

TRAVEL MANAGEMENT

A VISION

The Carson has a well-planned, well-built, well-managed transportation system. People are able to get where they need to by various modes of travel, yet the wildlife, vegetation, soil, water and air are high quality and well managed for today's and future generations. There are no unnecessary roads and trails.

This looks into the future, although some of it maybe happening now. It is stated in the "present tense" as if it is already that way. This gives a feel of where we are heading. It paints a general picture with a broad brush.

MANAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- All roads and trails will be inventoried and decisions made about their intended uses.
- Roads and trails not needed will be closed and the land managed for natural resource purposes. They may be seeded with grass or, in low-use areas, simply abandoned and left to return to a natural condition on their own. An average of 70 miles will be obliterated each year.
- Needed roads and trails may be relocated to more desirable locations.
- Construction standards for permanent roads and trails will be the minimum needed to meet intended uses.
- Traffic management methods, such as closures, restrictions on use, and information signs, will be applied to roads and trails to provide for the safety of users, to minimize user conflicts and to protect resources such as soil, vegetation, wildlife habitat and water quality.
- It is from roads and trails that forest visitors gain visual impressions of the forest landscape. Roads and trails should be managed considering the view from the road and the visitor's enjoyment and should provide functional access requirements.
- Roads and trails will be managed to provide a variety of opportunities for all users.

This snaps a more detailed picture. It gives a feel of the intent, purpose and goals. It is the framework for the standards and guidelines.

Setting The Stage

Roads and trails in the national forests enable movement of people and resources in and out of the forests. Roads provide access for recreationists, allowing hikers to reach trail heads to Wilderness Areas. For example, roads provide access for management of timber resources, allowing Forest Service workers to carry out silvicultural treatments, stand improvement, reforestation, and brush and weed control, and for protection for all resources through control of fire, insects, and disease. Roads are also necessary for production of timber, livestock, and minerals.

With so many uses and users, conflicts and concerns develop that lead to questions about road suitability: Why are roads/trails needed? How many roads/trails are needed? Where are roads/trails needed? How much will they cost? How will the roads/trails affect the environmental quality of the area? What are appropriate road/trail standards? Why are roads open or closed to vehicular traffic? Which roads/trails are no longer needed? Why is motorized treatment not allowed or allowed? All these questions need to be answered before the first stake goes into the ground.

C. Forest-wide Prescriptions

The Different Types Of Roads And Trails. The transportation system is made up of many types of roads and trails. Only a small percentage of the roads can be described as highways or city type trails. High-standard roads called "arterial roads," make up about a small percent of the forest transportation system. They are often two lane and paved and can handle unrestricted traffic at moderate speeds. Arterial roads are expensive to build and maintain. These forest arterial roads are similar to the State and county roads that cross national forests.

Branching from the arterial roads into the forest are the "collector roads"-- the medium-standard roads. They may carry mixed timber and recreation traffic, so they may have turnouts or be wide enough to allow vehicles meeting each other to pass. Collector roads are usually stable enough for most traffic during the normal season of use. They cost about half as much to build and maintain as arterial roads.

Small, single-lane roads, known as "local roads," are found at the end of the road system. These minimum-standard roads provide access for specific purposes, such as conducting a timber sale, tending a grazing allotment, maintaining an electronic communications station, reaching a trail head, or maintaining a dam. They allow limited passing, and the road conditions require that vehicles move slowly. These roads are much used by the public for hiking, horseback riding, berry picking, birding, and hunting and are often seeded with grasses and plants for wildlife. Many are closed to vehicular traffic much of the time. The surfaces of such roads may not be stable under all traffic or weather conditions and may be rough and dusty. Construction and maintenance costs are very low.

The Major Transportation Challenges. Most of the arterial and collector roads are already in place. Therefore, most of the Forest Service planning for the future focuses on what is needed most in today's forest--local road construction and reconstruction. These shorter roads will be built for a specific short-term activity and then will be managed to meet other resource needs.

So it is local roads that present the major transportation challenges to Forest Service managers. Some people want all roads to provide year-round access for a continuous flow of products or recreational opportunities. This kind of access required relatively high road standards. Others want road standards lowered to provide primitive or semi-primitive recreational opportunities and to protect wildlife habitat. Yet others would rather have no additional access roads constructed at all.

Limited Access Is A Positive Method Of Resource Management. More attention is being given to closing roads as a means of protecting resources. Roads and trails will be closed periodically to protect wildlife and reduce maintenance costs or be closed simply because the roads are no longer needed for recurrent resource activities.

Whether a road should be closed is determined by examining the objectives in the Forest Plan. If it is determined that constant vehicle use is unnecessary, the Forest Service closes the road and puts it in storage, so to speak, until it is needed for another planned resource activity. During the closure period, the road is usually available for such uses as hiking, horseback riding, and hunting. In some cases, roads are obliterated and seeded with grass when they are no longer needed. Local roads not needed until later may be closed with earthen berms.

In some instances, when weather (such as during spring thaw) or road conditions cannot provide for year-round use, or in periods critical to wildlife (such as elk calving), roads can be closed temporarily. These closures may range from a few weeks each year to several years. Some roads are closed to avoid soil erosion and preserve water quality, then reopened some years later when necessary for timber harvest or other use.

