

Summary

SUMMARY

The Salmon-Challis National Forest (SCNF) proposes to update two current motorized Travel Plans by designating a system of roads, trails, and areas open to public motor vehicle use to comply with new federal regulations. The regulations are known as the Travel Management Rule and are codified at 36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295 *“Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use”* (Federal Register 2005: 70 FR 68264). This Travel Management Rule requires National Forests to designate routes and areas for public motor vehicle use and display them on a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM). Once these designations have been identified on the MVUM, it is prohibited to possess or operate a motor vehicle on National Forest System (NFS) lands in that administrative unit or ranger district other than in accordance with those designations. The area affected by this proposal is the entire SCNF, excluding the portion of the Forest within the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness Area (FC-RONRW), which is congressionally designated as non-motorized.

Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR Part 212 governing administration of the forest transportation system and regulations at 36 CFR Part 295 governing use of motor vehicles off National Forest System (NFS) roads are combined and clarified in this final rule as Part 212, Travel Management, covering the use of motor vehicles on NFS lands. These regulations implement Executive Order (E.O.) 11644 (February 8, 1972), *“Use of Off-Road Vehicles on the Public Lands,”* as amended by E.O. 11989 (May 24, 1977). These Executive Orders direct federal agencies to ensure that the use of off-road vehicles on public lands would be controlled and directed so as to protect the resources of those lands, and to promote the safety of all users and minimize conflicts among the various uses of those lands.

Prior regulations at 36 CFR Part 295, which provide for allowing, restricting, or prohibiting motor vehicle travel, were developed when off-road vehicles were less widely available, less powerful, and less capable of cross-country travel than today's models. The growing popularity and capabilities of off-highway vehicles (OHVs) demand new regulations, so the Forest Service can continue to provide these opportunities while sustaining the health of NFS lands and resources. The magnitude and intensity of motor vehicle uses have increased to the point that the intent of E.O. 11644 and E.O. 11989 cannot be met while still allowing unrestricted cross-country travel.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of this action identified by the Salmon-Challis National Forest Supervisor is to designate a system of roads, trails, and areas open for public motor vehicle use that addresses current and anticipated recreation needs, provides a variety of recreation access opportunities, considers management concerns (such as public safety, maintenance costs, and consistency with adjoining public lands), reduces impacts to forest resources, recognizes reserved or outstanding rights, and reduces conflicts between recreational uses on the SCNF. The need for this action is to meet national direction published in the Federal Register (70 FR 68264) 36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, 295 *Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use*.

BACKGROUND

Management of the SCNF is guided by individual Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMPs), also called Forest Plans, as directed by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA). The Salmon National Forest LRMP and a Forest Travel Plan map were completed in 1988. The Challis National Forest LRMP was completed in 1989. Motorized vehicle management was identified as a major

public concern during the planning process for the Challis LRMP and an environmental analysis and a subsequent travel map was completed for the Challis National Forest in 1994.

This Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) complies with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations. The EIS analyzes and discloses the direct, indirect and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from approving the Preferred Alternative or another alternative within the range of alternatives analyzed in the EIS.

DECISIONS TO BE MADE

Given the purpose and need, the Forest Supervisor will review the Preferred Alternative and other alternatives analyzed in this FEIS, and consider the environmental consequences of all alternatives to make the following decisions for motor vehicle travel on the SCNF:

1. Which roads, trails, and areas to include or eliminate from the existing Travel Plans and designate for motor vehicle use.
2. Which unauthorized routes to designate and add to the system as roads or motorized trails.
3. The type of uses and seasons of use allowed on these roads, trails, and areas.
4. The design features necessary to minimize adverse environmental impacts associated with travel management designations.
5. How management parameters should be balanced with recreation opportunities.
6. Monitoring to be included to evaluate project implementation.
7. Whether to approve modifications to the Salmon National Forest LRMP and amendments to the Challis National Forest LRMP.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Substantial public input on the existing and proposed Travel Plans was received and incorporated into the Draft EIS and Final EIS alternatives.

Prior to publishing a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an environmental impact statement in the Federal Register, the Forest Service briefed local government officials, motorized advocacy groups, businesses, special interest groups, and environmental organizations. Public meetings and field trips were held in Salmon, Challis, Mackay, and North Fork, Idaho. Newspaper articles and press releases about the Travel Planning effort have been published in local and regional papers since the spring of 2006. The project website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/sc/recreation/Travel%20Plan/index.shtml> is used to disseminate information and gather public comments.

COOPERATING AGENCIES

At the request of a local Board of County Commissioners, the SCNF offered cooperating agency status to the three counties (Butte, Custer, and Lemhi) where SCNF lands occur. Cooperating agency representatives from these three counties were invited to participate in meetings, review public comments, identify issues and alternatives, and assist the interdisciplinary process.

PROPOSED ACTION AND THE REVISED PROPOSED ACTION

A Notice of Intent (NOI) was published in the Federal Register on August 3, 2007, describing the agency's initial proposal to designate a system of roads, trails, and areas for public motor vehicle use. Scoping letters were sent to 651 individuals, groups, agencies and tribes. The project first

appeared in the Forest's Schedule of Proposed Actions in July 2007. The Forest received forms, letters, and e-mails in response to scoping.

