



File Code: 7710/2350

Date: January 7, 2009

Notice of Opportunity to Comment Grand Mesa National Forest Mechanized Travel Restriction

This letter and attached maps provide you with information about the proposed restriction and public involvement. This opportunity to comment will serve as both scoping under the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and the comment period required in 36 CFR 215.3.

INTRODUCTION

For the past fifteen years the Grand Mesa National Forest has been involved in travel management planning. Travel management has focused primarily on motorized travel to date. As early as six years ago some areas were identified as appropriate for non-motorized travel. More recently it was noted that a new situation was occurring on the Grand Mesa National Forest that was not adequately addressed in any previous travel analysis regarding non-motorized travel (specifically mountain bikes). Mountain bikers, particularly “free riders” or “downhill riders”, were beginning to create their own trails in often environmentally undesirable locations causing unacceptable resource impacts.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Forest Service proposes to restrict non-motorized, mechanized travel (i.e., “mountain bikes”) to designated routes. Restrictions would apply only on the Grand Mesa National Forest, Colorado.

Three preliminary alternatives have been developed to address a range of alternatives to analyze the restriction. A No Action Alternative will also be addressed by way of comparison in subsequent analysis.

Alternative 1 – Proposed Action, Designated Routes (328 miles)

Alternative 1 would include the following:

- Restricting mechanized travel to currently designated (system) routes. Other than formal designation on maps or signing, mechanized users would not experience any difference in designated routes.
- Hiker only trails (Mesa Lakes, Ward Lake Complex and Crag Crest) would not be included (approximately 15 miles).
- No off route use would be allowed including those trails currently being utilized that are not “system” routes.
- Decommissioning of all existing and future “non-system” routes would occur.

Alternative 2 – Increase designated routes open to mechanized (approximately 187.5 additional miles added to the 328 miles in Alternative 1)

Alternative 2 would include the following:

- Formally restricting mechanized travel to currently designated routes.



- Designating use of selected Nordic ski trails (approximately 174 miles) for summer use by mechanized travel. These routes would not be open until appropriate trail work occurred to ensure resource protection and appropriate trail construction specifications are met.
- Constructing approximately 9.5 miles of new mechanized single-track trails in the Flowing Park Area including constructing a connector trail to allow access to Flowing Park area from Mesa Top Trailhead as grant money and volunteer work allows.
- Designating a new approximately 4 mile-long mechanized single-track trail from Mesa Lakes Trailhead in the area west of Water Dog Reservoir

Alternative 3- Increase designated routes open to mechanized with seasonal closures

Alternative 3 would include the following:

- Similar to Alternative 2 with the addition of implementing seasonal trail closures within the Kannah Creek Basin during key big game hunting seasons – October 1 annually.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The GMUG has identified a need to restrict mechanized use to designated routes on the Grand Mesa National Forest. The purpose of the agency’s action is to address a recreation niche that was overlooked in previous analysis and prevent further resource damage from a proliferation of user-created routes.

The proposed travel restriction responds to the general direction outlined in the *Amended Land and Resource Management Plan Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests* (1991) (GMUG LRMP) by providing for semi-primitive non-motorized recreation opportunities.

PARTICIPATION IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

Preliminary review of this project does not indicate that any extraordinary circumstances or issues are present, or that the proposed action will result in a significant effect to the environment. I anticipate the environmental analysis will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA).

It is anticipated that a Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact documenting the decision will be issued after the EA has been completed. The Responsible Official for this travel management decision is Charles Richmond, Forest Supervisor for the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests. A Legal Notice of Decision will be published at that time in the *Grand Junction Daily Sentinel*.

This opportunity to comment serves two purposes: 1) as scoping for this project under the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and 2) as the comment period required at 36 CFR 215.3. The opportunity to comment on the Proposed Action ends 30 days following the date of publication of the legal notice of opportunity to comment in the *Grand Junction Daily Sentinel*. Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted. In order to be eligible to appeal the Forest Service final decision on this project, individuals must comment during this 30 day comment period per 36 CFR 215.6(a)(3). Only those who submit timely comments will be accepted as appellants of the final decision. Comments are defined in 36 CFR 215.6(a)(3). Comments must be within the scope of the

proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and include supporting reasons for the Responsible Official to consider. Also, for appeal eligibility, each individual or representative from each organization submitting comments must either sign the comments or verify their identity upon request.

Mail your comments to:

Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests
Attention: Forest Supervisor
2550 HWY 50
Delta, CO 81416

Fax comments to: **970-874-6698**

Electronic comments will be accepted, and must be submitted as an ANSI compatible format (e.g. *.doc, *.txt, *.rtf) or .pdf. Please note in the subject line that the comments are for **Grand Mesa Mechanized Travel Restriction**. For electronically mailed comments, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of comments, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means. Electronic comments should be sent to:

comments-rocky-mountain-gmug@fs.fed.us

Hand delivered written comments will be accepted at the GMUG Forest Supervisor's Office, 2250 Highway 50, Delta, Colorado, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except for federal holidays. Oral comments will be considered in the EA.

Only those individuals or groups responding to this proposal or indicating a desire to be added to the mailing list will receive further mailings regarding this project.

I appreciate your interest and involvement in the management of the Grand Mesa National Forest. If you have questions, please feel free to contact Niccole Mortenson, Engineering and Minerals NEPA Project Specialist at 970-874-6616 or nmortenson@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,

/s/ Charles S. Richmond
CHARLES S. RICHMOND
Forest Supervisor