

## Chapter 2. The Alternatives

### ***Introduction***

This chapter describes and compares the alternatives considered for the Modoc National Forest Motorized Travel Management EIS. It describes both alternatives considered in detail, and those eliminated from detailed study. The end of this chapter presents the alternatives in tabular format so that the alternatives and their environmental impacts can be readily compared.

Based on the issues identified through public comment on the Proposed Action, the Forest Service developed three alternative proposals that achieve the Purpose and Need differently than the Proposed Action. In addition, the Forest Service is required to analyze a No Action Alternative. The No Action, Proposed Action, and other action alternatives are described in detail below.

### ***How the Alternatives Were Developed***

The four action alternatives represent a wide range of perspectives designed to address the significant issues as described in the Purpose and Need (Chapter 1).

### **Refining Alternatives Submitted by the Public During Scoping**

During the 30-day public scoping process, alternatives were submitted for consideration by three groups. After the scoping period concluded, the Forest Service reviewed and gave due consideration to their proposals. The resulting alternatives incorporate these and other proposals and information offered by the public and the work of the Interdisciplinary Team.

Also important in this process was the information gathered by the Forest Service in its consultation and discussions with tribal representatives, local counties, interested individuals and Forest Service employees. State and Federal agencies advised the Forest Service during the process through numerous informal contacts. During the scoping period, the Forest received additional information internally that was incorporated into the Proposed Action. First, it was determined that the 44N08 and 44N01 roads that go from the Glass Mountain Pumice Mine to County Road 97 are not safe for use by off-highway vehicles (OHVs) because of the high volume of large trucks that use the road. The Forest is proposing to close these 1.45 miles of road to use by OHVs; other vehicles will still be allowed to use the road. Second, a seasonal closure was initially proposed from November 1 through March 31 in bald eagle winter roost areas as required in the Modoc Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP). After additional scoping, the Forest realized that in most cases this guideline can be implemented; however, there is one bald eagle roost area directly adjacent to the community of Tionesta. System roads 44A19D, 44A19C, 44N19, 44N20 and 44N04Y are within this area. These roads have been open to public use with no discernable disturbance to the bald eagle during their wintering period. Bald eagles that roost there have become habituated to vehicular traffic. If these roads are seasonally closed, the inholding community of Tionesta would be affected. As a result, the Forest is proposing a site-specific, non-significant Forest-plan amendment to the bald eagle winter roost guidelines that would allow for vehicle use year round in this specific eagle roost area on designated roads within that area. All other roads in bald eagle winter roost areas would have the seasonal closure implemented as directed by the LRMP. An update notice was sent out to the public and published in the newspapers of record the week of July 21, 2008. The scoping period to comment on these changes was extended until August 8, 2008 and three additional comments were received but did not vary from the scope of the other comments received.

## ***Alternatives Considered in Detail***

Four action alternatives (Alternatives 2, 3, 4, and 5) and a No Action Alternative (Alternative 1) are analyzed in detail in this DEIS. The No Action Alternative represents the continuation of cross-country travel, including continued use of all unauthorized routes by motor vehicles. This alternative serves as a baseline for comparison among the alternatives, and is required by the implementing regulations of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The planning area for the alternatives includes National Forest System lands on the Modoc National Forest. It does not include any private, state, or other Federal lands.

Each alternative assumes that other adjacent Federal lands, such as those administered by the Bureau of Land Management, would be managed according to existing management plans and applicable Federal laws. Each alternative also assumes that private lands will meet applicable state and Federal land-use regulations.

## **Monitoring**

Monitoring is critical for evaluating the effectiveness of management decisions, the accuracy of analysis assumptions, and conclusions. Monitoring of road and trail conditions is required, and must meet regional and national standards. If monitoring determines additional resource damage is occurring, steps to prevent further damage may be taken. If the mitigations are not effective or are not possible, road or trail closures may be required, and may require additional NEPA analysis. Condition surveys are performed on all maintenance level 3, 4, and 5 roads every five years, with approximately 20 percent completed each year. Condition Surveys are performed on maintenance level 1 and 2 roads based on a relatively small random sample generated by the Washington Office. In addition to the formal condition surveys, the Forest will monitor road conditions continually as they are driven for other purposes. As problems are identified, they will be addressed as resources allow, and appropriate management actions will be undertaken in accordance with law, regulation and policy (such as emergency closures).

