

**Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)
for the
Tusayan Ranger District
Travel Management Project**

Kaibab National Forest
Coconino County, Arizona

Introduction

The Decision Notice (DN) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Tusayan Ranger District Travel Management Project are presented here. The Decision Notice documents my decision and provides my explanation of the management and environmental reasons I used to make my decision. The FONSI presents the reasons why I find this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment and therefore an environmental impact statement will not be prepared.

The Environmental Assessment completed for this project is incorporated by reference in this Decision Notice/FONSI. The Decision Notice/FONSI documents the following:

- Background information regarding my decision;
- My decision to select Alternative 3 *as modified*;
- The rationale for my decision;
- The alternatives considered;
- A Finding of No Significant Impact;
- The implementation date;
- The rights to appeal and administrative review;
- Contact information; and
- My signature and date, as the responsible official.

Background

The proposed travel management project for the Tusayan Ranger District of the Kaibab National Forest (KNF) is intended to improve the management of motorized vehicle use on the District in accordance with the Travel Management Rule. An EA was prepared to document the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects of the proposed action and alternatives to the proposed action. An open, inclusive approach was used in the planning process to help me make this decision. My intent is to continue with this approach as we implement the travel management rule. Although I make this decision based on the best available science and information currently on hand, it is not without some uncertainty or risk. I fully expect that by placing an emphasis on monitoring, any identified course for corrections or adjustments will be made.

I want to note that the EA and this decision are somewhat different than those done for more typical vegetation management projects. This project has revealed some deep-rooted social values that are difficult to capture and address, especially when considering the rules and regulations the Forest is required to implement. In my judgment though, the changes and restrictions that will result from this decision will be largely beneficial for the cultural and natural resources we all enjoy on the Kaibab National Forest. The decision I am making will provide for ample opportunities for the public to continue to enjoy the Tusayan Ranger District of the Kaibab National Forest and will also substantially reduce the potential for resource damage in environmentally sensitive areas.

In July 2010, the Tusayan Ranger District began the official 30-day comment period for the Tusayan Ranger District Travel Management Project Environmental Assessment (EA). A legal notice was published in the *Arizona Daily Sun* on July 30, 2010 inviting public comment on the Proposed Action and EA. The comment period provided an opportunity for the public to provide early and meaningful participation on the proposed action prior to a decision being made.

I have made my decision after careful review and consideration of the public comments and analyses prepared for this project. I considered the public input received during the Tusayan travel analysis process (TAP) in the fall of 2006 (which was updated in 2008 to more closely follow the proposed travel analysis guidance in Forest Service Manual (FSM) 7710.2). I also considered all comments collected during scoping, as well as individual comments received throughout the planning process. I have reviewed the other alternatives presented in the EA, the alternative maps and the non-significant amendment to the Forest Plan. The following pages document my decision and rationale for selecting Alternative 3, as amended.

Decision

1. The Decision

Based on the EA completed for this project and comments received from scoping and public review of the EA and proposed action, it is my decision to select and implement Alternative 3 with the modifications listed below. Alternative 3 with modifications is hereafter referred to as the Selected Alternative.

My decision modifies Alternative 3 in two ways:

1. By dropping the proposed motorized dispersed camping corridors along 28.5 miles of roads, and
2. By only adding 15 miles (approximately) of short spur roads to the designated system that have historically served as access to dispersed camping sites and other activities on the District rather than 16 miles as proposed.

My decision to modify Alternative 3 is based on consideration of the public comments and the EA prepared for this project. In comparing the analyses for Alternatives 3 and 4 (Chapter 3), dropping the proposed motorized dispersed camping corridors will reduce the potential for effects to natural resources and cultural sites on approximately 2080 acres and therefore better meet the purpose and need for action (Chapter 1 Section 1.3). Detailed assessment in the EA also identified 10 short spur roads (adding up to just over 1 mile) that are not suitable to be added to the road system at this time because of potential safety concerns and not meeting maintenance

level 2 standards (Chapter 3 Section 3.1). In addition to the 10 road segments, I also find that it would not be appropriate to add three road segments (Spurs 45, 110 and 152) because they fall within goshawk nesting areas and adding these roads runs counter to our Forest Plan guidance (Chapter 3 Section 3.5). Therefore, even though these actions/roads were carried forward throughout the analysis and were a part of the proposed action, I have chosen to modify Alternative 3 in an effort to improve the management of motorized vehicle use on the Tusayan Ranger District (TRD) while providing for public safety.

The modifications for the Selected Alternative fall within the effects analysis discussed in the Tusayan Ranger District Travel Management Project Environmental Assessment (December 2010). The effects would be slightly less than those discussed for Alternative 3 and there would be no new direct, indirect, or cumulative effects.

My decision includes a non-significant amendment to the Kaibab National Forest Land Management Plan (DN, Appendix 1) to make the plan compliant with the Travel Management Rule (TMR) and will result in the publication of a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) showing those roads, trails and areas designated for motor vehicle use on the Tusayan Ranger District.

