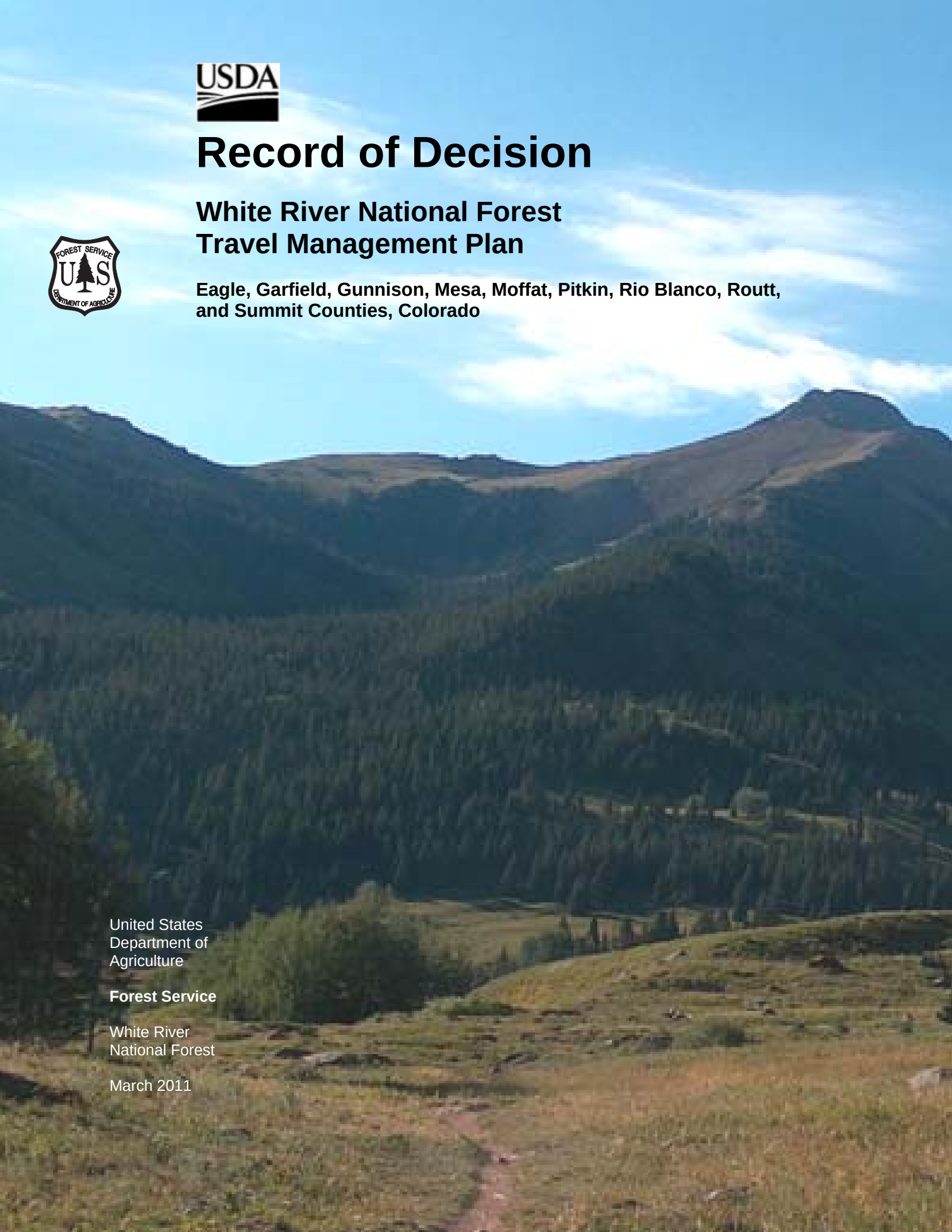

Record of Decision

White River National Forest
Travel Management Plan

Eagle, Garfield, Gunnison, Mesa, Moffat, Pitkin, Rio Blanco, Routt, and Summit Counties, Colorado

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

White River
National Forest

March 2011

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Introduction

This Record of Decision (ROD) documents my selection of the designated road and trails system, allowable uses on these routes, and winter travel motorized uses by area or designated routes on the White River National Forest (WRNF) to comply with the Travel Management Rule (36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295 "Travel Management; Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use", Federal Register 2005: 70 FR 68264) and White River National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). The management options selected in this decision replace the existing travel plan and map (1985).

This ROD provides information about the project area, the purpose and need for the project, public involvement, issues analyzed, and the alternatives considered. Most important, it is a summary of the management actions I have selected and the factors I considered in making my decision. Also documented are findings required by laws, regulations, and policies, as well as information about the appeal process and implementation of this decision.

This ROD is based on the Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS) for the White River National Forest Travel Management Plan and its findings. For more detailed information on management actions and their effects, readers should refer to the Final EIS.

Travel Management

Travel management is the integrated planning of, and providing for, movement of people and products to and through National Forest System lands. A travel management plan provides clear, specific direction on the appropriate levels of land, water, and air access opportunities to be made available to forest users.

Travel management on the White River National Forest seeks to incorporate planning for appropriate movement of people and products across the forest. An efficient transportation network is essential for forest resource management, outdoor recreation use, and access. To balance the diverse needs of all those who use the system, the transportation network and the manner in which it is used must be effective in providing access, be properly maintained, and be ecologically sound.

Location

The White River National Forest is located in the west central part of Colorado and ranges in elevation from 5,000 to more than 14,000 feet, with most of its lands lying between 8,500 and 11,800 feet. There are approximately 2,482,000 acres within the forest boundary, and approximately 198,300 of those acres are of other ownership.

The area affected by this proposal is the entire WRNF, which occupies parts of nine counties, with the majority acreage in Eagle, Garfield, Pitkin, and Summit counties and small parcels in Gunnison, Mesa, Moffat, Rio Blanco, and Routt counties. The forest is administratively divided into five ranger districts: Aspen/Sopris, Blanco, Dillon, Eagle/Holy Cross, and Rifle.

Purpose of and Need for Action

The purpose of this project is to identify the transportation system with the goal of balancing the physical, biological, and social values associated with the White River National Forest. It responds to several needs noted below.

Need: Update the Official Designated Transportation System on the White River National Forest.

National policy direction requires national forests to clearly designate travel systems and opportunities. The existing travel plan was developed in conjunction with the 1984 forest plan. It is recorded in the 1985 White River National Forest Travel Map (USDA Forest Service/White River National Forest 1985). Map corrections are needed to reflect current route locations, changes in ownership, changes in area travel management due to the 2002 forest plan, and inventory updates. Improved technology in mapping and information exchange has allowed for considerable refinement of the forest road and trail data.

There is a need to align the travel strategy on the forest with the forest plan and any changes in laws and regulations. Travel strategies will focus on what uses are going to be allowed on specific routes. These uses include motorized, mechanized, and non-motorized modes of transportation.

This action responds to the goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines outlined in the forest plan, and helps move the forest toward desired conditions described in that plan. The White River National Forest Travel Management Plan will be developed in accordance with the forest plan and the laws and regulations that govern forest management.

By providing a designated travel system for the White River National Forest, the public will be able to clearly identify where and what modes of travel are allowed and not allowed across the forest.

Need: Identify What Is Not Part of the Official Designated Travel System on the White River National Forest and be Able to Restore Lands Back to Their Natural State.

Sometimes referred to as “ways,” “non-system,” “unauthorized” or “user-created” routes, many roads and trails on National Forest System lands are routes that are not created, recognized, or managed as part of the designated, authorized transportation system. Many of these routes are older timber, range, mining, or oil and gas exploration roads that no longer serve their intended purpose; other routes have been created by off-road/trail recreation use.

The designated travel system is the official road and trail system on the forest. The designated system identifies what roads and trails are allowed to be used for various modes of travel. In so doing, unauthorized roads and trails will be examined for designation or elimination. This is a one-time consideration of these travelways as specified in the forest plan EIS (USDA Forest Service 2002b, p. 385-386).

Since 1985, the WRNF has recognized that several changes made to the travel system warrant examining and decisions made in response to unauthorized routes. One significant change in resource use lies in the modes of travel that have become popular since the adoption of the 1985 travel management plan. For example, ATV and mountain bikes use has become popular among recreationists. Such expanded uses place additional demands on the travel management system. Also, when preparing for the new travel

management plan, it became apparent that the inventory contained roads and trails that were not officially on the system but nevertheless were being used. The process outlined for managing unauthorized routes in the travel management plan was to consider those routes that could possibly serve as designated roads or trails. These routes were nominated by both internal and external parties, and some were carried forward from old inventories. Routes to be added were considered by personnel examining the need, resource conditions, and public input.

Upon conclusion of the travel management process, all unauthorized roads and trails on the landscape will be designated for elimination through landscape rehabilitation and decommissioning. This includes any unauthorized route, whether or not it is considered in this process. All newly discovered unauthorized routes will also be designated for decommissioning.

