



USDA Forest Service Update

July 2014

Subject: Roads and Travel Management

Issue: Identifying the road system on National Forest System (NFS) lands which provides public access while protecting resources and reducing costs continues to be a high priority. The Travel Management rule describes this process and identifies how trade-offs between cost, restoration, and access of the nation's forests and grasslands should be made. Priority work related to travel management has been identified in Watershed Restoration Action Plans, project NEPA, National Fish Habitat Partnerships, and in response to natural disasters, such as wildfire and flood events.

Background: The Travel Management rule requires each national forest to designate those roads, trails, and areas open to motor vehicle use. Designations include class of vehicle and, if appropriate, time of year. Once designated, routes and areas are identified on a motor vehicle use map, and the rule prohibits motor vehicle use inconsistent with the designations. Travel management also requires a hard look at the existing road system to identify potential opportunities to remove roads associated with negative environmental impacts.

The rule stated the Forest Service may allow, restrict, or prohibit over-snow vehicle use at the local level. A court decision found the Forest Service does not have discretion and will designate over-snow routes. The proposed rule was posted in the Federal Register on June 18, 2014 seeking public comments for 45 days. The court deadline for the revised rule is September 9, 2014.

As part of the Watershed Condition Framework, every National Forest and Grassland in the nation has identified priority watersheds, along with potential projects in Watershed Restoration Action Plans. The pilot Integrated Resource Restoration regions (Northern, Southwestern, and Intermountain regions) are able to combine fund types for restoration projects, while the remaining regions rely on funds such as Legacy Roads and Trails (CMLG) and Roads Management (CMRD) for activities such as road decommissioning, maintenance, and long-term storage.

Upgrading the legacy of undersized culverts to restore fish passage and provide greater resilience to flood events is one focus of road related restoration. Under the current Federal Highways bill (MAP-21) the Forest Service is no longer specifically funded \$10 million annually to remove or upgrade priority road-stream crossings. As funding sources are reduced and intense storms continue to damage watershed resources, prioritization of restoration activities and integration with partners' objectives becomes critically important. Tropical Storm Irene demonstrated that Forest Service road-stream crossings designed and constructed for unimpeded aquatic organism passage or "stream simulation design" resulted in significantly reduced damage and economic impacts to road infrastructure following the storm.

Key Messages

- The Travel Management rule provides a national framework for local decision-making;
- The Travel Management rule provides multiple opportunities to the public and other interested entities to provide input to transportation decisions;
- A designated system of routes and areas will enhance public enjoyment of the national forests while providing better protection of water, soil, wildlife, and other values and uses;
- High priority restoration activities are identified through the Watershed Condition Framework and their accompanying Watershed Restoration Action Plans;
- Road-stream crossings continue to be a priority for increasing native fish habitat and restoration of fragmented aquatic ecosystems.

CONTACT: Rob Harper, Director WFWARP (202) 205-1671
Emilee Blount, Director Engineering (703) 605-4962