

Chapter 1: Purpose and Need, and Proposed Action

1.1 BACKGROUND

1.1.1 AGENCY TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLANNING

Travel management planning, or management of roads and trails, has received increasing attention in the last decade within the Forest Service. This increased attention is largely the result of increased use of National Forests for recreation purposes. Increased forest visitation has led to concerns that much of this increased use is unmanaged and may be causing undesirable resource and social impacts.

One of the initial activities on the Custer National Forest (Forest) related to travel management was inventorying motorized and non-motorized routes. This inventory, conducted during 1999 and 2000, established a baseline for future analyses. This effort was specifically in preparation for the Northern Region (Region) of the Forest Service analysis of cross-country vehicle use. That analysis resulted in the Tri-State Off-Highway Vehicle Decision (2001 Tri-State OHV Decision) in 2001. The primary focus of the decision was restricting motorized vehicles to use of existing motorized routes.

During this time, the Forest Service developed a national framework for conducting roads analyses. The Forest Scale Roads Analysis (Roads Analysis) for the Custer National Forest (see Project Record) was completed on the Forest in January, 2003 based on this framework. The report highlighted potential impacts of roads and/or motorized access on wildlife, water quality, cultural resources; right-of-way issues; and potential changes to road management objectives. The key findings in the Forest Scale Roads Analysis report were considered in the development of this proposal (see Roads Analysis section below).

In 2005, the Forest Service finalized the Motorized Travel Rule which outlined a process for motorized travel management planning to be used by all National Forests. The Rule requires distribution of a Motor Vehicle Use Map to the public for implementation of travel management decisions, which the Forest Service has committed to completing by the end of 2009.

1.1.2 DISTRICT TRAVEL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND PLANNING

The Ashland Ranger District (District) contains a network of system and unauthorized (non-system) routes. The District's system roads are generally a result of historic routes determined to be needed for management of the District; roads developed or improved in conjunction with specific agency activities such as timber harvesting; and access needs associated with permits.

The primary travelways on the District, such as Cow Creek (#4095), O'Dell Creek (#4131), Wilbur Creek Cutoff (#4775), Beaver Creek (#4133), generally tend to be improved, better maintained routes

National Forest System road or trail – A forest road or trail that the Forest Service has determined is necessary for the protection, administration, or utilization of the National Forest System and the use and development of its resources, and identified in the forest transportation atlas.

Unauthorized route – A route that is not a National Forest System road or trail or a temporary road or trail and that is not included in a forest transportation atlas.

Chapter 1: Purpose and Need, and Proposed Action

that are typically suitable for use by passenger vehicles. In addition, there are a limited number of District roads were designed and constructed during timber harvest activities, or were improved to agency standards during fire rehabilitation efforts suitable for high-clearance vehicle use. The majority of routes on the District are rough, unsurfaced, sometimes over-grown and/or grassed-in, slow-speed routes that are typically more suitable for high-clearance vehicles, all-terrain vehicles, and motorcycles. When wet, these routes often become impassable.

Non-system routes on the District are generally believed to have developed in conjunction with recreational and permitted activities. The accrual of non-system routes has raised concerns about potential unintended effects, such as degraded wildlife habitat and diminished quality of recreation experiences.

District-wide travel management planning was last addressed on the District in 1992. However, the majority of the elements contained in this decision do not appear to have been implemented. Further, the conditions on the ground and agency policy have changed since 1992, which would make implementation of the 1992 decision impractical and inconsistent with current policy.

The Ashland Ranger District initiated the current travel management planning effort in late summer 2007 and distributed a scoping letter for the proposed action on November 26, 2007. The proposed action was developed in compliance with the 2005 Motorized Travel Rule, the Custer National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), and other related guidance. This Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) incorporates information gained from past planning efforts, current agency guidance, and specialist's input, along with the comments received from the public on the proposed action.

1.1.3 FOUR THREATS TO FOREST AND GRASSLAND HEALTH

Former Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth identified four key threats to maintaining and restoring the health of America's forests and grasslands: fuels and fire, invasive species, unmanaged recreation, and habitat fragmentation. The Chief noted specific concerns related to unmanaged motorized recreation and the creation of unplanned motorized routes, and the potential for these to have adverse impacts on natural resources. The 2005 Motorized Travel Rule was developed to address this concern. Chief Bosworth committed to implementing this rule by the end of December, 2009. Gail Kimball, current Forest Service Chief, affirmed the agencies commitment to meeting this timeline. This project is a part of that commitment.

