

DECISION NOTICE
and
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

**NORTH FORK JOHN DAY MOTORIZED ACCESS
AND TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**

Grant, Umatilla, and Morrow Counties, Oregon

Umatilla National Forest

An environmental assessment that addresses an access management program and plan is available for public review at the District Ranger office in Ukiah, Oregon, and the Forest Supervisor's office in Pendleton, Oregon.

The proposed management area is the North Fork John Day Ranger District.

The proposed program and plan were developed by an interdisciplinary team of USDA Forest Service personnel from Resources, Timber, Wildlife, and Engineering, with review by the District Ranger and District staff. They were assisted by a public working group representing motorized vehicle users, nonmotorized vehicle users, Isaak Walton League/Nature Conservancy, grazing, mining, wood products industry, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the town of Ukiah, and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Key issues identified were (1) wildlife, (2) recreation, (3) economics, (4) administrative use, and (5) the ability to implement and enforce the selected alternative.

(1) Wildlife issues deal with effects on habitat, buck and bull escapement, harassment, and displacement of animals onto private land.

(2) Recreation issues focus on experience of the forest users, limited access, a potential to change traditional uses, more concentrated use, access for the elderly and handicapped, and the provisions for a wider range of recreational opportunities.

(3) Economic issues are concerned with increases in enforcement costs, a reduction in maintenance costs on system roads, unit costs for management activities, effects on local economies, and the cost of implementation.

(4) Administrative use issues focus on the effect of restricted access on all user groups, the necessity for coordination to accomplish management activities, and the effects on private land access.

(5) Implementation and enforcement issues deal with the reality of implementation, the enforceability of plan components, and the ability of the public to easily understand the proposed program.

Alternatives developed for the EA are as follows:

ALTERNATIVE A - Current Management/No Action

Emphasis is on no change. Does nothing to enhance wildlife or recreational experience. Would require no added effort or increase in funding to continue to administer. Is not responsive to public comments or Forest Plan.

ALTERNATIVE B - Multiple Use

Emphasis is on a unified approach to managing access. Responsive to wildlife, public, and resource concerns. Would require additional effort and an increase in funds to administer. Would require greater coordination in accomplishing targets. Responsive to public comments and Forest planning documents. Would broaden enforcement capability to include OSP (Oregon State Police). Would be consistent District-wide, easy to understand and inform the public of reasons for restrictions, and easy to identify opportunities for nonmotorized use.

ALTERNATIVE C - Wildlife

Emphasis is on the protection and enhancement of wildlife habitat. Responsive to wildlife needs at the expense of some other needs. Would require additional effort and an increase in funds to administer. Would require greater coordination in accomplishing targets in areas identified as key to wildlife habitat. Would be somewhat responsive to the Forest Plan. Would be more difficult to understand and administer because of the seasonal nature on all closures. Would be easy for the public to understand the reasoning for closures.

ALTERNATIVE D - Recreation

Emphasis is on the enhancement of recreation activities, particularly those associated with motorized travel. It is not responsive to the needs of the recreationist desiring more semi-primitive, nonmotorized experience, except during the hunting season. It would not require an increase in funds to administer. It would not be responsive to the Forest Plan, and would not be responsive to the needs of wildlife.

Based on the analysis and evaluation process carried out, I have decided to implement the proposed action: Alternative B - Multiple Use. Overall it best resolves the identified issues as follows:

Wildlife

Alternative B meets the needs of wildlife by reducing road densities approximately 60 to 70 percent on a yearlong basis, enhancing buck and bull escapement on a sustained basis, providing protection for wildlife at key time periods (winter range and calving area/summer range), and reducing vehicle harassment on a sustained basis.

Alternative A does nothing to immediately effect road densities, provides no enhancement of buck and bull escapement, offers protection to only a few key winter range areas and does little or nothing to reduce vehicle harassment. Displacement of animals onto private land would continue as timber entry into undisturbed areas continued without control of constructed roads.

Alternative C would immediately reduce road densities by approximately 50 percent but many closures would be seasonal in nature. Key habitat areas such as winter range and calving areas/summer range would be restricted during use periods. Displacement would be reduced, but because of the seasonal nature of the closures would not be totally stopped. Buck and bull escapement would be enhanced during the hunting season. Harassment of game animals would be curtailed during critical times of the year.

Alternative D would maintain only existing winter range closures with no consideration given to calving/summer range areas. A seasonal closure would be in effect during hunting season to improve hunting experience and buck and bull escapement. Displacement of animals onto private land would be affected minimally by the seasonal closure during the hunting season.

Recreation

Alternative B best meets recreational needs by creating a better balance between nonmotorized and motorized opportunities. Traditional areas of significant use would be maintained whenever possible. Conflicts between user groups would be reduced. The elderly and handicapped would have reasonable access to Forest land and would experience an increase in barrier-free facilities available for their use.

Alternative A does nothing to bring about a better balance between motorized and nonmotorized use. Nonmotorized experience may be further reduced by road entries into previously unroaded areas. All traditional uses of the Forest would be maintained. Conflicts between user groups would continue and possibly increase as recreation use picks up. Elderly and handicapped use would be restricted only by existing closure orders.

Alternative C would improve nonmotorized experiences during the hunting season and other seasonal closure periods. Nonmotorized experiences would be improved on a rotating basis. Existing closures would be maintained. Traditional use of the Forest would be subject to change only during the seasonal restrictions. Conflicts between user groups would continue. The elderly and handicapped would only be effected during the closure periods.

Alternative D would improve nonmotorized experience classes during the hunting season only. Traditional uses of the Forest would be effected only during the hunting season. Conflicts between user groups would continue. The elderly and handicapped would be effected seasonally by closures, limiting their ability to use all roads for motorized travel.

