

Motorized Travel Management Environmental Assessment

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Abstract: This environmental assessment describes the potential effects of a proposal by the Cleveland National Forest (Cleveland NF) to make changes to its existing transportation system. Proposed changes, which are detailed in Chapter 2, include: adding roads for highway-legal vehicles only; adding trails for all types of vehicles (i.e., four-wheel drive vehicles, trail-class vehicles, and motorcycles); adding trails for trail-class vehicles; adding trails for motorcycles only; and revising the total number of acres of OHV open-use areas. These actions are proposed to implement the 2005 Travel Management Rule (36 CFR Part 261) while providing for a diversity of motorized vehicle recreation opportunities and for motorized access to dispersed recreation opportunities. This environmental assessment discloses environmental impacts associated with a no action alternative, the initial proposed action, and alternative to the initial proposed action that was developed as a result of public scoping.

Chapter 1

Purpose and Need

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Cleveland National Forest (Cleveland NF) has prepared this environmental assessment in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations. This document—which discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts that would result from alternatives to the initial proposed action—is organized into four chapters:

Chapter 1 – Purpose and Need. This chapter briefly describes the alternative proposed for implementation, the need for that alternative, and other purposes to be achieved by the proposal. This section also details how the Cleveland NF informed the public of the initial proposed action and how the public responded.

Chapter 2 – Alternatives. This chapter provides a detailed description of the alternative that was developed in response to comments raised by the public during scoping. The end of the chapter includes a summary table that compares alternatives with respect to environmental impacts, as well as a discussion of alternatives that were considered but not carried forward into detailed analysis.

Chapter 3 – Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences. This chapter describes the environmental impacts of the proposed alternative and the no action alternative.

Chapter 4 – Consultation and Coordination. Reserved for inclusion in final EA.

Additional documentation, including more detailed analyses of project-area resources, is found in the project record on file at the Cleveland NF supervisor's office.

1.1.1 Background

The use of off-highway vehicles (OHV) and all-terrain vehicles (ATV) has increased significantly over the past few decades. California has the highest level of OHV use of any state in the nation. Approximately 800,000 ATVs and OHVs were registered in 2004, a 330-percent increase from 1980. Annual sales of ATVs and OHVs in California were the highest in the U.S. for the last five years. Sales of four-wheel-drive vehicles in California increased by 1500 percent between 1989 and 2002.

Unmanaged OHV use can result in unplanned roads and trails, erosion, watershed and habitat degradation, and impacts to cultural resources. Compaction and erosion are the primary impacts of OHV use on soils. Riparian areas and aquatic-dependent species are particularly vulnerable to damage from OHV use. Former Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth identified unmanaged recreation, including impacts from OHVs, as one of the four key threats facing the nation's forests and grasslands.

In 1986 the Cleveland NF completed a land management plan (LMP) which established roads, trails, and areas that were open to OHV travel, and which designated two areas—Corral Canyon and Wildomar—that were open to cross-country travel. These OHV route designations and designated areas were

analyzed under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and were implemented through a long-term forest order that has been in effect since 1988. A minimum “backbone” system of approximately 418 miles of roads on the Cleveland NF was also identified at this time.

In June 1988, to ensure compliance with the 1986 LMP, Cleveland NF Supervisor Michael Rogers signed Forest Order No. 88-02-1, which remains in effect pending the outcome of this environmental analysis. Forest Order No. 88-02-1 prohibits the following acts, with exemptions for persons with a valid permit and for fire-fighting personnel performing official duties, on Cleveland NF land and national forest development roads:

1. Using a green sticker vehicle (i.e., any “off highway motor vehicle subject to identification” as defined in California Vehicle Code Section 38012) on any forest road except on those roads identified for such use by the Forest Off Road Vehicle Plan and Map of the Cleveland NF Management Plan dated February 1986 (36 CFR 261.54(a) and (b)).
2. Using motorized vehicles on any forest development trail except on those trails identified for such use by the Forest Off Road Vehicle Plan and Map of the Cleveland NF Management Plan dated February 1986 (36 CFR 261.55(b)).
3. Possessing or using a vehicle off forest development roads or trail, except on areas identified for such use by the Forest Off Road Vehicle Plan and Map of the Cleveland NF Management Plan dated February 1986 (36 CFR 261.56).

