



Decision Notice
& Finding of No Significant Impact

Turkey Springs Trail Management Plan

USDA Forest Service
Pagosa Ranger District, San Juan National Forest
Archuleta County, Colorado

Portions of Townships 34-36 North, Ranges 2-4 West, N.M.P.M.

Introduction

This Decision Notice documents my decision to approve Alternative 3, with modifications, for the Turkey Springs Trail Management Plan project. My decision is based on an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the Turkey Springs Trail Management Plan project, dated March 2012. In this notice, I have documented important elements of the management alternative I have selected for implementation and the rationale for my choice. This notice also references the design criteria and monitoring plan that will be implemented with my decision.

The EA associated with this Decision Notice was prepared to document the environmental effects of implementing changes to the existing motorized and non-motorized trail systems within the analysis area. In accordance with the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an interdisciplinary team of Forest Service specialists (ID team) conducted the analysis and documented the results in an EA. The EA was released in pre-decisional form on July 15, 2011. Based on comments received during the 30-day comment period, some clarifications related to the impacts of noise, clarification of the socioeconomics section, and additional information related to Mexican spotted owl were made in the EA. Additional design criteria were also added to address safety concerns and enforcement issues. None of these clarifications altered the impacts analysis contained in the EA, but were done to further explain certain concepts or correct minor wording errors. The EA on which I based my decision is available for review at the Pagosa Ranger District office in Pagosa Springs, Colorado (Tel. 970-264-2268) and on the web at:

www.fs.usda.gov/goto/sanjuan/projects .

The analysis area includes the Turkey Springs, Middle Mountain, Horse Mountain, and Devil Mountain areas of the Pagosa Ranger District. The analysis area is 67,569 acres in size. Approximately 56,099 acres of the analysis area (83 percent) are on National Forest System (NFS) lands. A project map, "Exhibit A", is attached, and displays the location of the analysis area relative to its location within the San Juan National Forest (SJNF).

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this action is to establish a trail system that will enhance and improve recreation opportunities in the analysis area in a manner that is both socially and ecologically sustainable. The need for this project is to address recreation opportunities and existing problems relating to the network of system and non-system trails in the Turkey Springs, Middle Mountain, Horse Mountain, and Devil Mountain areas, including a perceived lack of adequate opportunities for certain recreation activities and user groups, fragmented trail systems, proliferation of user-created routes, user-group conflicts, safety concerns, and unwanted impacts to forest resources.

Decision

Based upon my review of the analysis documented in the final EA dated March 2012 and my review of the comments received during the 30-day public comment period, I have decided to implement Alternative 3, as described in the Final EA on pages 16-17, with modifications. The only difference between Alternative 3 and Alternative 3 Modified is that Alternative 3 Modified will add an additional 1.0 miles of non-motorized, non-system trails to the transportation system, rather than decommissioning them. Alternative 3 Modified will allow for a variety of changes to the existing trail system, including the adoption of non-system trails, changes in the managed use permitted on existing trails, and new construction of trails and trail segments. By selecting Alternative 3 Modified, I have provided a variety of trail-based recreational opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized users, and addressed relevant resource concerns. Alternative 3 Modified, hereafter referred to as the Selected Alternative, authorizes the following management actions:

- Add a net of 12.1 miles of ATV trails to transportation system (6.8 miles from designation of trails on ML1 roads, while retaining these ML1 roads on the system; 2.9 miles from adoption of non-system routes; and 6.0 miles from new ATV trail construction). (*Note: the net increase of ATV trail miles reflects not only these additions but also subtractions from the current ATV trail system as a result of the conversions of motorized trails to non-motorized trails, closures, etc. listed below.*)
- Add a net of 13.6 miles of single-track motorized trails to transportation system (9.2 miles from conversion of system non-motorized trails to single-track motorized trails; 1.1 miles from adoption of non-system routes; and 3.3 miles from new motorized single-track trail construction).
- Add a net of 28.8 miles of non-motorized trails to transportation system (5.4 miles from designation of trails on ML1 roads, while retaining these ML1 roads on the system; 1.2 miles from conversion of system motorized trails to non-motorized trails; 29.3 miles from adoption of non-system routes; and 6.1 miles from new non-motorized trail construction). The 29.3 miles of non-system routes includes 1.0 mile of non-system routes analyzed under Alternative 4, which were adopted under Alternative 3 Modified. (*Note: the net increase of non-motorized trail miles reflects not only these additions but also subtractions from the current non-motorized trail system as a result of the conversions of existing non-motorized trails to motorized trails, closures, etc. listed above and below.*)
- Close 0.1 miles of system road to motorized travel.
- Remove 2.4 miles of motorized trails from the transportation system.
- Remove 4.0 miles of non-motorized trails from the transportation system.
- Remove from transportation system and decommission 0.1 miles of closed system (ML1) road.
- Decommission 0.5 miles of non-system roads.
- Decommission 3.4 miles of non-system trails. Alternative 3 Modified decommissions 1.0 fewer miles of non-system trails than the original Alternative 3 due to the addition of these non-system trails to the transportation system.
- Prohibit camping within 100 feet of the East Monument Road (NFSR 630) parking area.
- Re-classify 11.7 miles of First Fork Road (NFSR 622) as open to all motorized vehicles instead of open to highway-legal vehicles only, after implementation of necessary mitigation measures required in the 2011 First Fork Road Mixed Use Analysis Report.
- Improve parking areas on Brockover Road (NFSR 919) and Newt Jack Road (NFSR 923) through installation of signage, grading, surface hardening (gravel), or other ancillary items.