Also included in the travel management plan is the identification of designated roads and trails no longer needed, which will be decommissioned. The end result of the travel management plan process will be a clear description of the travel system necessary for administrative and recreational use on the White River National Forest.

Additional routes can be added to the designated system after the completion of the ROD through project identification, determination of purpose and need, examination through the NEPA process, and proper design and execution.

Need: Designate a Travel System that is Aligned With the Forest Service Mission, Including the Need to Manage the Land by Providing a System that Attempts to Balance Social and Resource Demands.

Population growth and demand on the forest resources has prompted the need to evaluate and designate a travel system to accommodate supply and demand placed on National Forest System lands while managing for conditions that enhance water quality, natural landscapes, and wildlife habitat.

Travel management, which plays an important role in every forest resource program, remains one of the most controversial elements in forest management. Since the 1985 plan was developed, motorized and non-motorized forms of travel have both increased and become more diversified. Use of mountain bikes, ATVs, four-wheel-drive vehicles, snowmobiles, and trails for hiking, horseback riding, and backcountry skiing all are competing over the same land base. Local communities near the forest have seen rapid growth in their populations, and tourism is on the rise.

Travel for recreation is not limited to activities that occur only on routes. It also includes use of those routes to access other recreation activities, such as camping, hunting, site-seeing, picnicking, and fishing. Finally, route networks are needed for access to trails in order for users to participate in a particular activity, such as hiking, mountain biking, or horseback riding.

Access is also needed for other land management activities such as timber and habitat improvements; forest product gathering; range allotment maintenance; vegetation treatments, power lines, radio and cell phone relay towers maintenance; natural gas development; private land in-holdings; and administrative activities.

While there is a need to provide access for people across the landscape, there is also a need to protect the landscape from the impacts that travel and people can cause. The footprint of a travel system can cause changes to the natural landscape that can cause additional sedimentation and fragmentation as more people access and utilize an area.

Forest managers need to determine the proper balance in the type, extent, and levels of forest transportation facilities and uses in order to address user conflicts and adequately protect resources. The travel management plan identifies the designated travel system in summer and winter.

Proposed Action

The proposed travel management plan for the White River National Forest and supporting environmental impact statement (EIS) presents options to accommodate the transportation needs of the public and to provide adequate access for forest and resource management while still allowing for the protection of natural resources.

The Draft EIS, Supplemental Draft EIS and Final EIS all described the impacts of the proposed and alternative travel systems on recreation, administrative access needs, wildlife and other natural resources. The intent is to have a clear and concise plan for a transportation system that addresses the needs for forest management, public access and recreation use.

The objectives of the travel management plan are to:

- Bring summer and winter transportation routes into compliance with laws, regulations, agency or national direction, and the forest plan;
- Designate forest road and trail systems and eliminate those routes that are not part of the system through rehabilitation and decommissioning;
- Provide a travel plan that defines modes of travel across the forest by area and by route; and
- Identify solutions to resource impacts resulting from designation of the transportation system, and identify routes for decommissioning.

To create appropriate strategies, travel systems are defined by summer and winter seasons. For summer travel, the travel management plan specifies the designated road and trail system along with allowable uses on these routes. For winter travel, the travel management plan specifies where motorized uses are allowed by area and designates motorized routes in the restricted motorized areas. The travel management plan carries forward forest plan direction for determination of travel opportunities.

Public Involvement

The White River National Forest travel planning effort was initiated in response to a demonstrated need outlined in the 1997 analysis of the management situation (AMS), and public interest during the forest planning process. The draft forest plan, released for public comment in August 1999, contained a detailed travel management plan. The decision-maker decided to separate the two decisions and analysis processes in response to public comment about the difficulty in reviewing both the travel management and forest plan decisions simultaneously, and the public's desire for more time to review travel management proposals. Planning information from the initial effort, including site-specific comments received during the comment period on the draft forest plan, helped to formulate the platform and considerations to be made in this travel management plan.

Scoping

The Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an environmental impact statement for the travel management plan was published in the *Federal Register* on August 27, 2002. The NOI

asked for public comment on the proposal from August 27, 2002 to October 31, 2002. The agency held six public meetings in September 2002 to introduce the travel management plan process and solicit comments. Open houses were held at ranger districts, where many members of the public visited and provided input into the process.

Some of the public comments provided specific information on the current inventory of non-system or user-created roads and trails and winter recreation areas. This information was used to update the inventory base layer data.

During the public scoping period, the White River National Forest received more than 580 letters. The USDA Forest Service Content Analysis Enterprise Team analyzed all the letters submitted during scoping. The team uses an established analytical process for transferring, sorting, disseminating, and categorizing letters into a database. More than 2,000 comments were derived from public scoping letters. Using the comments from the public and other agencies (see Issues section), the interdisciplinary team developed a list of issues needing to be addressed in the environmental analysis.

Draft EIS

The White River National Forest released the Draft EIS for the White River National Forest Travel Management Plan on July 28, 2006 for comment. During the comment period, White River National Forest staff members held meetings with individuals, interest groups, and government representatives. Over 600 CDs containing the Draft EIS were distributed, and the document was available on the White River National Forest website along with an interactive map. There were 1,447 comment letters, e-mails, and faxes received on the proposed White River National Forest travel management plan and Draft EIS during the public comment period from July 28 to October 26, 2006.

Supplemental Draft EIS

White River National Forest staff responded to the Draft EIS comments and was able to use these comments to help formulate the Supplemental Draft EIS (SDEIS). On November 7, 2008, the White River National Forest released the SDEIS for the White River National Forest travel management plan for public comment. Over 900 CDs containing the SDEIS were distributed. The document and supporting information was posted on the web site and the interactive map was updated. WRNF staff held several meetings with individuals, interest groups, and government representatives. There were 713 comment letters, e-mails, and faxes, received on the proposed White River National Forest travel management plan and SDEIS during the public comment period from November 7, 2008 to January 6, 2009.

The comments were reviewed by staff and responses written. These comments helped staff, line officers, and the responsible official understand the issues and potential solutions for the travel management plan. Many ideas were carried forward into the Final EIS for consideration.

Forest Service responses to comments for both the Draft EIS and SDEIS are part of the project record and are available for review.

Issues

Public comment disposition helps to highlight both public and internal agency concerns relating to the proposed action. Issues are derived during the initial environmental analysis process, generally during project scoping. Once a list of issues is identified, those issues are analyzed through interdisciplinary review and categorized.

The interdisciplinary team for travel management reviewed all comments in the database and categorized each issue into significant and non-significant issues. Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations, Sec. 1501.7, direct the team to "identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)."

Significant Issues

NEPA regulations define significant issues as matters that are related to the effects of the proposed action and its implementation. Many of the significant issues that deal with effects are tracked through the analysis process but do not drive alternative formulation. Significant issues were grouped to create the key issues (those driving the development of alternatives).

Key Issues from Scoping

The Forest Service identified the following key issues during scoping:

Volume and type of recreation access;

Resolution of recreation conflict; and

Protection of natural resources.

Issues from Draft EIS and Supplemental Draft EIS Comment Periods

Comments and issues raised during the Draft EIS comment period echoed those of the scoping period. WRNF staff received and responded to hundreds of separate public concern statements. Most concerns fell within the key issue areas previously identified during scoping.

Some comments focused on the need for the agency to reflect on the costs of the transportation system, including maintaining, rehabilitating, and decommissioning routes. Issues were also raised about how much infrastructure the forest could afford to add and what routes would be best to add related to condition or cost. General concerns centered around the need to provide for certain uses. Users tended to emphasize a use they participate in on the national forest. Some, who understand the effects of a growing user population and recognize that other uses occur as well, made suggestions as to how to accommodate them. While many requested separation of uses from other users, most wanted their use to remain available close to their preferred recreation areas. Over 2,000 comments addressed site-specific roads, trails, and winter use areas. Some specific routes or areas had several comments that reflected a range of desires: e.g. to allow motorized use, restrict motorized use, add a route, not restrict a use of choice, etc. Some routes or areas prompted opposing views as well.

Moving forward, the deciding official's preferred alternative was developed from the alternatives presented in the Draft EIS and was presented in a Supplemental Draft EIS (SDEIS) as Alternative G. As stated in the Draft EIS, blending the concepts and ideas from the previous alternatives presented the best solution to meet the goals of the travel management plan. In total, the "blend" is not evenly distributed; rather, each geographic area was examined and determinations were made as to how each would best serve the forest as a whole concerning travel. Further incorporation of the USDA Forest Service Rule; Travel Management–Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use; Revisions to 36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295also influenced how networks were designed. The consideration of public comments further helped White River NF staff design, simplify, and incorporate the many comments presented to the agency.

