



Briefing Paper

BLUE MOUNTAINS FOREST PLAN REVISION - 2015

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National Forests

Forest Access: Frequently Asked Questions

Introduction

The following material is prepared as part of the Forest Service's ongoing effort to provide information on forest access issues and to assist with common topics discussed during public engagement. Specific access-related topics highlight:

- Discussion of Forest Plan and Travel Management planning process.
- Comparison of Forest Plan revision and travel management planning and processes.
- Descriptions of Forest Plan components that address forest access.
- Comparisons of alternatives within the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) that relate to forest access, specifically road density metrics.
- Discussion of Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) and how they are integrated with the revised Forest Plan and planning components.
- Tools and tips for participating in public engagement activities.
- Reference list to find access-related topics and discussions in the draft documents.

This information is provided to address the considerable public interest and debate over these specific topics. The National Forests recognize that access continues to be an important issue and concern for the communities in northeastern Oregon and southeastern Washington as it is vital to sustaining the customs, culture, and economic stability of the region. We remain focused on creating opportunities for additional public input, to answering common questions and advancing the dialogue between communities and the National Forests, and to listening and considering the concerns brought forward during public engagement. We are encouraged by continued discussion on these key topics and look forward to open, positive, and productive dialogue.

Question: Forest Service planning - what is it, how do we do it, and why?

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976 requires every National Forest or National Grassland managed by the Forest Service to develop and maintain an effective Land Management Plan (also known as a *Forest Plan*). The process for developing and revising plans, along with the required plan content, is outlined in planning regulations, often referred to as the planning rule.

The Forest Plan establishes direction so that all future decisions in the planning area include an interdisciplinary approach to achieve integrated consideration of physical, biological, economic and other sciences. The Forest Plan provides direction to assure coordination of multiple uses (outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife and fish, and wilderness) and sustained yield of products and services.

Forest Plan approval, amendment and revision does not authorize, fund or carry out any projects, unless specifically stated in the decision document.



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Forest Plan approval results in:

- 1) Establishment of Forest multiple use goals and objectives;
- 2) Establishment of Forest-wide management requirements (standards and guidelines);
- 3) Establishment of management areas and management area direction applying to future activities in the management area;
- 4) Designation of suitable timber land and establishment of allowable timber sale quantity;
- 5) Non-wilderness allocations or wilderness recommendations; and
- 6) Establishment of monitoring and evaluation requirements.

Question: What is the 2005 Travel Management Rule?

In 2005, the Department of Agriculture revised regulations regarding travel management on National Forest System (NFS) lands to clarify policy related to motor vehicle use, including the use of off-highway vehicles. These regulations implement Executive Order (E.O.) 11644 (February 8, 1972), "Use of Off-Road Vehicles on Public Lands," as amended by E.O. 11989 (May 24, 1977). These Executive Orders direct federal agencies to ensure that the use of off-road vehicles on public lands will be controlled and directed in order to protect resources, to promote the safety of all users, and to minimize conflicts among the various uses of those lands. The revised travel management regulations (36 CFR 212) were developed in recognition that previous regulations were out dated: off-highway vehicles (OHVs) are more widely available, are more powerful, and are increasingly more capable of cross-country travel compared to models available in the 1970s and 80s. Their growing popularity and capabilities required new and updated regulations.

Travel Management Rule – Subparts A, B, and C

The Federal Travel Management Rule (36 CFR 212) has several parts to address the Forest Transportation System and is divided into three separate but related sections:

- **Subpart A** – addresses the administration of the Forest Transportation System; however it is not a decision document, rather it is an analysis of what is needed to administer and maintain our road system
- **Subpart B** – addresses Designation of Roads, Trails, and Areas open to Public Motor Vehicles
- **Subpart C** – addresses Use by Over-Snow Vehicles

In addition to the revised travel management regulations at 36 CFR Part 212, Parts 251 (Land Uses), 261 (Prohibitions), and 295 (Use of Motor Vehicles Off National Forest System Roads) were also updated to provide national consistency and clarity on motor vehicle use of the National Forest Transportation System.