New trail design, survey, and construction will be undertaken in accordance with Forest Service direction specified in EM 7720.103 and FSH 2309.18. All new construction of all terrain vehicles (ATV) trails will be designed (and constructed accordingly) to meet Forest Service Trail Class 3

specifications by a qualified engineer or trail planner. All new construction of mountain bike trails and single-track motorized trails (i.e., motorcycle trails) will be designed (and constructed accordingly) to meet Forest Service Trail Class 2 specifications by a qualified engineer or trail planner. Forest Service trail design parameters can be found in Table 2 of the EA on page 18.

In the event that a route proposed for new construction cannot be designed and/or constructed to its prescribed Trail Class specifications within the corridor that was surveyed as part of this analysis, the appropriate level of environmental analysis of the new route location will be completed prior to construction and designation of the trail.

All new motorized trails will have seasonal closure dates when they are closed to all motorized vehicles, with the exception of snowmobiles operating on snow within existing areas designated as open to snowmobiles. These closure dates will vary, based on the type of trail. All new ATV trails will have seasonal closure dates of December 1 through May 14 annually, in accordance with existing District policy governing seasonal closures for motorized trails. All new single track motorized trails will have seasonal closure dates of September 1 through June 14 annually to provide for wildlife security during spring fawning and calving periods, and to provide for non-motorized recreation opportunities during the fall season.

All non-system routes proposed for inclusion in the trail system that require repairs or reconstruction to meet Forest Service standards for the assigned trail type, class, and managed use being prescribed for the route will receive the needed improvements prior to the route being added to the trail system and opened to public use.

All system trails proposed for changes in their managed use that require repairs or reconstruction to meet Forest Service standards for the managed use prescribed for the trail will receive the needed improvements prior to the route being reclassified and opened to the new use(s).

Motorized use of non-system routes not proposed for inclusion in the transportation system would continue to be prohibited, in accordance with existing policy. Non-motorized use of non-system trails being proposed for decommissioning would be discouraged through such methods as informational signage, barrier installation, and/or tread obliteration, as particular trail situations warrant. Non-motorized non-system trails not proposed for decommissioning or inclusion in the transportation system would be monitored for resource damage resulting from continued use and evaluated for decommissioning if necessary.

My decision to implement Alternative 3 modified also includes adoption and implementation of design criteria, as well as a monitoring plan (listed in Appendix A of this document and in Chapter 2 of the EA on pgs. 29-34).

Rationale for My Decision

I chose Alternative 3 Modified as the Selected Alternative because it meets the purpose and need of the project, and addresses the key issues in a more balanced way when compared with the other alternatives. It provides increased opportunities for trail-based recreation in the analysis area by adding 54.5 miles of additional trails to the transportation system. The addition of 28.8 miles of non-motorized trails, 12.1 miles of ATV trails, and 13.6 miles of single-track motorized (motorcycles) trails will provide more recreational opportunities for hikers, mountain bikers, and motorized users. Since more opportunities are provided for these users, and since a majority of the non-system routes

that are not added to the system will be decommissioned, there will likely be a reduction in the amount of unauthorized use and/or route pioneering that is currently taking place in the analysis area, as well as an overall reduction in user group conflicts.

Even though the reduction of user group conflicts is one of the stated purposes of this project, it is not possible to come up with an alternative that completely eliminates conflicts between users with very different interests and needs. This is perhaps most notable with respect to the designation of National Forest System Trail (NFST) 600 and NFST 605 as open to single-track motorized use, which has proven contentious and could increase conflicts between single-track motorized users and the non-motorized users who have worked to reclaim and maintain these two trails for several years. In an effort to reduce these potential conflicts, design criteria have been adopted as part of the Selected Alternative that will, among other things, require these and all other new single-track motorized trails to be closed to motorized use from September 1 through June 14, which in turn will provide an opportunity for non-motorized recreationists (including horseback riders, hikers, hunters, and outfitter guides) to utilize these trails without the presence of motorized vehicles early and late in the season.