Economic

Alternative B's economic effect would consist of increasing enforcement costs in the short term with a decrease over time. Road maintenance costs would decline sharply as a result of fewer open roads. Local economies may experience an increase in revenue; however, management is unsure of the overall effect. Implementation would be costly but partnerships would be sought to defray the initial expenditures. Unit costs for management activities would go up but the activities would be more responsive to public input.

Alternative A enforcement costs would remain stable or would increase slightly, due to the creation of new roads. Road maintenance costs would remain stable or will slightly increase because of new road construction. Unit costs would remain stable. Local economies would remain stable. There would be no increase in implementation costs except those associated with management of new roads. Management activities would not be responsive to public input.

Alternative C enforcement costs would remain high because of the rotating nature of the seasonal closures. Maintenance costs would be reduced slightly by road closures occurring during high use and wet periods. Impacts on local economies are not known; however, better hunting experiences may act as a draw to the area. Implementation costs would be high as would maintenance of the seasonal signing. Unit costs for management would be higher and to a degree be responsive to public input on management activities.

Alternative D enforcement costs would be slightly higher than Alternative A as a result of the hunting seasonal closure. Road maintenance would be higher as a result of having more roads open and available for travel outside the closure period. Local economies may experience a boost as improved hunting experience may be a draw to the area. Implementation costs would be slightly higher than the no-action alternative due to the seasonal closure. Unit costs for management would generally be less because of the more open nature of the road system; however, management activities would not be responsive to public input.

Administrative

Alternative B's effect on administrative use would treat all user groups in the same fashion. Permits would be required for entry on restricted roads. Proposals for entry would be weighted against reasons for establishment of the restriction and permits issued accordingly. Managers would be required to do a better job of planning and coordination in order to complete assigned targets. Access to private land may be limited to fewer roads but would be mutually agreed to by the landowners. All administrative use would be strictly monitored and utilized in evaluations to determine changes in road status.

Alternative A would have little or no effect on administrative use by the Forest Service. Access would be restricted to other users and the public. Planning and project accomplishment would not require any special considerations. Administrative use would not be recorded or managed.

Alternative C's effect on administrative use would treat all user groups the same. All activities would be completed outside restrictive time periods and be accomplished using designated routes available and open. Managers would be required to schedule and complete activities outside seasonal closure periods. Access to private land may be more restrictive during seasonal closures. The elderly or handicapped would experience more limited access opportunities during closure period. Administrative use would not be allowed during closure periods.

Alternative D would effect all user groups the same during the fall seasonal closure. Motorized activity outside that time period would be relatively free and open. Conflict with management planning would be minimal. Private land access may be more limited during the fall seasonal closure. Administrative use would not be allowed on closed roads during the closure period.

Implementation and Enforcement

Alternative B implementation and enforcement would require a substantial amount of initial cooperation and organization. All system roads and most trails would be signed to state the road or trails available for use or the reason motorized use was restricted. Enforcement capabilities would be enhanced due to consolidated and standardized management techniques. One written order would cover the District. The system would be user friendly.

Alternative A implementation would require no additional effort or cooperation. Enforcement capabilities would remain the same and continue to struggle with noncompliance. Public information would remain weak and confusing because of numerous closure orders and varying traffic control techniques.

Alternative C implementation would require a great deal of time and initial planning. Separate implementation schedules would be required for each seasonal closure. Enforcement would be made easier because of the logical nature of the seasonal closures; however, enforcement difficulties may arise as a result of untimely or incomplete posting of area restrictions. Maps and closure orders would be complicated because of revolving nature of the closure areas and period.

Alternative D implementation would require a great deal of initial effort to identify adequate travel routes. A single effort would be required to identify roads and trails available for motorized travel during the hunting period. Motorized use outside the time period would be relatively free. Enforcement efforts would be confined to existing closures, and the seasonal closure during the hunting season. Reasons for the closure would be logical and easily understood; however, designated routes could be easily altered, causing enforcement problems.

Based on the Environmental Analysis and professional experience, I have determined that access management activities will have no irreversible or irretrievable adverse environmental effects, individually or cumulatively, to either biological or physical components of the human environment. Additionally I find it will have little or no effect on: Consumers, civil rights, minority groups, and women; prime farmland, rangeland, and forest land; wetlands and flood plains; threatened, endangered, or sensitive species; safety; cultural resources, soils, fisheries; or ecologically critical areas. The action does not pose a violation of Federal, State, or local law requirements imposed for the protection of the environment, and is within the scope of the Desolation and Heppner Unit Plans and is consistent with and will be tiered to the Umatilla National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) as implemented. Therefore I find an environmental impact statement is not needed.

This project will not be implemented for 7 days following the date of the legal notice announcing this decision.

This decision may be appealed in accordance with provision of 36 CFR 217 by filing a written notice of appeal within 45 days of the date that the legal notice of this decision appears in the East Oregonian newspaper. The appeal must be filed with John F. Butruille, Regional Forester, Pacific Northwest Region, P.O. Box 3623, Portland, Oregon 97208; and a copy simultaneously sent to the Deciding Officer, James A. Lawrence, Forest Supervisor, Umatilla National Forest, 2517 S.W. Hailey Avenue, Pendleton, Oregon 97801. The notice of appeal must include sufficient narrative evidence and argument to show why this decision should be changed or reversed (36 CFR 217.9). Appellants must submit 2 copies of the Notice of Appeal to each officer if the notice is more than 10 pages in length.


JAMES A. LAWRENCE
Forest Supervisor

6-5-90
DATE