Public attitudes toward this method of traffic management vary. Some people believe the public should have an unrestricted right of vehicular use of national forest roads and trails built with public money. Others believe that, since primitive and semi-primitive recreation opportunities and wildlife habitat are not readily

available on private lands, limited access is the most logical way to provide these opportunities on National Forest System lands.

Travel Opportunities And Restrictions. Authority for management of the road and trail system and other areas of the Forest is Secretary of Agriculture Regulations Title 36 Parts 261.12, 261.13, 261.54, 261.55, 261.56 and 295. Wilderness areas are closed to mechanical use under 36 CFR 293.6. Parts of the Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River are closed to motorized use under Executive Order 11644 and 11989 and 83 CFR Part 8340.

Most of the closure areas are closed or restricted in the sense that cross-country vehicle travel is not permitted. Insofar as possible, opportunities have been identified for use by jeeps, motorcycles, snowmobiles, ATVs, horseback riders and cross-country skiers.

The areas restricted or closed will not necessarily remain unchanged in the years to come. The process of regulating use is designed to change and meet new public needs and demands. It will be "fine-tuned" to reflect new information about vehicle impacts on wildlife, watershed, range and timber, as well as effects on other kinds of recreation and changing patterns of use.

Outside of restricted areas, many roads constructed for timber harvesting and other purposes have been "put to bed". Drainage and revegetation measures have been installed to permit these roads to heal and stabilize. These situations can be recognized by physical barriers, such as earth berms, ditches, or signs.

When fire danger is extreme, travel on the Forest may be restricted to certain roads or areas.

Standards and Guidelines

MOTOR VEHICLE USE MAP (MVUM)... Motor vehicle use off the designated system of roads, trails, and areas is prohibited, except as identified on the motor vehicle use map or unless specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulations by an authorized officer. Roads and trails open to motor vehicle use are designated by vehicle class and, if appropriate, by time of year pursuant to 36 CFR 212.51. Designated roads, trails, and areas shall be identified on a motor vehicle use map that is available to the public pursuant to 36 CFR 212.56.

TRANSPORTATION ANALYSIS... Transportation investments by individuals, other agencies or the Forest Service will be located and constructed to meet long term needs based on a transportation analysis which considers planned resource objectives.

LOCAL TERMINAL ROADS... Local terminal roads shall be drained and closed promptly after the end of resource management activities. Temporary roads shall be drained, obliterated, and revegetated immediately after the timber purchaser has finished using it.

ROAD MAINTENANCE...

- Maintain the transportation system at a cost efficient level in terms of operations, and reconstruction. Road maintenance activities will generally be conducted primarily for protection of forest resources, road investment, user safety, and only secondarily for user comfort. When roads in need of maintenance cannot be serviced, they will be closed if unacceptable resource damage is occurring or if they are unsafe.
- Evaluate all travelways to determine if they are needed and should be on the Forest Development Road or Trail System and whether their use is covered under an approved operating plan or special use permit. Road management plans will be reviewed or developed for all Forest Development Roads every five years and will include updating transportation maps and inventory. Where appropriate, roads will be covered under either a special use permit or operating plan.

DOUBLE LANE STDS... Reconstruct roads to a double lane standard only when traffic analysis indicates that a single lane will not safely and economically handle the projected traffic.

C. Forest-wide Prescriptions

ROAD GRADES... Arterial and collector road grades will not normally exceed 10% unless justified from the standpoint of savings and user costs or to protect the investment and adjacent resources. Likewise, local road grades normally will not exceed 12% (Best Management Practices).

RESEEDING... Reseed road cut and fill slopes with grasses and forbs which are adapted to the area and provide effective erosion control (Best Management Practices).

ROAD WIDTH... Construct local roads to a 12-foot width, except where accessing possible future (next planning period) cable logging areas where the minimum width will be 14 feet.

ELK CALVING... Do not conduct timber management activities, develop or utilize the road system in elk calving areas from May 1 to July 25. (Management Areas 1-14)

ELK MIGRATION AND COVER...

- Identify elk migration routes and provide elk cover along ridges, drainages, and transition areas when locating and designing roads. (Management Areas 1-14)

- Do not locate arterial, collector, or local service roads through identified elk migration routes unless no feasible alternative exists, as determined by interdisciplinary team review.

TRAILS:

MAINTENANCE... Maintain all system trails at a level that corrects unsafe conditions and minimizes unacceptable resource and trail damage. Prepare an annual trail management plan that identifies planned standards. Provide maintenance to restore the trail to those design standards. Pursue opportunities to develop "barrier free" trails on present and new locations to provide for use by the handicapped, young, and elderly.

OPPORTUNITIES... Consider trail opportunities for motorized/non-motorized, summer/winter activities when planning road closures or obliteration projects.

CONTINENTAL DIVIDE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL... Maintain or enhance the existing visual quality recreation potential and possibilities for a trail along the corridor that has been identified as a possible location for the Continental Divide National Scenic trail on the Tres Piedras, El Rito, and Canjilon Ranger Districts.

CANJILON MTN LOOP TRAIL... Construct the Canjilon Mountain Loop Trail (13 miles).