2. Features of the Selected Alternative

To meet the purpose and need for action in accordance with the Travel Management Rule, implementation of Selected Alternative, (Alternative 3 as modified) will do the following:

- Amend the KNF Forest Plan to prohibit motorized travel off of designated routes on the Tusayan Ranger District, except as identified on the MVUM.
- Change approximately 143 miles of roads open to motorized travel to open to administrative use only.
- Add approximately 15 miles of short spur roads to the designated system. These routes have historically provided access to the forest for a variety of recreational activities including motorized dispersed camping.
- Allow the limited use of motor vehicles within one mile of all designated system roads (except where prohibited) to retrieve a downed elk by an individual who has legally taken that animal.
 - Legally harvested elk may be retrieved during all legal elk hunting seasons, as designated by the Arizona Game and Fish Department, and for 24 hours following the end of each season.
 - Only one vehicle (one trip in and one trip out) would be allowed for Motorized Big Game Retrieval (MBGR) per harvested animal.
 - Hunters will be required to use the most direct and least ground disturbing route in and out of the area to accomplish the retrieval.
 - MBGR would not be allowed in existing off road travel restricted areas, or when conditions are such that travel would cause damage to natural and/or cultural resources.
 - Motorized vehicles would not be permitted to cross riparian areas, streams and rivers except at hardened crossings or crossings with existing culverts.

The Selected Alternative would result in a designated road system on the Tusayan Ranger District with approximately 566 miles of road open to motor vehicle use by the public, including the newly added 15 miles of short road segments. One hundred and forty-three miles of road (not included in the total miles mentioned above) will be restricted to administrative use only and closed to public use to allow limited use of these roads for administrative purposes such as continued administration of commercial fuelwood permits and timber sale contracts.

Fuelwood Gathering and Special Forest Products Management Strategy

I am well aware that fuelwood and Special Forest Product (SFP) collection on the Tusayan Ranger District is a popular and necessary activity for many local users of the National Forest. I can assure you that the District will continue to offer fuelwood and Special Forest Product (SFP) permits to meet local demands. The District will also continue to accommodate the collection of special forest products and fuelwood by Native Americans for traditional use per the existing MOU and law, regulation, and policy. Fuelwood/SFP gathering will continue to be permitted on the Tusayan Ranger District, provided that:

- 1) The permittee does not travel off of designated open system roads (except for roadside parking) and is in compliance with permit stipulations; or,
- 2) The permittee is in a designated area that authorizes off road travel for fuelwood/SFP collection.

Areas that allow fuelwood/SFP collection off of the designated open roads are, and will continue to be approved through subsequent site-specific environmental analysis and authorization.

3. Mitigation Measures Specific to the Selected Alternative

Mitigation measures were developed to ensure environmental effects remain at acceptable levels during implementation of the project (Chapter 2 Section 2.5). The Forest Service will apply the following mitigation measures to the Selected Alternative:

- Prohibit the use of motor vehicles, including for the purpose of retrieving a legally taken elk, when it results in damage to natural and cultural resources and/or compromises the ability of the Forest Service to meet management objectives.
- Implement the Wet Weather Roads Policy (see glossary in EA) when soil moisture conditions and the potential for road and resource damage exist. Implementation of the policy is at the discretion of the Forest Supervisor or District Ranger.
- Implement Appendix B “Design Features, Best Management Practices, and Mitigation Measures” in the “Final Environmental Impact Statement for Integrated Treatment of Noxious or Invasive Weeds on the Coconino, Kaibab, and Prescott National Forests within Coconino, Gila, Mojave, and Yavapai Counties, Arizona” (2004).

4. Monitoring Specific to the Selected Alternative

Monitoring entails the gathering of information and observation of management activities to ensure that Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines as well as the objectives of the project are being met. Forest Plan monitoring and evaluation items will be implemented where appropriate. Additional monitoring needs were also compiled for this project to validate assumptions used in this planning process, and to verify that the project is being implemented as intended. This

analysis includes the following project specific monitoring:

- Monitor the road system during administration of the District and determine if there are roads that could be decommissioned or obliterated in future planning projects.
- Areas with limited use of motor vehicles for the purposes of big game retrieval will be monitored to assess for damage to natural and cultural resources and/or frequently occurring actions that compromise the ability of the Forest Service to meet management objectives. This monitoring will occur in conjunction with other project or management activities, including enforcement of the Wet Weather Roads Policy.
 - If soil damage and/or excessive damage to vegetation are discovered, the Forest Service will take the necessary action to move the area into compliance with the Forest Plan. This may include temporarily or permanently closing areas to motorized vehicle use. All permanent closure proposals will follow the required NEPA process.
- Designated roads as well as closed roads will be monitored periodically for ruts, erosion, or sedimentation of water bodies. This monitoring will occur in conjunction with other project or management activities, including enforcement of the Wet Weather Roads Policy.
 - If damage, erosion, or sedimentation of water bodies is discovered, the Forest Service may repair or upgrade the roads and routes. Temporary or permanent closures of roads may be necessary. Decommissioning or obliteration of closed roads (i.e. block access, rip compaction, re-vegetate) may be necessary. All closure, decommissioning, or obliteration proposals will follow the required NEPA process.
- Forest Service personnel will continue to do annual invasive exotic weed inventory and monitoring in conjunction with other project or management activities. Areas targeted for weed surveys will include all roads and unauthorized routes.
 - If weed populations are discovered, the Forest Service may temporarily close specific roads and/or areas that allow motorized vehicle use for big game retrieval, until the weeds are controlled.
- Known rare plant populations will be monitored periodically for impacts. Surveys for new populations of rare plants will be conducted periodically in conjunction with other project and management work in the area.
 - If new rare plant populations are discovered, the Forest Service may close specific roads, road segments, or prohibit the use of motorized vehicles for the retrieval of legally taken big game in the area. Road or area closures or road decommissioning may be needed if motorized vehicle travel is harming or has the potential to harm rare plants. All closure proposals will follow the required NEPA process.
- Monitor motor vehicle use during administration of the District for compliance with the Motorized Vehicle Use Map and forest closures. Adjust management strategies as needed to increase compliance.