1.1.4 ROADS ANALYSIS

The Forest completed the *Forest Scale Roads Analysis* in January, 2003. The report indicated that route density (system and non-system) on the District may be of concern in terms of impact on wildlife secure habitat (see Wildlife section of Chapter 3 for additional information). The report also highlighted cultural resource concerns with maintenance level 3, 4, and 5 roads on the District (see Cultural Resource section of Chapter 3 for additional information).

Maintenance Level (ML) 1 – A system road in “storage” for future use.

ML 2 – Typically a low speed, single-lane, native-surfaced, high-clearance vehicle road.

ML 3 – Typically a low speed, single-lane, gravel-surfaced, passenger vehicle road.

ML 4 – Typically a double-lane, gravel-surfaced road.

ML 5 – Typically a double-lane paved road.

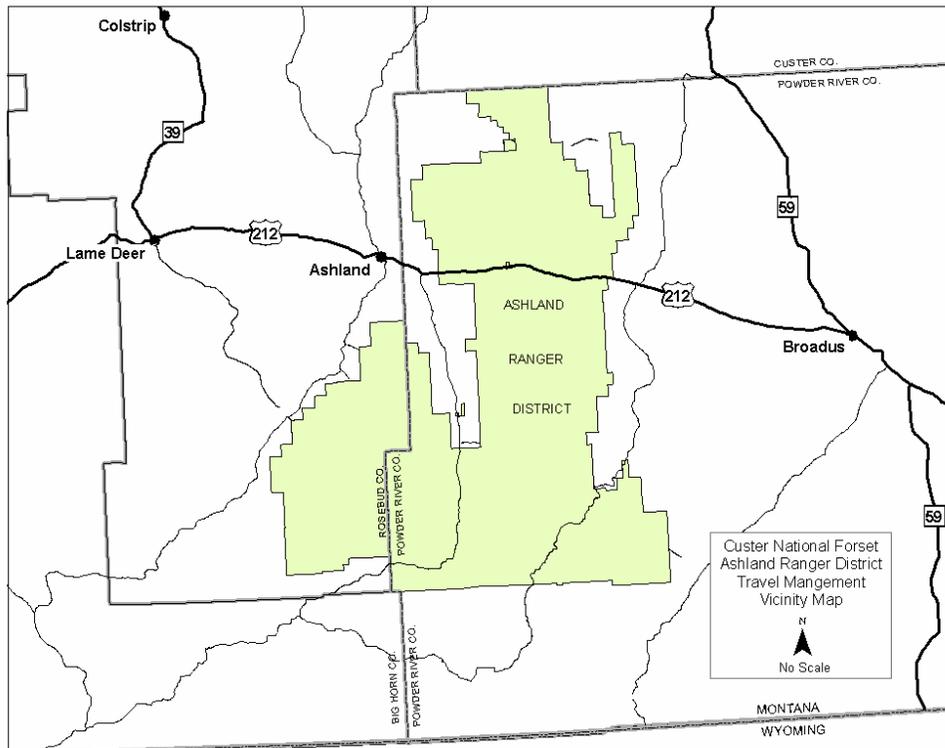
1.1.5 GENERAL LOCATION AND GEOGRAPHIC SETTING

The District, situated in southeast Montana, is composed of a single geographic unit, and is separate from other National Forest System lands (see vicinity map below). As such, the District is the single largest block of contiguous federal ownership in Eastern Montana, consisting of approximately 436,546 acres of National Forest System land. However, within the Forest boundary, there are 502,152 acres of land that includes both private inholdings and adjacent lands in other ownership.

The Ashland Ranger District is situated on a remnant plateau which has eroded away to leave the present landforms. The plateau stands out from the surrounding prairie because of its elevation and the ponderosa pine forest. The elevation ranges from 3,200 to 4,300 feet and generally falls within the 11-15 inch precipitation zone. Vegetation includes dense stand of ponderosa pine, hardwood draws, sagebrush, and open grass uplands. These lands contain and support a large variety of landforms, vegetation, wildlife, and uses. The vegetation on the District consists of ponderosa pine and grasslands interspersed by draws and ridges resulting in a landscape pattern that is approximately half timbered and half grassland. Game species are abundant with strong populations of deer, grouse, wild turkey and elk. Non-game species are also abundant and can be found throughout the District. The District has a large grazing program, a significant fuels reduction program, and has considerable lightning caused fires annually. In the past eight years, over 25% of the District has burned from wild fires.

The entire District is within the State of Montana, with the majority of District lands located in Powder River County and a smaller portion in Rosebud County.