The SDEIS presented a focused preferred alternative (Alternative G) derived from the entire planning effort that preceded publication. The public was given an opportunity to comment, not only on the travel management plan up to the release of the SDEIS, but an opportunity to see where the White River NF was heading with the travel system in the future. The public comments therefore were primarily more site-specific than previous comments. Most fell into specific geographical areas of concern. Opposing thoughts on how these areas should be managed were presented. General comments continued to fall into the three key issue areas identified early in the process. All comments were reviewed and were used to help the forest prepare the final preferred alternative described in the Final EIS.

The White River National Forest staff appreciates the time people took to offer their ideas. The forest was able to utilize many of the informative and helpful suggestions into the planning process. The comments were heavily considered in development of the SDEIS and Final EIS. The forest staffs responsible for the site-specific recommendations for alternative development were also the same members who reviewed and responded to the site-specific comments. The forest staffs responsible for analysis were the same members who reviewed and responded to the programmatic comments. This effort involved most of the personnel across the entire White River National Forest who incorporated their expertise into the travel management plan.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered three other alternatives, which are discussed below. A more detailed comparison of these alternatives can be found in Chapter 2 of the EIS.

All action alternatives in the travel management plan would:

- Provide for multiple uses and sustainability in an environmentally acceptable manner;
- Emphasize cooperation with individuals, organizations, and other agencies in coordinating planning and project implementation;
- Strive to improve the financial efficiency for travel management;
- Meet forest-wide goals and objectives and a set of standards and guidelines that ensure protection of forest resources;
- Comply with applicable laws; and
- Help meet the desired conditions established in the forest plan.

A number of travel management designations and activities would not change in the travel management plan. These include:

- Existing permitted use, including ski resort developed areas and infrastructure;
- Existing developed recreation sites, utility corridors, and electronic/utility sites;
- Existing rights-of-way;
- Current designated national scenic and recreational trails and byways;
- Prohibition of motorized and mechanized use in designated wilderness areas; and

- Permissions for any federal, state, tribal, or local official in the performance of official duty to enter restricted areas or use restricted types of vehicles by Forest Service personnel.

Updated data and analytical procedures, as well as evolving scientific knowledge, have been incorporated into all alternatives.

Alternative A (No-Action)

Background

NEPA regulations at 40 CFR 1502.14 state that "agencies shall: (d) include the alternative of no action." Guidance from the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) clarifies that the no-action alternative be based on no change from current management.

As current conditions were analyzed, it became clear that significant changes had occurred in the known inventory of travel routes. A large number of additional unauthorized routes were brought to the attention of the interdisciplinary team during the scoping process. Alternative A, although infeasible to implement, serves as a context for current condition for environmental analyses. The current resource conditions on the forest described in the affected environment sections of each resource reflect a "snapshot" in time.

Alternative A does not address the purpose and need and is not fully compliant with forest plan direction.

Theme

Alternative A considers the current condition for travel management on the White River National Forest.

Key elements of Alternative A include:

For summer:

- The current condition is the current designated system routes with their current legal uses; motorized and mechanized uses would only occur (legally) on these routes;
- Unauthorized routes would not be legal for use by motorized or mechanized vehicles;
- Horse and hike use would be allowed everywhere on the forest unless restricted by special order;
- Unauthorized routes would not be rehabilitated (as rehabilitation is an action);
- No unauthorized routes would be adopted;
- Changes would not be made to consider motorized mixed use per the travel rule, so no National Forest System routes would be changed to licensed motorized only; and
- Changes to uses on routes would not be changed to meet forest plan direction (as the forest plan did not address roads and trails site-specifically) or other regulations; rather they would remain as is.

For winter:

- The forest plan Record of Decision made area-wide decisions as to whether allow motorized and non-motorized use in a particular area. The current condition is based on forest plan area decisions because the forest plan did, through standards and guidelines and management area prescriptions, dictate where open, restricted, and prohibited areas of winter motorized activity can occur. Some prescriptions allow open winter motorized use, some call for restricted winter motorized use (to routes and small "play areas"), and some prohibit winter motorized use.
- The forest plan did not designate any specific routes or play areas in the restricted prescriptions. These can only be designated in an action alternative.
- The forest would be open to foot and other non-mechanized winter travel such as cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.

Alternative F

Background

Alternative F represents the original Alternative B in the Draft EIS, with corrections.

Theme

Alternative F considers the minimum actions needed to bring the forest travel system into compliance with forest plan direction.

Key elements of Alternative F include:

- Standards and guidelines in the forest plan would guide management of the forest travel system;
- There would be no consideration of user-created routes for system designation. No user-created routes would be adopted. All user-created routes would be decommissioned;
- All designated Forest Service system routes would be carried forward. Any Forest Service system routes currently out of compliance with the direction in the forest plan would be brought into compliance or decommissioned;
- All modes of travel would be compliant with forest plan direction;
- Changes would not be made to consider motorized mixed use per the travel rule, so no national forest system routes would be changed to licensed motorized only; and
- Like Alternative A, winter motorized use is dictated by forest plan management area and recreation opportunity spectrum direction. Management area prescriptions that are restricted to routes and play areas under this alternative would be non-motorized. The forest plan did not designate any specific routes or play areas in the restricted prescriptions. These can only be designated in an action alternative. For winter, Alternative F would have the same management direction as that under Alternative A.

Alternative G

Background

Alternative G was the preferred alternative for the SDEIS and incorporates elements of all the action alternatives presented in the Draft EIS, public input, and the latest regulations for travel management.

Theme

This alternative strives to balance the public transportation needs, including recreation uses, with natural resource protection and enhancement. The alternative was designed to best meet the public desire to access and recreate on the national forest in a natural setting.

Key elements of Alternative G include:

- Meeting forest plan and regulatory guidance for travel management;
- Consideration of the alternatives and information presented in the Draft EIS;
- Consideration of all public input from scoping and Draft EIS comments;
- Consideration of the mixed use safety studies and application of these into network planning;
- Presentation of the summer roads and trails system and uses for each route;
- Consideration of unauthorized routes for adoption or decommissioning;
- Presentation of system routes no longer needed to be decommissioned; and
- Presentation of areas where motorized over-snow travel is authorized, restricted, and prohibited during the winter season. Includes presentation of over-snow motorized designated routes in restricted motorized areas.

Selected Alternative

Alternative G Modified (GM) is largely the same as Alternative G, but has been modified to respond to public and internal concerns. Alternative GM is a culmination of the travel management planning process. This alternative incorporates elements of all the alternatives presented in the Draft EIS and SDEIS, and public input. It also incorporates the most current regulations for travel management.

Key elements of Alternative GM include:

- Meeting forest plan and regulatory guidance for travel management;
- Consideration of the alternatives and information presented through-out the entire travel management planning process;
- Consideration of all public input from scoping, Draft EIS and SDEIS comments;
- Consideration of the mixed use safety studies and application of these into network planning;
- Presentation of the summer roads and trails system and uses for each route;
- Consideration of unauthorized routes for adoption or rehabilitation;
- Presentation of system routes no longer needed to be decommissioned; and

- Presentation of areas where motorized over-snow travel is authorized, restricted, and prohibited during the winter season. Includes presentation of over-snow motorized designated routes in restricted motorized areas.

Monitoring and Implementation

The travel management plan was designed to meet forest plan desired conditions, goals, and objectives and follow all standards and guidelines. The forest plan monitoring strategy evaluates the desired conditions, goals, objectives, and effectiveness of standards and guidelines. Monitoring of motorized uses as part of the forest's land management plan is required in 36 CFR 212.57. The monitoring plan is not a decision to be made; rather it is a tool to assure that the travel plan decisions are carried out (40 CFR 1505.2(c) and 1505.3).

Under the monitoring protocols, the recreation resource staff have been surveying and interviewing users across the forest. This study, national visitor use monitoring (NVUM), is conducted every five years and is expected to continue.

Other tools to help the forest monitor the effectiveness of the travel management plan include field reconnaissance by ranger district and forest personnel including backcountry rangers, wilderness rangers, snow rangers, engineers, recreation managers, and any other forest personnel that are in the field. Citizens who report findings also help to identify issues that need to be remedied. Law enforcement observations and database recordings will help identify problem issues and areas that need attention and/or corrective measures.

At the conclusion of this travel management planning process the White River National Forest will engage in completing a Travel Management Implementation Action Plan (TMIAP). The TMIAP will describe steps to be taken to effectively implement the Travel Management Plan Record of Decision. The emphasis will be on the "4Es:" Education, Engineering, Enforcement, and Evaluation (monitoring). This guide is not part of the Travel Management Plan decision however is a step the White River National Forest is doing to ensure implementation of the decision is executed.

