



United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service

Draft Record of Decision

Rico West Dolores Roads and Trails (Travel Management) Project Forest Plan Amendment

**Dolores Ranger District, San Juan National Forest,
Dolores and Montezuma Counties, CO**

November 2017

Rico West Dolores Roads and Trails (Travel Management) Project
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Introduction

This Record of Decision (ROD) documents my decision and rationale on the Rico West Dolores Roads and Trails Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) as it relates to amending the San Juan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan).

This decision includes,

- 1) Changes to the Forest Plan Summer Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classes for the Rico West Dolores area.
- 2) Changes to the Forest Plan Overground Travel Suitability and OHV Area Designations (OGTS) for the Rico West Dolores area.

Attachments to this ROD include,

- 1) Attachment 1 – Maps
 - a. ROS Alternative A (No Action) and ROS Alternative B
 - b. OGTS Alternative A (No Action) and OGTS Alternative B

My decision will be reflected in new ROS and OGTS maps specific to the RWD area. No text changes to the plan would occur.

Background

The Rico West Dolores Roads and Trails (Travel Management) Project (RWD Project) FEIS describes analysis of the physical, biological, social, and economic effects of the proposed changes to the designated system of roads and trails open to over-ground travel by motor vehicles, proposed physical changes to the road and trail system (decommissioning, structural developments, maintenance levels, trail class), and proposed amendments to the Forest Plan.

The purpose of the RWD project is to provide an array of opportunities for the current and future recreational desires of the public with Forest Service responsibilities for wildlife and fisheries management, water resources management, and forest management as well as the desires of local communities and affected private landowners. More specifically, the project is needed in order to develop a sustainable system of trails and roads where motorized travel is appropriate. It strives to improve both the motorized and nonmotorized user's experience. The purpose of, and need for, the RWD Project is to manage over-ground wheeled motorized vehicle use by designating a system of roads, trails, and areas for motorized use by vehicle class and, if appropriate, by time of year. In addition, the project identifies the Minimum Road System needed for safe and efficient travel and for administration, utilization, and protection of National Forest System lands; and identifies roads under Forest Service jurisdiction that are no longer needed to meet forest resource management objectives and that, therefore should be decommissioned or considered for other uses, such as for trails.

The Forest Plan identifies the need for updates to OGTS based on project level analysis. "A number of travel landscapes on the SJNF have not undergone site-specific overground travel management planning prior to publication of this LRMP. For these landscapes, travel suitability as depicted on Figure 2.13.1 primarily reflects current management and is subject to change through a plan amendment based on

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site-specific analysis that will be completed through the travel management planning process.” (Forest Plan page 98).

The effects of changes to ROS settings are described in Section 3.12 of the FEIS. Recreation benefits of roads are described in Section 3.16 Transportation. Effects of changes to OGTS categories are described in Section 3.17 Forest Plan Overground Travel Suitability Map. Maps of proposed changes to the Forest Plan ROS and OGTS were included for each alternative analyzed in detail. This amendment decision does not approve site-specific motor vehicle designations or ground-disturbing activities either now or in the future.

Decision and Rationale

As part of meeting the need for management of roads, trails and motor vehicle use on National Forest lands in the RWD project area, my decision will amend the Forest Plan ROS and OGTS maps. My decision reflects the new choices for motor vehicle use made by the District Ranger and will guide future decisions specific to the Rico West Dolores Area. Changing these designations requires a Forest Plan Amendment. Based upon recommendations from the District Ranger and my review of the FEIS, my decision selects the ROS and OGTS that align with the motor vehicle designations and minimum road system for Alternative B (Modified) as described in the concurrent project-level decision.

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)

For ROS, I select the ROS map (attached).

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum provides a framework for stratifying and defining classes of outdoor recreation environments, activities, and experience opportunities. The settings, activities, and opportunities for obtaining experiences have been arranged along a continuum or spectrum divided into six classes: Primitive (P), Semiprimitive Nonmotorized (SPNM), Semiprimitive Motorized (SPM), Roaded Natural, (RN), Rural (R), and Urban (U). ROS is a macro-scale classification system, not a micro-scale system. The ROS offers a framework to establish the desired setting conditions of access, remoteness, naturalness, built environment, social encounters, visitor impacts, and management. As described in the Forest Plan introduction to recreation settings, “These maps show broad desired setting conditions for the entire planning area; therefore, site-specific analysis is generally necessary in order to further refine desired setting conditions that may apply to site-specific projects.”

