

## Notification to Discontinue Downed Game Retrieval off-route on the Grand Mesa National Forest

Charlie Richmond, GMUG Forest Supervisor plans to discontinue a provision that provides for the use of ATVs off of designated routes for the purpose of retrieval of downed game within three designated areas on the Grand Mesa National Forest during big game hunting seasons, beginning 2005.

There are no trail / route closures or changes to route designations proposed. This decision will not affect travel opportunities on the 700+ miles of existing designated routes.

### Background

In December 1994, the Forest Supervisor of the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forest signed a Decision Notice which changed travel management on the Grand Mesa National Forest (GMNF) from “travel anywhere” to “travel on designated routes only” and identified the routes that were to be open to motorized travel. Some routes were closed to motorized travel as a result of that decision.

As part of this 1994 decision, travel off of designated routes for the purpose of retrieval of downed game was allowed during the hours of 10:00 am to 2:00 pm, using ATV's. The retrieval areas comprised approximately 80,280 acres -- the Flowing Park-Anderson Lake area, the Ward-Leon-Atkinson area, and the Porter-Owens Creek area (See attached map).

The Forest Supervisor committed to monitor use for three years to determine compliance with the time period, check whether off-route motorized travel was used only for retrieval and not for hunting access, and determine if resource damage was occurring as a result of the off-route travel. Not expressly stated in the decision, but implied none-the-less, was the intention of the Forest Service to re-evaluate the decision to allow this motorized access at some point in the future.

### Monitoring

The game retrieval provision has been in place for nearly 10 years. The Forest Service has made the following determinations:

- The privilege accorded by this authorization in the 1994 decision has been systematically abused. Under the guise of retrieval of game:
  - travel into other areas outside of the game retrieval areas is common, resulting in an extensive law enforcement challenges and disrupting the hunting experience of others;
  - travel is not occurring during designated time; disrupting the hunting experience of others;
  - additional illegal routes result. One set of tracks attracts use by others who are not paying close attention to restrictions, and new routes continue to be pioneered into areas.

- The Grand Mesa National Forest is not consistent with restrictions already in effect on both the Uncompahgre and the Gunnison National Forests.
- Unacceptable environmental effects result with the creation of additional illegal routes on the Forest. The current restriction imposes an unreasonable burden on law enforcement personnel to demonstrate proof that a rider is actually traveling to a downed animal.

Extensive analysis and discussion of effects of possible travel management options regarding game retrieval have completed through the 1994 Grand Mesa Travel Management environmental assessment and decision notice and the Uncompahgre Travel Plan environmental impact statement and record of decision (2002). Therefore, it is not thought at this time that any additional analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act will be required.

Comments can be submitted until April 15, 2005 to: Grand Valley Ranger District, 2777 Crossroads Blvd., Unit A, Grand Junction, Colorado 81506; e-mail to, comments-rocky-mountain-gmug-grande-valley@fs.fed.us; or fax to 970-263-5819.

For further information call the Grand Valley Ranger District at (970) 242-8211 or see the GMUG web site at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/gmug/policy/> under "Travel Management".