

Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest
Travel Management, Subpart B
Purpose and Need, and Proposed Action
December 22, 2014

Background
In 2005, in an effort to address negative resource impacts resulting from unmanaged motorized recreation, the Forest Service published the Motorized Travel Management Rule (36 CFR 212). This Rule requires that all national forests and grasslands designate roads, trails, and areas that are open to motor vehicle use. Designations are to be made by class of vehicle and, if appropriate, by time of year, and to be displayed on a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM). Motor vehicle use off designated roads and trails and outside designated areas would then be prohibited by regulation (36 CFR 261.13). The MVUM is to be updated and published annually, as travel planning will be an ongoing process. The rule also contains provisions for limited motor vehicle use within a specified distance of designated roads in order to access dispersed camping and for parking.

In 2006 the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest set forth with the goal of establishing a clearly defined system of roads, trails, and areas where motorized use could occur across a 4 million acre landscape. Toward that end, the Forest hosted meetings and comment opportunities, gathering input from groups and individuals. Resource specialists worked to analyze effects of several alternative motorized travel systems. Given the size of the forest, environmental issues, and extensive existing road and trail system, the analysis was too complex to be covered in a single document. The Okanogan-Wenatchee Forest Supervisor decided to reconsider the approach, taking on the task in a smaller, more manageable, and ultimately more responsive way.

The interdisciplinary team was reconvened to analyze components of the Travel Management Rule that can be applied consistently across the forest, namely the effects of maintaining the existing open motorized roads and trails for the uses currently authorized, and closing the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest to motorized cross-country travel.

In subsequent years, each District will have the opportunity to consider changes to that motorized system in response to public and resource management needs. Site specific road access and management decisions will continue to be made at the district level; allowing for additional public involvement. The many comments already collected will be available to each ranger district so that information can be used in future travel management proposals.

Purpose and Need
The purpose and need of this project is to implement the requirements of the 2005 Motorized Travel Management Rule. In order to do this and publish an MVUM, there is a need to:

- Prohibit motor vehicle travel off of the designated system of motorized roads and trails¹,
- Provide for motorized access to dispersed camping along select designated system roads, and
- Amend the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forest Land and Resource Management Plans to clarify that, expect for over-snow vehicle use, areas, roads, and trails shall be closed to motor vehicles unless specifically designated as open on an MVUM.

¹ The Travel Management Rule defines limited exceptions to the cross-country travel prohibition.
The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest currently manages a system of roads and trails open to motorized travel as listed in the Forest Travel Management Atlas. Each road is assigned a maintenance level\(^2\), and each trail is designated as motorized or non-motorized. Motorized trails are designated for a specific vehicle class\(^3\). There are existing seasonal closures on some roads and trails on the Forest. The Okanogan National Forest Travel Plan (April 2005) designates area closures, specific road and trail restrictions, and open routes through area closures on the Methow Valley and Tonasket Ranger Districts. Additional closure orders are used to limit or prohibit motorized vehicles on some roads and trails on these districts. The Chelan, Entiat, Wenatchee River, Cle Elum, and Naches Ranger Districts also use closure orders to limit or prohibit motorized vehicles on some roads and trails, and in some areas, but these orders are not shown on one consolidated map. Some roads on the Forest are identified as open for motorized mixed use, meaning a specific type of unlicensed vehicle is authorized to operate on roads open to highway legal vehicles.

Cross-country motorized use is currently allowed on approximately 2.4 million acres of National Forest System Land, as long as no resource damage occurs. This includes motorized use on maintenance level 1, decommissioned, and unauthorized roads not covered by seasonal or individual closures. In fact, the Okanogan Travel Plan specifically states that unlicensed OHVs may be driven on roads that are blocked with rocks, trees or earthen barriers, and not open for passenger cars or trucks. Under this existing Travel Plan, once a road is blocked, it is considered part of the cross-country landscape, and therefore open unless designated closed. Despite regulations against creating resource damage, such damage has occurred in some areas from cross-country motorized use. Many unauthorized motorized trails and roads have been created by motorized recreational use on the Forest.

The Travel Management Rule allows for limited corridors to be designated for motorized access to dispersed camping. The Okanogan Forest Plan requires provision for a variety of recreational experiences (p. 4-38), of which motorized dispersed camping is an important part. The Wenatchee Forest Plan does not include the same standard and guideline, but requires that dispersed recreation sites be evaluated to determine if they meet present and future public expectations, needs, and desires, and if they have the resource capability of sustaining present or future levels of visitor use (p. IV-65). Open roads currently provide motorized access for dispersed camping across the Forest. A network of unauthorized or user-created access routes to dispersed campsites has developed over the years as people have driven off system roads to popular areas. Although some areas are currently closed to cross-country travel by orders or the Okanogan Travel Plan, most areas adjacent to open roads are currently open to cross-country travel since off-road use is not expressly prohibited.

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\(^2\) Definitions of road maintenance levels, from FSH 7709.58, 10, 12.3:
- Maintenance Level 1: assigned to intermittent service roads during the time they are closed to vehicular traffic
- Maintenance Level 2: roads open for use by high-clearance vehicles
- Maintenance Level 3: roads open and maintained for travel by prudent drivers in a standard passenger car. User comfort and convenience are low priorities.
- Maintenance Level 4: roads that provide a moderate degree of user comfort and convenience at moderate travel speeds.
- Maintenance Level 5: roads that provide a high degree of user comfort and convenience.

