regions 8 and 9 in 1965.
Numbers may not total due to rounding.
To convert miles to kilometers, multiply by 1.609.

Source: Background data for USDA Report of the Forest Service for Fiscal Years 1996, 1997, and 1998.

TABLE 3: Current Program/No Action Alternative -- Planned Number of Miles and Types of Forest Management Roads Constructed and Reconstructed Annually[a]

	Total	Access/ Public Safety	Fire Suppression	Forest Management	Land Uses	Minerals	Recreation	Watershed	Fish and Wildlife
Reconstructed									
Classified	4,140 (68)	596 (4)	0 (0)	2,436 (31)	225 (5)	61 (7)	249 (3)	527 (7)	46 (11)
Constructed									
Classified	626 (168)	17 (1)	0 (0)	433 (122)	91 (24)	51 (7)	27 (14)	5 (0)	2 (1)
Temporary	1,201 (120)	1 (0)	13 (4)	1,101 (91)	16 (0)	58 (24)	3 (1)	1 (0)	7 (0)
Subtotal – constructed	*1,827* *(288)*	*18* *(1)*	*13* *(4)*	*1,534* *(213)*	*107* *(24)*	*109* *(31)*	*30* *(15)*	*6* *(0)*	*9* *(1)*
Total	5,966 (356)	614 (5)	13 (4)	3,970 (244)	332 (29)	170 (38)	279 (17)	533 (7)	55 (12)

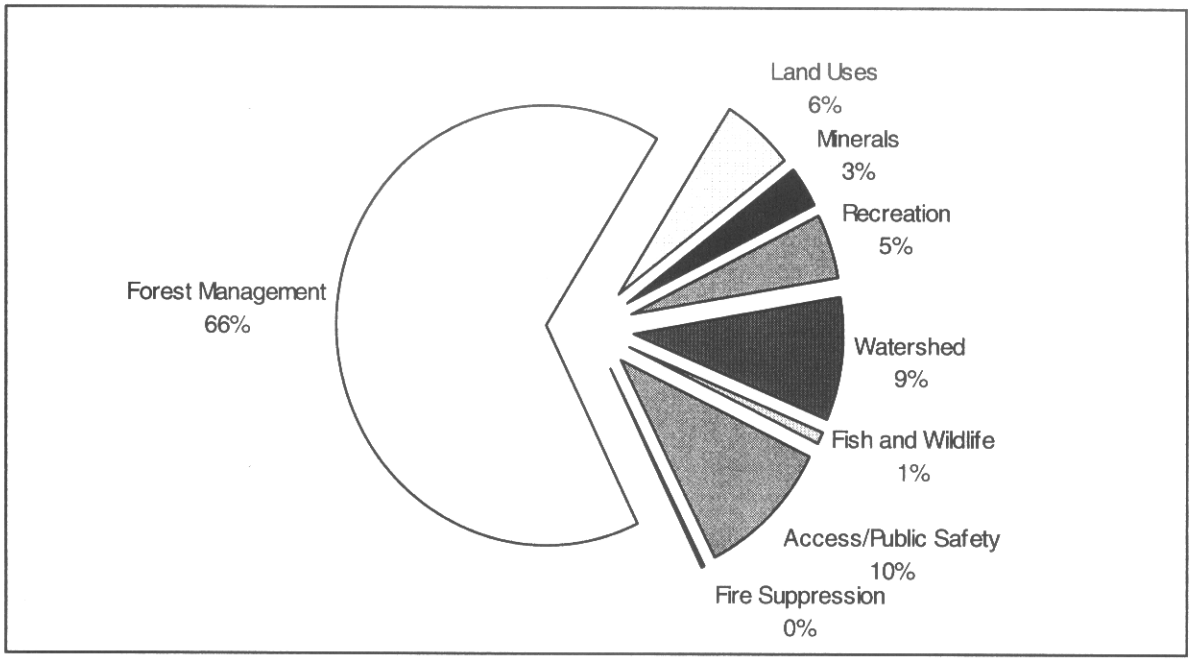
[a] The Forest Service does not reconstruct or construct unclassified roads. Temporary roads are constructed to facilitate particular short-term activities and later closed. Not all roads are constructed by the Forest Service.