On August 11, 2003, the Pacific Southwest Region of the Forest Service entered into a memorandum of intent (MOI) with the California Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Commission, and the Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division of the California Department of Parks and Recreation. The MOI was a starting point for a region-wide effort to designate OHV roads, trails, and any specifically defined open areas for motorized vehicles on maps of California’s national forests.

On November 9, 2005, the Forest Service published final travel management regulations in the *Federal Register* (Vol. 70, No. 216-Nov. 9, 2005, pp 68264-68291). This Travel Management Rule requires designation of roads, trails, and areas open to motor vehicle use on national forests. Only roads that are part of a national forest transportation system may be designated for motorized use. Designations are made by class of vehicle and, if appropriate, by time of year.

The Travel Management Rule prohibits the use of motor vehicles off designated National Forest System roads, trails and areas, as well as use of motor vehicles on roads and trails that are not specifically designated for public use. The Cleveland NF was in compliance with the MOI and the Travel Management Rule at their inception because of prior transportation analysis contained in the LMP, because the prohibitions contained in Forest Order No. 88-02-1 were already in effect, and because of the roads analysis process that was performed in association with the forest plan revision process.

In 2006 a final record of decision was signed for the Cleveland NF Forest Plan Revision Final Environmental Impact Statement and Land Management Plan. This record of decision, as well as the revised LMP, provides management direction that can help guide future travel management decisions through suitable uses tied to specific land use zones and an updated recreation opportunity spectrum map.

On some National Forest System lands repeated use has resulted in roads and trails that are unplanned and unauthorized. These routes generally developed without environmental analysis or public involvement, and do not have the same status as National Forest System roads and trails included in the national forest

transportation system. However, some unauthorized routes provide opportunities for outdoor recreation by motorized and non-motorized users, and would enhance the national forest transportation system. Other unauthorized routes are poorly located and cause unacceptable impacts. Only National Forest System roads and trails can be designated for motorized vehicle use. In order for an unauthorized route to be designated, it must first be added to the national forest transportation system.

In 2005, the Cleveland NF completed an inventory of unauthorized routes on National Forest System lands as described in the MOI and identified approximately 220 miles of unauthorized routes. The Cleveland NF then used an interdisciplinary process to conduct travel analysis that included public involvement to identify proposals for changes to the existing transportation system. Roads, trails and areas that are currently part of the Cleveland NF transportation system and are open to motorized vehicle travel would remain designated for such use except as described below under the analyzed alternatives. This proposal makes needed changes—including vehicle restrictions, additional motorized trails, and reducing open areas—to National Forest System roads, trails, and areas in accordance with the Travel Management Rule (36 CFR Part 212).

In accordance with the Travel Management Rule, following a decision on this current proposal the Cleveland NF will publish a motor vehicle use map identifying all Cleveland NF national forest transportation system roads, trails, and areas that are designated for public motor vehicle use. The motor vehicle use map will specify the classes of vehicles and, if appropriate, the times of year for which use is designated.

Unauthorized routes not included in this proposal are not precluded from eventual consideration for addition to the transportation system and inclusion in a motor vehicle use map, pending future environmental analysis, public involvement, and documentation. The record of decision for the Cleveland NF Forest Plan Revision Final Environmental Impact Statement and Land Management Plan allows for the consideration of such routes gradually over time.

