

## Questions & Answers

Questions and answers are provided for line officers, RAP coordinators, public affairs officers and workshop facilitators to enable consistent responses to potential questions that are likely to be common throughout the Province. They assure a foundation for consistent terminology, maximizing one clear voice and minimizing the potential for public confusion and controversy created by inconsistent or conflicting information provided within the Province.

### Background

#### 1. What is the Forest Service Road System?

The National Forest Road System consists of more than 380,000 miles of roads. The following is the approximate transportation system described in miles of roadway that currently exists on the Lassen National Forest is 3,683 miles.

The types of roads range from permanent, double-lane, paved highways to single-lane, low-standard roads intended only for use by high-clearance vehicles, such as pickup trucks. At this time, a significant portion of this system is closed or use-restricted to protect resources.

#### 2. What is the purpose of the Forest Service Road System?

Although the majority of forest roads were constructed to facilitate timber harvesting, today the Forest Service Road System constitutes an important component of the Nation's rural road system. It provides access for resource protection and for commercial activities or public uses such as timber harvesting, recreation outfitting, mining, and grazing. In addition, the system provides access for recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, skiing, bird watching, camping, hiking, and driving for pleasure.

#### 3. What changes have occurred in the uses of the Forest Service Road System over the last 10-15 years?

Annual national recreation use on National Forests has increased from less than 250 million Recreation Visitor Days (12 hours of on-site use by one or more persons) to more than 800 million and is projected to increase further. An estimated 1.7 million recreational vehicles travel forest roads each day. Eighty percent of this use is on 20% of the system, mostly on roads that are accessible to low-clearance vehicles. An estimated 15,000 log trucks and associated timber harvesting vehicles use forest roads each day, down from 42,000 in 1990. {Opportunity to add specific Forest information}

#### 4. What is the Forest Service's current maintenance backlog?

The Forest Service has a growing \$8.4 billion maintenance and reconstruction backlog and receives only 20 percent of the annual maintenance funding it needs to maintain its existing 380,000+ mile road system to environmental and safety standards. {Opportunity to add specific Forest information}

#### **5. Are there other roads within national forests that are not a part of the Forest Service Road System?**

Yes. There are authorized roads within the system that are owned and managed by States and counties as well as roads permitted to private individuals. There are also more than 60,000 miles of unclassified (unauthorized) roads on National Forest System lands that have been developed over time by users outside the forest planning process that do not meet technical standards or environmental protection standards. These unauthorized roads may present an environmental threat and a potential safety threat to users.

#### **6. How has the Forest Service road budget changed over the last 10 years?**

In 1988, the Forest Service received more than \$297 million to plan, reconstruct, construct, and maintain roads. In 1998, the Forest Service received \$187 million to plan, reconstruct, construct, and maintain roads. **{Opportunity to add specific Forest information}**

#### **7. Why is there a need for a new Forest Service road management policy?**

This action is needed to reflect changes in public demand and use of national forest resources; to better consider scientific information about the socio-economic environmental impacts of road construction, reconstruction, and maintenance; and to prioritize present and future management objectives consistent with available funding. This policy will help ensure: 1) the rehabilitation of ecological processes disturbed by past road construction; 2) efficient reconstruction and maintenance of Forest Service roads; 3) the construction of new roads is limited to those necessary for National Forest System resource management; and 4) that future construction, restoration, and maintenance of roads will have a minimal long-term adverse environmental impact.

### **General**

#### **1. Does the policy apply to other public or private lands?**

The policy affects only roads on National Forest System lands. The policy directs the Forest Service to undertake a scientifically based roads analysis procedure on each forest before constructing, reconstructing, or decommissioning roads. The roads analysis procedure will consider and evaluate roads on other Federal, State, county, and private lands within the analysis area and identify their relationship to the issues and concerns identified in the analysis, but will not

directly affect the use of these roads. Opportunities to construct, reconstruct, and decommission both classified and unclassified roads within the analysis area will be identified with the help of the public. Decisions will be made at the local level to implement identified road management opportunities on Forest Service lands only.

## **2. What roads are included in the policy (recreation/off-highway/snowmobile trails, unclassified roads, etc.)?**

Only forest road system roads (classified) and unclassified roads are included. A road is a general term denoting a facility for purposes of travel by vehicles greater than 50 inches in width. Includes only the area occupied by the road surface and cut and fill slopes. Travel issues associated with hiking trails, airstrips, waterways, and off-highway vehicle travel are not addressed in this policy, but should be addressed through local forest planning.

## **3. Will there be any new roads?**

Yes. However, the emphasis of this policy is: maintenance of the existing road system; decommissioning of unnecessary classified and unclassified roads after extensive analysis and public involvement at the local level; and maintenance and reconstruction of needed roads as necessary.

## **4. How does the roadless initiative relate to this policy?**

The Idaho District Court enjoined the Forest Service from implementing “all aspects of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule” as well as a section of the November 2000, forest planning rule that addresses the inventory and evaluation of roadless areas during the forest plan revision process (*Kootenai Tribe of Idaho v. Veneman* and *State of Idaho v. U.S. Forest Service*). The Idaho District Court's decision to grant a preliminary injunction has been appealed and is now pending before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. The Forest Service is revising the Roadless Rule, so it is uncertain how a final roadless rule would be implemented.

## **5. How does the road management policy affect forests that have completed Access and Travel Management plans?**

The policy would apply to all Forests. Forests that have completed access and travel management plans will need to ensure that the plans have incorporated the components of a scientifically-based roads analysis procedure in their planning. If not, then the forest needs to do that before road decisions can be implemented.

## **Effects on Access and Recreation**

### **1. Will the RAP affect access to private property?**

No. Current Forest Service regulations and policy ensure access provided by statute, treaty, or pursuant to reserved or outstanding rights. Access to private property is one of the criteria that will be considered in the roads analysis.

### **2. How does this affect off road vehicles?**

Access issues associated with off road travel will be addressed at the local level through roads analysis and forest planning. The intent of the roads policy is to provide a road system that allows for safe and efficient public use, and is economically and environmentally sound. It is not intended to limit access by off highway vehicle or other recreation users. Decisions to decommission roads will be made locally with full public involvement. The Forest Service is a multiple use agency, and it takes providing access to the National Forest System very seriously. The Forest Service will continue to work hard to ensure that its existing roads are adequately maintained, signed, mapped, and marked for public use and enjoyment.

### **3. How will access rights of permittees and others be affected?**

The rule will not affect access rights for existing permit holders or for projects already under contract.

### **4. Will RAP encourage road-to-trail conversions?**

It is anticipated that through road analysis and local decision-making, some portion of the existing classified and unclassified road system may be converted to trails. With public involvement, RAP may identify opportunities and it would remain to local decision making (through NEPA) to put those into place.

### **5. Will the RAP close any category of roads (classified, unclassified, etc.)?**

The RAP may recommend closure of some roads. Any decision to close a road would need to be made as part of NEPA. The RAP may also recommend a change in the management objectives for some roads.

### **6. Will recreation be altered in any way by Forest Scale RAP? Specifically, will this policy reduce or eliminate motorized and mechanical uses of these areas? Will hunting or any other recreational use be curtailed?**

Decisions to build new roads and to decommission roads will be made after conducting an extensive science-based analysis and public involvement process at the local level. The RAP may recommend closure of some roads. Any decision to close a road would need to be made as part of NEPA.