\(^3\) Unlicensed vehicles are divided into 3 classes: greater than 50 inches wide, such as a 4x4; less than 50 inches wide, such as an ATV; or motorcycle.
Proposed Action

The Forest Supervisor for the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest proposes to close the Forest to cross-country motorized travel off the existing open system roads (maintenance levels 2-5) and existing open system motorized trails. All system roads currently open for motorized use (maintenance levels 2-5) would remain open to highway legal vehicles during the existing seasons of use, with existing designations for vehicle types. All motorized system trails would remain open to current vehicle designations (greater than 50 inches, less than 50 inches, or motorcycle) during the existing seasons of use.

The Travel Management Rule does not require reconsideration of past management decisions, and the Forest is not proposing changes to existing road maintenance levels, or to the use designation of trails. The proposed action would make the following changes:

- Prohibit cross-country motor vehicle use off the existing system of roads and trails.
- All maintenance level 1 roads would be closed to motorized vehicles, unless currently part of a motorized system trail, in accordance with Forest Service Handbook direction (FSH 7709.58, 10, 12.3).
- Allow motor vehicle use up to 30 feet from the edge of all open system roads for parking, and up to 10 feet off the side of motorized trails to allow safe passage of other vehicles, as long as resource damage does not occur.
- Allow managed motor vehicle use off approximately 1,840 miles, or approximately 34% of currently open road for the purpose of accessing dispersed camp sites (as shown on the Proposed Action Map). The corridors would be 300 feet wide from the road centerline, on both sides of these roads. Within corridors, motorized vehicles would be restricted to existing routes, and vehicles would not be permitted within 100 feet of water. Some routes within these corridors have been improved to reduce environmental impacts. Fences, boulders or other barricades, and signs define the acceptable travel routes. At these sites, vehicles would be allowed on the defined route, regardless of the proximity to water.
- Amend the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forest Plans to make them consistent with the Travel Management Rule as follows:

  The Okanogan Forest Plan currently contains the following forest-wide standard and guideline:
  17-3 Areas, roads, and trails shall be designated open, closed, or restricted to motorized use to conform to management goals. These designations shall be displayed in the Forest travel plan (USDA 1989 page 4-50).

  This would be amended as follows:
  17-3 Except for over-snow vehicle use; areas, roads, and trails shall be closed to motor vehicles unless specifically designated as open on the motor vehicle use map. Open, closed, and restricted areas, roads, and trails shall conform to the goals of the management area. Project-specific NEPA decisions may be made on a case-by-case basis to open, close, or restrict roads, trails, and areas based on the goals of the management areas; these changes would be displayed on future motor vehicle use maps. Over-snow vehicle use areas, roads, and trails shall be open, closed, or restricted consistent with the goals of the management area and designated on a map depicting authorized use.
The Wenatchee Forest Plan currently contains the following forest-wide standard and guidelines:

**Road Operation**

1. Road closures – The decision to close any Forest Road will be made on a case by case basis. Unless there is a resource need documented in the project analysis, currently open roads will remain open and newly constructed roads will be closed to public access by vehicle (USDA 1990, page IV-102).

**Trail System Maintenance and Operation**

1. The Forest trail system will provide for use by all specified modes of transportation as contained in the management prescriptions (USDA 1990 page IV-69).

These would be amended as follows:

**Road Operation**

1. Except for over-snow vehicle use, roads shall be closed to motor vehicle use unless specifically designated as open on the motor vehicle use map. Open, closed, and restricted roads shall conform to the goals of the management area. Project-specific NEPA decisions may be made on a case-by-case basis to open, close, or restrict roads, trails, and areas based on the goals of the management area with changes displayed on the subsequent motor vehicle use map. Over-snow vehicle use on National Forest System roads may be allowed, restricted, or prohibited consistent with the management area prescription.

**Trail System Maintenance and Operation**

1. The Forest trail system will provide for use by all specified modes of transportation as contained in the management prescriptions. Except for over-snow vehicle use, trails shall be closed to motor vehicle use unless specifically designated as open on the motor vehicle use map. Open, closed, and restricted trails shall conform to the goals of the management area. Project-specific NEPA decisions may be made to open, close, or restrict trails based on the goals of the management area with changes displayed on the subsequent motor vehicle use map. Over-snow vehicle use on National Forest System trails may be allowed, restricted, or prohibited consistent with the management area prescription.

The Wenatchee Forest Plan would additionally be amended to add the following standard and guideline (IV-69):

**Motorized Areas**

1. Except for over-snow vehicle use, areas shall be closed to motorized vehicles except where specifically designated open on the motor vehicle use map. Open, closed, and restricted areas shall conform to the goals of the management area. Project-specific NEPA decisions may be made to open, close, or restrict areas based on the goals of the management area with changes displayed on the subsequent motor vehicle use map. Over-snow vehicle use on National Forest System areas may be allowed, restricted, or prohibited consistent with the management area prescription.