



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service



Scoping Document

Austin and Tonopah Ranger Districts Combined Travel Management Project

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Hanapah Arch Photo by Dave McMorran

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
Austin and Tonopah Ranger Districts
Humboldt County, Nevada

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A. INTRODUCTION

This scoping document is part of the public involvement process for the proposed Austin and Tonopah Ranger Districts Combined Travel Management Project. The purpose of this document is to provide initial information on the proposed project and to invite your comments. Public involvement is encouraged and is used for identifying issues that are relevant to this project.

The 1969 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and its implementing regulations define the environmental analysis process. The initial analysis for this project will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA).

The Forest Service is the lead agency for the project. The Austin and Tonopah District Ranger is the responsible official and will make the decision for the EA or Environment Impact Statement (EIS).

B. PURPOSE AND NEED

The number of user-created routes across the Districts has increased over the last several years. Some of these routes were established where there is potential for resource damage. Prohibiting motor vehicles from traveling off designated roads and trails would reduce the effects to natural resources caused by cross-country travel.

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to provide motor vehicle access to meet recreation and management objectives while limiting environmental impacts and ensuring a sustainable transportation system across the two Districts.

C. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement in the environmental analysis process is essential. In 2005, the Districts conducted open houses. Forest maps displayed system and user-created routes. Attendees gave input on which routes they felt were needed for recreation and access across the Forest. The public is now invited to submit written comments stating their concerns and issues that are relevant to the Proposed Action. Comments received from this scoping document and from personal contacts will be used to help establish the scope of the environmental analysis.

Public involvement will be ongoing throughout the analysis process. However, written scoping comments should be received by August 31. Comments received, including the names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposal and will be available for public inspection.

D. PROPOSED ACTION

The Proposed Action would change the status on 30 National Forest System (NFS) roads by designating them as NFS trails. Twenty-four of these NFS trails (71.1 miles) would be open to motorized vehicle use. The remaining six trails (15.3 miles) would be open for non-motorized use. These routes are depicted on the attached maps as solid blue lines.

The Proposed Action would also add 18 user-created routes totaling 21.9 miles as NFS roads (11 routes, 7.5 miles) or NFS trails (7 routes, 14.4 miles). Motor vehicle use would be permitted on these NFS trails. The table below provides the route number, mileage, and map number showing where the routes are located. On the maps, proposed NFS roads are depicted in green, and proposed NFS trails are depicted as solid purple lines.

Finally, the Proposed Action would prohibit the use of motor vehicles off designated routes. Exemptions to the prohibition of motor vehicles off designated routes include:

- ❖ Aircraft;
- ❖ Watercraft;
- ❖ Over-snow vehicles;
- ❖ Limited administrative use by the Forest Service; use of any fire, military, emergency, or law enforcement vehicle for emergency purposes;
- ❖ Authorized use of any combat or combat support vehicle for national defense purposes;
- ❖ Law enforcement response to violations of law, including pursuit; and
- ❖ Motor vehicle use that is specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulation (i.e., woodcutting permits, term grazing permits, approved plans of operations) (36 CFR 212.51a).

Highway-legal vehicles and unlicensed vehicles, such as all terrain vehicles (ATVs), off-highway motorcycles, and other similar types of motor vehicles share current system roads. These mixed-use routes currently include both roads maintained to accommodate standard passenger automobiles as well as more primitive roads for high clearance four-wheel drive vehicles. Any additions to the District transportation system would be added as a mixed-use route unless specifically identified for single vehicle type.

In summary this Proposed Action would prohibit motor vehicle use off the designated NFS roads and NFS trails in accordance with 36 CFR 261.13. The Proposed Action also includes changes to the current forest transportation system located on the Austin and Tonopah Ranger Districts. These include changes to the status of NFS roads and NFS trails. The Proposed Action includes the addition of some user-created routes to the current forest transportation system. Motor vehicle use on these routes may be authorized by the type of vehicle permitted and by the time of year (36 CFR 212.50). The Proposed Action does not include the designation of OHV areas where motor vehicles would not be restricted to designated routes nor does it provide for game retrieval. The Forest would continue to be open to other forms of cross-country travel, such as by horseback, hiking, over-snow machines and cross-country skiing.