Many public comments requesting better quality and more accurate proposed action maps were received after the NOI was published and maps and tables of proposed designated routes were posted on the SCNF website. During the fall and winter of 2007-2008, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and associated databases were upgraded and refined to improve the quality and accuracy of the maps and information needed for detailed analysis. As a result, errors in the mileages of roads and motorized trails and inconsistencies with direction in the Forest Plans were discovered.

A revised NOI was published in the Federal Register on May 30, 2008, correcting errors and resolving inconsistencies. Thirty-two comment letters were received in response to the revised NOI.

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

A Notice of Availability (NOA) of the DEIS was published in the Federal Register on Friday, September 26, 2008, starting a 60-day legal comment period. The DEIS and maps were sent to 556 individuals, three Tribal governments, three cooperating agencies, 19 federal, state and local government agencies, and 32 organizations and special interest groups. Seven public meetings were held in Salmon, Challis, North Fork, Leadore, Mackay, Idaho Falls, and Pocatello, Idaho, in October and November 2008. Over 375 public responses were received in the form of letters, e-mails, faxes, maps, and verbal remarks during the legal comment period. Twenty-two responses were received after the close of the comment period. These comments were analyzed and used to refine issues and improve alternatives. A thorough discussion of the entire public participation process as well as responses to public comments is included in Chapter 4.

ISSUES ANALYZED IN DEPTH

After thorough analysis of public scoping and internal comments to the Proposed Action and the Revised Proposed Action, the Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) developed the issues and concerns analyzed in the Draft EIS.

According to Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations and Forest Manual and Handbook direction, issues were identified as significant issues and non-significant issues in the Draft EIS. Significant issues were used to develop alternatives to the Revised Proposed Action.

Since the release of the Draft EIS, Forest Service Manual (FSM 1950) and Forest Service Handbook (1909.15) direction have been revised and no longer require the identification of significant issues. New guidance directs the agency to identify the issues to be analyzed in depth (FSM 1950.41). As a result, the section of the FEIS addressing issues has been changed to reflect new direction. Additionally, some issues have been modified and clarified based on public comments to the DEIS.

The issues analyzed in depth in the FEIS are:

Recreation Issue 1: The designation of specific motorized routes (and the prohibition of cross-country travel off the designated system) will affect motorized and non-motorized recreation experiences.

Recreation Issue 2: Designating motorized access to specific dispersed campsites (based on mileage) along the Salmon River Road would be difficult for the public to understand and implement, difficult for the agency to enforce, and will adversely affect anglers and campers by

restricting their choices during high-use seasons (spring and fall steelhead fishing seasons, and summer floating season).

Recreation Issue 3: Allowing motorized access to dispersed camping for 300 feet on either side of designated routes (except the Salmon River Road) would defeat the purpose of the Travel Management Rule and lead to adverse impacts to wildlife habitat, fish habitat, soil and water quality.

Roadless Character Issue 1: Motor vehicle use on designated roads and motorized trails within Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA) detracts from the roadless characteristics of the land.

Wilderness Issue 1: Existing motor vehicle use in the Borah Peak, Boulder/White Clouds, and Pioneer Mountain Recommended Wilderness Areas adversely affects wilderness characteristics.

Water Resources Issue 1: The type, extent, and location of roads, trails, and dispersed camping may accelerate erosion, deliver sediment to streams, and degrade water quality.

Soil Resources Issue 1: The type, extent, level of use and location of motorized roads, trails, and dispersed camping may degrade soil productivity, accelerate erosion, deliver sediment to streams, and degrade water quality.

Fisheries Issue 1: Motor vehicle use of new and existing roads and trails may impact habitat for fish species (bull trout, westslope cutthroat, sockeye salmon, spring/summer Chinook salmon, and steelhead) by causing disturbances within Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCA), damaging stream-banks, and directly effecting fish species at stream crossings.

Noxious Weeds Issue 1: Increased use of motorized routes may increase the risk of invasive and/or noxious weed expansion and establishment.

Noxious Weeds Issue 2: Cross-country travel from designated routes for dispersed camping may increase the risk of invasive and/or noxious weed expansion and establishment.

Cultural Resource Issue 1: Motorized travel on user-created routes and trails that were previously non-motorized, as well as motorized access for dispersed camping, have the potential to adversely impact significant cultural resources which the SCNF is mandated to protect.

Wildlife Issue 1: Motor vehicle use of new and existing roads and trails can cause disturbance and reduce habitat effectiveness for federally-listed or candidate, USFS Region 4 Sensitive, and SCNF Management Indicator Species, as well as other special status species such as migratory birds and ungulates. The density of designated roads and motorized trails and the season of use of roads and motorized trails can impact wildlife by resulting in disturbance during critical life stages, compromised security, and/or impacts to habitat.

Sensitive Plants Issue 1: Undesignated roads and trails and areas open to motorized cross-country travel can damage habitat or directly impact regionally sensitive plant populations.