I recognize that this will not resolve all of the concerns expressed by those in favor of keeping NFST 600 and NFST 605 closed to motorized use. However, my decision to allow single-track motorized use on certain trails took into account impacts to these and other user groups (EA, pgs 35-46), impacts to various resources (EA, pgs 46-122), and the fact that there is currently only one trail on the Pagosa District, covering 8.1 miles, that is designated for single-track motorized use. In contrast, there are over 370 miles of trails on the Pagosa District that are closed to motorized use and available exclusively for non-motorized recreation. With the selection of Alternative 3 Modified, I have provided additional trail-based recreation opportunities for a user group that has very few options within the District to enjoy their preferred recreation activity at the potential expense of reducing recreation opportunities on two trails for a user group that has abundant trail-based recreation options available to them.

I also recognize that the Selected Alternative will result in some measure of dissatisfaction from motorized users who would prefer additional loop opportunities, longer rides, and a more equitable distribution of motorized to non-motorized trails on the District. Again, my decision has taken these potential impacts into consideration along with impacts to other users (EA, pgs 35-46) and other resources (EA, pgs 46-122). I believe that the Selected Alternative constitutes the most balanced approach of all the alternatives to meeting the purpose and need and addressing key issues, and while it will not maximize potential opportunities available to motorized users within the analysis area, it will nonetheless improve considerably upon the existing condition for this user group and create a sustainable, high-quality network of motorized routes in this portion of the Pagosa District.

My decision to implement Alternative 3 Modified also took safety concerns into account, specifically, concerns raised by horseback riders who are concerned about sharing trails with motorized users (particularly motorcycles). Several design criteria related to safety will be implemented as part of the Selected Alternative, including the installation of cautionary and informative signage, the widening of certain trail sections to reduce exposure concerns associated with mixed use, the relocation of a barbed wire fence adjacent to portions of NFST 600 away from immediate proximity to the trail, and the implementation of seasonal closures for single-track motorized trails that will provide non-motorized users that have safety concerns related to sharing trails with motorized users opportunities during the spring and fall when they can use these trails without the presence of motorized users (EA, pg. 29). As such, I believe that the Selected Alternative adequately addresses safety concerns through the implementation of design criteria related to safety, as well as through the availability of other non-

motorized trails that non-motorized users can travel. Additionally, the First Fork Road (NFSR 622) will not be opened to mixed use until after all necessary mitigation measures required in the 2011 First Fork Road Mixed Use Analysis Report have been implemented.

Concerns were also expressed during the draft EA comment period as to the ability of the District to enforce the prescribed seasonal closures, as well as the ability of the District to maintain the additional trail miles when resources are already limited for trail maintenance. Compliance with the proposed travel regulations is an essential component to the success of the overall trail plan; consequently, a design criteria was added to the Final EA specifying that the District focus existing law enforcement resources and volunteer patrols, to the extent practicable, on monitoring and enforcing seasonal and other travel restrictions within the analysis area during the first three years of implementation. If violations of seasonal restrictions are regularly observed, a variety of possible actions have been identified to address the situations, including the possibility of closing the trail to motorized use (EA, pgs 29, 33). As for the financial/sustainability concerns, monitoring, funding, maintenance, and design requirements have been included in the EA (either through design criteria or directly as part of the proposed actions) and crafted to minimize the impacts on existing trail management resources (EA, pgs 15-18 and 29-34). The EA stipulates further that should any trails receive unacceptable levels of impacts as a result of changes in designation, they will be closed to the newly designated uses until such time as they are repaired (EA, pg 29). Monitoring will be conducted by recreation staff and resource specialists and will be documented utilizing the Forest Service Trail Condition Survey Matrix (CASM) and Trail Assessment and Condition Survey (TRACS) protocols. Typical information gathered using this survey methodology include trail feature description, condition, mitigation measure needed, severity of condition, and priority of mitigation. The Line Officer, in consultation with agency resource specialists, shall determine when impacts to trails reach an unacceptable level and should be closed.

As noted above, I believe the Selected Alternative balances the need to provide additional trail-based recreation opportunities with the need to address unwanted impacts to forest resources. I came to this conclusion after a thorough review of potential impacts to the physical and biological resources in the analysis area (EA pg. 46-95, 108-122), especially watershed and soils (EA, pgs 61-69), and wildlife (EA, pgs 69-95). According to the Watershed, Soils, and Geology Section on pages 65 and 66 of the EA, impacts to watershed and soil resources under Alternative 3 will be minor with the application of the design standards and guidelines contained in the project design criteria (EA, pgs. 30-31). The Wildlife section on pages 80 and 81 of the EA disclosed that there would be impacts to wildlife, including impacts to habitat capability and effectiveness and impacts to the amount of big game security habitat. This is most likely to occur in areas that currently provide relatively undisturbed, high quality habitat for Management Indicator Species (MIS) in the Middle Mountain, Devil Mountain and Horse Mountain areas that would be open for single-track motorized use under the Selected Alternative. However, this section went on to conclude that impacts to MIS are not expected to appreciably impact local populations, nor will they affect the viability of any species Forest-wide. This is in part due to the seasonal closure of these single-track trails which, while not eliminating all impacts to wildlife, would minimize disturbance to MIS prior to peak birthing seasons (EA pg. 81). In addition, the HD Mountains Interagency Mule Deer Migration Study (unpublished) showed that average migration through the area from 2004-2010 occurred during the month of May when the trails will be closed to motorized use. Information related to this study is included in the project record.