Rationale for the Decision

I made my decision based on the best science and information available and carefully considered applicable laws, regulations and policy. I also considered the information disclosed in the EA, the Forest Plan and the project record. I considered how the alternatives in the EA met the stated Purpose and Need for Action, and how they addressed the key issues. I carefully considered public, tribal governments, and State and other Federal agencies' comments. In summary, my decision to select Alternative 3 with modifications is based on the following factors:

1. How the alternative meets the Purpose and Need for Action.
2. How the alternative addresses the Key Issues developed from scoping.
3. How the alternative affects economic, social, and environmental resources.
4. How the alternative responds to public comment.

1. Meeting the Purpose and Need for Action (Section 1.3 of the EA)

The purpose of this action is to improve the management of motorized vehicle use on National Forest System lands on the Tusayan Ranger District (TRD) of the Kaibab National Forest (KNF) in accordance with the Travel Management Rule (36 CFR 212, 251 and 261). The action is needed to:

- **Amend the KNF Plan to prohibit motor vehicle use off the designated system of roads, trails, and areas on the district, except as displayed on the MVUM.** Currently, the KNF Plan allows for motorized travel off of forest roads on the district. Amending the plan will bring travel management policies in compliance with the Rule which prohibits use off of the designated system once the MVUM is published.
- **Reduce adverse resource impacts caused by roads and motorized cross country travel in order to maintain and restore the health of ecosystems and watersheds.** Some existing system roads are creating unacceptable resource damage while cross country travel has resulted in the creation of unauthorized roads, many of which can damage and/or provide unwanted motorized access to sensitive resources on the TRD.
- **Provide for motorized dispersed camping and motorized retrieval of legally taken big game animals.** These popular activities each present social and environmental implications that need to be addressed in the implementation of the Rule. Cooperation with State agencies in achieving game and habitat management objectives while protecting other forest resources is directed by the KNF Plan and other regional and national guidance.

I find that Alternative 1 does not comply with the Purpose and Need for Action since it would continue with the current management of the District transportation system and not implement the Travel Management Rule. Implementation of Alternative 1 would not restrict motor vehicle use or make any needed changes to the transportation system. Motorized cross country travel would continue to be allowed, except in the areas currently closed to off road vehicle travel; existing roads would remain open and unchanged. Motorized dispersed camping and motorized big game retrieval would continue to be allowed across the District. Unauthorized routes would continue to be available for public use, and would likely increase in number. The wet weather road system would continue to be implemented when necessary. A Forest Plan Amendment

would not be included under the No Action alternative to prohibit cross country travel, and Plan language would remain unchanged.

After careful review and consideration, I find that the action alternatives analyzed in the EA, including the selected alternative, meet the purpose and need for action and the requirements of the travel management rule. The Selected Alternative best addresses the purpose and need for action by reducing adverse resource impacts on 143 miles of roads and substantially reducing motorized cross country travel while continuing to provide a variety of recreational opportunities.

2. Addressing Key Issues (Section 1.11 of the EA)

The Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) used scoping comments from the public, tribal governments, State and other Federal agencies to identify the key issues to be analyzed. Two key issues were identified for this project and those issues, along with the indicator(s) of each issue are described in Chapter 1 Section 1.11. The following is a brief summary of how the alternatives responded to each key issue and indicator.

Alternative 1 – No Action

Key Issue 1 – The proposed action would restrict motorized recreation opportunities because some of the roads that are proposed to be closed to the public are used for motorized touring.

Alternative 1 provides for 709 miles of national forest system roads open to motorized use, which includes existing system roads and known unauthorized roads. As a result, there would be little to no restrictions on motorized recreation opportunities and motorized cross country travel would continue to be authorized. This alternative would not restrict access on any roads identified as having resource concerns and would not implement any restrictions on motorized big game retrieval.

Key Issue 2 – The proposed action allows for motorized dispersed camping and motorized big game retrieval across a large area of the district and is not used sparingly.

Alternative 1 would continue to allow for motorized dispersed camping across the entire District, except in areas currently restricted. Motorized big game retrieval would continue to be allowed for all big game species across the entire District, except where cross country travel is already prohibited.