ALTERNATIVES

This section describes the Preferred Alternative and a range of alternatives developed from public and internal comments during the scoping period for the Proposed Action, the comment period for the Draft EIS, the Purpose and Need, and issues identified in Chapter 1. The alternatives present a range of options as required by the NEPA regulations (40 CFR 1502.14). Five alternatives were considered in this FEIS, including the No Action Alternative and four action alternatives. The Preferred Alternative was developed from the Revised Proposed Action analyzed in the DEIS.

CHANGES BETWEEN THE DRAFT AND THE FINAL EIS

Several changes have been made between the DEIS and the FEIS. These changes include items that affect each alternative. Changes for individual resources are described in Chapter 3 - Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences. Specific changes within an individual alternative are described in the alternative description. General changes between the DEIS and the FEIS include:

- Alternative 5, the Preferred Alternative, was added to the analysis. This alternative responds to internal and external comments to the DEIS; including Region 4 direction regarding motorized access for dispersed camping.
- Miles and acres for all alternatives have been updated to reflect the most accurate identification and mapping of routes and the most current state of management.
- Alternatives 0, 1, 3, and 4 have modified to correct numerical errors and address public comments and concerns in response to the DEIS.
- A brief discussion of the effects of designated routes to permitted fuelwood gathering has been included in response to public comments and concerns.
- The analysis for all resources has been updated, corrected, and expanded. Chapter 3 provides a discussion of analysis changes.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED ANALYSIS

An alternative that would eliminate all motor vehicle travel in Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) was considered but was dismissed from detailed analysis. About 80 percent of the Forest is within IRAs and/or Forest Plan Recommended Wilderness Areas and eliminating all motor vehicle travel within IRAs would fragment the existing transportation system. Neither the 2001 Roadless Rule nor the Idaho Roadless Rule precludes motor vehicle travel on existing system routes in IRAs. Alternative 3, however, does analyze the effects of eliminating motor vehicle travel within Forest Plan Recommended Wilderness Areas.

A proposal specific to management on the Salmon portion of the Forest was submitted by two local residents and a member of a conservation organization. This proposal delineated broad geographic areas of the Salmon National Forest where proponents thought motor vehicle travel should be emphasized as described in Alternative 4 of the DEIS and other areas the proponents thought should be non-motorized. Some geographic areas align with general route designations in Alternative 4, while others do not. Motor vehicle use is currently restricted in some areas on the existing Travel Plan to provide erosion control and big game security. The purpose for these restrictions is still valid; therefore this particular component of the proposal was considered but dismissed from detailed study.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

As stated above, the IDT developed and analyzed five alternatives including the No Action Alternative and the Preferred Alternative. The alternatives are described below indicating the miles of roads, trails, and acres of motorized access for dispersed camping. The descriptions of alternatives are based on the best available information; however, corrections and adjustments to the data would continue to occur throughout project implementation.

FEATURES COMMON TO ALL ACTION ALTERNATIVES

Travel management is the administrative process of designating the type and season of use allowed on roads, motorized trails, and areas of NFS lands. No ground-disturbing activities such as route construction or decommissioning are associated with this process. Forest Plan modifications and amendments, in addition to project design features, mitigation, and monitoring would apply to all action alternatives as described in the following sections.

Acres available for limited motor vehicle use to dispersed camping were calculated using slopes less than 30 percent.

No motorized access for game retrieval would be allowed.

All of the action alternatives would allow motorized access to dispersed campsites via routes that terminate in dispersed campsites as well as within 300 feet of most designated system roads and motorized trails (but does not include motorized access to dispersed camping on currently unauthorized routes proposed for designation or the Salmon River Road FR #60030) *where slope, vegetation type, and resource conditions would permit such use without causing unacceptable levels of damage.*

Forest Plan Modifications and Amendments

The Salmon National Forest LRMP allows editorial and other minor modifications without amending or revising the plan. Direction in the plan states: "Editorial and other minor modifications to [these] management requirements which do not alter their intent may be made without amending or revising the Forest Plan" (LRMP IV-4). Language in the Salmon LRMP would be modified to comply with the Travel Management Rule.

The Challis National Forest LRMP does not include language allowing modifications to the plan that do not alter the intent therefore, non-significant amendments the Challis LRMP would be needed to change language to comply with the Travel Management Rule for all action alternatives. These are described in Chapter 2 of the FEIS.

Types of Routes

Appendix A (Glossary) of the Final Environmental Impact Statement provides a definition of the following types of routes, vehicles, and uses: Cross-country Motor Vehicle Use; Designated Route; Unauthorized and Classified Road; National Forest System (NFS) Road; Motorized trail, OHV trail, or ATV trail; Two-wheel motorized (Motorcycle) trail; Non-motorized trails Highway-Legal vehicles Non-Highway Legal Vehicles and Motorized Mixed Use.

Summer Use Regulations

For all alternatives, the 1988 Salmon National Forest Travel Map and the 1994 Challis National Forest Travel Map would be replaced with a MVUM that designates routes for summer use only. Summer use is defined as the snow-free season when vehicles or equipment such as a snowmobile or skis are not required for travel. The 1988 Salmon National Forest Travel Map and the 1994 Challis National Forest Travel Map would provide travel management direction for over-the snow use on each respective Forest until over-snow direction is incorporated and displayed on the MVUM. This is expected during the second publication of the MVUM in 2011. The MVUM will be displayed by ranger district. Maps will be available free of charge at all SCNF offices and on the Forest web page.

