

Travel Management Project Update

The Forest received more than 800 comments concerning the draft travel management proposal. Numerous opportunities for public comment were offered, including an official notice-and-comment period from Feb 21, 2008 – March 21, 2008. While comments are still welcome, the issues to be addressed in the environmental analysis have been identified based on comments received through March 21, 2008.

After many public comments were received about use of OHVs for retrieval of big game, the Forest decided to consider limited public use of OHVs for big game retrieval. The authority to make a decision on use of OHVs for big game retrieval is delegated to the Forest Supervisor only; therefore, the District Rangers will not make the final decision on travel management. The decision to consider limited public use of OHVs for big game retrieval resulted in preparation of only one environmental document rather than the five documents originally contemplated. The change was not intended to remove any powers from District Rangers; rather, it was intended to broaden public access to the Forest for the purposes of legal, limited big game retrieval.

The Forest used public comments to identify issues to be addressed in the Environmental Assessment. The Environmental Assessment will be made available when the decision is made.

Based on comments, the following significant issues have been identified:

Issue 1: Loss of existing access for persons with disabilities, hunting (transporting deer stands, scouting, and game retrieval), dispersed camping, and other recreational uses

Issue 2: Possible loss of economic benefits to local communities

Issue 3: OHV/Equestrian trail conflicts

Issue 4: Lack of single track trail for motorcycle use

Issue 5: Possible safety hazard of mixed use of different kinds and sizes of vehicles on roads and trails

Issue 6: Environmental damage due to concentration of use on certain routes

The NEPA process will form the basis for Phase I travel management decisions. Additional consideration of routes, Phase II, will be undertaken at the District level when the Forest undertakes watershed analysis in the area of suggested routes. The Phase II or watershed analysis will allow the Forest more time to address routes that are not currently a part of the recognized system of roads or trails for the Forest.

The NEPA process is not yet complete; no changes have been made as a result of travel management; and changes addressed in the NEPA document will not take effect until a decision document is signed and Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUMs) are published. The Forest intends to make travel management decisions in the very near future; however it is unlikely that any decision will be made prior to September 30, 2009.

Until a decision on travel management is made and MVUMs are published, persons may continue to utilize off-highway vehicles on open Forest Service roads and through the woods. Off-highway vehicle use is not allowed in areas or on roads that are posted as closed, such as recreation areas, single use trails or wilderness areas.