1.1.2 Travel Management on the Cleveland NF

This proposal is just one project among many in our long-term goal of managing our transportation system in a sustainable and cost-effective manner. Previous administrative decisions have substantially reduced the number of miles of National Forest System roads available for motorized use. Past and ongoing travel management activities on the Cleveland NF include:

1. Current NEPA analysis that is underway for proposed rehabilitation of approximately 29 miles of unauthorized routes that burned in the Harris, Witch, Poomacha, and Santiago fires in October 2007. All these routes evaluated for rehabilitation are currently in nonmotorized land use zones as per the LMP.
2. Proposed analysis for using green sticker funds to decommission routes in the vicinity of Long and Bear valleys on the Descanso Ranger District and in the vicinity of North Main Divide Road on the Trabuco Ranger District.
3. Decommissioning of routes in the Wildomar OHV area that are not part of the Cleveland NF transportation system.
4. Past NEPA decisions that decommissioned 67 segments of unauthorized routes totaling approximately 14.3 miles on the Descanso Ranger District. These routes intersected the designated OHV system and were all rehabilitated using green sticker funds or via Horse fire burned-area emergency response funds. Included in this total are routes that intruded into the Hauser Wilderness Area.

5. Decommissioning of 37 miles of unauthorized routes that were burned by the Cedar fire in 2003. Routes were removed from the inventory based on 2005 satellite imagery and subsequent ground verification in areas that were accessible.

Ongoing efforts include: (1) Forest Order No. 88-02-1, which prohibits motor vehicle use off designated routes; (2) efforts to reduce the impacts associated with non-system routes; and (3) efforts to address impacts associated with the current transportation system through road maintenance and monitoring of best management practices. Implementation of this proposal and subsequent designation of motorized routes through publication of the motor vehicle use map are only one step in the overall management of the Cleveland NF transportation system.

1.1.3 Scope of this Action

This proposal does not revisit previous decisions that resulted in the current transportation system. This proposal is focused only on implementing the Travel Management Rule (36 CFR 212 (B)). Previous decisions concerning road construction, reconstruction, closures, decommissioning, trail construction, type of use, seasonal restrictions, and land suitability for motorized use are outside of the scope of this proposal. The responsible official is limited with regard to staff and funding and, by necessity, must limit the scope of any project to that which is within his means to accomplish. Through travel analysis, the Cleveland NF identifies discrete projects, prioritizes them, and builds them into the future program of work. Only those projects within the capability of the Cleveland NF are brought forward by the responsible official and carried forward in accordance with the purpose and need for action.

The route designation process is not a “one time” event. The infrastructure of the Cleveland NF will always have room for improvement. During the public meetings and scoping period, the Cleveland NF mapped routes that were identified by the public and were not yet in the Forest Service GIS database. Even though these routes were not brought forward into the current analysis, they may be analyzed in the future for potential inclusion into the transportation system or potential rehabilitation.

The Cleveland NF welcomes suggestions for improving the current transportation system and restoring the environment. Such suggestions are considered within the context of the overall mission of the Cleveland NF and will be considered as availability of staff and funding allows. Scoping for this project resulted in many suggestions for improving the transportation system through reconstruction, decommissioning, road and trail closures, restoration projects. These ideas and suggestions may be considered in future travel management analyses.

Project Location

For maps of the project area, please see the appendices or visit the Cleveland NF website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/cleveland/projects>.

1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED

The Cleveland NF undertook this travel management action in accordance with the Travel Management Rule. Specific areas were identified in which there is a need for change. The following needs have been identified for this proposal:

1. There is a need for regulation of motorized vehicle travel by the public in the Corral Canyon and Wildomar OHV areas. The Corral Canyon and Wildomar OHV areas were first designated as open

areas in the 1986 LMP and carried forward into the 2005 revised LMP. Currently, public wheeled motorized vehicle travel is open to cross-country travel in these two areas. After years of open riding conditions, the number of trails has grown, and some of the new routes have environmental impacts and safety concerns that have not been addressed. Recent wildfires removed much of the vegetation that limited motorized vehicle travel in the Corral Canyon OHV area. Under these circumstances, continued open riding in these areas will lead to further trends in route proliferation and resource damage. Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule provides guidance for ending these trends and managing motorized recreation in a sustainable manner.