Overall, Alternative 1 does not meet the stated Purpose and Need for Action and does not adequately address all of the Key Issues. Alternative 1 would not bring the District into compliance with the Travel Management Rule and would not make any changes to the District's transportation system to address resource concerns. Compared with the Selected Alternative and other alternatives analyzed in detail, implementing Alternative 1 would respond the best to Key Issue 1 because it would keep the current condition of having unrestricted travel and retain the most miles of road for public use. This Alternative is reflective of many comments we received by the public who desire to continue to allow cross-country travel and not change the District's transportation system. However, Alternative 1 would not address Key Issue 2 because it does not restrict cross country travel for any purpose. Motorized dispersed camping and motorized big game retrieval would not be used sparingly and user created routes are projected to increase

across the District.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

Key Issue 1 – *The proposed action would restrict motorized recreation opportunities because some of the roads that are proposed to be closed to the public are used for motorized touring.*

Alternative 2 provides for 546 miles across the District of national forest system roads open to motorized use. This alternative would prohibit motorized cross country travel (except as identified on the MVUM), and change 163 miles of District roads that were identified in the TAP as having resource concerns to administrative use only. Approximately 20 miles of the roads to be restricted to administrative use only were identified during scoping by the public as part of motorized route and loop touring opportunities; these would be closed with Alternative 2.

Key Issue 2 – *The proposed action allows for motorized dispersed camping and motorized big game retrieval across a large area of the district and is not used sparingly.*

Under Alternative 2, motorized big game retrieval would be restricted to elk only, and hunters would be restricted to one trip in and one trip out when retrieving their game. Motor vehicles would be restricted to traveling no more than one mile off of the designated road in order to retrieve their elk and prohibited from entering closure areas.

Alternative 2 would allow the limited use of motor vehicles for the purposes of dispersed camping within 300 feet on approximately 28.5 miles of NFS roads. This could potentially affect natural and cultural resources on approximately 2080 acres. Alternative 2 would also add approximately 16 miles of short spur roads to the designated system that have historically served as access to dispersed camping sites (and other activities) on the District. Roadside parking would be allowed along the open road system unless posted otherwise.

Overall, I find that Alternative 2 is consistent with the travel management rule and meets the stated purpose and need for action. Compared with the Selected Alternative, Alternative 2 does not address Key Issue 1 as well as the Selected Alternative because it would restrict motorized recreation opportunities on approximately 20 more miles of road. Additionally, Alternative 2 also does not address Key Issues 2 as well as the Selected Alternative because of the potential resource impacts from incorporating camping corridors.

The Selected Alternative – Alternative 3 (modified)

Key Issue 1 – *The proposed action would restrict motorized recreation opportunities because some of the roads that are proposed to be closed to the public are used for motorized touring.*

The Selected Alternative provides for 566 miles of national forest system roads open to motorized use. The Selected Alternative would prohibit motorized cross country travel (except as identified on the MVUM), and change 143 miles of national forest system roads to be restricted to administrative use only which were identified in the TAP as having resource concerns. While this alternative restricts motor vehicle use on 143 miles of road to administrative use only, it provides for an additional 20 miles of open national forest system roads than Alternative 2.

Key Issue 2 – *The proposed action allows for motorized dispersed camping and motorized big game retrieval across a large area of the district and is not used sparingly.*

While the Selected Alternative allows for motorized big game retrieval, it places limitations on these activities. MBGR is limited to a single species, elk, and hunters would be restricted to one trip in and one trip out when retrieving their game. Motor vehicles would be restricted to traveling no more than one mile off of the designated road in order to retrieve their elk and prohibited from entering closure areas.

The Selected Alternative modified Alternative 3 by dropping the proposed motorized dispersed camping corridors along 28.5 miles of roads. The Selected Alternative, Alternative 3 as modified, would add approximately 15 miles of short spur roads to the designated system that have historically provided access to the forest for a variety of recreational activities including motorized dispersed camping. Roadside parking would be allowed along the open road system unless posted otherwise.

Overall, I find that the Selected Alternative is consistent with the travel management rule and meets the stated purpose and need for action. I find it adequately addresses the Key Issues identified and the comments that were submitted during this planning process. It prohibits motorized travel off the designated system except as identified on the MUVM and reduces the potential risks for effects to natural and cultural resources as compared with Alternatives 1 and 2.

Compared with Alternative 1, I find that my decision to select Alternative 3, as modified, would allow for motorized big game retrieval sparingly. Current conditions and existing policy allow an unlimited number of trips for all aspects of hunting that includes scouting, MBGR for all species with no limit on the distance traveled from system roads, no restrictions on seasons or weather conditions and no requirement for use of a direct route. The selected alternative applies limits on all of these currently unlimited activities.

When compared with Alternative 2, the Selected Alternative responds better to Key Issue 2 because it retains approximately 20 miles of road identified by the public as opportunities for motorized touring that would not be available with the changes in the proposed action. The Selected Alternative also responds better to Key Issue 2 than Alternative 2 because it reduces the potential risk for effects to natural and cultural resources on approximately 2080 acres.

