

Defining the Decision Space & Decision Criteria

for

Motorized Route Designation Mendocino National Forest

Background

Between January and September of 2006 the Mendocino NF worked with stakeholders to collaboratively develop the proposed action for the motorized route designation process. This was in preparation for conducting NEPA during fiscal year 2007.

Early in the collaboration process we explained that the decision maker needs to define the *decision space* and establish the *decision criteria* within which the proposed action(s) needs to be developed. We provided an earlier draft of this document as a springboard for public discussion of this subject, to provide input to the Forest Supervisor and District Rangers. A second draft that incorporated suggestions from the February/March public workshops was presented at the June workshops for stakeholder comment and review. No further comments were received.

As it turns out, most of the tentative proposed actions that have been developed are within the authority of the District Rangers. So they will likely be the decision makers for the proposals that go forward. However, to maintain consistency across the Forest, Forest Supervisor and District Rangers have established this single set of criteria for all route designation proposals.

Decision Space

Decision space is defined by legal and policy side-boards with which a proposed action must comply. The Forest Supervisor and District Rangers do not have discretion to deviate from the decision space, because it is established by higher level authority.

The proposed action *must*:

1. Comply with applicable laws
2. Comply with applicable regulations
3. Comply with applicable policy (Forest Service Manuals & Handbooks)

Decision Criteria

Decision criteria are considerations that help prioritize among possible actions. Decision criteria are within the discretion of the decision maker to establish. They should be supported by a clearly articulated rationale.

Listed below are the decision criteria that the Forest Supervisor and District Rangers have established to guide the formulation of route designation proposed action(s). They will also be relied upon in choosing between NEPA alternatives at the point of decision. The rationale for each criterion is also listed in *itallics*.

The proposed action(s) *should*:

1. **Operational Affordability** - Be affordable to maintain in a safe and environmentally sound condition. *The system's projected operation,*

maintenance, and enforcement costs should not exceed expected funding and contributed work. Otherwise we will end up with an inadequately maintained system, with deteriorating user safety and satisfaction, and unacceptable resource damage. Route adoption can contribute to affordability by providing low cost operational capacity. Affordability analysis should also consider the effect of unmet demand on the level of unauthorized use and its associated impacts on enforcement workload and resource impacts.

2. **Low Capital Investment** - Not require substantial capital investment to implement. *We do not expect much funding to be available for significantly expanding or reconfiguring the existing system. Proposals that require capital investment but do not yet have a likely source of funding identified are not ripe for decision in this process.*
3. **Balanced Recreation Opportunities** - Provide for a balance between motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities within the Forest as a whole, as measured by conformance with motorized and non-motorized land use allocations of the Forest Plan. *Both types of recreation are legitimate uses of national forest system lands. However they are not always compatible with each other. To assure that people have a variety of quality opportunities for each type of use, proposals should minimize conflict.*
4. **Quality Motorized Recreation Opportunities** - Provide for high quality of motorized recreation opportunities, as measured by connectivity, loop opportunities, range of challenge levels and route types (e.g. single-track vs. two-track vs. road), variety of landscape settings, opportunities for dispersed camping, and other desired characteristics. *Providing quality opportunities on the designated system is important for user satisfaction. It is also important in terms of making the designated system an attractive alternative to unauthorized cross-country travel or use of user-created routes.*
5. **Compensatory Tradeoffs** - Consider opportunities for tradeoffs between the elimination of existing 'problem' designated routes and the designation of better routes that are not currently designated. *By 'problem' routes we mean those that are costly to properly maintain or have unacceptable resource impacts or user conflicts. There may be opportunities to eliminate such routes and compensate by designating routes that do not have such problems. Tradeoffs like this can improve affordability and resource protection while maintaining motorized use opportunities.*
6. **Cost Efficiency** - Provide for cost-efficiency of operation and maintenance as measured by direct and indirect costs per unit. *Inefficiencies tend to reduce the size / quality of the system that can be sustained. For example, the trail-based portion of the system is currently concentrated in the southern part of the Forest. This reduces the indirect costs from the amount of time needed for equipment transport, and travel for management and enforcement personnel as compared to the same trail mileage spread out over the entire Forest. Another example would be the efficiency of focusing on the more popular routes even though the heavier use may increase maintenance costs. The cost per user per mile on popular routes is generally lower than on routes with low use, even though the cost per mile is greater.*
7. **Forest Plan Compliance** - Comply with and implement existing Forest Plan direction; that is, not require any significant amendment of the Forest Plan. *The Forest Plan integrates and balances the management and uses of the various resources. We do not have the organizational or financial capacity at this time to revisit this or other substantial aspects of the Forest Plan in this route designation*

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