## **Descriptions of the Alternatives**

This section describes each of the five alternatives considered in detail. The alternatives are described in three parts with the action alternatives having several common factors:

1. **Cross-country travel:** All of the action alternatives ban cross-country travel.
2. **Changes to the existing National Forest Transportation System (NFTS):** The alternatives vary in changes to the existing NFTS in terms of vehicle class or season of use.
3. **Additions to the NFTS:** Alternative 2, 4 and 5 include lists of roads that are proposed for addition to the NFTS. Each of these roads is identified by a unique road number or route ID. All proposed route additions have an assigned maintenance level based on specific road objectives, and any applicable vehicle class or season of use. All of the proposed additions on the MDF will be maintenance level 2 and open to all vehicles. All proposed routes will receive the appropriate level of routine maintenance such as clearing brush, posting signs, cleaning, clearing debris, etc. Each road, trail, or area is site-specifically addressed in Appendices A1 and A2, where site-specific reviews by resource specialists are documented. Resource specialists reviewed all proposed routes to determine site-specific impacts. For some routes, no work beyond routine maintenance is needed. For one road, additional work is needed to bring the route up to a safe and environmentally sustainable condition. Where specific actions are identified for a given road or trail, such actions will be completed prior to designation of the road or trail for public motorized use.

## Seasonal Closures for All Alternatives

In the past, seasonal closures have been issued and enforced. Currently, there are no seasonal restriction closures in place on the Forest, although there are several standards and guides that indicate where closures may be beneficial.

Seasonal closures in this document are proposed for three of the four action alternatives. Most of the closures are weather related and are proposed because of the effects of rain and snow events on clay soils and the resulting damage to roads. The table below shows the closure name, date, and the reason for the closure. A variation of these closures is common to all three of the alternatives where seasonal closures are proposed. Only one closure date per road would be applied.

**Table 2-1. Seasonal Closure Type and Dates**

Closure name	Closure date	Closure type
SC1	11/1-3/31	Bald Eagle Winter Roost
SC2	11/1 - 4/30	Wet Weather
SC3	12/1-4/30	Wet Weather
SC4	12/16-4/30	Wet Weather
SC5	2/15-4/30	Wet Weather

### Alternative 1: No Action

The No Action Alternative provides a baseline for comparing the other alternatives. Under the No Action Alternative, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. No changes would be made to the current NFTS, and no cross-country travel prohibition would be put into place. The Travel Management Rule would not be implemented, and no MVUM would be produced. Motor vehicle travel by the public would not be limited to designated routes. Unauthorized routes would continue to proliferate and have no status or authorization as NFTS facilities.

1. **Cross-country Travel:** Motor vehicle travel off designated NFS roads and NFS trails and areas by the public would continue except as currently prohibited by Forest order. A total of 1,609,466 acres are currently open to cross-country travel.
2. **Changes to the existing NFTS:** No changes to the existing NFTS or to current LRMP direction. No seasonal restrictions exist under current management plan direction.
3. **Additions to the NFTS:** There would be no additions to the existing NFTS.

### Alternative 2: The Proposed Action

The Proposed Action was created by the Interdisciplinary Team using input from the public regarding the inventoried unauthorized routes. It includes the prohibition of cross-country motorized travel, proposed changes to the existing NFTS, and the additions to the NFTS as described in the Notice of Intent (NOI) published May 12, 2008 (Volume 73, Number 92).

1. **Cross-country travel:** This alternative would prohibit motor vehicle travel off the designated NFTS roads by the public; except as allowed by permit or other authorization.
2. **Changes to the existing NFTS:** Close approximate 6 miles of 46B29HB (along Boles Creek between Clear Lake and Steel Swamp) to public motorized use.

*Proposed seasonal restrictions:* Seasonal restrictions on 312 miles of NFS roads due to weather restrictions. There would be three weather-related closure dates and one related to bald eagle winter roosting. The roads seasonally closed for bald eagle winter roost requirements total approximately five miles, with the remainder of closures being weather related.

**Table 2-2. Alternative 2— Seasonal Closures Grouped By Date (Proposed Addition of Unauthorized Routes)**

Group name	Date closed	Miles	Number	Type
SC1	11/1-3/31			
SC2	11/1-4/30			
SC3	12/1-4/30	9.44	23	Wet weather
SC4	12/16-3/31	10.36	51	Wet weather
Total		19.8	74	

**Table 2-3. Alternative 2—Seasonal Closures Grouped By Date (Existing NFTS Roads)**

Group name	Date closed	Miles	Number	Reason
SC1	11/1-3/31	4.85	2	bald eagle
SC2	11/1-4/30	14.25	15	weather & road condition
SC3	12/1-4/30	178.13	83	weather & road condition
SC4	12/16-3/31	115.23	113	weather & road condition
Total		312.46	213	

*Changes in class of vehicles:* There are currently 3,764 miles of level 2 road open to the public for mixed use. Mixed use is defined as allowing use by both highway-legal vehicles and off-highway vehicles. Alternative 2 proposes to change the class of vehicle on 138 additional miles of maintenance level 3 roads to allow for mixed use. It would restrict use on 44N08 and 44N01 roads to highway-legal vehicles only. The table below lists the vehicle class changes proposed under Alternative 2.