Summer travel management would include the following:

- Motorized and non-motorized travel routes, designated by the Forest Service as open to public travel.
- A designation for a road or trail includes all terminal facilities, trailheads, parking lots, and turnouts associated with the designated road or trail.
- Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) operation for general travel would not be allowed off any designated motorized route. Motor vehicle use for big game retrieval off designated roads or designated motorized trails would not be allowed. The Forest Supervisors in Idaho and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) support the prohibition of motorized travel off of designated routes for game retrieval.
- Unauthorized routes would be restricted to non-motorized use unless designated for motor vehicle use in the selected alternative.
- All areas and routes in the project area are open to non-motorized use (by foot, mountain bike, or horse) unless prohibited for administrative reasons.

Other Common Features

- Grants and Agreements – the Forest Service will pursue partnerships and grants with Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation to maintain motorized and non-motorized trails.

Standards and Maintenance

Road and trail standards vary depending on intended use. Standards allow for a range of route conditions from primitive to high standard. No new road or trail construction or improvements involving ground disturbance would occur under any of the alternatives.

Project Design Features

Project design features (PDFs) include Best Management Practices (BMPs), standard operating procedures (SOPs), and identified design features. These items are included to protect public safety and Forest resources, and are integral parts of all action alternatives.

Newly designated roads and motorized trails would be subject to the project design features described in the FEIS and would not be authorized or placed onto the MVUM until on-the-ground assessments are made and all applicable PDFs are implemented.

User education and enforcement of the new travel management regulations would occur. User education would include public meetings and brochures describing the new travel management policy and use of the MVUM.

The SCNF would follow national direction for signing and maps. The Forest Service has developed a standard national format for the MVUM. The Forest Service plans to issue additional travel management guidance in its sign standards handbook to ensure consistent messages and use of standard interagency symbols.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The goal of Travel Plan monitoring is to determine how well the Travel Plan is working and to make management or monitoring adjustments if necessary. Monitoring and evaluation tell how travel management decisions have been implemented (called “implementation monitoring”) and how effective the implementation has proven to be in accomplishing the desired outcomes (called “effectiveness monitoring”). The monitoring items associated with this Travel Plan are described in detail in Chapter 3 of the FEIS.

EXISTING CONDITION

The existing condition is not an alternative but it is described and discussed so the public and the decision-maker will understand the on-the-ground situation and how unmanaged cross-country motorized travel has led to proliferation of unauthorized routes.

Many public comments expressed confusion and frustration about the Existing Condition and No Action Alternative. Some respondents stated the Existing Condition *is* the No Action Alternative; however, this is not the case for this particular analysis. The Existing Condition is the actual situation of roads and trails, including unauthorized routes and motorized cross-country travel on the ground while the No Action Alternative represents the current authorized management situation.

Unauthorized routes in restricted areas of existing Travel Plans (1,594 miles), and unauthorized routes causing resource damage in areas open to cross-country travel on existing Travel Plans are violations of current management. Many public comments requested the Forest “leave things the way they are” without recognizing that many routes currently existing on the landscape are not authorized and are causing adverse resource impacts.

The existing condition for motor vehicle use consists of about 2,900 miles of open Forest system roads, about 1,120 miles of motorized system trails, about 2,700 miles of unauthorized routes, and approximately 980,423 acres open to cross-country travel. Off-road travel for access to dispersed camping, for game retrieval, and fuelwood gathering also occurs across the Forest. The existing condition consists of both authorized and unauthorized uses

The existing condition will not be mapped. Although the Forest has an inventory of unauthorized routes, it would not be feasible to display all known routes at the mapping scale used for this analysis. Maps of known unauthorized routes are in the project record.

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE ALTERNATIVES

ALTERNATIVE 0 - NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

The No Action Alternative is the current, authorized management displayed on existing Travel Plan maps, travel management decisions made through other NEPA analyses since the existing Travel Plans were developed, and existing closure orders. The No Action Alternative is required by NEPA and serves as the baseline for analyzing effects. This alternative would maintain current management direction and would not implement the Travel Management Rule.

The current Salmon National Forest Travel Plan allows direct ingress and egress for temporary campsites within 300 feet of open designated routes, provided that no vegetation is damaged or destroyed and no streams or wet meadows are crossed. Motorized access to dispersed camping is also allowed in open areas of the Forest except where restrictions are shown on the map or signed on the ground. The current Salmon Forest Travel Plan map does not indicate if game retrieval is allowed or prohibited. The current Challis National Forest Travel Plan map allows motorized travel to campsites, for game retrieval, and fuelwood cutting within 300 feet of designated roads and to campsites and for game retrieval within 300 feet of designated trails. Areas identified on the map as “A” areas are generally open to all motorized vehicles, but some restrictions apply.

Salmon River Road: This alternative allows motorized access for dispersed camping within 300 feet on either side of the Salmon River Road (FR #60030), where topography allows, provided no streams are crossed and no wet meadows are damaged.