The TMIAP will include monitoring elements to evaluate whether public needs are being met, whether use is compliant with the travel management decision, and whether implementation methods are effective. Included in the plan will be recommendations and design from archeologists, biologists, and other specialists to ensure impacts are minimized and in some cases conditions and habitats improved.

The roads and trails that are to be part of the National Forest System are designated through this plan. These roads and trails, including routes added to the system, will need to be maintained to standard. Routes that are not designated through the plan will be decommissioned. A plan for how, where, and when to decommission roads and trails will be established by the White River National Forest through the TMIAP. Additional site-specific recommendations including biological and archeological clearances may be required to identify the best methods to bring roads and trails to standard or decommission and rehabilitate them. The additional examinations are not to revisit the decision as to whether the road or trail should exist or not, rather they will focus on the best methods to meet resource needs and plan objectives.

The forest is updating its sign plan in concert with regional direction. The forest will continue to sign for travel management across the forest. The forest is dedicating time and money to install educational, informational, and regulatory signing across the forest.

Motor vehicle use maps, as required by the travel rule, will become available for public distribution. Forest-wide travel order(s) will be in place to provide the mechanism to enforce travel management strategies. Other maps will be developed and available through a variety of media to convey travel information and recreational opportunities.

The selected alternative features areas of emphasis for particular uses, utilizes existing travel systems where appropriate, and strives to meet the desired recreation experience.

Implementation of the travel management plan will include strategies for educating users, utilizing law enforcement efficiently, and developing tools for communication to inform visitors of the forest, including signs, kiosks, maps, web-sites, etc.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study in the Final EIS

Federal agencies are required by NEPA to rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives and briefly discuss the reasons for eliminating any alternatives that were not developed in detail (40 CFR 1502.14).

The interdisciplinary team originally considered five alternatives during the planning process. The original alternatives—B, C, D, and E—were analyzed and disclosed in the Draft EIS. The action alternatives—C, D, and E—represented a reasonable range of alternatives for consideration. The SDEIS and Final EIS incorporated the Draft EIS alternatives by reference and further incorporated public comment, corrections, and current regulations.

The following action alternatives were studied in detail in the Draft EIS.

Action Alternative C

Background

Alternative C responds to the issues of volume and type of recreation access.

Theme

Alternative C focuses on accommodating recreation for more users where possible. It emphasizes shared use and optimization of available facilities, thus providing for a greater capacity for recreation across the forest.

Under Alternative C, key elements include:

- Optimization of road and trail opportunities;
- Mostly hierarchical[1] recreation use on roads and trails;
- Likely to have fewer exclusive use roads and trails;
- Creation of more opportunity for people to disperse;
- Creation of the most miles available for a particular use (non-exclusive);
- Likely to have the highest recreation capacity;

[1] Hierarchical is a system in recreation describing allowable uses. The uses described are—from least restrictive to most—high-clearance vehicles, all-terrain vehicles, motorcycles, bicycles (mechanized), horse and pack animals, foot (hiking). Under the hierarchal system, the uses listed after the specified allowed use for a route would also be allowed on that route. For example, if high-clearance vehicles are allowed on a road, then so is every other use; if a trail is open to motorcycles it is also open to mountain bikes, animals, and foot traffic.

- Identification of more loop opportunities; and
- Likely to add more unauthorized routes and have less decommissioning of system roads and trails.

Action Alternative D

Background

Alternative D responds to recreation user conflict issues.

Theme

Alternative D emphasizes reducing recreation conflicts among users and promoting a more sustainable recreation program in the long term.

Under Alternative D, key elements include:

- More separation of use and consideration of some exclusive use;
- Does not necessarily follow hierarchal use of roads and trails;
- Individual decisions are made on the appropriateness of each type of use on each route;
- Reduction of user conflict and long term recreation program sustainability;
- Identification of loop opportunities;
- Creation of more designated routes and play areas in winter;
- Likely to have fewer total miles or areas available to a particular use, but more miles available for shared uses on routes; and
- Likely to add more unauthorized routes and have less decommissioning of system roads and trails.

Action Alternative E

Background

Alternative E responds to the issues of managing recreation use to reduce the impacts on natural resources and wildlife caused by recreation.

Theme

Alternative E emphasizes natural resource and habitat protection while still allowing recreation use.

Under Alternative E, key elements include:

- Designate travel systems to reduce impacts on habitats (wildlife) and natural resources;
- Mostly hierarchical recreation use on roads and trails;
- Likely to have more shared recreation use on a limited system;
- Likely to have fewer roads and trails to maintain and be more sustainable from an economic standpoint;
- Likely to cluster recreation in some areas;

- Allowance for more primitive, non-motorized recreation experiences;
- Identification of fewer loop opportunities;
- Likely to add the fewest unauthorized routes and have the most decommissioning of system roads and trails.

Rationale for Elimination from Detailed Study

Several factors contribute to the reasons why Alternatives C, D, and E were not re-examined in detail in the SDEIS and Final EIS.

The deciding official and Forest Service staff were able to utilize the information presented in the Draft EIS to develop the alternatives presented in the SDEIS. The SDEIS was developed to show progression in the planning process and present management scenarios that reflected the forest's best options for travel management planning. The Final EIS is the conclusion to that progression.

These alternatives were fully examined in the Draft EIS, and provided the foundation for the final alternative (Alternative GM) in the Final EIS. The SDEIS incorporated elements of these alternatives, public comment, and updated resource information into a single comprehensive and more focused alternative (Alternative G). The Final EIS presents an update to Alternative G presented in the SDEIS. This alternative has been further refined to address public comments and corrections presented in the SDEIS. The resulting alternative, Alternative GM, is the final preferred alternative and reflects consideration of the full range of options presented throughout the planning process.

Updating Alternatives C, D, E and presenting them in the Final EIS is not required and would add to the complexity of reviewing the document. These alternatives have already been analyzed and presented to the public for comment. They have been improved upon in reaching the end goal for the travel management plan.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

The NEPA implementing regulations (Section 1505.2) require that the alternative(s) that best promotes national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA, Section 101, be identified in the decision as the "environmentally preferable alternative" or alternatives. This is ordinarily "the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment and best protects, preserves, and enhances historical, cultural, and natural resources" (FSH 1909.15, 05).

The environmentally preferable alternative is not necessarily the alternative that would be implemented, and it does not have to meet the underlying need for the project. It does, however, have to cause the least damage to the biological and physical environment and best protect, preserve, and enhance historical, cultural, and natural resources.

For this plan, I believe Alternative GM is the environmentally preferable alternative. In comparison with the other alternatives, this alternative represents the minimal road and trail system and returns the most miles to a natural state. This alternative examines the travel system as a whole, adopting some unauthorized routes where needed and eliminating some system routes where not needed. This was done with consideration to resource impacts, resulting in the selection of routes that best serve users while reducing impacts to the environment.

Decision

As the deciding official, I reviewed the purpose and need, the proposed action, the alternatives, and the environmental consequences to make the following decisions for the White River National Forest Travel Management Plan:

1) Designation of the summer roads and trails system
    a) Defining the designated forest roads and trails;
    b) Defining what modes of travel are acceptable on each road and trail;
    c) Deciding whether to incorporate or decommission unauthorized routes;
    d) Determining if certain forest routes are no longer needed as part of the system and identifying those for decommissioning.
2) Designation of winter uses:
    a) Designating open areas and routes for motorized use by vehicles made for over-snow travel.

The Selected Alternative

Based on my review of the Final EIS and public comments, I have decided to implement Alternative G Modified (GM), as described in the Final EIS and associated planning maps and tables. I am basing my decision not only on the Final EIS but on the entire process that was undertaken to get to this selected alternative. This decision reflects over seven years of highly engaged public involvement, collaboration, and consultation with individuals, groups, agencies, Tribal governments, and local governments with both common and widely diverse interests.

The summer and winter Travel Management Plan tables and associated summer and winter Travel Management Plan maps provide the details for the selected alternative and are incorporated in this decision.

The selected alternative is consistent with all pertinent laws, regulations, and agency policy. The decision is compliant with the White River National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and does not contain any amendments to that decision.

Travel Season Definitions

The travel management plan maps and subsequent orders are separated into two seasons. The summer and winter map do not overlap. When one season ends, the other begins. It is expected, therefore, that all summer motorized and mechanized uses end on the date specified and transition to allowable winter motorized uses, then reverse back on the date specified.

Summer Season

Summer season is considered the snow-free season. Summer season begins May 21 (at 00:00) and ends November 22 (at 23:59).

During the summer season all motorized and mechanized travel is restricted to routes designated for each particular use type—full-sized vehicles, all-terrain vehicles, motorcycles, mountain bikes, and all other mechanized vehicles used for human transport. Other designations include pack and saddle, and foot.

Some roads and trails may remain open prior to the opening date and after the closing date on a site-specific basis, only when the authorizing official determines there is a

public need and ground conditions are sufficient to allow the activity. Any exceptions to the listed dates will be made through a line officer's special order and posted at the specific location.