When considered in combination with the effects of prohibiting cross-country travel and limiting motorized big game retrieval, the Selected Alternative will have substantial beneficial effects over the current condition and I find that the Selected Alternative is the most balanced alternative on both the social and environmental scale.

Alternative 4

Key Issue 1 – *The proposed action would restrict motorized recreation opportunities because some of the roads that are proposed to be closed to the public are used for motorized touring.*

Alternative 4 provides for 566 miles of national forest system roads open to motorized use. It would prohibit motorized cross country travel (except as identified on the MVUM), and change 143 miles of national forest system roads to be restricted to administrative use only

which were identified in the TAP as having resource concerns. While this alternative restricts motor vehicle use on 143 miles of road to administrative use only, it also provides for an additional 20 miles of open national forest system roads than Alternative 2.

Key Issue 2 – *The proposed action allows for motorized dispersed camping and motorized big game retrieval across a large area of the district and is not used sparingly.*

Motorized big game retrieval would be prohibited under this alternative. This alternative does not include any camping corridors, but adds 16 miles of short spur roads that have historically provided access to the forest for a variety of recreational activities including motorized dispersed camping, greatly reducing the potential for impacts compared with Alternatives 1 & 2.

Overall, I find that Alternative 4 meets the purpose and need for action. This alternative is similar in effects to the Selected Alternative because it does not include camping corridors and thus reduces the potential risk for effects to natural and cultural resources on approximately 2080 acres, as compared with Alternative 2 and *the original proposed* Alternative 3. Alternative 4 would also reduce the potential effects on an additional 200 acres (approximately) per year (based on the analysis provided in Section 3.8) as compared to the Selected Alternative by prohibiting motorized big game retrieval motorized cross country travel.

3. Effects to Economic, Social, and Environmental Resources (EA, Chapter 3)

With the Tusayan Ranger District located adjacent to the Grand Canyon National Park, I took special note of the variety of multiple land uses occurring on the District. Activities such as dispersed camping, special use permit motorized tours and outfitter guides, big game hunting, cattle grazing, fuelwood gathering, and Native American cultural activities fill a niche for the local communities such as Tusayan, Grand Canyon Village, Williams, Flagstaff, Cameron, and Supai. The District has a long-term relationship working with the Grand Canyon National Park and Tribes to ensure that forest users are well aware of the forest boundaries and motorized vehicle use rules of each area.

I also took into consideration that over the past 10 years the Tusayan District has carefully evaluated road use on the District along with previously existing roads and has closed approximately 100 miles of roads through site-specific NEPA decisions. The current analysis in the EA is a snapshot of existing travel routes and development of subsequent solutions to create a balanced travel management direction for the Tusayan Ranger District.

The EA described the present conditions of the environment on the Tusayan Ranger District. It also disclosed the probable consequences (impacts and effects) of implementing each Alternative (Chapter 2) on selected environmental resources (Chapter 3). The EA provides an analytical basis to compare the Alternatives.

The Selected Alternative can be implemented without significant adverse effects on economic, social and natural resources as documented in the EA (see all of Chapter 3). There are no expected significant adverse effects on Transportation management (Section 3.1), Recreation and Scenic Resources (Section 3.2), the Social and Economic Environment (Section 3.3), Soil and Watershed health (Section 3.4), Wildlife (Section 3.5), Noxious and Invasive Weeds (Section 3.6), Sensitive Plant Species (Section 3.7), Cultural Resources (Section 3.8), Vegetation

Management (Section 3.9), Fire and Fuels Management (Section 3.10), Range resources (Section 3.11), and Other Disclosures (Section 3.12) due in part, to an extensive list of Mitigation Measures (EA, Chapter 2 Section 2.5). The effects are expected to be minor and short in duration. Thus, the Selected Alternative will not affect either the short-term or long-term productivity of the Kaibab National Forest, in terms of sustainability of the resources or outputs associated with them.

Overall, I find that the Selected Alternative has no significant resource or social impacts (EA, Chapter 3). Furthermore, there are no significant adverse cumulative effects expected (EA, Chapter 3). The Mitigation Measures for the Selected Alternative were specifically designed to additionally minimize resource impacts on wildlife, recreation visitors, and other resource impacts (EA, Chapter 2 Section 2.5).

4. Public Comment

I want to thank the individuals, organizations and agencies that participated and provided comments for this analysis. The input was valuable in helping me make my decision.

Public involvement was a key component in the planning and decision making process (see Sections 1.9 and 1.10 of the EA). Public comments were received during the scoping and throughout the planning process. The IDT responded to comments in various ways throughout the NEPA process, including refining alternatives, adding or modifying mitigation and monitoring measures, responding to key issues and enhancing the analysis. Appendix 4 contains the comments received during the comment period and the Forest Service's response to those comments.

The public comment we received on this project was important to me in making my decision. I have reviewed the many public and agency comments we received and the responses to those comments. I have also reviewed the changes from the EA for Comment to the final EA. I want to specifically address some of the comments here in order to better explain my decision.

