

Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Clearwater Forest Issues Travel Plan Decision

Orofino, ID – With public comments analyzed and analysis completed, Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest Supervisor Rick Brazell has decided how motorized uses will be managed on roads and trails within the boundaries of the 1.8-million-acre Clearwater National Forest.

Brazell selected **Alternative C Modified**, an alternative based on Alternative C that was described as “Motorcycle Loop Trails and Wildlife Habitat” in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement released in July 2009.

While the modified alternative is similar to the original Alternative C, Brazell said it responds to issues and concerns about opportunities for motorcycle loop trips to a greater degree than Alternative C. It also implements seasonal trail closures to protect key fisheries and wildlife habitat.

The decision:

- Permits motorized uses on designated routes, except for snow machines in winter. This change is consistent with national direction, and is a fundamental change from the current situation where travel is permitted except where specifically restricted.
- Restricts motorized travel (particularly over snow) and bicycle travel in areas recommended as Wilderness by the 1987 Forest Plan. An exception is summer motorized travel on Fish Lake Trail 419.
- Implements seasonal closures on some trails in Management Areas C1 (big-game summer range emphasis), C6 (fisheries habitat emphasis) and C8S (big-game summer range/timber management emphasis). This reduces opportunities primarily for backcountry motorcycle users.

“This was not an easy decision to make,” Brazell stated. “While many commenters sought increased motorized opportunities, others passionately argued for the elimination of motorized uses in many areas of the Forest.”

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Brazell said he used four key considerations in making the decision: (1) the degree to which each alternative would provide well-distributed opportunities for motorized recreational uses and quiet, non-motorized uses of the trail system outside of Wilderness; (2) the degree to which each alternative would provide well-distributed opportunities for both snowmobiling and quiet, non-motorized winter recreation; (3) the degree to which each alternative would achieve desired conditions for other resources, particularly wildlife and recommended Wilderness; and (4) the degree to which each alternative was consistent with goals and objectives in the 1987 Forest Plan.

“I sincerely believe the selected alternative provides the best mix of motorized uses while protecting wildlife and fisheries habitat,” he explained.

Brazell said individuals who drive full-size vehicles or off-road vehicles will not notice much change from the current situation.

Those who will experience the most change will be motorcyclists who use the North Fork Ranger District. While there will more loop opportunities than originally presented, there will be shorter seasons for the use.

Individuals who ride bicycles and snowmobiles in recommended Wilderness will also be affected by the decision. The 1987 Clearwater Forest Plan recommended 198,200 acres for Wilderness designation in the Mallard-Larkins, Hoodoo (Great Burn), and Selway-Bitterroot areas.

Upon issuing the decision the Forest will focus efforts on creating a Motor Vehicle Use Map that will display the travel management decision for Forest users. That will hopefully be completed prior to the summer travel season.

The Clearwater National Forest initiated the travel planning process in response to national agency direction to designate roads, trails and areas where motorized travel will be permitted and to display them on a Motor Vehicle Use Map.

The Travel Planning Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision represent the culmination of more than four years work and incorporation of thousands of public comments.

All project documents are posted on the website

http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=17992

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