My decision adds 4,464 acres of semi-primitive non-motorized (SPNM) recreation setting in the Ryman Trail area, and the Willow Creek area. Conversely, Alternative B (Modified) decreases semi-primitive motorized (SPM) settings by the same number of acres. No changes occur to the Roaded Natural (RN), Primitive (P) classes.

Overground Travel Suitability

For OGTS, I select the OGTS map (attached).

In the Forest Plan, over-ground motorized suitability is divided into three types of areas: ‘Unsuitable’, ‘Suitable’, ‘Suitable Opportunity’. ‘Unsuitable’ areas include wilderness and other areas that are generally not conducive to road or motorized trail system development for resource, habitat, and/or constructability reasons. ‘Suitable’ areas are those that have an existing developed road and/or

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motorized trail system that, for the most part, serves the recreation and resource access needs of the particular area. 'Suitable' areas would not generally be considered for net overall expansion of the transportation system. 'Suitable Opportunity' areas are those that have an existing road and/or motorized trail system that can be improved by adding routes. Making changes to the existing road and trail system (e.g., to address resource concerns or enhance recreation experiences) is allowed within all area types. Such changes may include eliminating or decommissioning roads and trails.

My decision selects the 'Suitable' category for a large portion of the RWD area and these areas would not generally be considered for net overall expansion of the transportation system. The Taylor Mesa area would be changed from 'Suitable Opportunity' to a 'Suitable'. The configuration of roads and trails on Taylor Mesa supports forest management and recreation access and a major increase in route density is not desirable because of wildlife habitat and riparian/wetland features. Therefore Taylor Mesa should not be listed as a 'Suitable-Opportunity' area.

As described in the Forest Plan, the 'Unsuitable' category identifies areas not conducive to road and trail development). My decision identifies proposed 'Unsuitable' areas in many of the areas labeled with the ROS SPNM settings. These areas are not likely to require road networks for Forest management in the future and no roads cross these areas currently. New future motor vehicle trails are not anticipated at this time.

Pre-Decisional Objection Process

In determining which pre-decisional objection process applies to this project I considered whether or not this amendment will affect future decisions in the Rico West Dolores area. Generally the rule of thumb is if the plan amendment covers both this project and future projects, it would fall under the planning rule objection process (219 subpart B). If the amendment is only associated with this project, it would be included in the associated 218 project-level objection process. Although I expect future decisions regarding roads and trails to be minor adjustments, changing the ROS classes and OGTS categories will affect any future decisions about the road and trail system in the RWD area; therefore, the Forest Service will apply the pre-decisional objection process at 36 CFR 219 subpart B to this Forest Plan amendment.

The following four factors were used to determine whether the proposed change to the Forest Plan is significant or not significant under the 1982 planning rule. The four factors are timing, location and size, goals, objectives and outputs, and management prescription.

Timing: Here we determined whether the change is necessary during or after the Forest Plan period or whether the change is to take place after the next scheduled revision of the Forest Plan. The later the change, the less likely the change is to be a significant change to the Forest Plan. The current Forest Plan was signed September 13, 2013. Major revisions are not anticipated in the near future so my decision will be in place for many years.

Location and Size: Here we determined location and size of the area involved in the change and the relationship of the affected area to the overall planning area (San Juan National Forest). The smaller the area affected, the less likely the change is to be a significant change to the Forest Plan. Areas identified as Unsuitable Wilderness on the OGTS maps do not change (21,044 acres). The remaining area to which

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the OGTS amendment applies equals 223,510 acres within the 1,863,394 acres of national SJNF lands, or 12 percent of the total San Juan Forest land area. The ROS settings only change 4,464 acres or 0.23 percent.

Goals, Objectives and Outputs: Here we determined whether the change alters the long-term relationship between the levels of goods and service projected by the Forest Plan. The amendment only applies to the project area and does not alter desired future condition of the land and resources or anticipated goods and service to be produced under the Forest Plan.

Management Prescription: Here we determined whether the change in the management prescription is only for a specific situation or whether it would apply to future decisions throughout the SJNF. There are no Forest Plan standards identified for ROS. Desired conditions and guidelines refer to the ROS maps. ROS is not a suitability determination and does not affect allowed, restricted or prohibited activities identified for the Management Areas that fall within the RWD area.

