



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Southwestern Region 3
Carson National Forest

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Dear Forest Partner:

We are pleased to inform you of our proposed actions for managing motorized travel on the Carson National Forest. This letter begins the "scoping phase," in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Enclosed are descriptions of the proposed actions, a system of roads and trails for motorized use, associated (small scale) maps, a summary of how motorized use would be managed by district, and a glossary of travel management terms. Where needed, motorized vehicle class and time of year restrictions are addressed. The Carson forest plan will be amended as needed to be consistent with the direction found in the Travel Management Rule.

Highlights of the proposal are:

- Eliminating cross-country motorized vehicle use on the Canjilon, El Rito, Tres Piedras, and Camino Real ranger districts. The Jicarilla and Questa districts are currently closed to cross-country travel;
- Increasing the miles of trail designated for motor vehicles 50" or less in width on the Questa and Canjilon ranger districts;
- Using a combination of parking adjacent to designated roads, corridors and motorized access routes to provide access to dispersed camping and big game retrieval;
- Having additional seasonal restrictions for habitat and soil and water protection on most ranger districts; and,
- Designating approximately 2,100 miles of road and motorized trails.

How to Get Information

The proposed action, existing motorized transportation system, and larger scale maps may be downloaded from the forest's web site at: http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/carson/recreation/travel_mgmt or you may request a CD containing the maps in .pdf format. We realize that the attached maps (Figures 1-4) do not show a high degree of detail. We chose to send you a format that closely resembles what the final motor vehicle use map (MVUM) will look like. Each forest is required to use standard symbols for displaying the motorized system. Please do not hesitate to request a CD for easier viewing or to visit any of our offices which have maps available for review.



Paper copies of the maps are available for review at ranger districts, the supervisor's office and public libraries in the vicinity of the Carson National Forest. The contact information for each local forest office is attached.

If you have questions about the NEPA process or the process for submitting comments, please contact the Travel Management Team, Paula Cote and Jack Carpenter at (575) 758-6284 and (575) 758-6221.

Commenting on the Proposed Actions

We request individuals, groups, Tribes, and other government agencies to review our proposed actions, including the maps, and provide us with comments in response to them. Your comments will be used to identify issues related to the proposed actions and the development of alternatives to address these issues. We encourage your involvement in this scoping process and are especially interested in new information related to the proposals that you think we may have overlooked. While opinions are also welcome, providing tangible and verifiable information is the most helpful way in making a good, informed decision. For example, comments should indicate a forest road or motorized trail number and specific reasons why it should or should not be designated for motorized use. Comments will be most effective if received by February 28, 2009. Final decisions should occur in the summer of 2009 and the decisions will be implemented in October 2009.

Send written comments to:

Carson National Forest
Travel Management Proposed Actions
208 Cruz Alta Road
Taos, NM 87571

FAX: 575.758.6213

Electronic comments can be submitted, but must be in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), MS-Word (.doc) or Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) to carson_trvl_mgt@fs.fed.us "CNF Travel Management" must be in the subject line of the e-mail.

In compliance with the Freedom of Information Act, please be aware that the written comments received on this proposal, including names and addresses, will be considered part of the public record and will be available for public inspection.

Sincerely,



KENDALL CLARK
Forest Supervisor

Attachment

Background

The Forest Service has identified four major threats to the national forests and grasslands: 1) the risk of catastrophic fire, 2) the loss of open space, 3) invasive species, and, 4) unmanaged recreation, including the effects of unmanaged off-highway vehicles (OHVs). In response to the latter, on November 9, 2005, the Forest Service published final travel management regulations for use of motor vehicles on national forest system lands. The new regulations amended Title 36 of the Code of Federal Regulations, parts 212, 251, 261, and removed part 295. These regulations together are referred to as the travel management rule (or rule) throughout this document.