Figure 1-1. Vicinity map.



Chapter 1: Purpose and Need, and Proposed Action

1.1.6 DOCUMENT STRUCTURE

This Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) discloses the potential environmental, cultural, social, and economic consequences of implementing alternatives to manage travel management within the Ashland Ranger District, Custer National Forest, Montana. The consequences of taking no action are also disclosed. This EIS, in conjunction with public comments, legal requirements, and existing management direction, will be used to establish travel management direction for the District.

Chapter 1 – Purpose and need for the project, and the proposed action.
Chapter 2 – Public involvement, issues, and alternatives.
Chapter 3 – Description of the affected environment and environmental impacts of the alternatives.
Chapter 4 – Project coordination, references, and those involved in preparation of the document.

This analysis is organized into four chapters and an appendices section. Chapter 1 identifies the reasons that the project is being conducted, legal requirements, and analysis parameters. Chapter 2 describes the public involvement, issues, and alternatives, including those not analyzed in detail. Chapter 3 presents the applicable affected environment and environmental consequences for each of the significant and other issues identified for this project. Chapter 4 describes the coordination conducted for this process and the individuals responsible for preparing the document. The Appendices incorporate additional material

needed to more fully understand the analyses and alternatives.

This EIS has been prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing NEPA provisions (40 CFR 1500), the National Forest Management Act and its accompanying regulations, Forest Service Manuals and Handbooks, and applicable Department of Agriculture and agency guidance.

1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED

In December 2005, a new travel management rule took effect for all National Forest System lands (Appendix A). The new rule directs National Forests to designate roads, trails, and areas suitable for public motorized travel. The actions described in this document are part of the planning process to select routes for designation under the new regulation. National Forests are expected to complete the planning and designation process by the end of September 2009. This commitment is displayed in the Chief's schedule for completion of travel management planning for National Forests and Grasslands available on the internet at <http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/ohv/summary07.pdf>. The Forest needs to complete travel management for the District to fulfill this commitment.

The purpose of travel management planning is to: 1) identify routes for public motorized use on the District, 2) provide for a variety of motorized and non-motorized opportunities, 3) minimize impacts on natural and cultural resources, and 4) have enforceable travel management guidelines that meet the direction of the 2005 Motorized Travel Management Rule.

1.3 PROPOSED ACTION

The Forest Service is proposing to designate the roads and trails available for public motorized use on the District in compliance with the 2005 Motorized Travel Rule. The existing *system* roads are considered the starting point for this analysis. Consequently, this proposal consists of the proposed

changes to the system roads (also known as actions) that the Forest Service is considering. The proposal includes the following types of actions:

- Designate a system of roads and trails on the District for motorized public use.
- Designate the type of vehicle and season of use for each system road and motorized system trail.
- Change certain system roads to motorized trails or mixed motorized use roads.
- Change certain non-system routes to system roads or system trails.
- Identify those system roads and non-system routes to be used for administrative use only.
- Designate dispersed vehicle camping along system roads and motorized trails.
- Change system roads for which there is no identified administrative, utilization, or protection need to Maintenance Level 1 system roads available for potential decommissioning in the future.

1.4 SCOPE OF DECISION TO BE MADE

1.4.1 DECISIONS TO BE MADE

The decision to be made is to designate a system of roads and trails on the District for public motorized use. In addition, some unauthorized (non-system) routes could be converted to system roads and motorized trails, and some system roads may be changed to system motorized trails. The type of vehicle and season of use would also be designated for each system road and motorized system trail. Dispersed vehicle camping distances or site specific restrictions would also be determined.

Existing Forest Orders that are not consistent with the decision made in the ROD would be rescinded and any new ones that are necessary for implementation would be issued.

1.4.2 DECISIONS THAT WILL NOT BE MADE

There were several subjects that commenters thought should be decided through this process, including cross-country game retrieval, exemptions for accessibility, changes to rights of access, decommissioning or obliterating routes, construction of routes, and over-the-snow vehicle use. The Deciding Official has determined that these actions are outside the scope of the analysis for this process. Specific rationale related to the determination for cross-country game retrieval, exemptions for accessibility, and changes to rights of access determination can be found in section 1.5 Legal Framework.

1.5 LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Forest Service must comply with laws, regulations, and policies in the management of the District. The Forest Plan is a part of the policy framework within which the Forest Service must conduct the analysis of District travel management planning. This framework also includes the laws, regulations, and policies that relate to travel management or the effects associated with travel management and travel management planning.