Winter Season

Winter season is considered the snow season. Over-snow motorized travel begins November 23 (at 00:00) and ends May 20 (at 23:59).

An over-snow vehicle is defined as a vehicle that is designed for use over snow and runs on a track or tracks and/or ski or skis while in use over snow (36 CFR 212.1).

Any other vehicle other than defined by 36 CFR 212 for winter use, including wheeled vehicles such as full-sized vehicles, all-terrain vehicles, motorcycles, mountain bikes, and mechanized vehicles, are prohibited, unless on a plowed or maintained road.

Under certain conditions over-snow vehicle use may remain open prior to the opening date and after the closing date on a site-specific basis, only when the authorizing official determines there is a public need and ground conditions are sufficient to allow the activity. Any exceptions to the listed dates will be made through a line officer's special order and posted at the specific location.

All grooming operations on winter trails require a permit or other authorization. On National Forest System lands where groomed motorized winter trails are provided by the Forest Service, or through other approved providers, travel is restricted to snowmobiles and non-motorized/non-mechanized uses only. Machines such as snowcats or other tracked vehicles designed specifically for over-snow winter travel are prohibited from these groomed trails unless equipped with and operating a grooming implement that is designed to groom the trail behind the machine. On groomed non-motorized winter trails, travel is restricted to non-motorized/non-mechanized uses only, unless granted through permit or other authorization. The intent of this provision is to maintain the integrity of the groomed snow surface and to protect the investment made in maintaining these winter routes for their intended purpose.

All Seasons

In making this decision, I have considered all the input from numerous sources including those from the public and those from the Ranger District staff, who conducted field reconnaissance and have local knowledge of the citizenry and territory.

Additional site-specific closures and seasonal exceptions or restrictions may be implemented either annually or on a case-by-case basis for management, wildlife, and resource protection through authorized travel orders. These site-specific travel orders will override the base summer and winter travel maps.

Forest Road and Trail Designation

The decision reaffirms the WRNF Forest Plan requirements that all motorized and mechanized (bicycle) travel occurs only on designated roads and trails.

This decision for the Travel Management Plan of the White River National Forest designates the official Forest Service system road and trail network. Of these roads and trails, most are open to the public. Some are under special-use permit and restricted to use by the permit holder. These permits have been granted under previous decisions.

The majority of these roads and trails were previously part of the Forest Service System; some have been added as they have proven to be essential to the network and meet design

standards for use, some will be decommissioned as they are not necessary or unsustainable.

Acceptable Modes of Travel on Roads and Trails

I have also made decisions as to which modes of travel are appropriate for each Forest Service System road and trail.

For the selected alternative there are 1,420 miles of road open to licensed vehicles and of those, 872 miles are open to licensed and unlicensed vehicles. There is a total of 1,613 miles of road and trail open to licensed motorcycles and of those 1,066 are open to unlicensed motorcycles. There is a total of 1,023 miles of road and trail open to motorized vehicles less than 50" in width (ATV's). Mechanized (bicycle) travel is allowed on 2,172 miles of road and trail. While the White River National Forest is an open forest for horse and hike travel, there are 3,373 miles of road and trail for horseback riding and 3,592 for hiking. This represents the total miles of opportunity for each use across the forest. Most routes allow more than one use.

Table 1.1—Summary of summer opportunity (roads and trails) in miles on the White River National Forest

Legend	Alternative GM
Licensed motorized vehicle	1420
Licensed and unlicensed full-size vehicle	872
Licensed motorized two-wheeled vehicle (licensed and unlicensed motorcycle)	1613
Motorized vehicles < 50" in width (ATV)	1023
Motorized two-wheeled vehicles (unlicensed motorcycles)	1066
Mechanized (bicycles)	2172
Pack animal (horse)	3373
Foot (hike)	3592

Unauthorized Routes

I am authorizing the incorporation of 225 miles of previously unauthorized routes into the system. These routes were found to be important to the travel networks, of value to users, and in good condition. All other unauthorized routes are to be decommissioned and rehabilitated including the 692 miles of inventoried unauthorized routes. Any newly discovered unauthorized routes will be decommissioned as well.

Decommissioning Current Routes

I also have made decisions as to which routes are no longer appropriate or were not needed as part of the official system. Some of these routes were on the official system; however they are no longer needed for access or use. Other routes may have been left on the landscape from previous actions and were not properly closed. There are 519 miles of system routes that will be decommissioned.

Decommissioning Activities

Decommissioning means these routes are to be removed from the landscape and returned to a more natural state. There is a suite of methods that can be used to accomplish this task. The activities range from blocking the entrance, scattering boughs on the roadbed, scarifying, seeding, and water barring, to removing fills and culverts, reestablishing drainage-ways, pulling back shoulders, and recontouring the slopes for full obliteration. These techniques are designed to effectively close routes, allowing full recovery over time. Agency resource specialists will consult to ensure that decommissioning activities enhance and protect resources. This includes following Section 106 requirements pertaining to inventory and protection of cultural resource prior to any ground disturbing activities.

Table 1.2—Summary of road and trail decommissioning in miles on the White River National Forest

Legend	Alternative GM
System routes already decommissioned (but require additional treatment)	178
Non-system routes already decommissioned (but require additional treatment)	162
System routes to be decommissioned	519
Non-system routes remaining but not system	0
Non-system routes to be decommissioned	692
Non-system routes added to the system	225

Winter Use Open Areas and Routes

I am authorizing those areas where motorized use over snow can occur in accordance with 36 CFR 212, Part C. I am authorizing 695,723 acres of open areas for motorized use; 517,693 acres of restricted areas where motorized use can only occur on designated routes; and 1,017,638 acres where motorized use over snow is prohibited (752,000 of these acres are designated Wilderness where motorized use is prohibited by law). Within the restricted acres I am authorizing 198 miles of over-snow routes.

Table 1.3—Summary of winter opportunities on the White River National Forest

Legend	Alternative GM
Open motorized areas (acres)	695,723
Restricted-motorized on routes only (acres)	517,963
Motorized prohibited areas (acres)	1,017,638
Special use permit (acres)	54,907
Designated motorized routes within restricted areas (miles)*	198

**Does not include motorized routes in open areas*

Other Decisions

The following decisions are elements of travel management that did not vary by alternative.

The following statement of exemption will be stated in the final travel order and motor vehicle use maps (MVUM): Except in wilderness and other congressionally designated special areas, the following may be exempt from prohibitions when granted by the forest supervisor: (36 CFR 212)

a) Limited administrative use by the Forest Service;

b) Use of any fire, military, or law enforcement vehicle for emergency purposes;

c) Authorized use of any combat or combat support vehicle for national defense purposes;

d) Law enforcement response to violations of law, including pursuit; and

e) Use and occupancy of National Forest System lands and resources pursuant to a written authorization issued under federal law or regulations. Note: emergency access and law enforcement pursuit does not necessarily require permission from the Forest Supervisor.

In designated wilderness the following persons may be exempt from prohibitions:

f) Persons with a Forest Service permit specifically authorizing the otherwise prohibited act or omission; and

g) Any federal, state or local officer, member of an organized rescue or firefighting force, in the performance of an official duty.

The Forest Supervisor has the authority to issue special orders limiting or changing access for protection of the natural resource, wildlife, or safety.

No off road travel will be allowed for game retrieval.

Off road parking for special uses such as forest product gathering will be specified and issued by special use permit.

Parking a motor vehicle on the side of the road is allowed up to 30 feet from the edge of the road surface for all uses other than dispersed camping or as specified by a permit.

Off road camping and parking must not damage the land, vegetation, or streams and no live trees may be cut (FSM 2355.30, 36 CFR 212, 36 CFR 261).

Nothing in this plan precludes future project-specific environmental analysis from proposing the construction of new system roads and trails.

Air Travel

All aircraft including but not limited to airplanes, helicopters, hang gliders, paragliders, hovercraft, balloons, ultralights, and other similar equipment will require a special use permit for take-off and landing locations on White River National Forest lands or waterways (36 CFR 261.58).

Boat Travel

Motor boats with gas or electric motors are allowed only on Dillon Reservoir, Green Mountain Reservoir, Ruedi Reservoir, Homestake Reservoir, and Shoshone Forebay. Boats with electric motors also are allowed on Heart Lake, Deep Lake, Meadow Lake, Sweetwater Lake, Chapman Reservoir, and Crescent Lake. All other bodies of water—lakes, streams, and reservoirs—are limited to non-motorized boating. Human contact (including swimming and wading) is prohibited in Dillon Reservoir. Human contact or boating of any kind is prohibited on Maroon Lake and Hanging Lake (36 CFR 261.58).