There are no Forest Plan Desired Conditions, Objectives, Standards or Guidelines directly tied to the OGTS map.

The OGTS informed the Allowable Uses tables for each Management Area in Forest Plan Chapter 3. These tables list uses and activities as either 1) allowed, 2) restricted or 3) prohibited. I find no need to change the Allowable Uses in the Management Area tables as a result of this amendment. The unsuitable category identifies areas 'not conducive' to road and trail development. This does not require a prohibition rather it explains to future decision makers that these locations within the larger Management Area would not lend themselves to future road or motorized trail development.

The Forest Plan was developed in accordance with the transition provisions of the current USFS planning regulations (36 CFR 219.17(b)(3)) that permit use of a previous 1982 version for the purpose of revising the FOREST PLAN. The RWD project was initiated on December 15th, 2014 when the Forest Service published a *Proposed Action for Travel Management of the Rico West Dolores Roads and Trails* as a starting point for the NEPA process. Based on comments received, the deciding official chose to document the environmental analysis in an Environmental Impact Statement and a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS was published on June 5th, 2015. Because the project was initiated within the timeframes set forth in the transition provisions, the proposed Forest Plan amendment is subject to 1982 Planning Rule regulations 219.17 (f) which state that 'If the change resulting from the amendment is determined not to be significant for the purposes of the planning process, the Forest Supervisor may implement the amendment following appropriate public notification and satisfactory completion of NEPA procedures.' For the above reasons, I conclude that my decision constitutes a non-significant amendment of the Forest Plan.

Other Alternatives Considered

Four other alternatives were analyzed in detail as described in the FEIS. As described in Section 3.12 of the FEIS, there were no changes to Roaded Natural (RN), or Primitive ROS designations under any of the action alternatives. Areas with RN designations would often appear as SPM or SPNM areas until active management projects such as timber sales occur. Road access is generally maintained in all the areas

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where it currently exists and new ‘unroaded’ areas were not established, in part, because so much of the RWD project area is included in Colorado Roadless Areas and Wilderness.

I did not select the ROS designations described for Alternatives A, C, D or E because they would not be in keeping with the preferred Alternative B (Modified) selected by the District Ranger regarding the minimum road system and motor vehicle designations. I defer to the District Ranger’s rationale for not selecting these alternatives. The District Ranger modified Alternative B to remove motorcycle designations from the Little Bear trail and a portion of the Bear Creek trail. This decision will lessen the amount of motor vehicle impacts in the Bear Creek drainage but did not increase ROS acres because of the nearby Hillside Drive Forest Road 426. Adding motorized use to the Loading Pen Trail does not change ROS settings because that trail falls in SPM and RN areas. The OHV trails on Black Mesa are also located in areas previously identified as RN or SPM.

For OGTS, the Taylor Mesa area would be changed from ‘Suitable Opportunity’ to a ‘Suitable’ in all the other actions alternatives (C, D and E). Alternatives D and E would designate the Bear Creek drainage as ‘unsuitable’ and Alternative E would designate the Bear Creek Drainage, the northern part of the Calico area, and the East Fork trail area as ‘unsuitable’. I defer to the District Ranger’s rationale for not selecting these alternatives.

Public Involvement

Public comments for the RWD Roads and Trails (Travel Management) Project Scoping Document were received during a scoping period that occurred between December 12, 2014 and January 30, 2015. The Proposed Action for Scoping document alerted the public to possible amendments to the Forest Plan ROS and OGTS designations. The Rico West Dolores Roads and Trails (Travel Management) Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was published May 6, 2016 and a supplement to the DEIS was published on July 7, 2017. See the ‘Public Involvement’ section of the *Rico West Dolores Roads and Trails (Travel Management) Project Draft Record of Decision* for further details about public involvement and how comments received were considered. Also refer to Appendix K of the FEIS.

State, County and Local Governments

The Montezuma and Dolores County Boards of Supervisors participated in discussions with the Dolores District Ranger regarding the Proposed Action for Scoping, and prior to release of the Draft and Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statements. The Colorado Parks and Wildlife also participated in informal meetings and shared resource data with the District Wildlife Biologist. The District Ranger visited with the Town of Rico Manager and Town Board. Livestock grazing permittees discussed the project during spring meetings and through formal comments.