The travel management rule (TMR) “provides for a system of National Forest System (NFS) roads, NFS trails, and areas on NFS lands that are designated for motor vehicle use. After these roads, trails, and areas are designated, motor vehicle use, including the class of vehicle and time of year, not in accordance with these designations, is prohibited. Motor vehicle use off designated roads and trails and outside designated areas is prohibited by 36 CFR 261.13 (36 CFR 212.50 (a)).” The designated roads, trails, and areas will be published on a motor vehicle use map, which will be available free of charge to the public. Exemptions from these designations include 1) Aircraft, 2) Watercraft, 3) Over-snow vehicles, 4) Limited administrative use by the Forest Service, 5) Use of any fire, military, emergency, or law enforcement vehicle for emergency purposes, 6) Law enforcement response to violations of law, including pursuit; and 7) Motor vehicle use that is specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulation (36 CFR 212.51). In designating routes, the responsible official may include in the designation the limited use of motor vehicles within a specific distance of certain designated routes, and if appropriate, within a specified time period, solely for the purposes of dispersed camping or retrieval of a downed big game animal by an individual who has legally taken the animal (36 CFR 212.51(b)).

The rule requires a motor vehicle use map (MVUM) that identifies designated roads, trails, and areas (36 CFR 212.56). When a decision is made related to travel management on the Carson National Forest, motor vehicle use maps will be made available to the public at the Forest Supervisor’s Office and all the ranger districts, as soon as practicable, as well as on the forest’s website. The motor vehicle use maps will specify the classes of vehicles and, if appropriate, the times of year for which use is designated.

A travel analysis process (TAP)¹ is required under the travel management rule. With public involvement, the TAP report makes recommendations on the forest’s road and trail system and includes the identification of the minimum road system. The proposed action incorporates many of the recommendations found in the TAP and moves toward having the minimum road system. The TAP, which is not a NEPA document, will be continually updated as necessary and will be used to assist future decision-making.

Public Involvement

The proposed actions were developed using many of the hundreds of comments received from forest users over the past few years, during open houses and direct contacts with government officials, agencies, and Tribal officials. Public comments used in developing the TAP report also played an important role in the development of the proposed action. Many of these comments

¹ The travel analysis process report is available on the Carson National Forest web site http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/carson/recreation/travel_mgmt.

focused on the need for motorized use for recreational activities that include camping, hiking, hunting, fishing, sightseeing, and pleasure riding.

Eight public meetings were held across the forest in July 2006 and then again in March 2007 to introduce the public to TMR and to listen to their suggestions and concerns. Over 150 people attended these meetings. Districts also included discussions on the TMR process during their 2007 and 2008 annual meetings with grazing permittees. In addition to the public meetings, members of the travel management team attended the Rio Grande Sportsman's clinic and Red River Sportsman's convention during the summer of 2008. Individuals contacted at the conventions and clinics included members of Trout Unlimited, Ducks Unlimited, and sportsmen's groups. Fliers explaining travel management were available during local community (Questa, and Latir) fiestas. One-on-one discussions between Forest Service officials and hikers and known motorized vehicle users of the forest were held, as well as, meetings with groups such as Amigos Bravos. During Career Days at local schools, presentations were held concerning travel management. The comments have been varied. Some people did not want to see the forest closed to cross-country motorized travel. Others wanted fewer miles of roads and trails designated for motor vehicle use. Most recently, the TMR process was presented (January 2009) at the annual Northern New Mexico Livestock Association meeting and districts have continued to make contacts with interested parties.

What is Not Changing

The rule allows the responsible official to incorporate previous administrative decisions regarding travel management made under other authorities, including designations and prohibitions of motor vehicle use, in designating NFS roads, trails, and areas on NFS lands for motor vehicle use (36 CFR 212.50(b)). Therefore, those existing miles of roads and trails already designated for motor vehicle use that are not changing in the proposed action will not be included in the effects analysis. Only the “new” changes to the designated system as identified in the proposed action will be considered in the effects analysis. The resulting motor vehicle use map will include the resulting designated road system. Non-system roads (decommissioned, unauthorized, etc.) will not be shown and it will be illegal to drive on them.