Changes between the Draft and Final EIS

Mileages of some routes have changed between the DEIS and the FEIS. The most substantial change is between the miles of routes open yearlong. The DEIS reported 2,419 miles of roads open yearlong, while the FEIS reports 2,751 miles. This correction is based on more accurate GIS analysis.

ALTERNATIVE 1 - DESIGNATED SYSTEM ROUTES

This alternative would designate existing system roads and motorized trails displayed on current Travel Plan maps and travel management decisions made through other NEPA analyses. This alternative would use the best available information to assign vehicle types and seasons of use on trails in areas open to cross-country travel on current Travel Plan maps. Some trails previously used for motorized travel may not be designated based on information in the Forest trail inventory.

Changes between the Draft and Final EIS

Page 2-2 of the DEIS states “there are about 3,900 miles of system routes (about 2,700 miles of open routes and 1,200 miles of closed routes) on the SCNF.” This should have stated “there are about 2,600 miles of open roads and 1,200 miles of closed roads (not routes) on the SCNF.”

The acreage available for motorized access to dispersed camping and game retrieval has been adjusted to only include those acres on slopes less than 30 percent slope.

ALTERNATIVE 3 – RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS/INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREA VALUES EMPHASIS ALTERNATIVE

This alternative responds to issues regarding effects to Recommended Wilderness Areas and Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) from motor vehicle use. No motor vehicle travel within Recommended Wilderness Areas and no designation of new roads within IRAs would be allowed under this alternative.

This alternative is more restrictive than other alternatives in that it offers fewer yearlong opportunities on roads, and is more restrictive of vehicle types on motorized trails.

Additionally, no motorized access for dispersed camping would be allowed off designated routes in RHCAs and this would be displayed on the MVUM.

Salmon River Road: Camping with the use of a motor vehicle (e.g. car, motor-home, truck and camp trailer, camper, off-highway vehicle, or motorcycle) would be allowed in designated dispersed camping areas and designated pull-outs along the Salmon River Road (FR #60030). This alternative identifies 52 pull-outs and areas available for dispersed camping. Day-use parking would be allowed along the Salmon River Road. Mileposts would be installed along the Salmon River Road to assist the public in locating pull-outs and dispersed camping areas on the ground.

Changes between the Draft and Final EIS

The DEIS stated “Under this alternative, no motor vehicle uses would occur within Recommended Wilderness Areas and no new routes would be designated in Inventoried Roadless Areas.” An error was pointed out by the public during the comment period that some new routes were designated in IRAs in this alternative. The DEIS should have stated “no new roads would be designated in Inventoried Roadless Areas.”

In the DEIS, this alternative also designated motorized routes funded by past grant money in IRAs. Some respondents to the DEIS objected to this, indicating that past funding sources should not affect the potential designation and analysis of routes in this alternative.

This alternative has been modified. There are no new roads and no motorized trails open to full-sized vehicles within IRAs including routes funded by past grant projects; therefore, the number of miles of motorized routes in IRAs is reduced compared to the DEIS. Additionally, some routes leading to wilderness areas and some routes with resource concerns have been eliminated from this alternative. The acres available for motorized access for dispersed camping are less because fewer routes are designated.

ALTERNATIVE 4 – MAXIMUM MOTORIZED EMPHASIS ALTERNATIVE

This alternative responds to issues that the designation of specific motorized routes to comply with the Travel Management Rule will affect motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities by altering the amount, type, and season of motorized routes. This alternative offers the least restrictive opportunities for motorized recreation.

This alternative also responds to the issue that designating motorized access to specific dispersed campsites along the Salmon River Road (using the mileage below North Fork as a location guide) would be difficult for the public to understand and for the agency to implement because there are no mileposts along the road.

Salmon River Road: This alternative proposes to designate six access routes along the Salmon River Road as well as 300-foot corridors along the Salmon River Road where motorized access to dispersed campsites would be allowed.

Designated routes off the Salmon River Road include the Newland Picnic Area Road, the Dump Creek gated dispersed area road, Cadagan Road, Cove Creek Helispot Road, Cove Creek Boating Site Road, Cache Bar launch area and campsites road. There would be no motorized access to dispersed camping at the Newland Administrative Site, the Newland Dumpsite, and Indianola.

A 300-foot corridor on either side of the Salmon River Road, where topography and vegetation permit, from North Fork to milepost 28.7 would be designated for motorized access to dispersed campsites only. No motorized access for dispersed camping would be available from milepost 28.7 to milepost 32.9 (bottom end of the Clam Hole). Another 300-foot corridor on either side of the Salmon River Road where topography and vegetation permit would be designated for motorized access to dispersed camping from milepost 32.9 to Corn Creek (at the campground entrance). No motorized access would be allowed within 30 feet of the Salmon River or its tributaries to provide streambank and water quality protection. An approximate 5-acre open area at the Cadagan dispersed campsite would also be designated for motorized access.

