

Travel Management Frequently Asked Questions

Why is the Forest doing Travel Management? Why not leave it like it is?

Chief Dale Bosworth, former Chief of the Forest Service, identified four threats to national forests; new Chief Gail Kimball supports this as well. The threats are: 1) the risk of catastrophic wildfire; 2) loss of open space; 3) invasive species; and 4) unmanaged recreation. The latter, including the use of OHVs, (trucks, motorcycles, ATVs), is why the forest is determining where motorized vehicles are allowed. Motorized travel management is a process to reduce natural resource damage from vehicles traveling off the designated roads and trails. Non-motorized travel, such as hiking and horseback riding, and winter over-the-snow travel is not included.

What is changing?

Motorized vehicle access to national forest lands will change. There may be some areas where access is reduced and some areas where the access may increase and still other areas where there will be no change.

Why is the Forest spending so much time and energy on OHV use?

OHV use is a valid and growing recreational activity on national forests. However, doing nothing to address cross-country (off-road) travel would be irresponsible. The Forest is proposing to manage this growing recreational use by essentially eliminating cross-country travel and by designating roads and trails that are appropriate for use by vehicles by vehicle type and time of year.

Are the needs of rural communities and traditional uses of forest products and ties to the land being considered in Travel Management Rule?

The forest values and supports traditional uses associated with the rural lifestyle of the many communities it serves, such as tending livestock, collecting firewood, vigas and latillas, and picking piñon. These activities will continue. Fuelwood (including vigas and latillas) gathering will be permitted under a separate permit authorization. Some districts currently have fuelwood areas or projects that provide access to fuelwood. Each district should be able to provide the public with this type of information. In addition, the forest will be looking for additional potential fuelwood areas.

Access to range operations will be determined at the annual meetings range permit holders have with each district. In some cases, accessing a specific location may require using a non-motorized method.

Is the Carson National Forest proposing new OHV (off-highway vehicle) opportunities?

The goal of this process is to designate a sustainable system of roads, trails and areas for motorized use. The vehicle type, time of year; and type of access to dispersed camping opportunities will be determined. Each district will determine if there is a need for additional OHV opportunities.

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Motorized recreation use by OHVs is a legitimate and appropriate way for people to enjoy their National Forests—in the right places, and with the proper management. The travel management analysis will help us determine where and when motorized recreation use by OHVs is appropriate. The proposed actions may consist of a decrease in available OHV opportunities when compared to the existing condition. In addition, more emphasis will be placed on providing motorized access to various activities (such as dispersed camping, picnicking, etc).

Where needed, a forest plan amendment will be prepared closing all areas open to cross-country travel. Currently, about forty percent of the forest is open for cross-country travel. All districts, with the exception of Jicarilla, have some areas where cross-country motorized travel is allowed. However, the Questa district has been restricting cross country travel through a forest special order. The proposed actions will include eliminating cross country motorized travel.

Who is making the decision about where OHVs and other vehicles can go?

Based on the environmental analyses and public input, the District Ranger or Forest Supervisor will decide: 1) which roads, trails, and areas will be designated for motorized use by the public by type of vehicle and time of year, and, 2) the type of motorized access to be provided for various activities (that include dispersed camping and big game retrieval).

What is the process?

The travel management (hereafter referred to as TM) plan follows the NEPA process. The process calls for several steps that include scoping, a 30-day notice and comment period, and a 45-day appeal process. The Carson had several pre-scoping public comment meetings in 2006 and 2007. The proposed actions are based on the public comments we received. The comments we received ranged from closing every road to motorized travel to adding additional routes. Each comment was carefully considered. How each comment was addressed will be available for public review (in the project record and on the forest web site) once the analysis is in progress.

The public involvement process over the last two years, combined with a science-based, internal analysis of the road system resulted in a Travel Analysis Process (TAP) report for each geographically similar area. The TAP report makes recommendations about the forest's road system, including the identification of the minimum road system as required under the Travel Management Rule. The TAP is a “living” document and will be continually updated as necessary and used to inform future decisions.

The first version of the TAP report is available to the public through the web at: http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/carson/recreation/travel_mgmt/index.shtml.

Final decisions will occur in the summer of 2009 and will be implemented in October 2009.

How will the forest enforce this rule? It seems like there are not enough Law Enforcement Officers (LEOs) or funding to do proper enforcement.

We believe that most people want to do the right thing and follow the rules. Law Enforcement and Investigations will continue to work with the public to gain and maintain compliance of our new motorized route designation plans. We believe that enforcement will get better because there will be regulations to enforce; at this time there are no laws or rules to enforce. Once a system is in place that informs the public where vehicular travel is allowed, being off that road system is an immediate violation. The Forest Service has good working relationships and cooperative agreements with the county sheriff departments, NM State Police and the NM Game and Fish Department. With assistance from other law enforcement entities along with ongoing education of users and signing, enforcement should be achievable. Our experience is that once individuals receive violation notices, violation numbers drop.