Many of the people who already provided comments during the public meetings stressed that motor vehicles are needed for subsistence and commercial activities on the forest. The Carson National Forest will continue to provide access to the national forest for activities like camping, hunting, hiking, mountain biking, wildlife viewing, horseback riding, and driving for pleasure on designated roads and trails. In addition, we recognize the culture of northern New Mexico is tied closely to the land and understand the importance of maintaining traditional and cultural uses of the forest. The rule allows a permitting process or travel off designated roads and trails. The gathering of forest products such as firewood, vigas, latillas, and piñon nuts, as well as providing access to grazing allotments, will be allowed through the forest's permit system or other written authorization as allowed under the rule (36 CFR 212.51(a)(8)). The forest will continue to allow parking within one vehicle length adjacent to a designated road, when it is safe to do so and when parking does not cause damage to forest resources.

Currently, the Carson forest plan designates certain roads across the forest, to allow motor vehicles within a 300-foot corridor. The proposed action identifies additional roads where corridors would be added.

Many people have expressed interest in how the Middle Fork Road (FR 487) on the Questa Ranger District would be managed. The proposed action would not change how Middle Fork Road is managed. It would remain closed to motorized use.

Location and Description

The Carson National Forest (forest) is in north-central New Mexico. The forest is approximately 1,492,000 acres, with three geographically distinct areas. The Canjilon, El Rito, and Tres Piedras ranger districts are located in the lower San Juan Mountains, west of Taos. The Questa and Camino Real ranger districts are in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. These two districts are separated by Taos Pueblo lands. The Jicarilla Ranger District is in the San Juan Basin, about four hours west of Taos, New Mexico. The proposed action and the travel management process focuses on these three distinct areas². The forest plan currently restricts cross-country travel by motor vehicles on the majority of the forest. There are three general locations on Camino Real Ranger District that are currently open to cross-country travel by motor vehicles. The Questa Ranger District is entirely closed to cross-country travel. On the Tres Piedras district, only the areas north of State Highway 64 are closed to cross-country travel. On the El Rito and Canjilon, the majority of the districts are open to cross-country travel.

The Camino Real (309,009 ac) and the Questa (271,555 ac) ranger districts are geographically separated south and north of Taos, New Mexico, respectively. They experience the most use from motorized and non-motorized recreational activities on the forest. Both districts combined include three wilderness areas, one wilderness study area, three downhill ski areas, a cross country ski area, numerous miles of hiking trails, camping, trout fishing opportunities, and hunting opportunities. There are 664 miles of National Forest System roads and 91 miles of National Forest System motorized trails (designated motorcycle or ATV) on the two districts.

The Canjilon (137,312 ac), El Rito (275,295 ac), and Tres Piedras (352,140 ac) ranger districts are geographically linked together across the lower end of the San Juan Mountains. Since these districts tend to be farther from population centers, more isolated, and contain fewer developed recreational facilities, they receive a moderate amount of motorized travel, often associated with fuelwood gathering, hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing. Visitor use on the three districts tends to be concentrated during hunting seasons. There are approximately 1,764 miles of National Forest System roads and no miles of National Forest System motorized trails (designated motorcycle or ATV) on the districts.

Motorized use on the Jicarilla Ranger District (145, 517 ac) is primarily to access well pads for gas operations, although the district is heavily used during the hunting season. The forest plan currently restricts cross-country travel by motor vehicles district-wide (Amendment # 9 1993). Motor vehicles are restricted to 185 miles of designated roads, with a 300-foot corridor. There are no miles of National Forest System motorized trails (designated motorcycle or ATV) on the district. Currently, there are several miles of road crossing private lands and Jicarilla Apache Nation lands. These roads cross lands that are not open to the public without authorization.

Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

Most visitors use motor vehicles to access the Carson National Forest National, whether for recreational sightseeing; camping and hiking; hunting and fishing; commercial purposes such as logging, mining, and grazing; administration of utilities and other land uses; outfitting and guiding; or the many other multiple uses of NFS lands. For many visitors, motor vehicles also represent an integral part of their recreational experience. People come to the Carson National Forest to ride on roads and trails in pickup trucks, ATVs, motorcycles, and a variety of other

² Although there are three geographic areas, four analyses are being conducted (Questa, Camino Real, Jicarilla, and Canjilon/Tres Piedras/El Rito).

conveyances. Motor vehicles are a legitimate and appropriate way for people to enjoy the forest—in the right places, and with proper management.

Visitors and users cherish the Carson National Forest for the values it provides, such as opportunities for healthy recreation and exercise, natural scenic beauty, important natural resources, protection of rare species, wilderness, a connection with their history, and opportunities for outdoor adventure. There is a need for designating a system of roads and trails for motor vehicle use in accordance with the travel management rule (36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295) that will enhance public enjoyment of the Carson National Forest, while maintaining other important values and uses.

In addition to compliance with the regulations associated with the TMR, there are some specific needs on the Carson National Forest to address in the designations. These needs came to light during the early public involvement for the travel management proposal. Based on this public involvement we identified the following specific needs for change:

- Provide a complete motor cycle loop on the Questa Ranger District.
- Reduce incursion of motor vehicles into the Pecos Wilderness on the Camino Real Ranger District.
- Provide more designated trail for motor vehicle use on the Canjilon ranger district in the vicinity of Canjilon and Canjilon Mountain.
- Provide route linkages between designated roads for motor vehicle use on the Questa, Tres Piedras, and El Rito ranger districts.
- Provide seasonal motor vehicle use restrictions on the Canjilon, El Rito, Tres Piedras, and Questa districts to protect wildlife habitat and/or soil and water resources.
- Add unauthorized routes to the motor vehicle system to move motorized uses away from sensitive water sources.

Proposed Action

To meet the purpose and need, the Carson National Forest is proposing to amend its forest plan to identify a designated road and trail system for motor vehicle use as shown on a motor vehicle use map and prohibit such use everywhere else (figures 1-4). Cross-country travel by motor vehicles would be prohibited. The specific elements of the proposed action are described below by geographic area.

Sangre de Cristo Mountains

On the Camino Real Ranger District (figure 1), the Forest Service proposes to:

- Close 96 miles of existing road to motor vehicle use.
- Designate approximately 4 miles of unauthorized roads for motor vehicle use.
- Designate a 300-foot corridor along 117 miles of designated roads for the purpose of access to dispersed camping and big game retrieval, in the vicinity of upper Taos Canyon, Garcia Park, the Rio Chiquito drainage, Borrego Mesa, Alamo-Dinner Canyons, and the southwestern portion of the district.

- Implement a seasonal closure to motor vehicle use on approximately 6 miles of designated roads in the vicinity of Forest Road 697.
- Convert 24 miles of motorized trail (19D, 20, 22, 22A, south of NM Highway 518) to non-motorized use only.

On the Questa Ranger District (figure 2), the Forest Service proposes to:

- Close 15 miles of existing road to motor vehicle use, in the vicinity of Midnight Meadows and Mallette Canyon.
- Designate 2 miles of unauthorized roads for use motor vehicle use, in the vicinity of Cabresto Canyon and Sawmill Park.
- Designate 8 miles of closed roads for motor vehicle use, in the vicinity of Largo Canyon area to provide public access around private lands.
- Designate a 150-foot corridor along 50 miles of designated roads for the purpose of accessing dispersed camping and big game retrieval, in the vicinity of Cebolla Mesa and Largo Canyon.
- Implement a seasonal closure to motor vehicle use on 71 miles of designated roads.
- Add 4 miles of designated trail for motorcycle use only, in the vicinity of Elephant Rock Loop Trail.