Proposed Changes to the Forest Transportation System on the Austin and Tonopah Ranger Districts								
Proposed NFS Roads converted to NFS Trails (motorized)								
Route #	Length (miles)	Map #	Route #	Length (miles)	Map #	Route #	Length (miles)	Map #
43194	6.0	11	43210	0.5	33	43223a	1.4	34
43248	3.0	34	43311	1.0	15	43372B	1.6	28
43374	1.0	18	43374a	1.5	18	43474	1.7	15
43515	5.4	7	44093a	4.0	17	44093c	3.7	17
44127	14.0	32	44127f	3.1	32	44162a	2.6	19
44208b	4.7	14	44208c	1.4	14	44208d	1.2	14
44404	2.8	10	44405	5.9	10	44827	1.37	22
44827a	0.3	22	43473	1.9	15	44093b	0.91	17
Proposed NFS Roads converted to NFS Trails (non-motorized)								
Route #	Length (miles)	Map #	Route #	Length (miles)	Map #	Route #	Length (miles)	Map #
43129	2.6	27	43292a	0.7	27	43351	1.7	25
44214A	4.4	8	44451b	3.7	6	44521	2.2	31
New Proposed NFS Trail								
Route #	Length (miles)	Map #						
T44521	0.3	31						
User-created routes designated as NFS roads								
Route #	Length (miles)	Map #	Route #	Length (miles)	Map #	Route #	Length (miles)	Map #
A002	1.0	3	A004	1.2	3	A006	0.7	16
A006a	0.2	16	A15713	0.1	21	A15765	0.1	23
U43302	0.5	13	U43334a	0.8	4	U43345	2.2	30
U43425	0.4	24	U44017b	0.2	26			
User-created routes designated as NFS trails								
Route #	Length (miles)	Map #	Route #	Length (miles)	Map #	Route #	Length (miles)	Map #
A030a	3.0	9	A036	5.2	12	A036a	0.9	12
A152	1.7	22	U43516a	0.5	29	U44018C	0.7	5
U44127g	2.4	20						

Map 1, shows the current forest system roads open for use by highway-legal vehicles and unlicensed vehicles. (Map 1 is 9.66 MB in size and will take time to load.) These maps are searchable and the user can see more or less map detail. Using the “find” function the viewer can search for and be directed to specific routes.

If selected as described above, the Proposed Action would result in the following changes to the forest transportation system on the Austin and Tonopah Ranger Districts.

Comparison of current and proposed forest transportation system on the Austin and Tonopah Ranger Districts				
	Current number of routes	Current miles of routes	Proposed number of routes	Proposed miles of routes
NFS roads	638	2207	551	2031.8
NFS trails (total)	90	408.6	128	509.9
NFS trails (non-motorized)	87	403	94	418.6
NFS trails (motorized)	3	5.8	33	91.3

E. NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

The starting point for the EA is the current forest road system and existing motor vehicle use restrictions and prohibitions. The No Action Alternative makes no change to the system, restrictions, or prohibitions. All user-created routes would remain open to motorized use and cross-country travel off those routes would continue to be allowed in areas where current restrictions do not apply. The Forest Service is required to address the No Action Alternative, even though it fails to meet the project purpose and need and does not comply with the 36 CFR 212.

F. SCOPE OF PROJECT

The geographic scope of this project is the area included in the Austin and Tonopah Ranger Districts of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. Where appropriate, the analysis of motor vehicle impacts may also address some off-forest lands.

Scope of Proposed Action: It is not within the scope of the project to physically close any NFS roads or user-created routes on the districts that would not be designated as open for motor vehicle use. Any physical closure of routes would require separate site-specific NEPA analysis.