Forest Plan Amendments

In addition to the amendments and modifications common to all action alternatives, another amendment to the Challis Forest Plan would be necessary to implement this alternative. The amendment would eliminate two-wheeled motor vehicle use on a portion of the Long Lost Trail #194 which is currently allowed under Amendment 9 of the Challis Forest Plan. The plan would also be amended to allow motorized travel on a portion of the Swauger Lakes Trail #091 to motorized and mechanized vehicles 50 inches or less in width only. Currently motorized travel is restricted to two-wheeled motorized and mechanized vehicles only.

Changes between the Draft and Final EIS

Alternative 4 has been modified to increase the miles of motorized routes, the types of motor vehicle uses, and to consider additional unauthorized routes. All routes specifically requested by the public during the comment period are considered in this alternative, but this alternative does not

propose designating all known unauthorized routes. Most of these routes are analyzed as motorized trails. The number of acres available for motorized access for dispersed camping is greater than calculated for the DEIS because more routes are designated.

ALTERNATIVE 5 – PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The Preferred Alternative is a new alternative not previously analyzed. It blends some components from action alternatives analyzed in the DEIS and incorporates new features to address Forest Service Regional direction and public comments to the DEIS. The Revised Proposed Action was used as a starting point for this alternative and strives to balance competing public interests regarding motorized and non-motorized uses on the SCNF. The development of the Preferred Alternative is described in detail in Chapter 1.

No motorized access for dispersed camping would be allowed within 30 feet of a stream, pond, or lake to provide streambank and water quality protection. Some designated Forest routes occur within 30 feet of a stream, lake, or pond. Traveling on these routes is acceptable; however, traveling off these routes for the purpose of accessing dispersed campsites would not be acceptable.

Eight high-use areas, where motorized access for dispersed camping off designated routes is a concern, were field-reviewed in the fall of 2008, after the release of the DEIS. A proliferation of unauthorized routes off Forest system roads and trails has adversely impacted cultural and natural resources in these areas. In Alternative 5, these areas would be closed to any motorized travel off designated routes including dispersed camping due to sensitive resource protection needs. Areas where motorized off-route travel would not be allowed are Sawmill Canyon, Antelope, Wildhorse, Pass Creek, and North Fork Big Lost River areas of the Lost River Ranger District, and the Thatcher Creek, Beaver Creek, and Cape Horn areas of the Middle Fork Ranger District. Dispersed camping would be restricted to designated sites, displayed on the MVUM and signed on the ground.

Salmon River Road: As part of route designation, this alternative proposes to allow limited use of motor vehicles within 300-feet of either side of the Salmon River Road and six intersecting access routes for the purpose of dispersed camping, where slope, topography, vegetation and resource conditions are suitable.

Designated routes off the Salmon River Road where limited use of motor vehicles for dispersed camping may occur are the Newland Picnic Area Road, the Dump Creek gated dispersed area road, Cadagan Road, Cove Creek Helispot Road, Cove Creek Boating Site Road, Cache Bar launch area and campsites road. There would be no motorized access for dispersed camping at the Newland Administrative Site, the Newland Dumpsite, and Indianola.

Limited use of motor vehicles within 300-feet on either side of the Salmon River Road, from North Fork to milepost 28.7 would be designated for dispersed camping only, where such use would not cause unacceptable resource damage. No motorized access for dispersed camping would be allowed from milepost 28.7 to milepost 32.9 (bottom end of the Clam Hole). Limited use of motor vehicles within 300-feet on either side of the Salmon River Road from milepost 32.9 to Corn Creek (at the campground entrance) would be designated for dispersed camping only, where such use would not cause unacceptable resource damage. No motorized access for dispersed camping or vehicle parking for dispersed camping would be allowed within 30 feet of the Salmon River or its tributaries to provide streambank and water quality protection. In some locations, the Salmon River Road is within 30 feet of the Salmon River. In those locations, no motorized off-road travel for the purpose of dispersed camping would be allowed. An approximate 5-acre open area at the Cadagan dispersed campsite would also be designated for motorized access.

COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES

Below is a comparative summary of how the alternatives respond to the purpose and need for action and how the alternatives respond to the significant issues. Also displayed are the projected outputs and other environmental effects that may influence alternative selection. Based on this information and the analysis provided in Chapter 3, the responsible official and the public will be able to compare how alternatives affect resources and issues differently and what the trade-offs are among alternatives to provide “a clear basis for choice among options by the decision maker and the public” (40 CFR 1502.14).