Table 1

Camino Real Ranger District			
	Existing	Proposed Changes	Resulting Designated System
Miles of road designated for motor vehicle use	450	Close 96	354
Miles of unauthorized roads added to the designated road system	Unknown	4	4
Miles of road with 300-foot corridor designated for motor vehicle use for the purpose of dispersed camping and big game retrieval	116	Add 117	233
Miles of trail designated for motor vehicles 50" or less in width	69	Close 15	45
Acres eliminated from cross-country use by motor vehicles	112,954	112,954	0

Table 2

Questa Ranger District			
	Existing	Proposed Changes	Resulting Designated System
Miles of road designated for motor vehicle use	214	Close 15 miles	199
Miles of unauthorized roads added to the designated road system	Unknown	2	2
Miles of road with 300-foot corridor designated for motor vehicle use for the purpose of dispersed camping and big game retrieval	31	None	31
Miles of road with 150-foot corridor designated for motor vehicle use for the purpose of dispersed camping and big game retrieval	0	50	50
Miles of trail designated for motorcycle use only	22	4	26
Acres eliminated from cross-country use by motor vehicles	0	0	0

Lower San Juan Mountains

On the Canjilon Ranger District (figure 3), the Forest Service proposes to:

- Close 202 miles of existing road to motor vehicle use.
- Designate approximately 5 miles of unauthorized roads for motor vehicle use.
- Designate a 300-foot corridor along 43 miles of designated roads for the purpose of accessing dispersed camping and big game retrieval.
- Designate a 150-foot corridor along 115 miles of designated roads for the purpose of accessing dispersed camping and big game retrieval.
- Implement a seasonal closure to motor vehicle use on designated roads in the vicinity of Mesa de las Viejas and Mesa Juan Domingo.
- Convert approximately 5 miles of road to “open to motor vehicles 50 inches or less in width,” in the vicinity of Canjilon and Canjilon Mountain.

On the El Rito Ranger District (figure 4), the Forest Service proposes to:

- Designate approximately 2 miles of unauthorized roads to motor vehicle use.

- Designate approximately 8 miles of roadbeds for route linkages in the vicinity of Valle Grande Peak and Spring Creek/Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit boundary.
- Designated a 300-foot corridor along 6 miles of designated roads in the vicinity of Forest Road 559 from the “T” to the Canjilon Ranger District boundary and Forest Road 20 along the Canjilon/El Rito district boundary (for the purposes of accessing dispersed camping and big game retrieval).
- Designate a 150-foot corridor along 313 miles of designated roads for the purpose of accessing dispersed camping and big game retrieval.
- Implement a seasonal closure to motor vehicle use on designated roads in the vicinity of Comanche Canyon and south of Forest Road 137.

On the Tres Piedras Ranger District (figure 5), the Forest Service proposes to:

- Designate approximately 3 miles of unauthorized roads for motor vehicle use.
- Designate approximately 7 miles of closed roads for motor vehicle use.
- Designate a 300-foot corridor along 246 miles of designated roads for the purpose of accessing dispersed camping and big game retrieval.
- Designate a 150-foot corridor along 232 miles of designated roads for the purpose of accessing dispersed camping and big game retrieval, in the southern portion of the district.
- Implement seasonal closure to motor vehicle use on designated roads, in the vicinity of Comanche Canyon and south of Forest Road 137.

Table 3

Canjilon Ranger District			
	Existing	Proposed Changes	Resulting Designated System
Miles of road designated for motor vehicle use	387	Close 202	185
Miles of unauthorized roads added to the designated road system	Unknown	Add 5	5
Miles of road with 300-foot corridor designated for motor vehicle use for the purpose of dispersed camping and big game retrieval	0	43	43
Miles of road with 150-foot corridor designated for motor vehicle use for the purpose of dispersed camping and big game retrieval	0	115	115
Miles of trail designated for motor vehicles 50” or less in width	0	Add 5	5
Acres eliminated from cross-country	133,792	133,7920	0

Canjilon Ranger District			
	Existing	Proposed Changes	Resulting Designated System
use by motor vehicles			