Subpart A

Subpart A outlines the *identification of road system* process. The road system defined under Subpart A is expected to meet resource and other management objectives adopted in the land and resource management plan, to meet applicable statutory and regulatory requirements, to reflect long-term funding expectations, and to ensure the identified system minimizes adverse environmental impacts associated with road construction, reconstruction, decommissioning, and maintenance. The Subpart A process uses a science-based, interdisciplinary roads analysis at the appropriate scale and involves interested and

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affected citizens, other state and federal agencies, and tribal governments. The Subpart A process does not result in a decision with a selected alternative to be implemented. The final report displays findings as opportunities and provides recommendations to inform future management decisions. As noted above, the resulting report must be consistent with and support the objectives found in the relevant land and resource management plan.

Subpart B

Subpart B outlines the *designation of roads, trails, and areas for motor vehicle use* process. Specific elements of the Subpart B process include:

- Requirements for each National Forest or ranger district to designate those roads, trails, and areas open to motor vehicles.
- Designation that includes class of vehicle and, if appropriate, time of year for motor vehicle use.
- Once designation is complete, the rule prohibits motor vehicle use off the designated system or use inconsistent with the designations.
- Designation decisions are made locally, with public input and in coordination with state, local, and tribal governments.
- Designations are shown on a motor vehicle use map that can be updated annually. Use inconsistent with the designations will be prohibited.

Subpart C

Subpart C of the Travel Management Rule (36 CFR 212) was recently amended to be consistent with Executive Orders cited above and the recent court decision issued from the United States District Court for the District of Idaho. The amendment parallels the process for designating National Forest System roads, trails, and areas for over-snow vehicle use as outlined in Subpart B. The rule applies where snowfall is adequate for that use to occur, and, if appropriate, shall be designated by class of vehicle and time of year. A number of exemptions allow for administrative use, use of fire, military, emergency, or law enforcement vehicles for emergency purposes; law enforcement responses to violations of law; and use that is specifically authorized under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulation.

Question: What is the difference between Travel Management and Forest Plan Revision?

The two planning processes are different, and each originates from different legal authorities (see discussion above) with different intents.

- **Forest Planning:** The Forest Plan is a programmatic document that provides strategic direction for the resource management of the entire planning unit (National Forest).
- **Travel Management Planning:** Travel management planning is a directed effort to manage Forest System roads, trails, and areas to protect the resources on public lands, to promote user safety, and to reduce conflicts among users. The travel management plan is comprised of both analysis (Subpart A) and project-level and site-specific planning and implementation (Subparts B and C).

There is interconnection between the two processes. Forest land management plans help establish broad management goals and objectives and include specific plan components that inform the travel management planning process. Travel management planning must be consistent with the relevant land management plan for the Forest.

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Travel Management Planning is directed at analyzing the National Forest Transportation System. Conversely, Forest Plan revision is directed at providing direction for the resource management (outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife and fish purposes, and wilderness) of the entire planning unit.

Question: What is the interrelation between the Proposed Revised Land Management Plan and the travel management planning processes?

The Forest Plan revision process **does not** modify the travel management rule and travel management planning process. The Forest Plan revision process **does** require that resource plans, such as travel management plans, developed by the Forest Service be consistent with land management plans. Where travel management plans are already in place, they must be evaluated for consistency with land management plans and amended if necessary.

The Revised Forest Plans have identified management areas where motorized access is designated either *suitable* or *unsuitable*—a designation based on *management area*, *desired conditions* and other resource and management considerations. During the travel management process, each National Forest will evaluate the road system in relation to these management areas and their assigned suitability. The Umatilla has a final Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM). The Malheur and Wallow-Whitman National Forests will use the management area allocations within the Forest Plans to assist with the travel management planning processes. Final MVUMs will be developed with public input and coordination with state, local, and tribal governments and will follow the process outlined for Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule (see above).

Question: What is the current status of Travel Management Planning on the Forests?

In March, 2015, direction was given by the Jim Peña, Pacific Northwest Regional Forester, that directs the Blue Mountain National Forests to defer any additional work required under Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule until after the Blue Mountains Plan Revision is completed. In line with the Regional direction, the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest has paused Subpart B analysis until the Forest Plan Revision is complete. The Forest remains focused on completing Subpart A of Travel Management Planning. Similarly, the Malheur National Forest will defer any Subpart B analysis until the Forest Plan Revision is complete. The Umatilla National Forest has previously completed Subpart A and B analysis. All three National Forests will continue to address natural resource concerns and public access needs as part of ongoing project-level decisions and forest restoration efforts.