The adoption of existing user-created routes into the trail system will likely result in decreased impacts on watershed and soil resources due to the periodic maintenance these trails would receive as part of the

transportation system (EA pg. 65). Providing more trail-based recreation opportunities will also likely reduce the amount of unauthorized use and/or route pioneering that is currently taking place in the analysis area, thus preventing additional impacts to soil and watershed, or wildlife habitat (EA pg 80).

In addition to adding 54.5 miles of trails to the transportation system, the Selected Alternative also closes or decommissions 10.4 miles of roads and trails. By closing 0.1 miles of system road to motorized travel, removing 2.4 miles of motorized and 4.0 miles of non-motorized trails from the transportation system, and decommissioning 0.5 miles of non-system road and 3.4 miles of non-system trails, impacts to watershed and soil resources will be eliminated or reduced along these routes (EA pg. 65). In sum, I acknowledge that there will be impacts associated with the addition of 54.5 miles of trails to the transportation system, but the application of project design criteria will limit these impacts and provide the necessary balance between recreational and ecological concerns as stipulated by the purpose and need.

An examination of the record shows a thorough review using the best available science. The environmental analyses disclosed in the EA identify the effect analysis methodologies, reference scientific sources which informed the analysis, and disclose limitations of the analysis. The ID Team used information from a broad range of sources as appropriate, including Regional- and National-level research, local research and information for specific species analyzed for this project, and recent site-specific field inspections and reviews of the analysis area.

The selected Alternative is consistent with proposed uses of private property to the east and south of the analysis area.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered three other alternatives in detail. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA on pages 14-17 and pages 35-122.

I did not choose Alternative 1-*No Action* because it does not meet the purpose and need for action. This alternative is the existing condition and was used as a basis for comparison of impacts between the alternatives. Because it retains existing road and trail designations, and does not propose any changes to the existing system, Alternative 1 fails to address existing problems related to the network of system and non-system trails in the analysis area, including the fragmented trail system, proliferation of user-created routes, or unwanted impacts to forest resources such as soil, water and wildlife. It also fails to provide additional recreation opportunities in the analysis area, particularly for motorized users.

All of the action alternatives were developed to meet the purpose and need for action, and address the key issues. The primary differences between the action alternatives is the degree to which each enhances and improves recreation opportunities for various users groups, how much time and effort would be involved in constructing and maintaining the trails provided, impacts to different user groups from the proposed changes, and the quantity and extent of potential impacts to other forest resources .

I did not choose Alternative 2 because, while it would improve recreation opportunities for mountain biking, ATV riding, and motorcycle riding over the current condition, it would provide considerably less additional opportunities and improvements than the Selected Alternative. Most notably, Alternative 2 does not provide any single-track motorized trails (i.e. motorcycles trails). There are ATV trails provided for in this alternative that can be used by single-track motorized trail users, but

numerous public comments have been received, both formally during this analysis and informally during general discussions, expressing dissatisfaction with the fact that there are no trails devoted to single-track motorized use anywhere on the District despite these types of trails being the preferred choice of the majority of forest motorcycle users. Since these discussions, there has been one trail on the Pagosa District, spanning 8.1 miles, that has been changed from being open to ATVs and motorcycles to being open just to motorcycles as a result of a separate analysis, but this still represents only a very limited opportunity for single-track users. Additionally, with fewer opportunities being provided for both motorized and non-motorized users (Alternative 2 adds approximately 25 miles of trails to the transportation system, compared to 55 miles under the Selected Alternative), use of non-system routes, crowding of system routes, and cross-country travel would likely occur at higher levels in Alternative 2 as compared to the Selected Alternative (EA pgs. 41-43).

Alternative 4 represents the maximum proposed alteration of the existing trail system through the net addition of approximately 74 miles of trails to the transportation system (29.8 miles of non-motorized trails, 14.6 miles of ATV trails, and 29.5 miles of motorized single-track trails). While this alternative would maximize opportunities available to ATV, motorcycle, and mountain bike recreationists in the analysis area, I did not choose this alternative because it would also result in more extensive potential impacts to existing recreation resources, wildlife resources, and watershed and soil resources, and would involve the largest investment of time and money to implement, monitor, and maintain.