Special Areas and Permits

Access for permitted activities (such as livestock operations, mineral and oil/gas exploration and development, maintenance of water developments, utility maintenance, timber management, ski area management, outfitter and guide operations, and special events) on National Forest System lands is independent of general public access. Individuals or groups with special permits are allowed to conduct their business according to conditions outlined in their permits. If a permit does not stipulate exemptions to the forest's general travel regulations, the general travel regulations will apply. Special use permits may be issued for specific uses and access needs across the forest.

Access to sacred sites and gathering places by Ute nation tribal members is granted per treaty and National Forest Service policy.

Golden Horseshoe

The Golden Horseshoe area on the Dillon Ranger District is designated Intermix 7.1 management area in the forest plan. These areas stress collaborative management with local governments and user groups. An inter-government cooperative task force along with public group participation has been created to work on the management direction for the recreation uses within this area. The selected alternative reflects the roads and trails that are currently ready to be incorporated into the travel system. The task force will continue to design a system that projects future road and trail needs along with those that need to be rehabilitated. The public is encouraged to work with the task force to help the group design the final transportation system for this area.

Camp Hale

Based on the opportunity for partnerships with interest groups and outfitters and guides to help institute and maintain an OHV Ranger program, I am reserving the option to authorize the following in the Camp Hale and Vail Pass areas: motorized access for all vehicles on 702 Resolution, 703 Homestake, 709/16 Shrine Pass, 714 East Fork Eagle, 715 Pearl Creek, 728 Lime Creek, 747 Wearyman, and 751 Ptarmigan roads. In addition the section of 702 Resolution road from Pando trailhead to the intersection of 716 Camp Hale and N702W would be open as ATV trails. Authorizing the designations would be based on my assessment of proposals and adequate long-term funding and other support needed for a viable OHV Ranger Program, including but not limited to all resources such Forest Service OHV rangers, program administration, supplies, and equipment necessary to run the program.

The OHV Ranger program will allow for Forest Service personnel to be dedicated to management of the motorized travel system including ensuring compliance, posting signs, reporting areas where maintenance or restoration work may be needed, safety concerns, education, etc. If this program is effective and can be readily sustained this may

lead to other opportunities across the forest as well. If this program is not effective, safety issues arise, or non-compliance occurs in spite of these efforts, I reserve the right in this decision to return the designations in part or in whole to licensed full-sized vehicles only. Until that time these roads will be open only to licensed full-sized vehicles and guided operations for ATVs under a special use permit.

Ski Areas

Ski areas are treated as year-round special areas in the travel management plan. The roads and trails dedicated to ski area operations will be considered designated permitted routes under the ski area permit. The ski areas will be responsible for the management, operation, and maintenance of these routes. Winter uses are controlled and managed by the ski areas as stated in their permits. Nordic centers are designated as special areas for winter operations. Any modifications to ski areas, Nordic centers, or any other special use area will be conducted under the respective permit, including initiating the NEPA process when appropriate and updating operating plans for implementation.

Dispersed Camping

For most of the forest, dispersed camping with a motor vehicle can occur 300 feet from a designated road. Camping is prohibited within 100 feet of lakes and streams and system trails, unless exceptions are justified by terrain or specific design that protects the riparian and aquatic ecosystems. There are some places on the forest where dispersed camping can only occur in designated sites. This direction is part of the forest plan and compliant with the travel rule. (Forest Plan - General Recreation Standard 1 page 2-34; Travel System Infrastructure Standard 5 page 2-39)

On-going monitoring of dispersed camping sites and site-specific actions is conducted to address resource and safety concerns. As funding is available, the White River National Forest will continue to inventory and monitor dispersed camping across the landscape. From these inventories, forest staff will evaluate dispersed camping conditions and determine if and where some areas should only allow camping in designated sites. Staff will also focus efforts along streams and lakes to improve conditions in these areas. Special emphasis will be placed on developing partnerships and education programs to minimize impacts to these riparian areas.

Decision Rationale

I am selecting Alternative GM because it best meets the purpose and need, and represents the best balance of social, economic, and environmental interests and effects.

Alternative GM meets the spirit of the Travel Rule and will allow the White River National Forest to implement an official travel system for the entire forest. My decision will help meet the increasing demand for recreational travel opportunities and provide a range of quality experiences for users. It achieves these purposes in a more balanced and environmentally sound manner when compared with the other alternatives.

All of the action alternatives would reduce impacts as each would decommission a majority or all of the unauthorized routes. Alternatives G and GM go one step further in that they also present routes to be decommissioned that are on the system, but found to no longer be needed or able to be maintained satisfactorily.

To meet recreation demand, both Alternatives G and GM also add some unauthorized routes to the system. I believe this is an important aspect as these routes are found to be important to the users and fit well into the travel system.

Alternative GM further incorporates ideas from the public, staff recommendations, and analytical considerations as to which routes should be added and which should be decommissioned.

I decided to add these previously unauthorized routes because these roads and trails have been used for decades and they provide important access to hikers, mountain bikers, motorcyclists, ATV, and horse users. Our analysis determined that these routes could be added without significant adverse impact natural resources and could be reasonably maintained over the long term.

I also decided to decommission routes that are not part of the official declared system. To be effective routes not part of the system should be rehabilitated either through mechanical or natural means. This will help promote travel where it is allowed and discourage travel where it is not allowed. I recognize that decommissioning activities may have initial impacts, but that these activities will lead to a more stable, natural environment.

Many ideas from the public were carried forward into Alternative GM. I realize not everyone who provided input will find their particular interests carried forward into the final selected alternative. In many cases there were legitimate opposing views, economic considerations, and environmental concerns that I considered in my decision. It is extremely difficult to balance these needs in a single decision. I have incorporated the public input over the past seven years to make a decision that will carry us forward for the coming decades.

My intentions are to engage in collaborations among varying, and sometimes opposing, user groups and to foster a stewardship ethic that looks for innovative partnerships and ways to share the resources of the White River National Forest. Given our current economic and budget conditions, innovative partnerships and programs, in my opinion, will be essential to funding and accomplishing work related to travel management as well as the overall management of recreation and natural resources on the White River National Forest.

Alternative GM provides opportunities for both OHV's and non-motorized uses of the White River National Forest through a road and trail system that attempts to accommodate a wide-variety of user demand with available opportunities. Alternative GM provides opportunities for snowmobile and non-motorized winter uses by specifying areas where motorized use is allowed, restricted to routes, and prohibited. This includes providing enough roads and trails for particular uses, and providing areas where conflicts can be reduced and users can find the experience they seek for their particular use. In addition, these opportunities must be accomplished while protecting the natural resources of the forest. Balancing these is very difficult. If one issue or concern is fully addressed, it will create conflict and unrest with another set of users.

The difference in the alternatives for the travel system does not limit access for commodity production or special-use authorization. The Forest Service can allow access through special use permits, use of temporary roads, and special use roads when necessary. Routes needed for commodity use only will be the responsibility of the permit holder and when not needed it will be that persons or company's responsibility to decommission those routes. While Alternative GM has the least amount of roads, the base system does provide access the forest where needed. Because of my ability to issue access when needed under the proper authorization, I believe this alternative does not unduly effect commodity production.

I recognized the need to allow the public to access and recreate on public lands. Our road and trail system is the primary way for people to enjoy the White River National Forest. Alternative GM provides for this need while minimizing impacts to natural resources. Thoughtful network design, the removal of unnecessary or resource damaging roads and trails, and the protection of resources were all key design elements of Alternative GM. I believe this alternative is the best choice from which the Forest Service can protect natural resources and provide public access and recreation opportunities across the forest.

Alternative GM contains the least amount of roads and trails and will result in the least amount of winter compaction among all alternatives. This alternative also adds some previously unauthorized routes to the system to provide forest users with reasonable access across the entire Forest. My decision reflects careful consideration of the environmental impacts over the long term. Alternative GM removes unauthorized and unnecessary roads and trails. By eliminating these routes, the Forest Service can actively rehabilitate these lands and allow the land to return to a more natural setting.

My decision reflects a long-term vision for a road and trail system that I believe we can maintain given current and future budget considerations. Road and trail maintenance is expensive and time-consuming work. This decision provides for an adequate system of roads and trails to provide the public with access to the White River National Forest; while at the same time, considers the long-term funding availability to maintain this system in a safe manner.

Through this decision, I have adopted sensible and practical means of mitigation to avoid, reduce or minimize environmental impacts. I have included features necessary to mitigate potential impacts on resources affected by implementation of the selected alternative. My conclusion is based on a review of the record that shows a thorough analysis using the best available science. The environmental analyses disclosed in the Final EIS identify the effects analysis methodologies, reference scientific sources which informed the analysis, and disclose limitations of the analysis.