**Table 2-4. Alternative 2—Proposed Changes in Vehicle Class (from Highway Only to all Vehicles – Mixed Use) on NFTS roads**

Miles	Number of Routes
138	23

Note: See appendix A-1 for a list of all routes.

- Additions to the NFTS:** This Alternative proposes to add approximately 336 miles of existing, inventoried unauthorized routes to the NFTS as level 2 roads. There would be approximately 20 miles of these roads that would have seasonal restrictions. The following summary table shows the miles and types of roads, by district, to be added into the National Forest Transportation System. A more complete table with each road listed is located in appendix A.

**Table 2-5. Alternative 2—Miles of Unauthorized Road Added to the NFTS, by District**

Miles of Unauthorized Road Added	District
40	Warner Mountain
21	Big Valley
93	Doublehead
185	Devils Garden
336	Total

Of the 1,168 roads proposed to be added in Alternative 2, the majority of the roads are spur roads and under a quarter of a mile in length. Table 1-1 in Chapter 1 of this document shows the distribution of road lengths.

### Alternative 3

Alternative 3 responds to the issues of cost, maintenance, inventoried roadless areas, quiet use, and natural resource impacts by prohibiting cross-country travel without adding any new facilities to the NFTS. This alternative also provides a baseline for comparing the impacts of other alternatives that propose changes to the NFTS in the form of new roads. None of the currently unauthorized roads would be added to the National Forest System under this alternative.

1. **Cross-country Travel:** Motor vehicle travel off the designated NFTS roads by the public; except as allowed by permit or other authorization would be prohibited.
2. **Changes to the existing NFTS:** Only those seasonal restrictions as specified in the MDF LRMP and contained in existing Forest orders would be continued. Currently, there are no seasonal restriction closures in place on the Forest. No changes to vehicle class are proposed in this Alternative.
3. **Additions to the NFTS:** There would be no additions to the existing NFTS.

### Alternative 4

Alternative 4 was developed as a modified version of an alternative submitted during scoping by a coalition of environmental groups. Alternative 4 responds to issues of inventoried roadless areas, quiet use, and natural resource impacts and does not add routes where resource concerns were raised internally and externally.

1. **Cross-country Travel:** Motor vehicle travel off the designated NFTS roads by the public; except as allowed by permit or other authorization would be prohibited.
2. **Changes to the existing NFTS:** Close approximately 6 miles of 46B29HB (along Boles Creek between Clear Lake and Steel Swamp) to public use.

*Proposed Seasonal restrictions:* There would be four weather-related closures and one related to bald eagle winter roosts. System roads 44A19D, 44A19C, 44N19, 44N20 and 44N04Y east of Tionesta would be excluded as stated in the Proposed Action. The table below shows weather-related seasonal restrictions on an additional 15 miles of proposed routes, 419 miles on NFS roads, and approximately 5 miles for bald eagle winter roost requirements.

**Table 2-6. Alternative 4—Seasonal Closure Grouped By Date (Proposed Addition of Unauthorized Routes)**

Group name	Date closed	Miles	Number	Reason
SC1	11/1-3/31			

Group name	Date closed	Miles	Number	Reason
SC2	11/1-4/30			
SC3	12/1-4/30	6.13	18	weather & road condition
SC4	12/16-3/31	9.14	47	weather & road condition
	Total	15.27	65	

**Table 2-7. Alternative 4—Seasonal Closure Grouped By Date (Existing NFTS Roads)**

Group name	Date closed	Miles	Number	Reason
SC1	11/1-3/31	4.85	2	bald eagle
SC2	11/1-4/30	14.25	15	weather & road condition
SC3	12/1-4/30	178.13	83	weather & road condition
SC4	12/16-3/31	115.23	113	weather & road condition
SC5	2/15-4/30	112.17	57	
	Total	424.63	270	

*Class of Vehicles Changes:* There are currently 3,764 miles of level 2 road open to the public for mixed use. Mixed use is defined as allowed use by both highway legal vehicles and off-highway vehicles. Alternative 4 would not add any additional routes for mixed use. It would restrict use to highway vehicles only on approximately 1.45 miles of 44N08 and 44N01 roads near Glass Mountain Pumice Mine.