Several of the trails included in Alternative 4 that were not included in the Selected Alternative would have provided much-desired loop opportunities for motorized users that accessed challenging, scenic terrain, and/or would open up larger amounts of desirable terrain for motorized users. This included new construction of Trails 11f (the ATV trail connecting Snow Springs and West Fork Devil Creek) and 12b (the trail connecting Chris Mountain and Devil Creek), as well as the re-designation of NFST 603 (the trail that goes down Devil Creek) from non-motorized to motorized. Field reconnaissance showed that to make the short connections provided by Trails 11f and 12b would require intensive design strategies to meet Forest Service specifications for new trail construction, as well as extensive maintenance over the long-term (EA pgs 45, 67-68). Opening NFST 603 to motorized use would require the relocation of multiple sections of this trail away from the drainage bottom, as well as improved stream crossings and intensive long-term maintenance (EA pg 67). There were also similar concerns about NFST 601, which was one of the trails that would provide motorized access to the First Fork Road (EA pg 67). I am unwilling at this point to commit to the cost and effort that would be required to construct or maintain Trails 11f and 12b, or that would be required to re-designate and maintain NFST 601 and NFST 603 as motorized. NFST 604 (the trail from Monument Park to Snow Springs) would also have provided a much desired loop opportunity for single-track motorized users with NFST 600 (the trail along the ridgeline to the west), but due to concerns related to potential impacts to outfitter/guides that have permits along this trail (EA pg 46), as well as concerns related to potential impacts to wildlife (EA pg 82-83), I decided not to include this trail. Not including the five trails mentioned above should also help reduce additional user group conflicts, especially with outfitter guides, hunters, and horseback riders who use these trails.

Public Involvement

The proposal was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) beginning in July-September 2010 edition, and has been in every subsequent edition. A scoping letter was mailed to known interested parties, local businesses, and government entities on September 17, 2010, announcing a public scoping period that commenced September 17, 2010 and ended October 20, 2010. A media release describing the project and upcoming open house was submitted to local and regional media

outlets September 17, 2010. A public open house (scoping) meeting was held at the Pagosa Springs Community Center on September 28, 2010. The ID Team used information from the scoping process to identify issues related to the initial proposal. All public comments were considered by the ID Team and the Responsible Official, and are documented in the project record. Those issues that guided the development of alternatives are described in Section 2.1 on page 13 of the EA.

Opportunities for public comment continued for a 30-day period beginning on July 15, 2011 following the issuance of the EA in pre-decisional form. The comment period was announced with a press release, direct mailing to those who previously showed interest and a legal notice in both the Durango Herald and Pagosa Sun, each published on July 14, 2008. A public open house was also held at the Pagosa Springs Community Center on July 28, 2011. Responses were received from 70 sources and covered a large variety of topics. A summary of these comments and Forest Service responses can be found in Appendix B of the EA.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I base my finding on the following:

- Both beneficial and adverse impacts were considered. This analysis indicates that the selected alternative would not result in any significant adverse effects (EA Chapter 3).
- Public health and safety will be provided for through implementation of design criteria requiring adequate signage, trail tread widening at particular points along the trail, and the relocation of a barbed wire fence adjacent to portions of NFST 600 (EA, pg. 29).
- The selected alternative does not involve impacts to unique characteristics or ecologically critical areas. By applying design criteria agreed to in consultation with SHPO, the proposed alternative would result in *no adverse effect* to cultural resources (EA pg. 102). The selected alternative is unlikely to affect users of nearby Wilderness areas since noise from use of the trails will be confined largely to motorized trail corridors and should not extend to nearby Wilderness areas (EA pg. 44). Impacts to wetlands will be minimized through the application of appropriate trail construction standards and design criteria (EA pgs. 18, 65-66). In addition, all new construction of single-track motorized trails will be designed by a qualified engineer or trail planner (and constructed accordingly) to meet Forest Service Trail Class 2 specifications. The selected alternative does not substantially alter the undeveloped character of the roadless areas, nor does it have a significant impact on any of the resources or features that characterize roadless areas (EA, pg 52). Wild and scenic rivers will not be impacted by the selected alternative (EA, pgs. 48, 116-117). There are no park lands or prime farmlands in the project area.
- The effects of this action on the quality of the human environment are not highly controversial. A thorough review of the impacts of the project was conducted using best available science. The environmental analyses conducted and displayed in the EA identify the anticipated effects, effect analysis methodologies, referenced scientific sources which informed the analysis, and disclosed limitations of the analysis (EA pgs. 1, 35-122, 125-129). Many comments were received during both scoping and the public comment period that expressed concerns related to potential impacts of the selected action, but no information was provided that would indicate that the effects on the human environment are highly controversial.
- The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain and do not involve unique or unknown risks (EA Chapter 3).

- The action will not establish a precedent for future actions that may have significant effect on the environment. It does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. Future actions will require their own analyses and decisions.
- Cumulative effects of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects have been considered and evaluated in addition to the impacts of this project. No significant cumulative impacts were identified (EA Chapter 3).
- By applying design criteria agreed to in consultation with SHPO, the proposed alternative would result in *no adverse effect* to cultural resources (EA pg. 102), including districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources (EA pgs. 100-108).
- The action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, Mexican spotted owl (EA pg. 94) and Pagosa skyrocket (EA pg. 60). The action will not affect any other endangered or threatened species or their habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973 (EA pp. 59, 91-92). The effects to Mexican spotted owl are due to potential disturbance associated with motorized use along the proposed 11b trail located in the Middle Mountain area. Surveys for Mexican spotted owl will be conducted in the potentially affected area during the 2011 and 2012 breeding seasons to determine occupancy. If the species is detected, construction of trail 11b and motorized use on the trail will occur outside the breeding season. Additional consultation with USFWS may be required prior to trail construction and use. The effects to Pagosa skyrocket are due to decommissioning of non-system roads, and the construction of non-motorized trails in potentially suitable habitat for this species.
- The action complies with Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment.