The Travel Management process on the White River has been a long and at times, difficult undertaking. We have received thousands of comments from a wide variety of interests. The process has gone on for nearly a decade. My decision marks the conclusion of this process. However, travel management implementation will continue to the foreseeable future. I have every intention of keeping this plan alive and relevant. We will conduct periodic reviews of the plan to determine if changes are needed. Undoubtedly there are specific issues that remain unresolved and will require a more site-specific review. I am committed to looking at additional roads or trails for inclusion into or removal from the system if it is warranted.

Travel Management is one of the most difficult and important decisions I will make as White River National Forest Supervisor. I do not take this responsibility lightly. I realize this decision may not be welcomed by all the stakeholders on the Forest. To make this decision successful, I know I must be open to criticism and be willing to make changes if necessary.

The White River National Forest is a crown jewel of our Nation's public land system. It is visited by millions and some of us are lucky enough to call it home. Travel management plays a vital role in shaping the future of this incredible 2.3 million acre piece of land. I am confident that through open dialogue and strong partnerships, we can maintain this crown jewel for generations to come.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

Travel management on the White River National Forest must adhere to management direction on many levels including statutes, regulations, laws, executive orders, and agency directives. Travel management on National Forest System lands must follow both federal and appropriate state level laws and regulations.

The EIS has been prepared in accordance with the following laws and regulations:

Clean Air Act of 1970

The Clean Air Act of 1970 and its amendments provide for protecting and enhancing the nation's air resources. The Federal and State ambient air quality standards are not expected to be exceeded as a result of implementing Alternative GM. This action is consistent with the Clean Air Act.

Clean Water Act

The Clean Water Act, as amended, regulates dredging and filling freshwater and coastal wetlands. Section 404 (33 USC 1344) of the Clean Water Act prohibits discharging dredged or fill material into waters (including wetlands) of the United States without first obtaining a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Wetlands are regulated in accordance with federal Non-Tidal Wetlands Regulations (Sections 401 and 404). No dredging or filling is part of this action and no permits are required. In addition, my decision will improve conditions with respect to temperature on State-listed impaired streams (Final EIS, Chapter 3, Hydrology section).This project is consistent with the Clean Water Act.

Endangered Species Act of 1973

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) (16 USC 1531 et seq.) requires that any action authorized by a Federal agency not be likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a threatened or endangered species, or result in the destruction or adverse modification of the critical habitat of such species.

The White River National Forest Travel Management Plan will result in a "May Affect But Not Likely to Adversely Affect" determination for the greenback cutthroat trout, penland alpine fen mustard, DeBeque phacelia, Colorado hookless cactus, and Ute ladies'-tresses orchid, all species listed or proposed for listing (phacelia) as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

Informal consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (16 USC 1531 et seq.), was initiated by the Forest Service on September 22, 2010 for this project. On November 18, 2010, the USFWS issued a second-tier biological opinion (USFWS reference # ES/CO:FS/WRNF; Tails: 65413-2010-F-0013; 65413-2009-B-0008; ES/LK-6-CO-08-F-024-GJ007) under the first-tier Southern Rocky Mountains Lynx Amendment biological opinion that concurred with the determinations for all species except the Canada lynx, a Threatened Species.

The USFWS informed the Forest Service of an adverse affect finding on the Canada lynx for this project due to current conditions in the Camp Hale and Ten Mile Lynx Analysis Units (LAUs), primarily because of existing and continuing winter snow compaction occurring as a result of winter recreation in the Vail Pass Winter Recreation Area (VPWRA), Vail Ski Area, and Copper Mountain Resort (ski area).

Although this travel management decision does not include proposed changes to winter travel routes and snowplay areas in the VPWRA or the ski areas, and does propose to reduce snow compaction in both the Camp Hale and Ten Mile LAUs, the USFWS concluded that existing conditions warrant a "May Affect, Likely to Adversely Affect" determination for the Canada lynx. The second tier biological opinion stated that the adverse effects do not rise to the level of take for Canada lynx.

The proposed action will have no effect on other Threatened or Endangered Species (bonytail chub, Colorado pikeminnow, humpback chub, razorback sucker, Uncompahgre fritillary butterfly, Mexican spotted owl).

Formal consultation with USFWS has been completed. The proposed action complies with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act.

National Environmental Policy Act

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires Federal agencies to complete detailed analyses of proposed actions that significantly affect the quality of the human environment. The Act's requirement to prepare an environmental impact statement is designed to provide decision-makers with a detailed accounting of the likely environmental effects of a proposed action prior to adoption and to inform the public of (and encourage comments on) such effects. The Final EIS analyzes the alternatives and displays the environmental effects in conformance with NEPA standards. The procedural requirements of the NEPA have been followed.

National Forest Management Act

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) amends the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 (RPA) and sets forth the requirements for Land and Resource Management Plans (Forest Plans) for the National Forest System. This decision is consistent with the 2002 Forest Plan as amended, as described elsewhere in this document and is thus consistent with the NFMA.

No amendments to the forest plan will be proposed through this travel management planning process. The travel management plan was designed to conform to the Forest Plan and all other laws, regulations and policies. Forest Plan standards and guidelines will be applied as appropriate to meet Forest Plan goals and desired conditions. The Forest Plan is incorporated into this document by reference.

National Historic Preservation Act of 1966

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) requires Federal agencies to consider the potential effects of a preferred alternative on historic, architectural, or archaeological resources that are eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and to afford the President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation an opportunity to comment. Section 110 of the Act requires Federal agencies to identify, evaluate, inventory, and protect NRHP resources on properties they control. Potential impacts to archaeological and historic resources have been evaluated in compliance with Section 106 of the NHPA.

The NHPA provides comprehensive direction to Federal agencies to identify, evaluate, treat, protect, and manage historic properties. The NHPA expands the NRHP and it establishes the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) and

SHPOs. Section 106 of the NHPA directs all Federal agencies to take into account effects of their undertakings (actions, financial support, and authorizations) on properties included in or eligible for the National Register. The ACHP's regulations (36 CFR §800) implement Section 106 of the NHPA. Section 110 of the Act sets inventory, nomination, protection, and preservation responsibilities for federally owned and administered historic properties.

Other Laws and Executive Orders

Executive Order 11593

Executive Order 11593, entitled Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment, also includes direction about the identification and consideration of historic properties in Federal land management decisions. The order, issued May 13, 1971, directs Federal agencies to inventory cultural resources under their jurisdiction, to nominate to the NRHP all federally owned properties that meet the criteria, to use due caution until the inventory and nomination processes are completed, and to assure that Federal plans and programs contribute to preservation and enhancement of properties not federally owned. This project satisfies the requirements of E.O. 11593.

Executive Order 11644

This order seeks to ensure that the use of off-road vehicles on public lands be controlled and directed to protect resources, promote the safety of all users of those lands, and to minimize conflicts among the various users of those lands. The purpose and need for this project addresses these elements by seeking to comply with the 2005 Travel Management Rule. The action alternatives address resource protection, user safety, and conflict among Forest users in different ways. The effects of the alternatives with respect to these objectives are disclosed in the resource sections in Chapter 3 of the Final EIS, including the *Recreation, Soils*, and *Hydrology* sections. This decision complies with the terms of this order.

USDA Forest Service Rule; Travel Management–Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use; Revisions to 36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295

This travel rule was written to address, at least in part, the issue of unmanaged recreation. The rule provides guidance to the Forest Service on how to designate and manage motorized recreation on the forest.

The travel rule provides regulations governing use of motorized vehicles, including off-road vehicles, on Federal lands to protect natural resources, promote public safety, and minimize user conflicts as directed in Executive Order 11644–Use of Off-Road Vehicles on the Public Lands (February 8, 1972), as amended by Executive Order 11989 (May 24, 1977).

Key Components of the Rule (36 CFR 212, 251, 261)

Key components of the rule include roads system management: a) Traffic on roads is subject to state traffic laws where applicable, and b) roads or segments thereof may be restricted to use by certain classes of vehicles or types of traffic (§212.5). Motor vehicle use on National Forest System roads, on National Forest System trails, and in areas on

National Forest System lands shall be designated by vehicle class and, if appropriate, by time of year (§212.51a).

Meeting the requirement to establish a designated system for motorized vehicle use, the White River National Forest began by incorporating the standard in the forest plan that states that all snow-free motorized (and mechanized) use would be on designated routes and not include any open areas (USDA 2002a, Travel System Infrastructure, Standard 4, p. 2-36).

To meet sections a) and b) of the §212.5 regulations, the WRNF also considered the following guidance:

Colorado state traffic laws regulate licensing, registrations, safety, and allowable modes of travel on public roads. Colorado state law also addresses the use of off-highway vehicles under Title 33, Article 14.5. Section 33-14.5-108 of that article addresses off-highway vehicle operations prohibited on streets, roads, and highways. The section reads: (1) No off-highway vehicle may be operated on public streets, roads, or highways of this state except in the following cases:…(h) (I) When the United States or any agency thereof authorizes by any means such operation on lands units jurisdiction (II) no-action is required to be taken by the United States pursuant to this paragraph (h) to authorize the use of off-highway vehicles on lands under the jurisdiction of the United States.