- Additions to the NFTS:** The Forest is proposing to add approximately 286 miles of existing unauthorized routes to the system as maintenance level 2 roads. Approximately 15 miles of these roads would have seasonal restrictions. The following summary table shows the miles and types of roads, by district, to be added into the National Forest Transportation System. A more complete table with each road listed is included in appendix A.

**Table 2-8. Alternative 4—Miles of Road Added to the NFTS, by District**

Miles of Unauthorized Road Added	District
32	Warner Mountain
20	Big Valley
85	Doublehead
149	Devils Garden
286	Total

## Alternative 5

Alternative 5 responds to the issue of access and motorized recreation opportunity and was developed as a modified version of an alternative submitted by the Blue Ribbon Coalition and public comments. During scoping, the MDF also received recommendations for additional mixed use that would better provide for access and motorized recreation opportunity.

1. **Cross-country Travel:** Motor vehicle travel off the designated NFS roads, NFS trails and areas by the public would be prohibited except as allowed by permit or other authorization.
2. **Changes to the existing NFTS:** Close approximate 6 miles of 46B29HB (along Boles Creek between Clear Lake and Steel Swamp) to public use.

*Proposed seasonal restrictions:* Seasonal restrictions on 307 miles of NFS roads due to weather restrictions. There would be one season for wet weather closures and one season related to bald eagle winter roosting. The roads seasonally closed for bald eagle winter roost requirements total 5 miles and exclude system roads 44A19D, 44A19C, 44N19, 44N20 and 44N04Y east of Tionesta as stated in the Proposed Action.

**Table 2-9. Alternative 5— Seasonal Closure Grouped by Date (Proposed Addition of Unauthorized Routes)**

Group name	Date closed	Miles	Number	Reason
SC5	2/15-4/30	19.8	74	weather & road conditions
	Total	19.8	74	

**Table 2-10. Alternative 5—Seasonal Closure Grouped by Date (Existing NFTS Roads)**

Group name	Date closed	Miles	Number	Reason
SC1	11/1-3/31	4.85	2	bald eagle
	Total	312.46	213	

*Class of vehicle changes:* There are currently 3,764 miles of level 2 road open to the public for mixed use. Mixed use is defined as allowed use by both highway-legal vehicles and off-highway vehicles. Based on input from the public during scoping, Alternative 5 proposes to change the vehicle class on 544 additional miles of maintenance level 3 roads to allow for mixed use. The 44N01 road would not be recommended for inclusion due to safety issues related to the Glass Mountain Pumice Mine. Alternative 5 would restrict use on this 1.45 miles of 44N08 and 44N01 roads to highway vehicles only. The table below lists the vehicle changes proposed under Alternative 5.

**Table 2-11. Alternative 5—Summary of NFTS Routes Proposed for Mixed Use**

	Miles	Number of Routes
Alternative 5	544	197

Note: See Appendix A-1 for a complete table of all routes.

3. **Additions to the NFTS:** The Forest is proposing to add approximately 336 miles of existing unauthorized routes to the NFTS as maintenance level 2 roads. Approximately 20 miles of these roads would have seasonal restrictions. The following summary table shows the miles and types of roads, by district, to be added into the National Forest Transportation System. A more complete table with each road listed is included in appendix A.

**Table 2-12. Alternative 5—Miles of Unauthorized Road Added to the NFTS, by District**

Miles of Unauthorized Road Added	District
40	Warner Mountain
21	Big Valley
93	Doublehead
185	Devils Garden
336	Total miles

### ***Comparison of Alternatives***

Chapter 3 describes the environmental consequences of the alternatives in detail. This section of Chapter 2 compares the alternatives by summarizing key differences between the alternatives and providing a summary of the effects analysis for all alternatives.