Findings of Compliance

The selected alternative complies with requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Endangered Species Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, and the National Forest Management Act. The project was designed to be in conformance with Forest Plan direction, standards, and guidelines related to trail system management (EA pgs. 5-7). The ID Team reviewed this direction as well as additional direction found in Management Area prescriptions and determined that the selected alternative complies with the Forest Plan. The Forest Plan provides the framework for the action proposed here, and we are undertaking the action as one step in implementing the Forest Plan, as required by the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 (RPA, P.L. 93-378) and the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA, P.L. 94-588).

A review of both Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA's) and Colorado Roadless Areas (CRA's) was conducted for this project. It was determined that the proposed project will not substantially alter the undeveloped character of roadless areas, or have a significant impact on any of the resources or features that characterize roadless areas (EA pgs. 50-52).

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) pursuant to 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 215. To be eligible to appeal this decision on this project, an individual or group must have provided a comment or otherwise expressed interest in this project during the comment period (36 CFR 215.11 (pre-2003 regulations)).

Turkey Springs Trail Management Plan DN

Appeals, including attachments, must be filed within 45 days from the publication date of legal notice of this decision in the Durango Herald, the newspaper of record. Attachments received after the 45 day appeal period will not be considered. The publication date in the Durango Herald, is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Notices of Appeal that do not meet the content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14 will be dismissed. It is an appellant's responsibility to provide sufficient activity-specific evidence and rationale focusing on the decision to show why the Deciding Officer's decision should be reversed.

Appeals filed under 36 CFR, Part 215, must be submitted (by regular mail, hand-delivery, or express delivery) to: USDA Forest Service Region 2, Appeals Deciding Officer, 740 Simms Street, Golden, CO 80401, or (by fax) to 303-275-5134. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered appeals are 8:00 a.m. through 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic appeals must be submitted in a format such as an email message, .rtf, .pdf, or .doc to appeals-rocky-mountain-regional-office@fs.fed.us. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to an electronic message, a verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature is one way to provide verification. For electronically mailed appeals, the sender should receive an automatic electronic acknowledgement as confirmation that the agency received the appeal; if the sender does not receive an automatic acknowledgment, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

Appellants are required to simultaneously send a copy of the Notice of Appeal to the Appeal Deciding Officer, Mark Stiles, Forest Supervisor – Forest Supervisor, 15 Burnett Court, Durango, CO 81301; or e-mail to: appeals-rocky-mountain-san-juan@fs.fed.us.

Implementation Date

Pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215, if no appeal is filed within the 45 day time period, implementation of this decision may occur on, but not before, the 5th business day from the close of the appeal filing period. If an appeal is received, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition. Implementation is scheduled to take effect in the 2012.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Sara Brinton at the Pagosa Ranger District, POB 310, Pagosa Springs, CO 81147, (970) 264-2268. For project information or to obtain a copy of the EA contact Paul Blackman at (970) 264-2268 or download a copy from www.fs.usda.gov/goto/sanjuan/projects.


Kevin C. Khung
District Ranger


Date

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Appendix A

Design Criteria and Monitoring Plan

The following design criteria will be applied to the Selected Alternative.

Recreation and Wilderness

- To reduce the strain placed on already limited trail management resources, the majority of funding for new trail design and construction must be provided through sources other than annual District appropriations for trail maintenance.
- To reduce the strain placed on already limited trail management resources and to limit unwanted resource impacts, all trails subject to changes in designations (including new construction, adoption of non-system routes, and conversions from current designations) will have condition surveys completed annually for five years to determine if resource damage is occurring as a result of the changes in use. In the event that an unacceptable level of resource damage is found to be occurring, the trail will be closed to all new uses until such time as conditions are satisfactorily improved. Monitoring will be conducted by recreation staff and resource specialists and will be documented utilizing the Forest Service Trail Condition Survey Matrix (CASM) and Trail Assessment and Condition Survey (TRACS) protocols. Typical information gathered using this survey methodology include trail feature description, condition, mitigation measure needed, severity of condition, and priority of mitigation. The Line Officer, in consultation with agency resource specialists, shall determine when impacts to trails reach an unacceptable level and should be closed.
- To ensure compliance with travel regulations, including seasonal restrictions on newly designated motorized trails, the District will focus travel management related law enforcement and monitoring efforts on the newly designated motorized trails during the first three years following implementation. This will be accomplished through regular patrols of the trails by Forest Protection Officers and volunteers. If violations are observed, possible actions that can be taken to correct violations include increasing education efforts, additional signage, installation of barriers, issuing violation notices, or reverting back to prior non-motorized designations.
- On Trails 600 and 605, if monitoring shows that the seasonal motorized restrictions established for these trails are repeatedly being violated, these trails will revert to their designations prior to this analysis (i.e., the trail segments will be re-designated as non-motorized).
- To improve user safety on multi-use trails, adequate cautionary and information signage will be installed on trail sections with extensive exposure concerns, and trail tread should be widened at the beginning and end of such sections to allow users to safely pass. "Share the trail" signage will be employed liberally at relevant multi-use trailheads.
- Prior to designating Trail 600 as open to motorcycle use, the barbed wire fence that runs along the ridgeline will be moved to a location that will not affect trail users.