2. There is a need for limited changes and additions to the Cleveland NF transportation system in order to provide wheeled motorized access for dispersed recreation activities, such as camping, hunting, hiking, and horseback riding. A portion of known dispersed recreation activities are not located directly adjacent to an existing NFS road or motorized trail. Some dispersed recreation depends on access by foot or horseback, and some depends on motorized vehicle access. Activities for which access is by motorized vehicle consist of short spurs that have been created and maintained primarily by the passage of the vehicles themselves. These user-created routes are not currently part of the Cleveland NF transportation system. By not adding these routes to the transportation system, the regulatory changes above would make continued use of such routes illegal. Continuation of dispersed recreation activities in specified land use zones is a desired condition of the revised LMP.

In meeting these needs, the Forest Service must also achieve the following purposes:

- A. Avoid impacts to cultural resources.
- B. Provide for public safety.
- C. Provide for a diversity of recreational opportunities.
- D. Assure adequate access to public and private lands.
- E. Provide for adequate maintenance and administration of designations based on availability of resources and funding. The Cleveland NF has an estimated maintenance backlog for motorized trails of \$37,000 and for roads of \$38 million. (The trails data was generated from INFRA. The Road data is the amount reported in the Forest Plan FEIS). Future trail and road budgets are expected to decline from current levels.
- F. Minimize damage to soil, vegetation, and other resources.
- G. Avoid harassment of wildlife and significant disruption of wildlife habitat.
- H. Minimize conflicts between motor vehicles and existing or proposed recreational uses.
- I. Minimize conflicts among different classes of motor vehicle uses.
- J. Assure compatibility of motor vehicle use with existing conditions in populated areas, taking into account sound, emissions, etc.
- K. Have valid existing rights of use and rights-of-way.
- L. Constrain the proposal to that which is within the capability of the Cleveland NF to analyze given: (1) the national schedule for regions to publish their motor vehicle use maps (for the Cleveland NF the publication deadline is December 31, 2008); (2) available funding (road and trail management budgets); and (3) available resources, including resource data and staff time.

1.3 PROPOSED ACTION

To meet the purpose and need as described above, the Cleveland NF proposes to implement Alternative 2, which is described in detail in section 2.1.2.2 of Chapter 2:

1. Prohibit cross-country wheeled motorized vehicle travel by the public off designated National Forest System roads, trails, and areas, except as allowed by permit or other authorization in the Corral Canyon and Wildomar OHV areas.
2. Add segments of both user-created and new trail to the Cleveland NF transportation system to maintain a diversity of motorized recreation opportunities in the conversion of the Corral Canyon OHV area from one in which cross-country motorized travel is legal to one in which all motorized travel must occur on designated routes or in smaller designated open areas. Install mitigation measures to prevent access to adjacent unauthorized routes.
3. Add segments of routes for highway-legal vehicles to the Cleveland NF transportation system to access dispersed recreation opportunities. Install mitigation measures to prevent access to adjacent unauthorized routes.
4. Establish an open riding area adjacent to Corral Canyon OHV campground and an open riding area adjacent to the Wildomar OHV trailhead where young riders can learn safe vehicle operation. All other OHV use in the Corral Canyon and Wildomar OHV areas would be restricted to designated routes.
5. Amend the LMP to adjust land use zones and recreational opportunity spectrum designations to reflect existing on-the-ground conditions.

1.4 PRINCIPLE LAWS AND REGULATIONS

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requires analysis of all major federal actions significantly affecting the human environment to determine the magnitude and intensity of potential impacts and that the results be shared with the public and the public given opportunity to comment. The regulations implementing NEPA require that, to the fullest extent possible, agencies prepare environmental analyses and related surveys and studies required by the Endangered Species Act of 1973, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, and other environmental laws and executive orders. Principle among these are the Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act of 1960, the National Forest Management Act of 1976 as expressed through the Cleveland NF Land Management Plan, the Clean Air Act of 1955, the Clean Water Act of 1948, and the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974.

Roadless Area Conservation. On September 19, 2006, the U.S. District Court, Northern District of California set aside the 2005 State Petitions Rule and re-instated the 2001 Roadless Rule ((36 CFR 294, Subpart B (66 FR 3272, Jan. 12, 2001)).