Significance

Some of the comments received stated that we should prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for this project given the size and scope. In my review of the EA, I find that it appropriately and adequately defines the effects from the federal action and the effects from the non-federal activities. I carefully considered that Tusayan District is bordered on the north by the Grand Canyon National Park, the Havasupai Reservation to the west and the Navajo Reservation to the east, to ensure that any effects defined from the federal action and the non-federal activities are not significant. I also considered that the Tusayan District has worked with the Grand Canyon National Park and Tribal Governments to ensure that boundaries were well established and respective land use rules are enforced.

The analysis in the EA was conducted in compliance with NEPA. Detailed biological, physical and social data were assembled and evaluated in this EA (Chapter 3). Public comments were used to identify key issues (Chapter 1). The Forest Service used an IDT of qualified professionals to conduct a thorough analysis and the effects analysis in Chapter 3 consistently indicated no adverse significant effects were expected. The cumulative effects analysis (Chapter 3) provides an integrated review of relevant biological, physical, and social components and did

not indicate significant adverse effects. The best available and high quality scientific information was used throughout the analysis. Comments received did not refer to or cite better quality information that was relevant to this project that should have been considered. I find the information presented in the EA allows for a meaningful analysis of the environmental impacts of the proposed action and selected alternative by presenting the information in comparative form, sharply defining the issues and providing a clear basis for choice.

Alternatives

We received some comments regarding the range of alternatives and suggestions for additional alternatives. The final EA considered these alternatives, analyzed one of them but did not consider the rest of them in detail (Chapter 2, Section 2.7). I believe that an adequate range of alternatives has been presented in response to public comments that dealt with the key issues as well as the purpose and need for action. Upon review, I agree with the rationale as to why several alternatives were not analyzed in detail.

Fuelwood

Many comments came in regarding the ability to collect fuelwood. This is a popular and necessary activity on the Tusayan Ranger District. The District will continue to accommodate fuelwood collection through a permit system to meet local demands provided that the permittee does not travel off of designated open system roads and is in compliance with permit stipulations; or, the permittee is in a designated area that authorizes off road travel for fuelwood collection.

In choosing the Selected Alternative, I carefully considered the effects of not being able to travel off road for fuelwood. The analysis and anticipated effects on fuelwood gathering are addressed in Section 3.9 of the EA. I am confident that there is an abundant supply of fuelwood that can be found on the District and that the District will continue to meet local demands with implementation of the fuelwood strategy described earlier as part of the features of the Selected Alternative.

Motorized Dispersed Camping Corridors

We received some comments expressing concern about the motorized dispersed camping corridors included in Alternatives 2 and 3. In making my decision to select Alternative 3, as modified, I considered the potential effects and risks to natural and cultural resources from allowing motorized dispersed camping in camping corridors. I find that the District was very proactive in surveying and proposing to add approximately 16 miles of short spur roads to the designated system that have historically provided access to the forest for a variety of recreational activities including motorized dispersed camping on the Tusayan Ranger District. Adding approximately 15 miles of the proposed 16 miles of short spur roads to the road system, which is equates to 156 road segments scattered throughout the District, is expected to reasonably accommodate existing motorized dispersed camping needs with little change from the current use. I also considered the fact that roadside parking is allowed and will continue to be allowed on the side of all open roads when it is safe to do so without causing damage to NFS resources or facilities, unless prohibited by state law, a traffic sign or an order. I concur with the effects analysis in Chapter 3 of the EA that this approach would be sufficient to reduce the potential for resource damage while providing ample opportunities for motorized dispersed camping.

Motorized Big Game Retrieval (MBGR)

Motorized big game retrieval was the most polarizing and controversial topic with the public. Some people wanted MBGR for all species while others commented that it should not be allowed (EA, Appendix 4). In developing the EA we considered a range of alternatives (EA, Sections 2.3 & 2.7), from alternatives that would continue to allow MBGR for all species to an alternative that would not allow MBGR at all. In review of the EA, I find that the Selected Alternative will greatly reduce the potential for resource damage over the current condition. While Alternative 4 would provide the greatest protection, I am fully aware of the impacts of allowing MBGR with this decision (EA, Chapter 3). Allowing MBGR for elk only will assist the District in meeting management objectives outlined in the Forest Plan (EA, Sections 3.2 & 3.5). I find the potential impacts are not significant and that the mitigation and monitoring measures incorporated into this decision will adequately reduce the risk of resource damage.

Summary of Decision Rationale

In making my decision, I considered the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of implementing the Selected Alternative. My decision requires the implementation of mitigation measures to help ensure protection of scenic resources, soils, watershed conditions, wildlife habitat, cultural resources and other resources. I find the mitigation measures will be effective in avoiding or minimizing environmental harm. These mitigation measures, combined with monitoring, ensure the project's objectives will be achieved in an environmentally sensitive manner.

The Selected Alternative best addresses the project's purpose and need for action and responds best to the issues as a whole. When compared to the other alternatives, the Selected Alternative is the most inclusive and complete with regards to the incorporation of site-specific comments from individuals, advocacy groups, and other government entities. As such, we believe that it achieves the best balance between competing interests.