Chapter 1: Purpose and Need, and Proposed Action

1.5.1 AUTHORITY FOR TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLANNING

The Secretary of Agriculture's authority for travel management rulemaking, and regulating the use and occupancy of National Forest System lands are set forth in 16 U.S.C. 551; 23 U.S.C. 205; 7 U.S.C. 1011(f); 16 U.S.C. 551; E.O. 11644; E.O. 11989 (42 FR 26959); 7 U.S.C. 1011(f); 16 U.S.C. 460l- 6a, 460l-6d, 472, 497b, 497c, 551, 580d, 1134, 3210; 30 U.S.C. 185; 43 U.S.C. 1740, 1761-1771; 7 U.S.C. 1011(f); 16 U.S.C. 460l- 6d, 472, 551, 620(f), 1133(c)-(d)(1), 1246(i).

1.5.2 EXECUTIVE ORDER 11644 AS AMENDED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER 11989

Executive Order (EO) 11644 required federal land management agencies to establish policies and procedures for management of motorized vehicles on public lands to protect resources, promote safety of users, and minimize conflicts among uses. Executive Order 11989 amended EO 11644 with additional guidance on protecting resources when establishing policies related to motorized travel on public lands. The 2005 Motorized Travel Rule is the agency's implementation of these executive orders.

1.5.3 EXECUTIVE ORDER 13443

EO 13443 requires federal land management agencies to consider the effects of agency actions on hunting, hunter participation, and wildlife habitat; work cooperatively with State and tribal entities on wildlife management; and consider programs and recommendations of comprehensive wildlife planning efforts. Chapter 3 discloses the effects of the proposed action on hunting, hunting participation, and wildlife habitat, and compliance with applicable species-specific and comprehensive wildlife management plans. Chapter 4 discloses consultation with State and tribal agencies regarding the proposed action.

1.5.4 2005 MOTORIZED TRAVEL RULE

1.5.4.1 Designation Criteria

The 2005 Motorized Travel Rule requires consideration of the effects of designating roads, trails and areas on specific resources and components of travel management. The Rule states, "In designating National Forest System roads, National Forest System trails, and areas on the National Forest System lands for motor vehicle use, the responsible official shall consider effects on National Forest System natural and cultural resources, public safety, provision of recreation opportunities, access needs, conflicts among uses of National Forest System lands, the need for maintenance and administration of roads, trails, and areas that would arise if the uses under consideration are designated; and the availability of resources for that maintenance and administration." (36 CFR 212.55 (a)).

The Rule also contains specific criteria related to designating trails and roads. For trails, it states, "In addition to the criteria listed in paragraph [a] of this section, in designating National Forest System trails and areas on National Forest System lands, the responsible official shall consider effects on the following, with the objective of minimizing: (1) Damage to soil, watershed, vegetation, and other forest resources; (2) Harassment of wildlife and significant disruption of wildlife habitats; (3) Conflicts between motor vehicle use and existing or proposed recreation uses of National Forest System lands or neighboring Federal lands; and (4) Conflicts among different classes of motor vehicle uses of National Forest System lands or neighboring Federal lands. In addition, the responsible

official shall consider: (5) Compatibility of motor vehicle use with existing conditions in populated areas, taking into account sound, emissions, and others factors.” (36 CFR 212.55 (b))

For roads, the Rule states, “In addition to the criteria in paragraph [a] of this section, in designating National Forest System roads, the responsible official shall consider: (1) Speed, volume, composition, and distribution of traffic on roads; and (2) Compatibility of vehicle class with road geometry and road surfacing.” (36 CFR 212.55 (c))

The effects associated with resources listed in the criteria identified above, are disclosed in this document for consideration by the responsible official. This disclosure of effects, in many cases, coincides with the disclosure of effects necessary for compliance with NEPA. However, the requirements of the 2005 Motorized Travel Rule do not supplant compliance with NEPA, rather the effects disclosure required by the Rule are in addition to that required by NEPA. The location of the effects disclosures for each of the criteria are listed in the following Table. Because no designated motorized areas are proposed in any of the action alternatives, there is no discussion of criteria related to designation of areas.

