



TRAVEL MANAGEMENT UPDATE

Planning for Off-Highway Vehicle Use on the Superior National Forest

February 2008

What's it all about?

The Superior National Forest is conducting an analysis for the Forest-wide Travel Management Project that will lead to site-specific decisions regarding off-highway motor vehicle use on all national forest system roads and trails within the boundaries of the Forest.

This effort involves determining which roads and trails we will continue to maintain for what level of use, which roads and trails will be decommissioned, and where off-highway motor vehicles will be allowed.



The Forest Plan and Off-Highway Vehicle Use

The Forest Service considers off-highway motor vehicles a legitimate recreational use on national forest roads and trails when responsibly managed. The 2004 Superior National Forest Plan provides for Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) "road and trail riding opportunities with experiences in a variety of forest environments, while protecting natural resources." Cross-country use by motorized vehicles is prohibited by the Forest Plan.

The Forest Plan directs that decisions about whether a specific trail or road segment (including "unclassified" roads) are to remain open and for what uses would be based on site-specific analysis, that includes public comment and consideration of potential environmental effects.

In September 2004, as a first step in implementing the Forest Plan, the Forest Supervisor issued an order listing which roads were open and which roads were closed to ATVs. A map showing these roads was distributed and has been revised on an annual basis. Since 2004, District Rangers have been including decisions about roads and trails in project analyses across the Forest.

National Travel Management Rule

In 2005, the Forest Service issued a national rule regarding Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) management that applies to all national forests, including the Superior National Forest. These regulations require each national forest to designate those roads, trails, and areas that are open to motor vehicle use as well as the class of vehicle allowed and, if appropriate, the time of year the use is allowed on designated roads and trails.

Decisions about OHV use already made in the Superior National Forest Plan are consistent with the 2005 National Travel

Management Rule. Under the national rule, the Forest Plan's conditional use of unclassified roads for off-highway vehicle riding (until site-specific decisions were made regarding unclassified roads) was given a deadline for making those decisions.

Current Status

In 2006, the Superior National Forest began working collaboratively with tribal, county and Minnesota DNR partners to identify existing travel routes and began plans to coordinate OHV travel routes. The Forest Service held public scoping to solicit comments from the public in a "phased" approach, beginning on the east side followed by scoping on the west side of the Forest. The scoping proposals issued in spring and summer of 2007 included a description, lists, and maps of proposed actions and locations

We received more than 950 comments in response to the scoping on the east and west zones of the Forest. In general, most comments could be categorized as suggesting additional closure of roads and trails to OHV use or suggesting additional roads and trails to be open for OHV use. Some comments supported the proposed action while others suggested additional considerations.

The project scoping packages are posted along with other project information on the "Projects and Plans" section of the Superior National Forest website:
www.fs.fed.us/r9/superior.

FACTOID: In Minnesota, the number of ATVs registered increased from 56,700 in 1994 to 222,600 in 2004. (Minnesota Department of Natural Resources 2005 OHV Study, page 33) This almost four-fold increase in the number of ATVs registered in Minnesota has greatly increased demand for riding opportunities on all ownerships.



What's "Down the Road"?

The interdisciplinary team is finalizing a range of alternatives and beginning the environmental analysis. From the scoping information, they have developed a Modified Proposed Action. At least two additional alternatives, based on public comments, will be developed and analyzed that consider both greater and fewer OHV opportunities than the Proposed Action. As a basis to compare other alternatives, a No Action alternative will be considered that reflects current OHV riding opportunities on the Forest.

A description of the alternatives considered and environmental analysis will be documented in a draft environmental assessment which we expect to release for review and comment in March 2008.

Public Open Houses

Public open houses are scheduled during March at each Superior National Forest office. We will have informational displays and local managers and project team

members will be available to explain the analysis and answer questions.

*****PUBLIC OPEN HOUSES*****	
All open houses will run from 2 PM until 6 PM. Dates and locations are as follows:	
March 19	Supervisor's Office Duluth, MN
March 20	LaCroix Ranger District Office Cook, MN
March 25	Gunflint Ranger District Office Grand Marais, MN
March 26	Tofte Ranger District Office Tofte, MN
March 26	Kawishiwi Ranger District Office Ely, MN
March 27	Laurentian Ranger District Office Aurora, MN

Availability of Documents

To reduce the use of paper and other resources, we will be making project documents available electronically via CD-ROM and on our web site. We plan to mail a CD copy of the draft Environmental Assessment to individuals and groups that responded to the scoping.

If you prefer a paper copy or are not already on our project mail list and are interested in obtaining a copy of project documents, please contact us and indicate whether you desire a paper copy or CD copy. Please provide your name and address.

We will continue to post project documents on the Forest website. Please let us know if you prefer to simply receive an email notifying you of new internet postings for this project. We will need your name, organization, and email address. Send to: r9_superior_NF@fs.fed.us

Project Timeline

February 2008 – Continue to develop alternatives and analysis for Environmental Assessment

March 2008– Release Environmental Assessment for public comment

March 2008 - Public Open Houses

March to April 2008 - Public comment period

May 2008 – Issue Decision

June 2008 – End of appeal period

Summer/Fall 2008 – Begin Implementation of Decision

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Check the "Plans and Projects" section of the Forest web site for the east and west zone scoping packages and for future documents related to this project.

www.fs.fed.us/r9/superior

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