The numbers in parentheses are a subset of the total miles and represent the miles of roads in inventoried roadless or other unroaded areas.

Numbers may not total due to rounding.
To convert miles to kilometers, multiply by 1.609.

Source: Data derived for the *Environmental Assessment for the Interim Rule Suspending Road Construction in Unroaded Areas of National Forest System Land*, March 1999 (Alternative 1, annualized) and other data provided by the regions.

FIGURE 1: Planned Road Construction and Reconstruction on National Forest System Lands by Natural Resource Purpose



Proposed Action

The proposed road management strategy would become effective immediately, although some elements would be implemented in forest plan revisions over the next 10 to 15 years. Revisions to forest plans would involve the preparation of additional NEPA analysis and documentation and Regional Forester approval.

In the transition period before such forest plan revisions took place or the Roadless Area Protection Rule is issued, the revised policy would require a demonstration of a compelling need to propose reconstruction or construction of roads in inventoried roadless and unroaded areas. Implementation of the proposed action in the transition period could include application of the road reconstruction/construction limitation to inventoried roadless areas only or to both inventoried roadless and other unroaded areas.

The proposed Road Management Strategy consists of the following components:

- Determine and provide the Forest Road System to best serve the current and anticipated management objectives and public uses of National Forest System lands
- Weigh the access benefits and the costs of road-associated effects on ecosystem values
- Develop a comprehensive inventory of classified and unclassified roads that are important to the management and use of the National Forest System or to the development and use of resources on which communities within or adjacent to the National Forests are dependent
- Give priority to decommissioning unneeded roads and reconstructing and maintaining the most heavily used roads
- Add new roads to the transportation system only where supported by a rigorous analysis

Decommissioning: Various levels of treatments to stabilize and rehabilitate unneeded roads, such as blocking the entrance, revegetating, water barring, removing fills and culverts, reestablishing drainage-ways, removing unstable road shoulders, or full obliteration by recontouring and restoring natural slopes.

Reconstruction: Construction activity that results in improvement, restoration, or realignment of a road as defined below:

Improvement – Construction activity that raises the traffic service level of a road or improves its safety or operating efficiency

Restoration – Construction activity required to restore a road to its approved traffic service level

Realignment – Construction activity that results in the new location of an existing road or portions thereof. Realignment may include decommissioning abandoned sections of roadways

Construction: Supervising, inspecting, building, and all expenses incidental to constructing or reconstructing of a forest development transportation facility, including

- Make future decisions regarding proposed road construction, reconstruction, and decommissioning at the local level using a science-based roads analysis that considers environmental and transportation needs and effects at multiple scales

- Until a comprehensive road inventory and roads analysis had been conducted and integrated into revisions of forest plans or the Roadless Area Protection Rule is issued, the following directions would apply:

  - Decisions on construction of new roads and reconstruction of existing roads in inventoried roadless areas and other unroaded areas would require a demonstration of a compelling need (such as critical resource restoration and protection, public safety, and access provided by statute, treaty, or pursuant to reserved or outstanding rights) and would be made after completion of an environmental impact statement approved at the Regional Forester level

  - Decisions on construction of new roads in roaded areas would be made using the "Roads Analysis Process" as appropriate and through the NEPA process[2]

Table 4 describes the components of the proposed action in inventoried roadless, unroaded, and roaded areas.

As a result of the road management strategy, a science-based roads analysis would be used to objectively evaluate the environmental, social, and economic impacts of proposed road construction, reconstruction, and decommissioning. The roads analysis would be an integrated environmental, social, and economic tool for transportation planning that addressed both existing and future roads.

