

NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service

Eldorado National Forest

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Eldorado National Forest Motorized Routes Designated

Placerville, CA..... Today, Forest Supervisor Ramiro Villalvazo signed his decision designating a total of 1,847 miles of roads and trails open for motorized public use in the Eldorado National Forest. The decision follows two and one half years of environmental analysis and public involvement.

The long anticipated decision also creates a seasonal closure of dirt roads from January 1 to March 31 and allows visitors to safely park their vehicles one car length off a designated route. Villalvazo's decision adds to the environmental protection of meadows, watersheds, wildlife habitats, and other sensitive areas, and provides quiet recreation opportunities.

"I am pleased to say that we have a new starting point for travel management within the Eldorado National Forest," said Villalvazo. "My decision is designed to provide access where it is important to Forest visitors and to protect Forest resources. I know we won't get it exactly right the first time, however, one key to implementing the plan is the opportunity to make changes."

The newly designated route system will add to the conservation of the Forest environment and provide motorized access for the public. Villalvazo says his final decision met the standards and guidelines found in the Forest's Land and Resource Management Plan, minimized impacts to meadows, and reduced impacts to stream courses and riparian habitat.

"The selected routes will add to visitor's recreational experience in the Forest," said Villalvazo. "We worked to create a diversity of public motor vehicle opportunities for visitors with ATVs, motorcycles, four wheel drives and other high clearance vehicles, and passenger cars.

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We created loops where we could, with the use of existing routes; we gave attention to maintaining access to interesting areas, and we provided access for dispersed recreation where it was environmentally possible.”

This summer the Forest Service will continue to allow motor vehicle use on routes displayed on the same free Motor Vehicle Use Restriction map that’s been available at all Eldorado National Forest offices since August 2005. Villalvazo said changing maps after the summer recreation season is over will be the least disruptive to visitors and give them more time to learn about the changes.

The new 2009 motor vehicle use map will display the 1,847 miles designated today plus 334 miles of county roads and state highways and 311 miles of routes previously designated in the Rock Creek area near Georgetown.

Today’s decision allows public motorized use on 1,002 miles of dirt roads and 210 miles of trails; and 635 miles of paved roads suitable for passenger cars. Cross country travel is prohibited. The decision also prohibits public wheeled over the snow travel on the following routes: all designated snow mobile routes and cross country ski trails in the Eldorado National Forest; Mormon Emigrant Road from the junction of Silver Fork Road southeast to the Iron Mountain SnoPark at Highway 88; and Loon Lake Campground Road; Chipmunk Bluff Road and Robbs Peak Road.

Villalvazo said that the three month closure of dirt roads during the historically wet months (January through March) is intended to protect road surfaces and prevent other environmental damage. The Forest Supervisor has the option of closing the roads sooner or leaving them closed longer if weather conditions warrant a change.

“One of our goals during the environmental analysis was to be responsive to what we learned from the thousands of people who took time to share their insights and information,” said Villalvazo. “Comments and suggestions we received were used to refine our analysis and guide the modification of an alternative which I selected for my decision.”

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The Forest Service will continue to recruit and welcome people to join the many individuals and organizations currently volunteering to help care for Forest routes.

Four open houses are planned for anyone interested in learning more about the decision at the following locations: El Dorado County Fairgrounds, Placerville –April 5, 9 AM – 3 PM; South Lake Tahoe Community College – April 10, 3 PM – 8 PM; Diablo Canyon Community College, Pleasant Hill – April 12, 9 AM – 3 PM; Amador County Board of Supervisor Office, Jackson – April 17, 3 PM - 8PM.

The Forest Supervisor’s decision, final Environmental Impact Statement, maps, and details about the open houses are posted on the Eldorado National Forest website at:

www.fs.fed.us/r5/eldorado.

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