Scientific information and assessments along with many situation-specific judgments are incorporated into this final decision, reflecting the intent to balance our multiple use and resource protection responsibilities. This alternative will continue to provide for motorized recreation opportunities while protecting the forest resources.

Alternatives Considered

Four alternatives were developed and considered in detail in the EA (Chapter 2, Section 2.3). These are discussed below. Seven additional alternatives were considered but dropped from detailed consideration and can be found in Section 2.7 of the EA.

- **Alternative 1 – No Action**

The “No Action” alternative was developed as a benchmark from which the agency can evaluate the proposed action. This alternative maintains current management practices and would not implement the travel management rule.

- **Alternative 2 – Proposed Action**

To meet the Purpose and Need for Action (Section 1.3), the following actions were proposed under Alternative 2 – the Proposed Action:

- Amend the KNF Forest Plan to prohibit motorized travel off of designated routes on the Tusayan Ranger District, unless authorized by an exemption, to be consistent with the language and intent in 36 CFR 212.
- Change approximately 163 miles of roads open to motorized travel to open to administrative use only.
- Add approximately 16 miles of short spur roads to the designated system. These routes have historically provided access to the forest for a variety of recreational activities including motorized dispersed camping.
- Allow the limited use of motor vehicles within 300 feet of the following Forest System Roads (FSR) for the purposes of dispersed camping (Figure 4): 305, 306J, 605M, 328, 301, 302, 303, 306, 347, 688, 2703, 2732, 304, 301, 310, 307 and 320. These approximately 28.5 miles of NFS roads are currently receiving this type of use.
- Allow the limited use of motor vehicles within one mile of all designated system roads (except where prohibited) to retrieve a legally hunted and tagged elk.
 - Legally harvested elk may be retrieved during the legal elk hunting season and for 24 hours following the end of the specific season.
 - Only one vehicle would be allowed for Motorized Big Game Retrieval (MBGR) per harvested animal.
 - A minimum number of trips are to be used to accomplish the retrieval, and the route taken is to be safe and relatively direct, minimizing negative resource impacts.
 - MBGR would not be allowed in existing off road travel restricted areas, or when conditions are such that travel would cause damage to natural and/or cultural resources.
 - Motorized vehicles would not be permitted to cross riparian areas, streams and rivers except at hardened crossings or crossings with existing culverts.
- **Alternative 3**

To meet the Purpose and Need for Action (Section 1.3), the following actions were proposed under Alternative 3:

 - Amend the KNF Forest Plan to prohibit motorized travel off of designated routes on the Tusayan Ranger District, except as identified on the MVUM.
 - Change approximately 143 miles of roads open to motorized travel to open to administrative use only.
 - Add approximately 16 miles of short spur roads to the designated system. These routes have historically provided access to the forest for a variety of recreational activities including motorized dispersed camping.
 - Allow the limited use of motor vehicles within 300 feet of the following National Forest System (NFS) roads for the sole purpose of motorized dispersed camping (Figure 4): 305, 306J, 605M, 328, 301, 302, 303, 306, 347, 688, 2703, 2732, 304, 310, 307 and 320. These approximately 28.5 miles of NFS roads are currently receiving this type of use.

- Allow the limited use of motor vehicles within one mile of all designated system roads (except where prohibited) to retrieve a downed elk by an individual who has legally taken that animal.
 - Legally harvested elk may be retrieved during all legal elk hunting seasons, as designated by the Arizona Game and Fish Department, and for 24 hours following the end of each season.
 - Only one vehicle (one trip in and one trip out) would be allowed for Motorized Big Game Retrieval (MBGR) per harvested animal.
 - Hunters will be required to use the most direct and least ground disturbing route in and out of the area to accomplish the retrieval.
 - MBGR would not be allowed in existing off road travel restricted areas, or when conditions are such that travel would cause damage to natural and/or cultural resources.
 - Motorized vehicles would not be permitted to cross riparian areas, streams and rivers except at hardened crossings or crossings with existing culverts.

NOTE: Alternative 3, considered in detail in the Environmental Assessment (Chapter 2 Section 2.3), was modified in consideration of the public comments and the EA to form the Selected Alternative described earlier in the Decision Notice (p. 2). My decision modifies Alternative 3 by dropping the proposed motorized dispersed camping corridors along 28.5 miles of roads, and by only adding 15 miles (approximately) of short spur roads to the designated system that have historically served as access to dispersed camping sites and other activities on the District rather than 16 miles as proposed.

- **Alternative 4**

To meet the Purpose and Need for Action (Section 1.3), the following actions were proposed under Alternative 4:

- Amend the KNF Forest Plan to prohibit motorized travel off of designated routes on the Tusayan Ranger District, except as identified on the MVUM.
- Change approximately 143 miles of roads open to motorized travel to open to administrative use only.
- Add approximately of 16 miles of short spur roads to the designated system. These routes have historically provided access to the forest for a variety of recreational activities including motorized dispersed camping.