Table 1–1. Guide to Locating Criteria Considerations Identified in the 2005 Motorized Travel Management Rule

Rule Criteria	Location in Document
General	
Natural Resources	Soils, Water, Vegetation, and Wildlife sections of Chapter 3; Air Quality in the Issues section of Chapter 2.
Cultural Resources	Cultural Resources section of Chapter 3.
Public Safety	Refer to Safety section below.
Provision of Recreation Opportunities	Recreation section of Chapter 3.
Access Needs	Refer to Access section below.
Conflicts Among Uses of National Forest System Lands	Recreation and Cultural Resource sections of Chapter 3; also refer to discussion below.
Need for Maintenance and Administration of Roads, Trails and Areas That Would Arise As a Result of Designation	Refer to Maintenance section below.
Availability of Resources for Maintenance and Administration	Refer to Maintenance section below.
Trail Specific	
Damage to Soil, Watershed, Vegetation and Other Forest Resources	Soils, Water, Vegetation, and Wildlife sections of Chapter 3; Air Quality in the Issues section of Chapter 2.
Harassment of Wildlife and Significant Disruption of Wildlife Habitats	Wildlife section of Chapter 3.
Conflicts Between Motor Vehicle Use and Existing or Proposed Recreation Uses of National Forest System Lands or Neighboring Federal Lands	Recreation section of Chapter 3.
Conflicts Among Different Classes of Motor Vehicle Uses of National Forest System Lands or Neighboring Federal Lands	Recreation section of Chapter 3.
Compatibility of Motor Vehicle Use with Existing Conditions in Populated Areas, Taking Into Account Sound, Emissions, and Others Factors	Generally not a concern - designated routes are generally not adjacent to populated areas on this District; also see Recreation section of Chapter 3 and Air Quality in Issues section of Chapter 2.
Road Specific	
Speed, Volume, Composition, and Distribution of Traffic on Roads	Refer to Safety section below.
Compatibility of Vehicle Class with Road Geometry and Road Surfacing	Refer to Safety section below.

Chapter 1: Purpose and Need, and Proposed Action

Access Needs

As required by the 2005 Motorized Travel Rule, access to National Forest lands was considered. The 1986 Forest Plan access objective is to provide at least one access point per five miles of administrative boundary where it has been determined that there is not adequate access from National Forest System land. There are some areas on the District that are not easily accessible by the general public, because private lands adjacent to the Forest as well as topographic features preclude access or roads/trails do not exist. Some additional access points have been identified outside of this process and, over time, access to the Forest may increase. However, the intent will not be to provide road/trail access to all areas on the Forest. Any access needs identified will be evaluated in a separate analysis from this project.

Accessibility

Special provisions aimed at providing people with disabilities motorized opportunities not available to all forest users have not been included in this proposal. In the comments and responses on the 2005 Motorized Travel Rule published on November 9, 2005 in the Federal Register, the agency states, “Under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, no person with a disability can be denied participation in a Federal program that is available to all other people solely because of his or her disability. In conformance with section 504, wheelchairs¹ are welcome on all National Forest System lands that are open to foot travel and are specifically exempt from the definition of motor vehicle in § 212.1 of the final rule, even if they are battery-powered. However, there is no legal requirement to allow people with disabilities to use OHVs or other motor vehicles on roads, trails, and areas closed to motor vehicle use because such an exemption could fundamentally alter the nature of the Forest Service’s travel management program (7 CFR 12e.103). Reasonable restrictions on motor vehicle use, applied consistently to everyone, are not discriminatory”. The proposal will provide reasonable access to all forest visitors.

Conflicts Among Uses of National Forest System Lands

The 2005 Motorized Travel Rule requires consideration of conflicts among uses of National Forest System lands. The Recreation and Cultural Resources sections of Chapter 3 each address aspects of conflicts among uses, primarily among users, including effects of motorized activities on non-motorized forest visitors and effects of motorized activities on uses associated with traditional religious and cultural practices. Conflict among other uses that may result from designation of system roads and trails, such as conflicts between motorized recreation and timber harvest activities, range management, and permit administration, were considered, but no substantive conflicts between these uses were identified.

Safety

The primary focus of public safety associated with route designation is related to mixing licensed and unlicensed vehicle use on District roads and trails. Commenters expressed an interest in having opportunities to operate unlicensed vehicles, while others have expressed safety concerns with permitting this activity. The 2005 Motorized Travel Rule lists public safety as one of the general criteria to be considered during the designation of roads, trails and areas. The Forest Service believes that both mixed motorized use roads and motorized trails are legitimate and appropriate uses of the national forests.

¹ A wheelchair is, “a device designed solely for use by a mobility impaired person for locomotion that is suitable for use in an indoor pedestrian area” (ADA, Title V Section 507 (c)).