This roads analysis tool would be used in deciding when and if new roads were needed and should be constructed, in deciding which roads should be reconstructed, and in establishing priorities for decommissioning and ecological restoration of unneeded roads. The Forest Service anticipates that such an approach would result in fewer miles of new roads being constructed than have been in the past. This approach would also result in more miles of roads being reconstructed and decommissioned than have been in the past, subject to congressional funding levels.

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[2]Under current Forest Service NEPA procedures (FSH 1909.15), an environmental impact statement is usually, as a matter of practice, but not always, prepared for proposed road construction or reconstruction in roadless or other unroaded areas.

TABLE 4: Proposed Action Components

	Decommissioning Existing Roads	Reconstructing Existing Roads	Constructing New Roads
Inventoried Roadless Area	• If no longer needed • Priority given to decommissioning roads that are causing excessive damage	• Decision based on science-based roads analysis • During transition, must demonstrate compelling need and typically would require an EIS and Regional Forester decision	• Decision based on science-based roads analysis • During transition, must demonstrate compelling need and typically would require an EIS and Regional Forester decision
Other Unroaded and Roaded Areas			
Unroaded Areas	• Priority given to decommissioning roads that are causing excessive damage	• Decision based on science-based roads analysis • During transition, must demonstrate compelling need and typically would require an EIS and Regional Forester decision	• Decision based on science-based roads analysis • During transition, must demonstrate compelling need and typically would require an EIS and Regional Forester decision
Roaded Areas	• Priority given to decommissioning roads that are causing excessive damage	• As needed and as funding allows	• Decision based on NFS resource management objectives and use

For purposes of analysis of the proposed action, the Forest Service assumes that Alternative 4 in the *Interim Rule EA* provides a reasonable estimate of the road construction and reconstruction that could occur under the proposed road management strategy. Alternative 4 would have temporarily suspended all permanent and temporary road construction and reconstruction in inventoried roadless and unroaded areas, except for roads that would be needed for public safety; to ensure access provided by statute or treaty; to address an imminent threat of flood, fire, or other catastrophic event that, without intervention, would cause loss of life or property; or pursuant to reserved or outstanding rights (*Interim Rule EA* at 5-6). The Forest Service believes that Alternative 4 as analyzed in the *Interim Rule EA* is a close approximation of the proposed action. Because road construction and reconstruction in roaded areas would be dependent entirely on site-specific issues and conditions and on local decisions, the Forest Service cannot estimate the miles of roads that might be constructed or reconstructed in roaded areas under the proposed action.

Implementation of the revised policy would result in an acceleration in the pace of road decommissioning. Key roads needed for recreation, rural access, and the sustainable flow of goods and services would also be restored and improved through road reconstruction efforts.

Using data from the *Interim Rule EA*, Table 5 describes the miles and types of roads that the Forest Service assumes would be reconstructed and constructed annually under the proposed action. Although fewer miles of roads would be reconstructed in inventoried roadless or other unroaded areas under the proposed action than under the no action alternative, more roads would be reconstructed on all NFS lands under the proposed action than under the no action alternative. However, the Forest Service has no basis on which to estimate the miles of roads that would be reconstructed in roaded areas; thus, the table makes it appear -- incorrectly -- that fewer miles of roads would be reconstructed under the proposed action than under the no action alternative. It is probable, however, that fewer roads would be constructed in roaded areas under the proposed action than under the no action alternative.

Figure 2 graphically depicts the natural resource purposes for road reconstruction and construction under the proposed action.

For purposes of analysis, this EA examines the potential environmental impacts associated with the road management strategy during both the transition period and over the long term for roaded areas. With respect to impacts in roadless areas, the effects would occur during the transition period or until the Roadless Area Protection Rule was issued. The impacts of the proposed policy, if adopted, would vary on each forest. Thus, in order to fully understand and disclose the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed policy on the national level, this EA recognizes that there would be a range of possible impacts associated with varying levels of miles of decommissioned roads, reconstructed roads, and new roads in inventoried roadless, other unroaded, and roaded areas. For purposes of analysis in this EA, impacts are generally a factor of miles of road.