Route Status	Alt. 0 No Action	Alt. 1 Designated System	Alt. 3 Wilderness Roadless Emphasis	Alt. 4 Motorized Emphasis	Alt. 5 Preferred Alternative
Project Area Acres (includes the entire SCNF excluding designated wilderness)	3,120,243	3,120,243	3,120,243	3,120,243	3,120,243
Acres open to cross-country travel	980,423	Limited use of motor vehicles for access to dispersed camping is included in the designation of routes and is quantified below			
Miles of system roads open yearlong	2,443	2,443	2,170	2,811	2,437
Miles of system roads open seasonally	169	169	254	208	233
Total System Roads	2,920	2,612	2,424	3,021	2,670
Miles of motorized system trails open yearlong to OHVs	833	6	25	275	86
Miles of motorized system trails open seasonally to OHVs	22	0	18	60	26
Miles of motorized system trails open yearlong to ATVs and 2-wheel vehicles	116	165	112	336	199
Miles of motorized system trails open seasonally to ATVs and 2-wheel vehicles	51	51	34	51	64
Miles of motorized system trails open yearlong to 2-wheel vehicles (closed to ATVs)	33	520	219	574	396
Miles of motorized system trails open seasonally to 2-wheel vehicles (closed to ATVs)	64	70	74	34	93
Total Motorized System Trails	1,119	812	482	1,330	864
Total Motorized System Routes	4,039	3,424	2,905	4,351	3,534
Miles of unauthorized routes in “open areas” of current Travel Plans	1,108	0	0	0	0
Miles of unauthorized routes in “restricted areas” under current Travel Plans	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total All Routes: System + Unauthorized	5,147	3,424	2,905	4,351	3,534
Acres of motorized access open to limited motor vehicle use for dispersed camping	401,589	120,251	67,881	150,512	116,748

MAJOR CONCLUSIONS

EFFECTS TO RECREATION, ROADLESS, AND WILDERNESS RESOURCES

The greatest impact to recreationists from any of the alternatives would be the designation of motorized routes as a change from acres currently open to cross-country travel. This, in turn, decreases the amount of motorized access to dispersed camping from what is currently available.

Areas classified as “open” to cross-country travel often contained Recreation Opportunity System classifications that were inconsistent with both Forest Plans’ direction. In general, Alternatives 3 and 5 most closely follow both Forest Plans’ ROS classification (less than 1% inconsistent), while Alternatives 1 and 4 are least consistent (2% and 1%, respectively).

Motorized routes in Recommended Wilderness Areas are present only on the Challis-Yankee Fork and Lost River Ranger Districts. Alternative 3 would close all motor vehicle use in Recommended Wilderness Areas, while miles of motorized routes would increase slightly from Alternative 1 to Alternative 4 on the Challis-Yankee Fork District, and decrease slightly on the Lost River Ranger District. Alternative 5 would result in a minimal decrease from Alternative 1 for these two districts.

EFFECTS TO WATER RESOURCES

Motorized route densities on the SCNF would be reduced in all subwatersheds from the existing condition over the range of action alternatives. Designated routes included in the No Action Alternative were used as a baseline to compare alternatives. Alternative 3 has the most relative reduction in route densities and would provide the most protection for water resources; Alternative 4 offers the least protection. Alternative 1 would have the least reduction in road densities.

Miles of designated routes in vulnerable subwatersheds on the SCNF would be reduced in all subwatersheds. Comparisons of miles of road in watersheds with greater than 50% sensitive lands were made against routes included in the No Action Alternative. In general, miles of routes in subwatersheds with a High vulnerability rating decreased from Alternative 1 across the alternatives. Exceptions were on the Challis-Yankee Fork, North Fork, Leadore, and Salmon-Cobalt Ranger Districts under Alternative 4, where route designation increased miles of routes in vulnerable watersheds between 30-50 miles.

Motorized routes within close proximity to sensitive streams were quantified for each alternative. In general, miles of routes within 300 feet of water quality limited streams decreased across the alternatives. Exceptions were on the Challis-Yankee Fork, Lost River, and Leadore Ranger Districts under Alternative 4, and on the Middle Fork Ranger District under Alternatives 3, 4, and 5 (although the increase is slight across the alternatives).

The number of inventoried perennial and intermittent stream crossings available for motor vehicle use was tallied for each alternative. Alternative 3 would have the fewest motorized stream crossings (2,234 fewer than currently exist) of all the alternatives, Alternative 4 would have the most crossings and would result in the most potential for sediment delivery to streams and loss of water quality.

EFFECTS TO SOIL RESOURCES

Total miles of designated motorized routes would decrease in all alternatives from the existing condition. All NFS trails in open areas displayed on the current Salmon National Forest and Challis National Forest Travel Plan maps are interpreted as motorized trails in the calculation of mileages because no official designations allowing or prohibiting motor vehicle use on these trails are currently in effect. This explains why there are so many motorized routes greater than 50 inches in

the existing condition. Reducing the miles of routes greater than and less than 50 inches wide on landtypes with high surface erosion hazard would reduce the potential for accelerated erosion and loss of soil productivity. Miles of two-wheeled motorized routes on high surface erosion hazard lands would increase in all alternatives except Alternative 1. Two-wheeled motorized routes are expected to have less impact than routes designated for larger vehicles. Acres of motorized access for dispersed camping would decrease in all action alternatives reducing the potential for erosion and loss of soil productivity.

EFFECTS TO FISHERIES

Direct and indirect effects to fisheries, streams, and riparian habitats as a result of designating motorized routes and use classes differ primarily in relation to the number of route miles within RHCA stream-side buffer zones, the number of stream crossings, and the site-specific locations of designated routes.