**Table 2-13. Summary Comparison of Alternatives**

	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
Cross-country Travel	Yes	No	No	No	No
Miles of Unauthorized Routes Added to NFTS	0	336	0	286	336
Number of Roads Proposed to be Added	0	1,158	0	1025	1,158
Miles of Seasonal Closures on Roads Proposed to be Added	0	20	0	15	20
Existing Miles of Seasonal Closures on NFTS	0	0	0	0	0
Proposed Miles of Seasonal Closures on existing roads on NFTS	0	312	0	425	312
Number of NFTS Roads Proposed for Seasonal Closure	0	213	0	270	213
Number of Closure Dates	0	4	0	5	2
Current Mixed Use Miles	3764	3761	3764	3761	3761
Additional Mixed Use Miles Proposed	0	138	0	0	531

	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
Number of Additional Roads Proposed for Mixed Use	0	23	0	0	197
Close 46B29HB	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Close 44N01 road to OHVs	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

## Summary Comparison of Alternatives, by Environmental Effects

**Table 2-14. Rankings of Alternatives, Averaged Across Indicators<sup>1</sup>**

Resource Area	Rankings of Alternatives, averaged across indicators				
	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4	Alt. 5
Aquatic Biota	2.2	4.2	5	4.2	4.2
Botanical Resources	1.5	2.5	3.7	3.5	2.3
Heritage Resources	1	5	5	5	5
Noxious Weeds	1	3	5	4	2
Recreation Resources Motorized	5	3	1	2	4
Recreation Resources Non-Motorized	1	2	5	4	2
Soil Resource	1	3	5	4	3
Terrestrial Biota	1	3.5	5	2.75	3.5
Visual Resources	1	3	5	4	3
Water Resources	1	3	5	4	3

1. A score of 5 indicates the alternative has the lowest negative impact for the specified resource; a score of 1 indicates the alternative has the highest negative impact for the specified resource. See Chapter 3 for more details.

## Alternatives Considered, but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires Federal officials to rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives and to briefly discuss the reasons for eliminating any alternatives that were not developed in detail (40 CFR 1502.14). NEPA requires consideration of only those alternatives that would fulfill the Purpose and Need described in Chapter 1. The following describes those alternatives that were considered but eliminated from detailed study, and the rationale for their elimination.

### Add All Unauthorized Routes to NFTS

This alternative was developed in response to initial comments from the public at open houses held in Modoc County who told us they did not want us closing any routes or placing any restrictions on their current use of the Forest. This alternative was suggested prior to creation of the Proposed Action. This approach would add all of the unauthorized routes that were inventoried, and not have any seasonal closures. Every level 3 road would be designated for mixed use.

*Rationale for elimination:* This Alternative does not meet the Purpose and Need. Several of the inventoried unauthorized routes have resource conflicts and create a potential for resource damage if added to the NFTS and allowed use by the public. Adding all of the unauthorized routes would not meet the purpose of minimizing damage to soil, vegetation and other Forest resources.

**Designate several high-use areas where use is limited to existing routes.**

*Rationale for elimination:* The current network of roads across the Forest is extensive, and already provides for a varied motorized-use experience. There is not a need to designate a “high use area” when the Forest provides an extensive network of roads available for OHV use already.

**Develop and implement a rainfall-based wet weather closure.**

*Rationale for elimination:* This does not meet the requirement of the Travel Rule to produce a Motor Vehicle Use Map that will be the final product of this process because it is not practical to change dates as they occur with different seasonal weather situations each year.

**Reduce System Road Density based on a Comprehensive Travel Analysis.**

*Rationale for elimination:* This alternative is outside of the scope of the project because it primarily points to Subpart A of the Travel Management Rule. The Proposed Action implements Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule, which states

The Responsible Official may incorporate previous administrative decisions regarding travel management made under other authorities, including designations and prohibitions of motor vehicle use, in designating National Forest System roads, National Forest System trails, and areas on National Forest System lands for motor vehicle use under this subpart (36 CFR: § 212.50 (b)).

The Responsible Official has determined that existing NFTS roads and trails would not to be considered for repair, reconstruction, or decommissioning, as part of this proposal. Repair and maintenance of the existing NFTS are routine, ongoing activities on national Forests, and are typically categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement in accordance with agency policy in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 30, Section 31.12 (4): “Repair and Maintenance of Roads Trails and Landline Boundaries.” Further, re-evaluation of previous decisions that established the existing NFTS is not necessary for implementing Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule. However, past, present, and future environmental impacts of the existing NFTS are incorporated into cumulative-effects analyses for the Proposed Action and alternatives.

This action is not addressing the creation of a travel management plan, but rather deals specifically with Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule, which provides direction for a system of NFTS roads, trails, and areas designated for motor vehicle use, and the prohibition of motor vehicle use off designated roads and trails and outside designated areas. Subpart B is intended to prevent resource damage caused by unmanaged motor vehicle travel by the public. Therefore, any analysis of our existing system and comprehensive changes made to that system are beyond the scope of this analysis.