Question: How does the Revised Land Management Plan (LMP) address public access?

Forest Plan components that provide guidance and strategic direction with regards to access and transportation include desired conditions, objectives, guidelines, management areas, and suitable uses.

- **Roads and Trails Desired Condition and Guidelines:** The Proposed Revised Forest Plan includes desired conditions with associated guidelines for roads and trails.
- **Watershed Objectives:** Objectives identified for road and trail related work to reduce sediment delivery from roads and trails to aquatic and riparian areas (hydrologic connectivity).

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- **Management Area Desired Conditions:** Desired Conditions for management areas where motorized use is described in terms of motorized and non-motorized use.
- **Management Area Suitable Uses:** Suitable uses are identified in terms of motorized access for winter and summer, as well as the suitability of road and trail construction for management areas.

What is “road density” and how is it considered within the Revised LMP?

Road density is defined as an indicator of the concentration of roads in an area. Road density can be further distinguished as *open* road density and physical road density. Open road density and corresponding human activity play a key role in determining whether wildlife remains in an area. Human disturbance associated with open roads can displace individual animals and make them vulnerable to harassment, reduce the amount of suitable habitat, and disturb nests and roosting activities. The table below displays open road density standards for the 1990s Forest Plans.

Open road density by management area, 1990 Forest Plans

National Forest	Road Density	Management Area(s)*	Plan Component
MAL	1.5 miles/square mile	MA 4D Wildlife Emphasis	Standard
	2.2 miles/square mile	MA 4D Winter Range	
	3.2 miles/square mile	Summer Range**	
UMA	2 miles/square mile	Forestwide	Desired condition
WAW	1.5 miles/square mile	MA 4E Winter Range MA 4D General Wildlife/Fish	Standard
	2.5 miles/square mile	MA 4A General Forest	

* See crosswalk in project record for more information.

** Includes all areas outside wildlife emphasis, winter range, and designated wilderness areas

Additionally, the National Forests are required to comply with road density standards, guidelines, and terms and conditions identified in Biological Opinions for Anadromous and Inland endangered and threatened fish species. The table below displays road density standards for the Revised Land Management Plan for each alternative for applicable management areas.

Comparison of open road density by management/resource area by alternative

Management/ Resource Area	Alt. B	Alt. C	Alt. D	Alt. E and F
MA 3B (Backcountry Motorized)	1.5 miles / square mile	N/A ¹		Desired Condition ²
MA 3C (Wildlife Corridor)	N/A ¹	1.0 miles / square mile	N/A ¹	1.0 miles / square mile
MA 4A (General Forest)	2.4 miles /	2.4 miles /	3.0 miles /	Desired

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	square mile	square mile	square mile	Condition ²
Winter Elk Habitat	1.5 miles / square mile	1.5 miles / square mile	1.5 miles / square mile	1.5 miles / square mile

¹ Indicates management area allocation is not contained within alternative.

² Desired condition for these management areas is to reduce road-related sedimentation by reducing road density and reducing hydrologic connectivity of the road system.

What is the Roadless Area Conservation Rule?

The Roadless Area Conservation Rule (36 CFR 294) was issued on January 12, 2001, and established prohibitions on road construction, road reconstruction, and timber harvesting in Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) on National Forest System lands. Its intent is to provide lasting protection for these areas in the context of multiple use management. The final rule was the culmination of previous roadless area inventory efforts beginning in the 1970s, and affords varying protections to 58.5 million acres of NFS lands nationwide.

Specific inventoried roadless area values and characteristics cited in the rule include:

- High quality of undisturbed soil, water, and air
- Diversity of plant and animal communities
- Sources of public drinking water
- Habitat for threatened, endangered, proposed, candidate, and sensitive species dependent on large, undisturbed areas of land
- Reference landscapes
- Natural appearing landscapes with high scenic quality
- Traditional cultural properties and sacred sites
- Other locally identified unique characteristics
- Primitive, Semi-Primitive, Non-Motorized, and Semi-Primitive Motorized Classes of dispersed recreation

How are Inventoried Roadless Areas considered in the Revised Land Management Plan?

Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs), as established in the 2001 Forest Service Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR), are allocated to varying management areas, with the majority being allocated to three primary management areas: Recommended Wilderness Area (1A), Backcountry non-motorized (3A), and Backcountry motorized (3B). The desired conditions, suitable uses and standards and guidelines for these management area designations align with the regulations outlined in the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Prohibitions within IRAs include road construction and reconstruction, and the cutting, sale, or removal of timber (subject to limited exceptions).

Efforts were made with the preferred alternative (Alternative E) to examine existing uses and to assign the management area in a consistent manner with existing uses. For example, motorized backcountry areas (MA3B), were delineated based on the current road and trail use in the areas and the low open road density; therefore, these areas will be suitable for motor vehicle use. In the case of non-motorized management areas (MA3A) boundaries were drawn specifically to not include roads, trails, and areas that are currently being accessed by motorized vehicles. In most cases, the non-motorized suitability designation does not affect current uses, given the deliberate omission of roads and trails from the nonmotorized management area (MA 3A).

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Tips and Tools for Public Engagement

The Forest Service continuously strives to connect and communicate with other federal, state, local, and tribal governments and with all interested publics. Communication is achieved through varying forums and processes, with an emphasis on the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. There are several ways to stay connected with ongoing Forest Service management and planning activities:

- View the Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) listing for all National Forest planning and project activities.
- Coordinate with the local unit (Ranger District) to stay informed on particular projects of interest and to learn about participation opportunities.
- Contact local Natural Resource Advisory Committees (NRACs) to gain insight into the complex multiple use management concerns and issues within the local area.
- Many Forests work together with Forest Collaborative Groups comprised of public and private organizations and individuals passionate about working together on large-scale management efforts. Groups often focus on uniting diverse interests toward a common goal and achieving the necessary balance between competing resource interests.

The Public Engagement Process

The current public engagements are designed to discuss and develop ideas that will help us improve the final Revised Forest Plans. The engagement meetings are open to the public and resulted from working with local organizations including counties, tribes, members of the public, and special interest groups. Meeting topics are based on feedback the National Forest has received and will focus on various key topics including forest access, backcountry designations, wilderness, and the pace and scale of restoration.

Everyone is welcome to participate. A few recommendations to enhance participation include:

- Browse our Forest Plan website to access additional information and to examine the prepared material for specific resource areas or topics.
- Become familiar with available information, the draft proposed revised Forest Plan, and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) to gain additional information on specific resource areas of concern.
- Be courteous during public engagement meetings. While many individuals are passionate about resource management issues, it is important to respect others' views and perceptions, and to take advantage of the opportunities to learn about other perspectives.
- Provide feedback that is specific to the Forest Plans. The more specific, the better.

These are just a few of the tools available for effective and productive engagement participation. As stated in a recent "open letter" by the three Blue Mountain National Forest supervisors:

We want Forest Plans that provide resiliency for our communities in Eastern Oregon and Washington; Plans that support the local economy and the social values of the people who use and depend on them. We also want resiliency in ecosystems that can withstand: drought, floods, wildfire, invasive species, human impacts and have the strength to return to healthy ecosystems in the long run. Our Forest Plans should provide the vision of how to do just that and we will continue to need your help in shaping them.

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References

The following references are listed to assist with finding access-related topics within the draft documents.

Access topics in the *Blue Mountains National Forests Proposed Revised Land Management Plan*:

Part 1 – Vision: page 16

Part 1 – Vision: pages 60-63

Part 2 – Strategy: Scenic Byways and All-American Roads, page 84

Part 2 – Strategy: Nationally Designated Trails, page 85-86

Part 2 – Strategy: MA 3A, 3B, and 3C, pages 90-91

Part 2 – Strategy: “General suitability matrix for management areas,” page 97

Part 2 – Strategy: Objective Statements, page 106

Access topics and analysis in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement:

Vol. 1, Chapter 2 – Elements Common to the Action Alternatives, pages 24-40

Vol. 1, Chapter 3 – Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences: pages 63-81

Vol. 2, Chapter 3 – Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences, pages 414-415

Vol. 3, Appendix A – 1990 Forest Plans Management Direction for Specific Resources, page 175

Vol. 3, Appendix A – Part 2: Comparison of the Action Alternatives, Roads and Trails Access, pages 200- 202

Vol. 3, Appendix B – Methodology: page 317

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