

File Code: 1950-1

Date: February 24, 2010

Dear Planning Participant:

The Colville National Forest is proposing to manage and direct motorized recreation in the south-central end of the forest (to include the Tacoma, Chewelah, and Calispell drainage basins). The project goals will include designating an expanded system of routes for motor vehicle use (including off-highway vehicles), providing for public safety, protecting natural resources, rehabilitating existing resource impacts from motor vehicle use, and minimizing user conflicts. Addressing impacts from dispersed camping associated with motor vehicle use is also to be included in the project. This proposed project is called the South End Motor Vehicle Management Project, and the analysis is being documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA).

The purpose of this letter is to give the public an opportunity to provide early and meaningful participation on a proposed action prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Official.

LOCATION OF THE PLANNING AREA

The planning area is about 191,000 acres, of which about 148,000 acres are National Forest System. The planning area includes the Tacoma, Chewelah, and Calispell drainages. Elevation ranges from about 6840 feet at Calispell Peak to about 1,700 feet near the town of Addy. This table displays the legal description of the planning area.

The planning area is located between U.S. Highway 395 and Washington State Highway 20. Flowery Trail (Stevens County Road 2902, Pend Oreille County Road 2110) bisects the planning area. The primary access routes into the planning area are along Stevens County Roads 2847, 2853, 2854, 2857, 2884, 2888, 2902, 2931, 2933, 2978, 2998, 3580, 3630, 3647 and 3667; and Pend Oreille County Roads 2022, 2030, 2110, 2341, 2373, 2389, 2441, 2489, 9205 and 9518. See the attached maps for the location of the planning area.

The project area does not include any wilderness, RARE II, or other inventoried roadless land.

Table 1. Legal Description of Planning Area

Township	Range	All or part of Sections
T. 31N	R. 41E	12
	R. 42E	1-3, 5-8, 11, 17, 18
	R. 43E	4-6
T. 32N	R. 41E	1-4, 9-18, 22-27, 34-36
	R. 42E	All
	R. 43E	5-8, 17-21, 28-33
T. 33N	R. 39E	1, 12, 13
	R. 40E	1-11, 15-22, 30
	R. 41E	All
	R. 42E	All
T. 34N	R. 43E	4-10, 16-21, 29-32
	R. 40E	23-36
	R. 41E	19-21, 23-36
	R. 42E	All
T. 35N	R. 43E	1-11, 15-22, 27-34
	R. 42E	1, 10-16, 21-28, 31-36
	R. 43E	6-11, 14-23, 25-36



PURPOSE AND NEED

A proposed action and its alternatives must meet the purpose and need in order to be studied in detail in the environmental analysis.

In 2005 the U.S.D.A. Forest Service adopted the Final Rule for Travel Management. The Travel Management Rule requires that each national forest designate routes¹ and areas that are open to motor vehicle use. Designations are made by class of vehicle and time of year on a motor vehicle use map (MVUM). Upon the creation of a MVUM, motorized travel off designated routes and outside of designated areas would then be prohibited.

Final Rule for Travel Management

Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use (Travel Management Rule) was published in the Federal Register. This affects 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295

The Travel Management Rule does not address over-snow vehicles or motorized wheelchairs.

In the spring of 2008, the Colville National Forest adopted Forest Plan Amendment #31 – Clarification of Forest Plan Direction Regarding Motor Vehicle Use, and issued a forest-wide Motor Vehicle Use Map. The 2008 MVUM did not include any new trail construction nor existing unauthorized roads².

Located closest to the population center of Spokane, the south-central part of the Forest receives a very high level of recreation use. High use areas include the North Fork Chewelah Creek, North Fork and Middle Fork of Calispell Creek and Tacoma Creek. Resource damage is currently high in portions of the project area due to uncontrolled motor vehicle use, proliferation of cross-country motor vehicle trails, and heavily-used dispersed camping sites in sensitive areas.

Environmental problems that have been observed in this area include eroding soil, damage to vegetation and meadows, damage to stream banks, impaired water quality, damage to fish habitat, impacts to wildlife habitat and use of the area, spread of noxious weeds, and damage to sensitive plant and wildlife habitat. Livestock management is made more difficult due to the proliferation of motor vehicle trails. Motor vehicle trails allow cattle to move more easily to places such as riparian areas where they cause or contribute to unacceptable resource damage.