Project Time Frame: The decision resulting from this analysis is expected to provide transportation management direction on the Austin and Tonopah Ranger Districts for the foreseeable future. 36 CFR 212 requires publication of a Motor Vehicle Use Map and annual updates to that map that are available to the public free-of-charge.

G. PRELIMINARY ISSUES

The Forest Interdisciplinary Team has identified the following potential issues related to the Proposed Action.

1. The user-created routes being considered for designation as either NFS roads or NFS trails developed overtime and through use may be in areas that are ill suited for the road or trail locations. This may include routes located on steep slopes, in or along riparian zones, through sensitive wildlife habitat, or across cultural and historic properties. Designating these routes and authorizing continued use may cause continued degradation of the resources. Designating motorized routes and prohibiting motorized use off those designated routes would reduce disturbance and resource impacts across the district.
2. Some of the currently user-created routes being considered for designation in the Proposed Action are located in areas identified in the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Even though these routes may have been present prior to identification of the Roadless Area boundaries, continued use of these routes could have an affect on Roadless Area characteristics, and Wilderness characteristics of the area.
3. The Proposed Action has the potential to change current use patterns by restricting motorized travel to designated routes. Forest visitors would no longer be authorized to drive cross-country to hunt, retrieve game, create dispersed camp sites, or engage in other motorized off-road recreation opportunities. By prohibiting cross-country travel and reducing the extent of dispersed camping, the Proposed Action could result in diminished recreation experience.

H. DECISION FRAMEWORK

Based on the environmental analysis in this EA, the District Ranger will decide which routes motorized traffic will be restricted to, and what areas, if any, will be open to cross-country motorized travel.

I. MAPS 1 THROUGH 34

Map 1 provides an overview of the Austin and Tonopah Ranger Districts with all of the NFS roads, which are open to public use, indicated in gold. (Map 1 is 9.66 MB in size and will take time to load.) On this same map, the user-created routes are indicated in green if they are to be designated as roads and solid purple lines if they are to be designated as motorized trails. Dashed purple lines indicate non-motorized NFS trails. NFS roads who's status will change as a result of the Proposed Action are also indicated on the maps in blue (converted to motorized trail) or light blue (converted to ATV trail).

Map 2 is provided, on the enclosed CD, as a guide to the location of Maps 3 through 34. (Map 2 is fairly large and will take time to download.) This map (Map 2) shows where, in the district, individual analysis roads are located and on which map they occur.

Maps 3 through 34 show the NFS roads open to the public for access across the Austin and Tonopah Ranger Districts. They also show the individual analysis routes that are being proposed for designation as NFS roads or NFS trails in the Proposed Action. The forest system roads are shown in gold. NFS roads being designated as NFS trails are in

blue and user-created routes are in green (road) or solid purple (motorized trails). Each route has a beginning point, a white circle, and an endpoint, a triangle.

J. COMMENT DISCLOSURE

To assist the Forest Service in identifying and considering issues and concerns on the Proposed Action, comments or suggestions should be as specific as possible. It is also helpful if comments refer to specific events, conditions, or practices, whenever possible. Comments may also address the Proposed Action, issues, and alternatives described in this scoping document. Reviewers may wish to refer to the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act at 40 CFR 1503.3 in addressing these points.

You may mail your comments to the addresses listed below or you may email your comments to comments-intermtn-humboldt-toiyabe-austin-tonopah@fs.fed.us. You may also fax or hand-deliver your comments.

Comments received, including the names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposal and will be available for public inspection.

K. CONTACTS

To submit your comments or for additional information, please contact:

Steven Williams, Austin and Tonopah District Ranger 100 Midas Canyon Road P. O. Box 130 Austin, NV 89310 775 964-2671 Fax: 775-964-1451	James Winfrey, Project Manager 1200 Franklin Way Sparks, NV 89431 775-331-6444 Fax: 775-355-5399
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