



**File Code:** 1950

**Date:** January 23, 2008

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/>

Dear Interested Party,

The Cabinet 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 (MVUM) 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.

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

### **PROJECT SIDEBOARDS**

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

- Travel management planning has been ongoing on the district for many years to provide for forest management and reach desired access management conditions grizzly bear. This project utilizes these past site-specific decisions related to motorized access as the basis for this proposal. The result is that approximately 420 miles of National Forest System roads on the district are available to highway legal motorized vehicles, including street legal ATVs. Additionally there are 116 miles of trail which legally allow motorcycle or OHV use because they currently do not have legal prohibitions to any motorized use.
- The area northeast of the Clark Fork River on the Cabinet Ranger District lies within the Cabinet-Yaak Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone, whereas the area southwest of the Clark Fork River on the Cabinet Ranger District is outside the recovery zone. Due to the grizzly bear recovery goals there are very few opportunities to provide increased motorized use in the grizzly bear recovery zone. To meet recovery goals the District will be assessing the current trails. There is a possibility continued motorized use on some roads or trails would mean prohibiting use on other currently open roads and trails. Opportunities for motorized use on the Cabinet Ranger District will be considered on a case by case basis with regard to forest management goals and objectives.



- 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; the need to protect and improve watersheds; 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 habitat conditions 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 with this effort. Collaborative efforts and projects to determine winter use will continue as guided by the forest's land management planning.

**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 providing for grizzly bear and big game habitat.

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

*1. Allow motorized access only on currently open National Forest System Roads and Trails where appropriate.*

Currently 420 miles of roads are open to highway legal vehicles, and an additional 116 miles of motorized trail do not have any legal prohibitions. The proposed action is to continue motorized travel on roads currently open to highway legal vehicles, and to designate motorized trails. The motorized trail designations and the allowed vehicle class will be determined by criteria such as location, topography, trail design, and include guidance from policy and regulations.

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

Approximately 4000 acres on the district lie within Idaho (Upper Elk Creek drainage, and small portions along east side the Divide Road #430). This area in Idaho is not covered under the 2001 Off-Highway Vehicle Amendment which prohibits motorized use off existing roads or trails. Motorized use in this area is not compatible with the steep forested terrain, sensitive soils, and management goals of the inventoried roadless areas associated with these Idaho lands.

## **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: 1/28/08

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 Cabinet **Ranger District, 2693 Hwy 200, Trout Creek, Montana 59874**. To submit comments electronically, please send to: comments-northern-kootenai-cabinet@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 March 6, 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 John Head, Project Leader, or Gary Kedish, Resource Officer at 406-827-3533.

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

Sincerely,

**JULIE A. MOLZAHN**  
District Ranger

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