Is the forest taking away all opportunities for OHV riders?

No, the forest recognizes OHVs to be a legitimate recreational use and knows that the OHV community will agree that not addressing current resource problems associated with this type of use will limit their future enjoyment in the National Forest. Understanding where and when OHVs are allowed on the forest will be beneficial to all users.

How will this affect hunting experiences?

Hunters will continue to have motorized access to much of the forest through a designated system of roads, as well as having foot or horseback access to other non-motorized areas of the forest including wilderness areas. Please refer to the scoping letter which includes the forest's proposals for using motorized vehicles for big game retrieval.

What about gathering fuelwood?

The ability to access firewood will be handled under a separate permitting process and the current fuelwood permit will have language that is consistent with the travel management decision. Some districts have fuelwood areas available or have vegetation projects underway that will provide access to fuelwood.

What about private land owners who are surrounded by forest lands.

Access to private lands will not change. The private land owner is permitted to access the land. The road to the private land may be closed to general public travel and it may be placed under special use permit, thereby shifting responsibility for the road and maintenance to the land owner.

What about camping?

The forest will be open for camping, but the change will be that some camping sites that are not in a developed campground will not be accessible by motor vehicle, including ATVs. We have been working to make sure that there is sufficient motorized access to dispersed camping opportunities. Please review the scoping letter which describes the

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forest's proposal for providing access to various activities. Options for camping include: (1) pulling off a designated road and walking in; (2) Add unauthorized routes to the motorized system for the purpose of providing motorized access to various activities that include (but are not limited to) camping and picnicking, and, (3) Designating corridors where motorized travel for access to dispersed camping is allowed within a specific distance from the designated (open) road.

Will there be seasonal closures?

Seasonal closures help reduce direct road maintenance costs, reduce natural resource damage, and reduce wildlife disturbances. The travel management plan will contain seasonal closure information. Many roads that have been open year-round have resulted in damage to soils and water from excess sediment and erosion. A majority of roads have severe road bed damage. Motor vehicle access can also disturb wildlife (increase animal stress) during the winter and during the spring calving times. Please refer to the forest's scoping letter which identifies where seasonal restrictions are proposed.

Does the forest have enough resources to manage current and anticipated motorized recreation use?

By eliminating cross-country (off-road) travel, and designating a system of roads, trails and areas, the forest would be able to target our efforts to protect and improve forest resources while providing a range of recreation opportunities.

How many miles of road currently exist on the CNF?

The Carson National Forest currently has approximately 2,641 miles of open roads and miles of roads and approximately 91 miles of motorized trails

How many miles of road are open to different vehicle sizes, and at what time of year?

Please refer to the forest's scoping letter for a description of what is currently open and how that would change with the proposal.

What opportunities will be available for ATVs and Motorbikes (single track)?

Please refer to the forest's scoping letter for a description of what is currently open and how that would change with the proposal.

Are all proposed changes consistent with the Carson National Forest Management Plan?

The travel management decisions will be consistent with the forest plan. This may require a forest plan amendment if the decision varies from the existing direction.

During the NEPA Scoping process, what's the best way to ensure that my comments about the proposed action are addressed?

Your comments should be as specific as possible. For example: Rather than saying, "I don't want roads closed"; it would be better to state: "I'd like to keep Forest Service Road XXX open as my family uses this road every year to access our favorite Trail #00," give specific information about roads and trails that mean something to you.

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What happens next?

The public will have 30 days to comment on the proposed actions. The proposed action(s) will be available on the forest website at: http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/carson/recreation/travel_mgmt. An interdisciplinary team of resource specialists will review the comments, identify issues, and will develop alternatives. The public will have an additional 30-day period in which to provide the forest input and comments. Resource specialists will prepare environmental consequences for the alternatives. We anticipate a complete analysis(es) and decision(s) by the summer of 2009.

Proposed Action (30 day scoping period) Public Input → Interdisciplinary Team Develops Alternatives → Interdisciplinary Team Develops Effects Analysis → 30 day Notice and Comment on proposed action → Environmental Analysis and Decision (DN/FONSI) is available for public review → 45-day appeal period

How do I learn more?

The CNF will strive to continuously update our website http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/carson/recreation/travel_mgmt to provide the most current information on the travel management process. Other ways to stay informed are by visiting your local ranger district for updated information or you can contact Paula Cote (575) 758-6284 and Jack Carpenter (575) 758-6221 or visit them at the Carson National Forest's Supervisor's Office, 208 Cruz Alta, Taos, NM 87571.