Vegetation

- Prior to commencement of construction activities, all equipment used in the construction of new trails will be cleaned of soil, seeds, vegetative matter, or other debris that could contain or hold noxious weed seeds.
- Prior to project activities, known sites of weed infestation will be treated within the project area.
- New infestations of noxious weeds identified by either the Forest Service or trail construction personnel will be promptly reported to the Forest Service noxious weed coordinator to ensure that treatment can occur. Post-treatment noxious weeds shall be treated following termination of project activities. Generally, after the second year of treatment, monitoring will determine the need for subsequent treatments.
- Disturbed areas should be seeded as needed to discourage establishment of noxious weeds. Seed mixes will not include aggressive, persistent, non-native species.

Rangeland Management

- Where possible, schedule pasture moves to avoid high use recreation weekends, holidays, and special events.
- Inform range permittees of the dates of special events or expected times of high recreational use.

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- Install ATV cattle guards, mountain bike cattle guards, self-closing gates, or similar structures at all trail/fence intersections. Livestock friendly gates shall be installed adjacent to these structures that will allow livestock movement from one side of the fence to the other.

Watershed, Soils, and Geology

Stream Crossings

- Install stream crossings to meet Corps of Engineers and state permits, pass normal flows, and be armored to withstand design flows.
- Install stream crossings on straight and resilient stream reaches, as perpendicular to flow as practicable, to provide passage of fish and other aquatic life.
- Install stream crossings to sustain bankfull dimensions of width, depth, and slope and keep streambeds and banks resilient. Favor armored fords for those streams where vehicle traffic is either seasonal or temporary, or the ford design maintains the channel pattern, profile and dimension.

Trail Criteria

- Keep roads and trails out of wetlands unless there is no other practicable alternative. If roads or trails must enter wetlands, avoid actions that may dewater or reduce water budgets in wetlands.
- Install cross drains to disperse runoff into filter strips and minimize connected disturbed areas. Make cuts, fills, and road surfaces strongly resistant to erosion between each stream crossing and at least the nearest cross drain. Disturbed areas should be seeded as necessary to minimize erosion .
- To the maximum extent possible retain stabilizing vegetation on unstable soils.
- Designate, construct, and maintain trails for proper drainage and armor their stream crossings as needed to control sediment.
- Design all trails, and other soil disturbances to the minimum standard for their use and to "roll" with the terrain as feasible.
- Use filter strips, and sediment traps if needed, to keep all sand-sized sediment on the land and disconnect disturbed soil from streams, lakes, and wetlands. Disperse runoff into filter strips.
- Key sediment traps into the ground. Clean them out when 50 percent full. Remove sediment to a stable, gentle, upland site and revegetate.

Construction Specific

- During construction, when soils are saturated, equipment operation will cease until the ground dries out or freezes. Soils are considered saturated when ruts 4 inches deep or deeper are created by equipment or vehicles on native surface roads or off-road. Ruts deeper than 4 inches would be rehabilitated.
- Keep heavy equipment out of streams, swales, and wet meadows.
- Maintain the organic ground cover of each activity area so that pedestals, rills, and surface runoff from the activity area are not increased. The amount of organic ground cover needed will vary by different ecological types and should be commensurate with the potential of the site.
- Keep ground vehicles out of wetlands. Do not disrupt water supply or drainage patterns into wetlands.
- Establish effective ground cover on disturbed sites to prevent accelerated on-site soil loss and sediment delivery to streams. Restore ground cover using certified native plants as practicable to meet revegetation objectives. Avoid persistent or invasive exotic plants.

Wildlife and Fish

- *Mexican spotted owl (MSO)* – USFWS protocol surveys for MSO have not been completed for the proposed action in the West Devil Creek area. Protocol surveys were initiated springs of 2011 and will be completed summer 2012. The completion of surveys will determine MSO habitat occupancy in the area, and the need to identify a Protected Activity Center (PAC) as described in the MSO Recovery Plan (USDI Fish and Wildlife Service, 1995). There will be no trails constructed in a PAC should one be identified in the West Fork Devil Creek area. Re-initiation of Section 7 consultation with USFWS will occur if MSOs are detected and expected to be influenced by activities associated with the proposed action. If there are no owls detected upon the completion of protocol surveys, no PAC will be identified, no design criteria applied, and no re-initiation of Section 7 consultation.