Travel Management Rule (36 CFR parts 212, 251, 261, and 295). This Cleveland NF travel management environmental assessment is designed to implement the requirements of the November 5, 2005 rule for travel management.

Cleveland NF Land Management Plan (LMP). The LMP contains various resource-specific standards which must be considered when undertaking any environmental analysis. These standards, which are summarized below, will be considered by the decision maker when choosing which alternative best meets the purpose and need for the project.

S11. When occupied or suitable habitat for a threatened, endangered, proposed, candidate, or sensitive species is present on an ongoing or proposed project site, consider species guidance documents (see Appendix H of the LMP) to develop project-specific or activity-specific design criteria. This guidance is intended to provide a range of possible conservation measures that may be selectively applied

during site-specific planning to avoid, minimize, or mitigate negative long-term effects on threatened, endangered, proposed, candidate, or sensitive species and habitat. Involve appropriate resource specialists in the identification of relevant design criteria.

S12. When implementing new projects in areas that provide for threatened, endangered, proposed, and candidate species, use design criteria and conservation practices (see Appendix H of the LMP) so that discretionary uses and facilities promote the conservation and recovery of these species and their habits. Accept short-term impacts where long-term effects would provide a net benefit for the species and its habitat where needed to achieve multiple-use objectives.

S31. Design new features or expansion of existing facilities to direct public use away from occupied habitat for threatened, endangered, proposed, and candidate species.

S34. Where a threatened, endangered, proposed, candidate, or sensitive species occurs in a recreation site or area, take steps to avoid or minimize negative impacts to the species and its habitat. Use the least restrictive action that will effectively mitigate adverse impacts to the species and its habitat.

S35. Manage dispersed recreation activities to ensure that environmental sustainability is maintained by utilizing the following measure: (1) Discourage camping within 100 feet of sensitive resources and habitats, including meadows and bodies of water, including streams, or within 0.25 miles of developed recreation facilities; (2) Discourage camping within 600 feet of any wildlife water source developments, such as guzzlers and water holes, in accordance with state laws; (3) Motorized and non-motorized vehicle travel is restricted to National Forest System roads, trails and limited areas that are designated for vehicle use.

S47. When designing new projects in riparian areas, apply the “five-step project screening process for riparian conservation areas” as described in Appendix E of the LMP.

S50. Mitigate negative long-term impacts from recreation use to soil, watershed, riparian, or heritage resources (see Appendix D of the LMP).

Record of Decision and the LMP Final Environmental Impact Statement. The ROD and the FEIS contain the rationale and direction for the Cleveland NF progressing toward a designated route system.

1.5 DECISION FRAMEWORK

The forest supervisor for the Cleveland NF will be the responsible official and will sign the decision notice. The responsible official will decide whether to adopt and implement the proposed action, an alternative to the proposed action, or take no action to prohibit cross-country motorized vehicle travel by the public off the designated system and make changes to the existing Cleveland NF transportation system.

1.6 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The interdisciplinary team (ID team) relied on public involvement to ensure that an adequate range of alternatives would be considered. Public involvement for this project included meetings held during the

summer of 2007, meetings held during early 2008, and a scoping letter mailed to interested persons in January 2008. Public involvement is summarized below.

After completing an inventory of existing roads, trails, and off-route use areas, maps were posted to the Cleveland NF website for public review and comment. Suggested adjustments to the maps were accepted until October 31, 2006.

Route designation has been discussed at quarterly meetings between Cleveland NF personnel and members of local off-highway vehicle user groups.

Press releases were posted on the Forest Service regional office travel management website (<http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/routedesignation/>) as well as on the Cleveland NF website. In addition, the press releases were sent to elected officials and to local media in the San Diego, Riverside, and Orange county areas.

On January 18, 2008, Cleveland NF Supervisor Will Metz mailed a letter to interested parties summarizing the proposal and requesting comments. A legal notice appeared in the San Diego *Union-Tribune* outlining the proposal and requesting comments.

Public open houses to discuss the proposal were held in San Diego County at the Cleveland NF supervisor's office on January 19, at the Palomar Ranger District on January 23, and at the Descanso Ranger District on February 6, and in Riverside County at the Trabuco Ranger District on February 7, 2008. Cleveland NF personnel were present at all meetings to answer any questions and to provide further information on the proposal.