Public safety on Forest roads and trails depends on many factors including the condition of the facility, speed traveled, type of vehicles, human factors like driver expectations, and environmental factors such as weather, noise, and/or visual distractions. National Forest System roads are designed primarily for use by highway-legal vehicles (motor vehicles that are licensed or certified for general operation on public roads within the State) such as a passenger car or log truck. Motorized mixed use is defined as designation of a National Forest System road for use by both highway-legal and non-highway-legal motor vehicles. Currently all roads on the District require the use of highway-legal vehicles. No roads are currently designated as motorized mixed use.

Designating National Forest System roads for motorized mixed use involves safety and engineering considerations. A motorized mixed use analysis must be completed by a qualified engineer. The level of analysis is to be based on personal knowledge, expertise, and experience. During the analysis, the engineer will review crash probability and crash severity.

Designating system trails for motorized use does not require a motorized mixed use analysis. Trail use and characteristics, such as slower vehicle speeds than roads, generally indicate that crash severity and crash frequency are expected to be lower than for roads. Although the District does not have any motorized trails at this time, motorized trails are common on many National Forests and nationally the Forest Service estimates that it has 47,000 miles of motorized trails (USDA Forest Service, 2008).

It should be noted that designation of roads or trails for motor vehicle use by a particular class of vehicle under 36 CFR 212.51 should not be interpreted as encouraging or inviting use, or to imply that the road, trail, or area is passable, actively maintained, or safe for travel. Designation only indicates the types of vehicles that are permitted to be used on that route.

Montana State Law

The Forest Service defers to state laws in regard to operation of vehicles on roads and trails. State laws related to roads fall under: Montana Code Annotated, Title 61. Motor Vehicles. State laws related to trails fall under: Montana Code Annotated, Title 23 Parks, Recreation, Sports, and Gambling, Chapter 2 Recreation.

The Forest would not deviate from State of Montana motor vehicle law by proposing motorized mixed use on National Forest System roads and motorized trails.

To operate a motor vehicle (highway-legal) on National Forest System roads, the vehicle must be registered with a valid license plate and the operator must possess a State drivers license and when operating a motorcycle must have a “motorcycle endorsement” on the license.

Montana State Law does provide exemptions for use of non-highway-legal (off-highway aka unlicensed) vehicles on National Forest System roads if the forest has designated and approved that road for such use (i.e. designated for motorized mixed use). The exemptions allow the operator of a non-highway-legal vehicle to be *under 16 years of age but at least 12 years of age* if at the time of driving the vehicle the operator has in their *possession a certificate* showing the successful completion of an off-highway vehicle safety education course approved by the State of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and is in the *physical presence of a person who possesses a drivers license*.

Montana State Law does not require that motor vehicles be licensed to operate on trails, but they are required to have an OHV sticker.

Chapter 1: Purpose and Need, and Proposed Action

Operator Responsibilities

Operating a motor vehicle on National Forest System roads, National Forest System trails, and in areas on National Forest System lands carries a greater responsibility than operating that vehicle in a city or other developed setting. Not only must the motor vehicle operators know and follow all applicable traffic laws, but they need to show concern for the environment as well as other forest users. The misuse of motor vehicles can lead to the temporary or permanent closure of any designated road, trail, or area.

Users need to be aware of and comply with the following standard language found on the Motorized Vehicle Use Map per Forest Service policy: *“Operators of motor vehicles are subject to State traffic law, including State requirements for licensing, registration, and operation of the vehicle in question. Motor vehicle use, especially off-highway vehicle use, involves inherent risks that may cause property damage, serious injury, and possibly death to participants. Riders should drive cautiously and anticipate rough surfaces and features, such as snow, mud, vegetation, and water crossings common to remote driving conditions. Participants voluntarily assume full responsibility for these damages, risks, and dangers. Motor vehicle operators should take care at all times to protect themselves and those under their responsibility.”*

Much of the Custer National Forest is remote, and medical assistance may not be readily available. Cellular telephones do not work in many areas of the Custer National Forest. Operators should take adequate food, water, first aid supplies, and other equipment appropriate for the conditions and expected weather.

Maintenance

Commenters indicated concerns that adding system roads and trails could increase the need for maintenance. The 2005 Motorized Travel Rule also includes a criterion related to maintenance needs that must be considered. This section is intended to address that criterion by considering the maintenance of motorized routes in this section.

