



Three Rivers Ranger District Motorized Use Designations Project

USDA Forest Service

December 2007

The Three Rivers Ranger District is seeking public input on project-specific planning to implement motorized vehicle use designations on the district.

The objective of this project is to produce a Motor Vehicle Use Map showing travel routes where motorized use is allowed, as directed by the 2005 Travel Management Rule. The forest deadline for final maps for publication is September 2009.

This proposal takes into account public involvement from past district projects, the Forest Plan Revision process, as well as the forest's Social Assessment and the Recreation Niche assessment process.

The Kootenai NF website has more information on motor vehicle use map development, including the district's Travel Analysis Report:
<http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/kootenai/>

PROJECT SIDEBOARDS

To complete a Motor Vehicle Use Map, we have developed the following sideboards, summarized from the district's Travel Analysis Report:

- Most of the Three Rivers Ranger District lies within the Cabinet-Yaak Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone. Travel management planning has been ongoing on the district for many years to provide for forest management and reach desired grizzly bear standards and habitat criteria by 2013. This project utilizes these past site-specific decisions related to motorized access as the basis for this proposal. The result is that approximately 530 miles of National Forest System roads on the district are available to highway legal motorized vehicles, including street legal ATVs.
- Due to these grizzly bear recovery requirements there are very few opportunities to provide increased motorized use. To meet requirements it is likely that opening a road or trail for motorized use would mean prohibiting use on another road.
- This project utilizes the outcome of the forest's Recreation Niche process, where goals were established to maintain dispersed and non-motorized recreation opportunities important to forest visitors. In this management strategy, the forest created a recreation vision, based on public desire and the unique characteristics of the forest. This focus (or niche) will guide the management of the recreation program for the coming decade. The level of motorized to non-motorized recreation opportunities also includes consideration for the district's steep, forested conditions, the amount of Inventoried Roadless Area (40% of the national forest system lands on district), the need to protect and improve watersheds and avoid weed spread to wildlife foraging habitat, and road maintenance budgets.
- The Motor Vehicle Use Map is to be reviewed, updated if needed, and reprinted for the district each year, so this analysis is not a one time occurrence. Travel management will also continue in the future as additional projects (i.e. vegetation management or other) may consider additional travel management actions while meeting grizzly bear standards and other resource concerns.
- Only wheeled motorized vehicle use will be addressed at this time. Over-the-snow motorized use will not be addressed on the district by this effort. Collaborative efforts and projects to determine winter use will continue as guided by the forest's land management planning.

Purpose and Need

The purpose and need for the Motorized Use Designations Project is to:

- 1. Meet the Chief's deadline to produce a Motorized Vehicle Use Map by December 2009.**
- 2. Designate motorized wheeled vehicle use on the district, while meeting grizzly bear habitat and big game habitat requirements .**

Proposed Action

The proposed action for the Motorized Use Designations Project is to:

1. Allow motorized access only on currently established open National Forest System Roads for highway legal vehicles.

The existing legal prohibitions covering National Forest System Roads on the district have been established primarily to meet grizzly bear standards. Although there is a public desire for additional motorized recreation access, opportunities for this are limited due to road density and security standards for grizzly bear and big game. The existing 530 miles of roads open to highway legal vehicles provide a variety of opportunities for motorized recreation.

2. Allow motorized access for dispersed camping along the designated road system only.

Currently, the 2001 Off Highway Vehicle amendment allows motorized access 300 feet off open roads for dispersed camping. On the Three Rivers Ranger District, the current open road system provides motorized access for most dispersed camping locations. Topography and vegetation limits additional opportunities for motorized access off open travel routes for dispersed camping purposes.

3. Allow non-motorized travel only on National Forest System Trails.

This action is consistent with current trail management for hiker/pedestrian and/or pack and saddle use as described in Trail Management Objectives, and other management criteria such as grizzly bear and big game habitat standards.

4. Prohibit cross country motorized use on the Idaho portion of the district.

Approximately 42,000 acres on the district lie within Idaho (Upper Callahan and Keeler drainages, and a small portion of the Buckhorn Ridge area). This area in Idaho is not covered under the 2001 Off-Highway Vehicle Amendment which prohibits motorized use off existing roads or trails. Much of this area lies within the grizzly bear recovery zone, and motorized use would prevent compliance with grizzly bear habitat criteria. Also, motorized use is not compatible with the steep forested terrain, sensitive soils, and management goals of the inventoried roadless areas associated with these Idaho lands.

A Proposed Action Map is included with this scoping notice. Larger scale maps are available upon request.

BACKGROUND

- The 2001 Off-Highway Vehicle Forest Plan Amendment Record of Decision prohibits motorized travel off roads (cross-country) existing prior to the decision on all Federal lands in Montana, North Dakota, and portions of South Dakota. Unauthorized roads and trails created prior to this decision allow motorized traffic unless prohibited by an area closure under a Forest Order. Motorized wheeled cross-country travel to a campsite is permissible within 300 feet of a motorized road or trail.
- In 2003 Former Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth identified four areas that are key to maintaining and restoring the health of America's forests and grasslands: fuels and fire, invasive species, unmanaged recreation, and habitat fragmentation. The former 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.
- On November 9, 2005, the Forest Service issued the Travel Management Rule revising regulations to require designation of roads, trails, and areas for motor vehicle use. The rule provides a consistent framework for motor vehicle use on National Forests and Grasslands. Subsequent to the publication of a forest Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM), the final rule prohibits the motor vehicle use off of the designated system. In conjunction with the release of the 2005 Travel Management Rule, Chief Bosworth committed to implementing this rule by the end of December 2009.

PROCESS AND TIMELINES

This project is anticipated to result in an Environmental Assessment analysis with the following projected timelines:

Proposed Action released for scoping:	12/17/07
Environmental Assessment issued:	7/1/08
Public comment period ends:	8/1/08
Decision expected	11/15/08
Data entered in preparation for map	by 5/15/09
Forest Draft Motor Vehicle Use Maps available	by 6/30/09
Forest Final Motor Vehicle Use Maps produced for publication	by 9/1/09

Your Involvement

For this project-specific planning effort, you are invited to send or phone in any comments, suggestions, or concerns you have.

Please send written comments to the **Three Rivers Ranger District, 1437 N. Hwy 2, Troy, Montana 59935**. To submit comments electronically, please send to: comments-northern-kootenai-three-rivers@fs.fed.us. Electronic comments must be submitted in rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc) or Word Perfect format. The subject line must contain the name of the project for which you are submitting comments. You should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from us as confirmation of receipt. If you do not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of comments, it is your responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

In order to be most useful to us, send your comments by January 31, 2008.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments may not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Part 215.

For more information, or if you would be interested in an open house on this project, please contact Douglas Spaeth, Project Leader, or Kathy Mohar, Environmental Coordinator at 406-295-4693.

I am the responsible official for this project. Your time and participation in this planning effort are greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

MIKE HERRIN
District Ranger

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDAs TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202)720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.