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- *Northern goshawk* - Surveys for northern goshawk will be conducted prior to new trail construction in suitable habitat. Surveys for northern goshawk will also be conducted on trails where use designations change from non-motorized to motorized. If active territories are detected, measures will be taken to minimize impacts from construction activities and changes in use designations.
- *Northern leopard frog* – Surveys for northern leopard frog will be conducted prior to new trail construction in order to minimize impacts to habitat. If the species is detected, measures will be taken to minimize impacts to habitat.

Cultural Resources

Culturally Modified Trees

- Some recorded Culturally-Modified Trees (CMTs) are located along trails; another is located near a dispersed recreational site (within site 5AA1152). Additional CMTs could be located within the project area. At present, no CMTs along trails show any evidence that they are being impacted by trail or recreational use. Erosion along a trail, trail construction, or trail clearing activities could impact trees. Crews will avoid felling Culturally Modified Trees (CMTs) and will take note of degraded soils near the base of these trees so that trails may be rerouted away from trees in the event degraded trail conditions began to impact root balls. In the event a CMT dies (and becomes a hazard tree) or falls across the trail or within a dispersed recreation site, the District Archaeologist will be notified and efforts will be made to collect dateable samples (pending approval through tribal consultation). In the event that the Forest Service becomes aware of degraded conditions near CMT's along non-motorized non-system trails (i.e., 5AA2630, 5AA2646, 5AA2654, 5AA3489), or they become hazard trees, and/or fall, the Forest Service would apply the same rules to these as to those within the formal trail system.

Use of Historic Trails

- Site 5AA2998.1, which is a historic lumber road, should be retained as a trail to preserve the historic route. It is one of two braided trails (with 9w), one of which will be decommissioned. Major reroutes should not be considered along this route.

Ground Disturbance (Road/Trail Maintenance, Gate & Cattle Guard Construction)

- Ground disturbing construction (e.g., construction of trails or gate) or trail maintenance activities (e.g., water bar construction) will generally not be permitted within historic properties along trails. Road maintenance will occur only within the current disturbance. Trail maintenance and construction activities (e.g., water bars and gates) along historic trails are permitted along segments which are considered non-contributing to overall eligibility or which contribute in location only. Maintenance/construction is permitted along 5AA528, 5AA1247, and 5AA3414 (within project area).

Reroutes to Avoid Historic Properties

- Short sections of trails 9hh and 9ii will be rerouted to avoid historic properties. At 5AA2598, continued use of the portion of the non-system trail that crosses the site constitutes an adverse effect (route 9w). A re-route of this portion of trail is required for the selected alternative. Any subsequent decommissioning of the portion of the trail(s) across site(s) will avoid ground disturbance.

Monitoring

- Sites identified as requiring monitoring at 10 year intervals are: 5AA760 and 5AA1479. Monitoring at 10-year intervals is already in place at site 5AA877/878. Monitoring is also in place at a 5-year interval for site 5AA1755. Should monitoring show that these sites are being adversely impacted by recreational use of trails, additional mitigation will be developed in consultation with Colorado SHPO.

Camping Closure

- Parking area 18a will be closed to camping. This closure is required to address impacts to a site.

Design Modifications & Additional Cultural Resource Inventory

- Additional inventory of route 11f will be required prior to commencement of any construction activities. Full compliance with the NHPA, requiring further consultation with SHPO and (possibly) additional fieldwork, will be required in the event of any substantial reroutes.

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General Design Criteria

- Should subsurface archaeological or historical materials be encountered during project activities, work should be halted and the SJNF District archaeologist notified immediately.

Monitoring

- Conduct trail condition surveys on all routes with changes in designation (including new construction) annually for five years to determine if resource damage is occurring as a result of the changes in use. Monitoring will be conducted by recreation staff and resource specialists and will be documented utilizing the Forest Service Trail Condition Survey Matrix (CASM) and Trail Assessment and Condition Survey (TRACS) protocols. Typical information gathered using this survey methodology include trail feature description, condition, mitigation measure needed, severity of condition, and priority of mitigation. The Line Officer, in consultation with agency resource specialists, shall determine when impacts to trails reach an unacceptable level and should be closed.
- Monitor all newly designated routes for compliance with seasonal restrictions for the first three years following route designation changes.
- The following archeological sites require monitoring at 10-year intervals: 5AA760 and 5AA1479.
- Active northern goshawk territories discovered in the analysis area and influenced by the proposed action, will be monitored to assess occupancy and effectiveness of measures taken to reduce disturbance impacts.
- Active northern leopard frog breeding sites discovered in the analysis area and influenced by the proposed action, will be monitored to assess occupancy and effectiveness of measures taken to reduce disturbance impacts.

Exhibit A – Vicinity Map

Figure 1: Analysis Area Vicinity Map -- Turkey Springs Trail Management Plan
 Pagosa Ranger District - San Juan National Forest - Analysis Area 67,569 acres