The Forest is required to maintain National Forest System roads in a condition to safely accommodate intended use in accordance with the maintenance objective for that road. Trail maintenance is intended to preserve the trail and related facilities to meet established objectives for that trail. Road Maintenance guidelines are prescribed in Forest Service Handbook 7709.58 Transportation System Maintenance Handbook and Forest Service Manual 7700 -Transportation System, Chapter 7730 – Operation and Maintenance. Trail Maintenance guidelines are prescribed in Forest Service Handbook 2309.18 Trails Management Handbook and Forest Service Manual 2300 – Recreation, Wilderness, and Related Resource Management, Chapter 2350 – Trail, River, and Similar Recreation Opportunities. The Forest’s road and trail activities are conducted in compliance with these directives.

Maintenance Funding

Based on past funding levels, the Forest is unlikely to have sufficient funding to maintain to standard all of the routes necessary for the administration, utilization, and protection of the District for the foreseeable future. As a result, the Forest prioritizes maintenance work and routinely applies for additional/supplemental funding to increase the number of miles of road and trail maintenance completed.

Road and trail maintenance funding can only be applied to system roads and trails. Similarly, road funding can only be used for road maintenance, and trail funding can only be used for trail funding. Because the District does not currently have any system trails, trail maintenance funds have not been expended on the District in the past. The Forest receives an annual trail maintenance allocation, which would be the source for any trail maintenance conducted on the District, in addition to any supplemental funding (ex: state trails grants) that can be secured.

Maintenance does not occur on every mile of road or trail every year. As mentioned above, maintenance is prioritized across the Forest and accomplished based on the funding received. Over the past 6 years, the Forest annual road maintenance accomplishment ranges anywhere from 0 to 17% of maintenance level 2 roads, 3 to 62% of maintenance level 3 and 0 to 81% of maintenance level 4 roads on the District. The following table displays the miles of road receiving annual maintenance on the District for the past 7 years.

Table 1-2. Summary of Road Miles Receiving Annual Maintenance² by Maintenance Level.

Ashland District	Fiscal Year (October 1 – September 30)					
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
2 - High Clearance Vehicles	17	8	4	2	5	5
3 - Suitable For Passenger Cars	32	67	3	17	16	67
4 - Moderate Degree Of User Comfort	-	1	-	-	-	-

Maintenance Standards

The Forest Service has established national maintenance standards for both roads and trails. The standards establish the corporate level of quality the Forest Service expects to provide. These standards include key measures related to health; safety; facility conditions; and compliance with laws, regulations, and policies. The trail standards also identify critical standards that if not met would pose “a high probability of immediate or permanent loss to people or property.” Immediate actions must be taken to correct or mitigate the problem if one arises, such as closing the route to the public until the issue is addressed.

1.5.4.2 Administrative Use

In some situations, it is necessary and/or prudent for the Forest Service to identify a route for administrative use only. The most common situation on the District is when no right-of-way for public access exists, but access is needed to conduct administrative activities. In other cases, administrative use routes may be identified to reduce the potential for vandalism of facilities or to protect the public from health and safety concerns, such as potentially harmful mine waste.

Several respondents expressed concerns about how travel management planning might impact their permitted use, or asked that exemptions or similar measures be included in this analysis for their permit activities. The 2005 Motorized Travel Rule Section 212.51(a) states that:

Motor vehicle use on National Forest System roads, on National Forest System trails, and in areas on National Forest System lands shall be designated by vehicle class and, if appropriate, by time of year by the

² Based on data specific to maintenance that were readily available. Totals include maintenance associated with timber harvest contracts, county agreements, and other appropriated forest funds.

Chapter 1: Purpose and Need, and Proposed Action

responsible official on administrative units or Ranger Districts of the National Forest System, provided that the following vehicles and uses are exempted from these designations:

- (1) Aircraft;
- (2) Watercraft;
- (3) Over-snow vehicles (see § 212.81);
- (4) Limited administrative use by the Forest Service;
- (5) Use of any fire, military, emergency, or law enforcement vehicle for emergency purposes;
- (6) Authorized use of any combat or combat support vehicle for national defense purposes;
- (7) Law enforcement response to violations of law, including pursuit; and
- (8) Motor vehicle use that is specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulations.

In other words, motorized use associated with permitted activities is exempt from the route designation process that is the subject of this analysis. Authorization for motor vehicle use for permitted activities, through a permit or another mechanism, is to be addressed separate from the designation process. That authorization must be “a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulations.”

Some commenters were concerned that routes identified for administrative use only will provide permittees motorized access not available to the general public. These commenters would prefer that routes that are available for permittee use be designated for public motorized use so that everyone has the same motorized access. This perception may always exist. However, motor vehicle use of administrative use routes is intended to be infrequent and only for specific, agency-approved activities required for administration, utilization, or protection of National Forest System resources.