Table 4

El Rito Ranger District			
	Existing	Proposed Changes	Resulting Designated System
Miles of road designated for motor vehicle use	688	Close 147	541
Miles of unauthorized road added to the designated road system	0	Add 2	2
Miles of road with 300-foot corridor designated for motor vehicle use for the purpose of dispersed camping and big game retrieval	10	Designate 6	16
Miles of road with 150-foot corridor designated for motor vehicle use for the purpose of dispersed camping and big game retrieval	0	313	313
Acres eliminated from cross-country use by motor vehicles	256,269	256,269	0
Tres Piedras Ranger District			
Miles of road designated for motor vehicle use	689	Close 125	564
Miles of unauthorized road added to the designated road system	0	3	3
Miles of road with 300-foot corridor designated for motor vehicle use for the purpose of dispersed camping and big game retrieval	177	Add 67	246
Miles of road with 150-foot corridor designated for motor vehicle use for the purpose of dispersed camping and big game retrieval	0	Add 232	232
Acres eliminated from cross-country use by motor vehicles	176,330	176,330	0

San Juan Basin

On the Jicarilla Ranger District (figure 6), the Forest Service proposes to:

- Close approximately 14 miles of existing road to motor vehicle use.

Table 5

Jicarilla Ranger District			
	Existing	Proposed Changes	Resulting Designated System
Miles of roads designated for motor vehicle use	185	Close 14	171
Miles of road with 300-foot corridor designated for motor vehicle use for the purpose of dispersed camping and big game retrieval	185	Delete 14	171

Travel Management Glossary of Terms

Designated road, trail, or area. A National Forest System road, a National Forest System trail, or an area on National Forest System lands that is designated for motor vehicle use pursuant to § 212.51 on a motor vehicle use map.

Forest road or trail. A road or trail wholly or partly within or adjacent to and serving the National Forest System that the Forest Service determines is necessary for the protection, administration, and utilization of the National Forest System and the use and development of its resources.

Motor vehicle. Any vehicle which is self-propelled, other than: (1) A vehicle operated on rails; and (2) Any wheelchair or mobility device, including one that is battery powered, that is designed solely for use by a mobility-impaired person for locomotion, and that is suitable for use in an indoor pedestrian area.

Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM). A black and white map reflecting designated roads, trails, and areas on an administrative unit or a Ranger District of the National Forest System.

National Forest System road. A forest road other than a road which has been authorized by a legally documented right-of-way held by a State, county, or other local public road authority.

National Forest System trail. A forest trail other than a trail which has been authorized by a legally documented right-of-way held by a State, county, or other local public road authority.

Non-motorized uses. Includes hiking, bicycling, and horse travel.

Off-highway vehicle. Any motor vehicle designed for or capable of cross-country travel on or immediately over land, water, sand, snow, ice, marsh, swampland, or other natural terrain.

Over-snow vehicle. A motor vehicle that is designed for use over snow and that runs on a track or tracks and/or a ski or skis, while in use over snow.

Restricted travel. Reference to this term should be associated with a specific reason such as a road closed to the public but open to administrative use; a road or trail that is limited to certain vehicle types; a road or trail that is only open for a portion of the year. A restriction may have one or more reasons and could include roadbed protection, wildlife habitat protection, etc.

Road. A motor vehicle route over 50 inches wide, unless identified and managed as a trail.

Seasonal restriction. Restriction of a road or trail during some part of the year for various reasons such as wildlife disturbance, unsafe or impassable conditions.

System routes. A road or trail the FS or BLM are currently managing (maintaining).

Trail. A route 50 inches or less in width or a route over 50 inches wide that is identified and managed as a trail.

Travel analysis process (TAP). It assesses current transpiration conditions and identifies issues, needs and opportunities for travel management. It consists of several sequential steps.

Vehicle classes. Categories describing vehicle type includes passenger cars, 4x4 vehicles, jeeps, OHV's, motorcycle