The project has been listed continually in the Cleveland NF schedule of proposed actions since July 2006 (<http://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/forest-level.php?110502>).

1.7 ISSUES

Comments from the public were used to formulate issues concerning the proposed action. An issue is a matter of public concern regarding the proposed action and its environmental impacts. The Forest Service separated the issues into two groups: significant and non-significant. Significant issues were defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action. Non-significant issues were identified as those: 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, LMP, or other higher level decision; 3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or 4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations explain this delineation in Sec. 1501.7, "...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)..."

1.7.1 Significant Issues

Issue 1: Many motorized routes proposed for addition to the transportation system are poorly located and will cause adverse impacts to plants, wildlife, water quality, soils and other natural resources.

Discussion: Alternative 3 (see section 2.2.1.3) was developed in part to address the areas where routes proposed for designation under Alternative 2 intersected habitat for threatened and endangered species, or where they intersected riparian areas. All routes that intersected threatened or endangered species habitat in Alternative 2 were dropped when developing Alternative 3. In all but two cases, routes that intersected riparian conservation areas in Alternative 2 were dropped when developing Alternative 3. In those two cases where such routes remained, mitigation would be used to ensure that route designation will have a positive or neutral effect on the riparian conservation areas.

Issue 2: The transportation system is already too large to provide adequate maintenance and administration. Current maintenance backlogs should be addressed before proposing the addition of new routes to an already overburdened system.

Discussion: Concerns were expressed about how the types of use allowed on roads, trails, and areas would impact the need for maintenance and administration. It was expressed that some types of use, specifically motorcycles, ATVs, and 4-wheel drives, result in higher maintenance costs due to resource damage caused by such uses. In addition, commenters felt that increasing the opportunities for such uses by designating additional routes would result in an increased need for Forest Service administration of these roads, trails, and areas to prevent unauthorized uses, resolve user conflicts, and provide for public safety. It was also expressed that certain mixes of use, if allowed in the same area, would increase the need for maintenance and administration of these areas.

Actions proposed under Alternative 3 would retain the opportunity to camp or park a street-legal vehicle at most dispersed recreation locations, but would not entail maintaining the full proposed road segment.

Issue 3: NEPA documents for the proposed action should include measures such as vehicle barriers and obliteration to block use and rehabilitate existing unauthorized routes from the Corral Canyon OHV area into the Hauser Wilderness.

Discussion: As part of the rehabilitation efforts subsequent to the Horse fire, which burned through the Corral Canyon OHV area and other locations on the Descanso Ranger District in 2006, unauthorized routes that led into the Hauser Wilderness Area have already been closed and barricaded. Mitigation measures to deter use of unauthorized routes has been included in previous NEPA decisions and has been incorporated into Alternative 3 of this analysis.

Issue 4: The Cleveland NF should be more responsive to the members of the OHV community who wish to see more recreational opportunities available on Forest Service lands.

Discussion: In response to public input and subsequent scoping comments from the OHV community, the Cleveland NF proposed a new, motorcycle-only route under both alternatives 2 and 3. In addition, the Cleveland NF removed two user-created trail segments that were proposed for addition to the transportation system as designated routes in Alternative 2. Members of the OHV community commented that they preferred to have a number of open areas adjacent to proposed or existing trails to enhance their recreational experience on challenging terrain. These open areas were added in Alternative 3.

1.7.2 Non-Significant Issues

Issue A: The Forest Service should conduct a forest-level road analysis.

Discussion: A forest-level road analysis was already completed by the Cleveland NF in conjunction with the Land Management Plan revision process. Conducting the same analysis now is beyond the scope of the project and would not address the purpose and need, as stated above. The Road Analysis Process (RAP) conducted during the 2005 Land Management Plan can be found at:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/scfpr/projects/lmp/docs/rap.pdf> . RAP maps can be found at:
<http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/scfpr/projects/lmp/maps.htm>