Motor vehicle use may occur by personnel from the Forest Service or other agencies, such as state law enforcement or game management agencies, or those authorized to use the route “under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulations.” Permit holders, such as utility companies, grazing permit holders, or outfitter/guides, are not automatically granted access to administrative use only routes. Their use of administrative routes must be specifically authorized in writing, must be necessary to conduct the activities authorized in their permit, must be for specific administrative routes, and may be limited to certain times of the year, as appropriate.

1.5.4.3 Public Rights-Of-Way Access

The 2005 Motorized Travel Rule states that, “In making designations pursuant to this subpart, the responsible official shall recognize: (1) Valid existing rights; and (2) The rights of use of National Forest System roads and National Forest System trails under § 212.6(b)” (36 CFR 212.55 (d)). While the subject of the rule is rights-of-way, the District has expanded this to include all authorizations issued for use of National Forest System lands within the District. In other words, nothing in this proposal is intended to alter authorizations for the use of roads and trails including, rights-of-way, road special use permits, operating plans, or special use permits. For example, this proposal does not contain actions that would alter the Forest Service’s commitment made in a road use permit authorizing a property owner to use National Forest System roads to access their property.

1.5.4.4 Revised Statute (R.S.) 2477 Rights-Of-Way

The 2005 Motorized Travel Rule exemption for legally documented rights-of-way held by State, county, or other local public road authorities covers rights-of-way under R.S. 2477 that have been adjudicated through the Federal court system or otherwise formally established. However, Congress

has placed a moratorium on rulemaking concerning recognition of any unresolved R.S. 2477 rights-of-way claims. Identification of unresolved R.S. 2477 rights-of-way in the EIS would be contrary to the Congressional moratorium and may give the appearance that the Forest Service is trying to establish the validity of R.S. 2477 right-of-way claims.

1.5.5 MINIMUM ROAD SYSTEM (36 CFR 212.5(b)(1))

This travel management planning process is expected to result in identification of the minimum road system necessary to meet the utilization (including recreation), protection, and administration needs of the District. Consistent with 36 CFR 212.5(b)(1), this process will involve the “science-based roads analysis” and “broad spectrum of interested and affected citizens, other state and federal agencies, and tribal governments” necessary for determining the minimum road system needed (see Chapters 2 and 3 of the EIS). In addition, the process is expected to result in the minimum “road system determined to be needed to meet resource and other management objectives adopted in the relevant land and resource management plan (36 CFR part 219), to meet applicable statutory and regulatory requirements, to reflect long-term funding expectations, to ensure that the identified system minimizes adverse environmental impacts associated with road construction, reconstruction, decommissioning, and maintenance.” Chapters 1 and 3 of the EIS identify consistency with the Forest’s land management plan and other statutory and regulatory requirements. EIS chapters 1, 2, and 3 disclose measures proposed to minimize adverse resource impacts and disclose the long-term funding expectations.

1.5.6 REGIONAL TRAVEL MANAGEMENT PLANNING GUIDANCE

1.5.6.1 Motorized Game Retrieval

The District is not proposing to designate any motorized game retrieval. In a June 30, 2006 letter to Forest and Grassland Supervisors, the Regional Forester for Region One of the Forest Service, Gail Kimball, provided guidance that stated, “Travel off route for big game retrieval is not recommended and must have Regional Forester approval prior to initiating any proposals that consider off route use for this purpose”. No extraordinary circumstances have been identified that warrant proposing motorized cross-country game retrieval on the District, consequently designation of motorized big game retrieval is not being proposed. The use of non-motorized game carts for game retrieval would not be affected by this proposal.

1.5.6.2 Motorized Cross-Country Areas

In a June 30, 2006 letter to Forest and Grassland Supervisors, the Regional Forester for Region One of the Forest Service provided guidance that stated, “Designated areas should have natural resource characteristics that are suitable for cross-country motor vehicle use or should be so significantly altered by past actions that motor vehicle use might be appropriate”. The Forest Service did not identify any areas suitable for motorized cross-country use on the Ashland Ranger District based on this guidance. As a result, designated cross-country motorized areas are not being proposed as a part of this project.

1.5.7 1986 CUSTER NATIONAL FOREST LAND AND RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Forest Plan directs management of all Forest Service administered lands within the Forest including the District. The Forest Plan provides both Forest-wide Management direction and

Chapter 1: Purpose and Need, and Proposed Action

direction for specific management areas. Forest Plan direction related to travel management is listed in Appendix B.

- End of Chapter 1 -