The purpose and need of this project is to:

- Designate an improved system of routes for off-highway vehicles (OHV) that would have acceptable resource impacts³, provide for a reasonable degree of public safety⁴, and be consistent with the Colville National Forest Land and Resources Management Plan (Forest Plan).

¹ Routes may include both roads and trails.

² Unauthorized roads are roads that are not part of the National Forest Road and Trail, and are not temporary roads. These routes are not managed as part of the designated transportation system. This includes historic roads and abandoned travelways.

³ “Acceptable resource impacts” are defined as meeting requirements for protection of the environment (e.g., National Forest Management Act, Clean Water Act, Endangered Species Act, National Historic Preservation Act, etc.) and Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines, including INFISH (Inland Native Fish Strategy) requirements.

⁴ “Reasonable degree of public safety” is defined as low or moderate vehicle collision probability and severity, as determined by a Motorized Mixed Use Analysis (see EM-7700-30, *Guidelines for Engineering Analysis of Motorized Mixed Use on National*

- Address impacts from dispersed camping accessed by motorized vehicles in high impact areas.
- Develop a system of routes and camping areas that can be maintained to standard within anticipated budgets.

Project Objectives

Based on public comments, this project emphasized the development of a system that would:

- Link the communities to the OHV opportunities. Since County roads ultimately link the Forest to the communities, the Forest Service looked at linking the OHV routes on the National Forest to the County Roads that allow OHVs.
- Provide long loop rides. According to the riders, they like to ride loops ranging from about 25-75 miles in length. No one watershed would provide long enough loops; in order to create long loops, the Forest Service looked at OHV routes that link the various watersheds together.
- Allow OHV access to camping sites. Many riders camp nearby, and they want to be able to begin and end their rides directly from their campsites. The Forest Service looked at ensuring that popular camping roads were included in the OHV routes.
- The Forest Service recognized a need to provide trailheads.

The Forest Service has identified dispersed camping as a significant source of resource degradation in this planning area. Under the current Motor Vehicle Use Map, motorized vehicles are allowed to leave open roadways to access dispersed campsites – for a distance of 300 feet from the centerline. Some roads are less than 300 feet from perennial streams (e.g., North Fork Chewelah, North Fork & Middle Fork Calispell, Tacoma, Cusick, and Ruby Creeks). Most of the campsites are accessed by undesignated spur roads off the main roads -- some are historic roads, and some are user-created roads.

PROPOSED ACTION

Off-highway Vehicles

Currently the planning area has about 460 miles of motorized vehicle routes. The following table summarizes the current Motorized Vehicle Use Map. The proposed action would increase total miles of motorized road and trail by about 3%. Maps showing the existing MVUM and the proposed MVUM are attached.

Table 2. Comparison of Current Motor Vehicle Use Map with MVUM Upon Completion Of the Proposed Action.

Motorized Vehicle Designation	Miles current MVUM	Miles Proposed MVUM
Routes open only to motorcycles (year round) Batey-Bould Trail System	41	41
Routes open only to vehicles 50 inches or less (off-highway vehicles, all terrain vehicles)	10	24
Roads open year-round	0	11
Roads open only part of the year	0	13
Routes open only to highway-legal vehicles	347	157
Roads open year-round	99	38

Forest System Roads).

Table 2. Comparison of Current Motor Vehicle Use Map with MVUM Upon Completion Of the Proposed Action.

Motorized Vehicle Designation	Miles current MVUM	Miles Proposed MVUM
Roads open only part of the year	248	119
Routes open to all types of vehicles including OHV	63	251
Roads open year-round	6	66
Roads open only part of the year	57	185
	461	474

This proposal would link all the primary OHV use areas so that riders can go from Calispell all the way to Ruby Creek; from there, existing routes can take them to the Heritage Lake area. Using county and National Forest Routes, riders can go from near Cusick to Chewelah. Trailheads would be developed in the North Fork Chewelah, Calispell and Tacoma Creek areas.

Table 3. Summary of Proposed Activities

Proposed Actions	Miles
Roads that are currently open on the MVUM that would be closed	1.2
NFS roads that are currently closed that would be opened	6.7
Unauthorized roads/user created trails that would be added	5.7
New construction	1.7

Some aspects of implementing the proposed action are contingent upon other actions. Connecting the Middle Fork Calispell OHV trails with the Boyer Ridge Road (FR 3520) requires an easement with Washington State Dept of Natural Resources. The proposal to link FR 3116500 to FR 3118001 requires an easement on private land. The proposals surrounding Phillips Lake require improvements in the riparian conditions at the lake.