The agreement with the Forest Service and the Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) in a Memorandum of Understanding (Forest Service Roads subject to the Highway Safety Act 1976, 1982)

Under the travel rule the Forest Service is to designate what motorized uses are allowed in what areas, and thus create a system that clearly defines what type of motorized use is allowed on which routes. This system is not hierarchical, but rather designates the appropriate use for each route. Several factors are considered when making determinations for use on roads and trails.

Safety

One major designation factor is whether a road that allows highway-legal vehicle use should or should not allow non-highway-legal vehicle use. A road that allows highway-legal and non-highway-legal vehicular use is referred to as mixed use. A major component of this issue is that in Colorado, ATVs cannot be licensed and therefore are not highway legal. Vehicles that are highway legal have features such as mirrors, lights, etc., that the State recognizes as being safe for highway and public road travel. The State makes the distinction by issuing licenses for vehicles that are highway legal.

Under the rule, the forest is required to make independent decisions on the safety of each motorized use for each route. On most of the forest's maintenance level 2 roadways, where the surface is rough enough to keep speeds down and use levels are lower, mixing highway legal and non-highway-legal use in most cases is generally not as much of a safety issue as it is on the level 3, 4, and 5 roadways, which are constructed and maintained for the speed and volumes of passenger car travel.

The White River National Forest conducted mixed-use studies on national forest roads designed to handle passenger cars. These roads include the major arteries across the forest. These studies reflect which roads would be safe for allowing licensed and unlicensed vehicles to utilize the same route.

Recreation

Often, users of the forest must rely on state, county, or local roadways to access forest roads and trails. State law prohibits non-highway-legal motorized vehicle use on public roadways unless the jurisdiction controlling the roadway has made a formal declaration to allow that use.

This limitation leads to the question as to what allowance makes sense from a recreation management standpoint. In order to provide a quality experience for motorized users, the network has to provide several miles of connected roadway. Another factor concerns what makes legal sense. For example, if a county road does not allow non-highway vehicle use and it directly leads to a Forest Service road or if a road goes back and forth in jurisdiction and therefore back and forth between highway-legal and non-highway-legal use, the Forest Service would likely not allow non-highway vehicular use. This action avoids encouraging illegal use on the sections of road that only allow highway-legal vehicle use. The forest will work with the various state, county, and local agencies to determine where non-highway-legal vehicles may be legally used on routes under the control of those entities. Decisions in the final travel management plan will reflect legality and practicality in allowing non-highway-legal motor vehicles to access areas of the forest. The practicality analysis will include factors such as the availability of adequate trailhead parking, need, and whether other legal constraints exist.

In addition to safety and access, the rule also requires the responsible official to consider the provision of recreation capabilities and system design. For example, it would not make sense to allow ATVs on a road that is part of or connected to a road that does not allow ATV use, especially if the portion that would allow ATVs is short (for example, only ¼ mile long) or does not lead to a destination area. Such conditions would not be considered to provide a quality experience to the ATV user. Rather, it makes sense to develop and design networks for ATV and other non-highway-legal vehicle users where they can access the quality and quantity of road and trail to have an enjoyable recreational experience.

Resource Considerations

Provisions under §212.55 require consideration of the effects of the designation of motorized use on National Forest System natural and cultural resources, public safety, provision of recreational opportunities, access needs, conflicts among users of National Forest System lands, the need for maintenance and administration of uses on roads and trails; and the availability of resources for that maintenance and administration.

The White River National Forest presents in the travel management plan areas where motorized use may or may not be allowed. Key aspects to this include:

3) Examination of unauthorized routes for rehabilitation or inclusion into the designated travel system. Examination of system routes also needs to be conducted to determine whether their purpose is still valid or whether they are not needed for the travel system. Based on inventory efforts that included public input and involvement, the travel management plan will provide the foundation for decisions on these routes. Decision factors include whether these routes serve a need and whether their use has any resource impacts; and if so, how these impacts should be mitigated. Also, the forest has to consider whether it can afford the maintenance and administration of these routes. Although decommissioning and rehabilitation have initial costs, once a route is decommissioned or rehabilitated, any resource impacts or administrative costs should essentially be eliminated. “[U]ser-created roads and trails may be identified through public involvement and considered in the designation process.

After public consideration and appropriate site-specific environmental analysis, some user-created routes may be designated for motor vehicle use pursuant to § 212.51 of the final rule" (Federal Register /Vol. 70, No. 216; Wednesday, November 9, 2005; Rules and Regulations, p. 68277.

4) Examination of existing system routes and whether they are suitable for certain vehicle uses, especially mixed use. Because maintenance level 3, 4, and 5 roads are considered "open to public" roads, special considerations have to be made as to whether these roads are safe for mixed use.

Other aspects of the decision regarding mixed use include considerations of safety, affects on resources, potential impacts to wildlife, ability to administer and enforce openings and closures, maximizing recreation opportunities, and minimizing recreational conflicts. When making decisions for use across the forest, the decision-maker will take all these factors into account, including public input and comment.

Winter Motorized Use

Directives for use by over-snow vehicles are included in the rule under Subpart C, §212.80 and §212.81. An over-snow vehicle is defined as a motor vehicle that is designed for use over snow and that runs on a track or tracks and/or a ski or skis while in use over snow §212.1. The directives specify that over-snow vehicles may be allowed, restricted, or prohibited according to circumstance. The rule states that the responsible official may use the process outlined in §212 to establish where over-snow vehicles would be allowed, restricted, or prohibited. The difference between the summer motorized designations and winter motorized designations is that the Forest Service has to officially designate where summer motorized use is allowed; for winter, the Forest Service has the option to show only where winter motorized use is restricted or prohibited. The White River National Forest has chosen to follow the process outlined in the rule through the travel management plan and subsequently will produce winter motor vehicle use maps to show where motorized winter use is allowed, restricted, or prohibited.

During the winter season, motorized and mechanized vehicles other than those defined as motorized over-snow vehicles in 36 CFR 212 are prohibited unless designated as allowed in the winter motor vehicle use map.

Parking Off of Designated Roadways and Trails

The rule provides the responsible official with the opportunity to authorize the limited use of motor vehicles within a specified distance of certain motorized roads and trails and, if appropriate, within specified time periods solely for the purposes of dispersed camping or retrieval of a downed big game animal by an individual who has legally harvested that animal (§212.51).

The forest plan specifies that the forest will permit motor vehicle travel up to 300 feet from designated travel ways for direct access to campsites, parking, firewood cutting, or gathering forest products provided that: minimal resource damage occurs and such access is not otherwise prohibited (USDA 2002a, p. 2-36). There are some routes that have special orders restricting any off-road travel and only allow dispersed camping in designated sites.

Driving off the road for the purpose of game retrieval has never been authorized on the White River National Forest and the forest will not enter into any analysis to allow that use, a decision that is carried forward in the travel management plan.

Driving off of the road for the purpose of fuelwood cutting and gathering of forest products may still be allowed to continue through the permitting system. Permits have long been required for the removal of forest products such as firewood. The new regulation gives allowance for driving off of designated roadways for a specified distance under a written authorization issued under Federal law or regulation (§212.51(a)(7)).

Executive Order 12898

A specific consideration of equity and fairness in resource decision-making is encompassed in the issue of environmental justice. Executive Order 12898 provides that, "each Federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations." No adverse effects from Alternative GM, as Modified have been identified on minority or low-income populations. See the *Socio-economics* section of Chapter 3 for more information.

Administrative Review (Appeal) Opportunities

Individuals or organizations who submitted substantive comments during the comment period specified at 215.6 may appeal this decision. The notice of appeal must meet the appeal content requirements at 36 CFR 215.14.

The appeal must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, or express delivery) with the Appeal Deciding Officer at: USDA Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region, 740 Simms, Golden, CO 80401; FAX: (303) 275-5154.

The office business hours for submitting hand-delivered appeals are: Monday through Friday 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., excluding holidays. Electronic appeals must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to appeals-rocky-mountain-regional-office@fs.fed.us. The appeal must have an identifiable name attached or verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic appeals.

Appeals, including attachments, must be filed within 45 days from the publication date of this notice in the [name of newspaper], the newspaper of record. Appeals, including attachments received after the 45 day appeal period will not be considered. The publication date in the Glenwood Springs Post Independent, newspaper of record, 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.

Implementation Date

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Wendy Jo Haskins, White River National Forest Supervisors Office, 900 Grand Avenue, Glenwood Springs, CO, 81601, (970) 945-2521.

Scott G. Fitzwilliams — March 17, 2011

SCOTT G. FITZWILLIAMS — **Date**

Forest Supervisor