



NEWS RELEASE

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FOREST SERVICE RELEASES DRAFT POLICY ON OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE USE IN NATIONAL FORESTS AND GRASSLANDS

WASHINGTON, July 7, 2004— U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service today released its proposal for managing motorized off-highway vehicle (OHV) use in national forests and grasslands, which will enhance recreational opportunities for the public and better protect the environment by requiring units to establish a designated system of roads, trails and areas.

“OHVs are a great way to experience the national forests, but because their popularity has increased in recent years, we need an approach that will sustain natural resource values through more effective management of motor vehicle use. The benefits of improving OHV use include enhanced protection of habitat and aquatic, soil, air and cultural resources,” said Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth. “The Forest Service wants to improve its management by balancing the public’s enjoyment of using OHVs with ensuring the best possible care of the land.”

In 2002, national forests and grasslands had more than 214 million visits. Nationally, the number of OHV users climbed sevenfold in the last 30 years--from five million in 1972 to 36 million in 2000. OHV users account for about 1.8 million or five percent of visitors to national forests and grasslands. Currently each of the 155 national forests and 21 grasslands has guidelines regarding OHV use, with some national forests managing use on a designated system of roads, trails and areas, while other do not. As a result, the Forest Service does not have a clear, consistent policy regarding motor vehicle use on national forests and grasslands.

The proposed rule represents a nationally consistent approach to travel management by requiring each forest and grassland to designate a system of roads, trails and areas slated for motor vehicle use. It would allow national forests to denote use of routes and areas by vehicle type and, if appropriate, by time of year. Once the designation process is complete, OHV use would be confined to designated routes and areas, and OHV use off these routes (cross-country travel) would be prohibited. Snowmobile use would continue to be managed as it is currently—allowed, restricted or prohibited on roads and trails and in areas on National Forest System lands.

“While some forests have begun to designate roads, trails, and areas for OHVs, I expect units to make significant progress in improving management of OHVs in the next two years,” said Bosworth. “We want to improve our management of outdoor recreation by having a system of routes and areas offering the best opportunities for OHV use while still meeting our responsibility to sustain National Forest System lands and resources.”

The proposed rule calls for the Forest Service to continue to engage with motorized sports enthusiasts, conservationists, state agencies, local governments, **tribal governments**, and others to identify routes offering the best opportunities for OHV use while still meeting its responsibility to protect the environment. The public would continue to be allowed to participate in the process of designating roads, trails, and areas or revising designations and would continue to receive advance notice to allow for public comment on proposed or revised designations. The agency has partnered with these groups in the past to provide enhanced motorized recreation opportunities by constructing, marking, maintaining and restoring trails as well as by providing training and safety instruction to users.

OHVs include motor vehicles that are designed or retrofitted primarily for recreational use off road, such as minibikes, amphibious vehicles, snowmobiles, motorcycles, go-carts, motorized trail bikes, and dune buggies.

The agency is accepting comments for 60 days after the proposal is published in the Federal Register. The rule text submitted to the Office of the Federal Register is available on www.fs/fed/us. Written comments may be sent to:

Proposed Rule for Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use
c/o Content Analysis Team
P.O. Box 221150
Salt Lake City, Utah 84122-1150

Comments also will be accepted by electronic mail to trvman@fs.fed.us or by facsimile to 801-517-1014. Comments also may be submitted by following the instructions at the federal eRulemaking portal at <http://www.regulations.gov>. All comments will be analyzed and addressed in promulgation of a final rule.