In addition, money to implement the proposal is not currently budgeted or assured.

Dispersed Camping

The Forest has recognized dispersed camping as one element that has been damaging sensitive resources for some time. The damage observed includes:

- compaction, runoff and erosion from campsites,
- damage to surrounding vegetation including both meadow vegetation and trees,
- compaction and erosion from roads accessing the campsites,
- people breaking down the stream banks and modifying streambeds,
- improper disposal of human waste, and
- litter.

The Forest recognizes that, in many areas, livestock grazing and dispersed camping has a cumulative effect on resources.

The planning area has about 240 inventoried dispersed campsites. The Interdisciplinary Team (ID team) identified the specific areas where dispersed camping is damaging resources, or has a high potential to damage resources. Based on the ID Teams analysis, most of the resource damage is caused by campsites located too close to the creeks, user-created routes to the campsites, and the sheer density of campsites in some areas.

The proposed action would control camping near about 47 miles of road. About 175 campsites are located in these areas. The following table shows the areas where dispersed camping would be controlled. A map showing where camping would be controlled is attached.

Table 4. Roads Where Off-road Motorized Access Would Be Eliminated and Campsites Would Be Designated

General Location	All or Part of the Following Roads	Miles of Road
Twelvemile Creek Homestead Meadow area	9535000 and 9535300	2.8
Bartlett Road area	4370004, 4370020, 4370470 and CR2030	4.7
Calispell Creek – lower North Fork and Middle Fork	3520000, 3540000, and CR 2022	7.0
Cusick Creek Area	3128030, 3128070, 3128140, and CR 2441	5.2
North Fork Chewelah Creek including Drummond Creek to Calispell Basin and Hartill Creek to Hartill Meadows	9545000, 9521000, 9521015, 9521099, 9521160, 9521164, 9521169, 9521190, 9521198, 9521230, 9521900, and CR 2998	11.5
Phillips Lake	2521120	0.5
Ruby Creek (middle portion)	2700004 and 2700008	2.9
Tacoma Creek	2600010, 2600015, 2600301, 2600326, 2600346, 2600350, and CR 2389	9.0
Winchester Creek	9517000	3.6

The South End Project proposes to designate campsites along these roads. Camping would only be allowed at designated sites. Motorized vehicles, including off-highway vehicles, would be limited to the roadway. Routes to campsites and parking for campsites would be designated on the ground – probably using carsonite markers.

South End would designate 130 campsites along the restricted roads. About half would be designated essentially ‘as is’ and about half would require restoration before they could be designated. About 20 new sites would be developed and designated. About 40 campsites would be closed to further use.

The public would continue to be able to use sites along other roads, and would be able to travel up to 300 feet from the centerline of the other open roads for the purposes of dispersed camping.

Resource Concerns

The following are the primary concerns raised by the Forest Service interdisciplinary team analyzing this project:

- Water, wetlands and aquatic habitats.
- Wildlife.
- Livestock.
- Disabled Hunter Program

Decision Needed

Based on the information received and the analysis of alternatives, including a “no action” alternative, the Forest Supervisor is expected to make a decision to select an alternative by July

of 2010. The decision needed is whether to implement these projects, and if so, which action alternative will best address site-specific issues while meeting management direction as stated in the Forest Plan.

Response To Request

Any comments provided will become a matter of public record and should include: the name, address, and telephone number of the provider as well as the title of the document (South End Motor Vehicle Management or Motorized Recreation Management Environmental Assessment). Also, comments should include specific items, along with supporting facts, you believe the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision.

Please send your comments regarding this project to me at the address listed on the front page of this letter, or call either myself or Nancy Glines, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, at (509) 447-7300, or John Buehler, Newport-Sullivan Lake District Ranger, at (509) 447-7300, or Fred Way, Three Rivers District Ranger, at (509) 738-7700. Comments sent via e-mail to comments-pacificnorthwest-colville-newport@fs.fed.us will also be accepted.

Also, please notify us by letter, phone call, or e-mail (nglines@fs.fed.us), if you want to stay on the mailing list for this project. We would appreciate receiving your response before **March 15, 2010**.

The proposals are also available on the World Wide Web at
<http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/colville/travel-mgt/south-end-mvm/index.shtml>

Sincerely,

ISI STEVE RAWLINGS (FOR)

RODNEY D. SMOLDON
Forest Supervisor

Enclosures (3)

cc: Bill Shields
Nancy C Glines