Local Organizations

Various local recreation user groups participated in the Pre-NEPA and NEPA public involvement process. Examples of these groups include San Juan Trail Riders, PAPA Telluride, San Juan Citizens Alliance, Groundhog Store, Private Landowners, Trout Unlimited, Southwest Colorado Cycling Association, Dunton Hot Springs, COHVCO, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Timberline Trail Riders, and Mesa Verde Backcountry Horsemen.

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Tribal Governments

Tribal consultation with approximately 26 tribes and pueblos that are culturally affiliated and traditionally associated with the SJNF occurred, beginning with scoping and continuing throughout the planning process.

Other Laws and Regulations

My decision complies with the National Forest Management Act (NFMA). This decision amends a Forest Plan that was promulgated under the 1982 Planning Rule. This decision fits the category of a Forest Plan amendment that is not significant (described above). The selected Alternative B (Modified) progresses towards and Desired Conditions and is consistent with all other Standards and Guidelines outlined in the Forest Plan.

See the presentation of other laws and regulations presented in the *Rico West Dolores Roads and Trails (Travel Management) Project Draft Record of Decision*. An examination of the record shows a thorough review using the best available science.

This decision to authorize the Forest Plan amendment is consistent with the intent of the existing Forest Plan's long term Desired Conditions and Objectives. The amendment was designed in conformance with existing Standards and Guidelines and revises ROS and OGTS mapping.

My conclusion is based on an evaluation of the record that shows a thorough review of relevant scientific information, a consideration of responsible opposing views, and the acknowledgement of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk.

Objection Filing Requirements

This Draft decision is subject to administrative review (objection) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 219 Subpart B. Only those who previously submitted substantive formal comments specific to the Management Plan during designated scoping or comment periods have eligibility to file an objection to the draft decision under 36 CFR 219.53. Objections must be based on previously submitted substantive formal comments attributed to the objector unless the objection concerns an issue that arose after the opportunities for formal comment. Incorporation of documents by reference is permitted only as provided in §219.54(b). It is the objector's responsibility to ensure timely filing of a written objection with the reviewing officer pursuant to §219.56(c). All objections are available for public inspection during and after the objection process.

Objections, including attachments, must be in writing and filed with the Objection Reviewing Officer within **60** calendar days following the publication of a legal notice in the *Durango Herald* (the newspaper of record for Forest Supervisor decisions on the Dolores District) announcing the Opportunity to Object (36 CFR 219.56). Publication is anticipated to occur on November 15, 2017. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. Objections must meet the minimum content requirements listed in 36 CFR 219.54(c). Objections, including attachments, must be in writing and filed with the Objection Reviewing Officer as follows:

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Postal service and street delivery address: Objection Reviewing Officer, **Regional Forester, US Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region** 1617 Cole Blvd. Building 17, Golden, CO 80401

- ✓ Hand-delivery: Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays. or FAX: (303) 275-5134
- ✓ or via the Electronic Objection Form on the project webpage
- ✓ or Email: *r02admin_review@fs.fed.us*
- ✓ Electronically mailed objections must be submitted in an email message, plain text (.txt), Word (.doc or .docx), Portable Document Format (.pdf), or Rich Text Format (.rtf) file formats.

Implementation

The District Ranger Decision will follow the objection process outlined in 36 CFR 218. Implementation will occur under both the Final Record of Decisions, which will be issued following the close of the Objection resolution periods (36 CFR 219.58 and 36 CFR 218.12). If no objections are received, implementation of the decisions may begin on, but not before, the fifth business day following the close of the objection filing periods (36 CFR 219.58(c) and 36 CFR 218.12(c)(2)). If an objection is received, the Final Record of Decisions would not be signed until the close of the objection resolution process (36 CFR 219.58(a) and 36 CFR 218.12(a)).

The FEIS will be filed with EPA and notice of its availability posted in the Federal Register. Implementation may not occur until 30 days after the Federal Register notice. The Federal Register notice is not tied to the objection process timelines. Implementation may begin immediately following signing of the Final Record of Decisions as described above, and 30 days after the Federal Register notice of availability of the FEIS.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, project details, or to obtain a copy of the FEIS or draft Record of Decision, or to obtain information about the Forest Service objection process, contact Derek Padilla or Deborah Kill at Dolores Ranger District, 29211 Hwy 184, Dolores, CO 81323, (970) 884-7296.

You may download the FEIS, this Draft Record of Decision and other relevant documents from <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=44918>