Road miles within perennial stream buffers (300 foot) and intermittent stream buffers (100 foot) are comparable between Alternatives 1 and 5, while Alternative 3 has the least miles in perennial and intermittent stream buffers, and Alternative 4 has the most. Motorized trail miles within perennial and intermittent stream buffers is also comparable between Alternatives 1 and 5, while Alternative 3 has the least miles and Alternative 4 has the most. The number of motorized road crossings on perennial streams is comparable between Alternatives 1 and 5, lowest in Alternative 3, and highest in Alternative 4. The number of motorized trails crossing perennial or intermittent streams is also similar between Alternatives 1 and 5, lowest in Alternative 3, and highest in Alternative 4. The number of RHCA acres open to motor vehicle use for dispersed camping would be least in Alternative 3 (none), moderate in Alternative 5, and highest in Alternatives 1 and 4. As the environmental baseline, Alternative 0 (No Action) has the greatest numbers of miles, crossings, and acres of all the alternatives. Therefore, Alternatives 1, 3, 4, and 5 would all provide for reductions in RHCA miles, stream crossings, and RHCA acres when compared to Alternative 0.

EFFECTS OF NOXIOUS WEEDS

Off-road motorized travel is not authorized in any of the action alternatives and closes 980,700 acres previously open to off-road travel. This closure would affect the potential spread of noxious weeds by greatly reducing site disturbance caused by motorized vehicles and eliminating opportunities for noxious weed seed dispersal.

Alternative 1 includes designating motorized routes currently included on the two existing Forest Travel Plans. This designation would continue the current spread of noxious weeds attributed to travel corridors as a noxious weed vector at its present rate. No additional travel corridors would be designated, thereby limiting the potential of noxious weed expansion into areas that are currently weed-free. With no additional route designations, expansion of noxious weeds into weed-free areas due to motorized travel is unlikely. Alternatives 3, 4, and 5 reduce the miles of designated motorized routes; however, how those routes are dispersed throughout the Forest and the type of route varies considerably. Some watersheds have an increased risk of noxious weed expansion and establishment under these alternatives. This change in risk is due to the reduction of acres available for dispersed camping. Areas available have a greater proportion of noxious weeds present in them and are at increased risk of expansion and establishment if they are used for dispersed camping.

EFFECTS TO CULTURAL RESOURCES

Implementation of the 2005 Travel Management Rule closing 980,287 acres to cross-country motorized travel would benefit cultural resources by reducing the potential for inadvertent damage

to sites by motor vehicles and dispersed camping. Vandalism to sites would also be reduced since fewer motorized routes would be available.

EFFECTS TO WILDLIFE RESOURCES

Wildlife species for which effects were analyzed include: gray wolf, Canada lynx, spotted bat, Townsend's big-eared bat, pygmy rabbit, fisher, wolverine, northern goshawk, flammulated owl, boreal owl, great grey owl, three-toed woodpecker, pileated woodpecker, Columbia spotted frog, greater sage-grouse, migratory breeding birds, and ungulates (elk, deer, mountain goat, and pronghorn antelope). Across the alternatives, individuals of the species considered may be impacted by the designation of routes, but no alternative is expected to result in any species trending towards Federal listing, or cause a loss of viability to the population or species.

In general, Alternatives 3 and 5 offer the most acres of security habitat and the lowest motorized route densities. Increased route densities in Alternatives 1 and 4 could facilitate direct disturbance to some species (lynx, fisher, wolverine, gray wolf). In addition, the increased route densities in Alternatives 1 and 4 could result in increased illegal harvest of ungulate species.

Seven seasonal periods are proposed for the Travel Plan. Seasonality of motorized routes is expected to mitigate potential effects to wildlife species.

EFFECTS TO SENSITIVE PLANTS

Alternatives 3 and 5 have lower route densities than Alternatives 1 and 4, and therefore have less potential to impact sensitive plant species. All alternatives could impact habitat if slopes become unstable as a result of motorized travel. Regardless of the alternative chosen, there is potential for individual plants of some species to be impacted by vehicles through compaction or trampling if they occur within the 300 foot dispersed camping corridor.

EFFECTS ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESOURCES

Although motor vehicle use off the designated system would be prohibited as a result of the Travel Management Rule, and unmanaged cross-country travel would not be allowed, little change in motor vehicle use is anticipated. The availability of substitute public lands allowing cross-country travel is very limited. Other federal lands (such as Bureau of Land Management lands) in the area are also revising travel management direction that may limit off-road motor vehicle uses. State lands are limited and scattered within and adjacent to the project area. It is expected that the overall level of recreation use on the SCNF would remain relatively constant, with somewhat higher concentrations on designated routes.

The effects of Alternatives 3 and 5 would be similar to those described under Alternative 1. Despite a reduction in the miles of designated motorized routes and acres open to motorized access for dispersed camping, it would not likely result in noticeable changes in the level of economic activity supported.

Under Alternative 4 the miles of designated roads and trails would increase by eight percent, as would the acres open to motorized access for dispersed camping. The increase in motorized opportunities could result in a slight increase in motor vehicle users, although any increases would likely be masked by expected increases in the population of motorized recreation participants. Increased job and labor income impacts would be unnoticeable. Cumulatively, increased motorized opportunities could potentially mitigate for increased restrictions on adjacent public lands. However, job and labor income impacts would remain a very small proportion of the analysis area economy.