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

I find the Selected Alternative is consistent with applicable federal, state, and local laws and requirements for the protection of the environment and with agency policy and direction. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA. The Selected Alternative is also consistent with the 1988 Land Management Plan for the Kaibab National Forest, as amended.

I have reviewed the environmental effects described in the EA and evaluated whether the Selected Alternative constitutes a significant effect on the quality of the human environment or

whether the environmental impacts would be significant based on their context and intensity as defined by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) using the criteria in the implementing regulations (40 CFR 1508.27).

I have determined that the implementation of the Selected Alternative will not result in any anticipated effects that exceed the level at which a significant effect on the human, biological, or physical environment in terms of context or intensity would occur. Both beneficial and adverse effects have been considered. Beneficial effects have not been used to balance, mask, or off-set adverse effects because there are no significant adverse effects. Any effects from the Selected Alternative are expected to be minor as all actions incorporate monitoring, best management practices and mitigations. These effects are not highly uncertain and do not involve unique and unknown risks. The action will not, in relation with other actions, cause cumulatively significant impacts.

Context

The project is site-specific and by itself, does not have international, national, region-wide or statewide importance (EA, Chapters 1 & 2). The short- or long-term effects from this project are local (EA, Chapter 3).

Environmental Impacts

For this project there are no known significant irreversible resource commitments or irretrievable losses of timber production, recreation opportunities, wildlife habitats, or soil productivity. The environmental assessment provides sufficient information to determine that this project will not have any significant adverse impacts and that implementation of the Selected Alternative will be beneficial to natural and cultural resources (EA, Chapter 3).

Public Health and Safety

The project activities will comply with all state and federal regulations. There are no adverse effects expected to public health or safety under any of the Alternatives (EA, Chapter 3 Section 3.1).

Unique Characteristics of the Area

I find there will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the Tusayan Ranger District such as historic or cultural resources, parklands, prime farmlands, wetlands, floodplains, wild and scenic rivers, Wilderness areas or ecologically critical areas. I carefully considered that Tusayan District is bordered on the north by the Grand Canyon National Park, the Havasupai Reservation to the west and the Navajo Reservation to the east, to ensure that any effects defined from the federal action and the non-federal activities are not significant. The Selected Alternative will have no adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic places, and there is no loss of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources (EA, Chapter 3 Section 3.8). Implementation of the Selected Alternative will not change nor negatively or adversely affect approximately 9,695 acres or three percent of the Tusayan District that is currently administratively closed to motorized cross country travel. This includes the Coconino Rim and Red Butte areas (EA, Chapter 3 Section 3.2); Coconino Rim is an inventoried roadless area while both areas are classified as semi-primitive non-motorized in the Forest Plan. The Selected Alternative is also not likely to adversely affect any ecologically critical areas important to any Management Indicator Species nor any Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive Species found on the District (EA, Chapter 3 Section 3.5).

Controversy over Effects

I recognize that elements of the Selected Alternative have generated controversy; however, there is no substantiated scientific controversy over the effects as described. The protection of natural and cultural resources as well as the opposing opinions related to the motorized recreation opportunities and non-motorized recreation opportunities were addressed during alternative development (EA, Chapter 1 Section 1.9).

Uncertainty

The effects analyses in Chapter 3 of the EA show the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. Mitigation measures, management requirements, standard practices, and monitoring will ensure effects are within the expected parameters (EA, Chapter 2 Sections 2.5 & 2.6).

Precedent

I find that implementation of the Selected Alternative is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects. Making changes to the designated system of roads based on the need to reduce adverse resource impacts does not establish a precedent for future actions or represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. Procedures are in place to periodically revise the MVUM to accommodate changes to the designated system as a result of future management decisions. Any future actions that alter the designated road system, alter motorized big game retrieval restrictions or affect motorized dispersed camping opportunities will have to be evaluated under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for significant effects.

Cumulative Effects

The Selected Alternative was evaluated in the context of other past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions (Appendix 2). When considering other activities within the area affected, the cumulative effects of implementing the Selected Alternative are anticipated to be minor and are not likely to impede the attainment of Forest Plan goals and objectives (EA, Chapter 3). This action does not result in cumulatively significant effects.

Properties on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places

I find that the action will have no adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. (EA, Chapter 3 Section 3.8). The State Historic Preservation Office concurred with these findings on August 26, 2010.

Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species (TES)

The BE completed for wildlife species determined that the Selected Alternative would *not jeopardize the continued existence* of California condors. The action *would not affect* Mexican spotted owls, Mexican spotted owl critical habitat, Sonoran Desert Area bald eagles, and black-footed ferrets because the Tusayan Ranger District is either outside of their range and/or the District lacks suitable habitat. Other species listed under the Endangered Species Act and identified by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service for Coconino Counties would not be affected by the project because the Tusayan Ranger District is either outside of their range and/or the District lacks suitable habitat.

The BE completed for plant species determined that the proposed action will have No Impact upon plant species listed as sensitive. The wildlife BE determined that the proposal will have No Impact upon the majority of the Forest's sensitive species and May Impact individuals of some species but would not cause a trend towards Federal listing or result in loss of viability in the planning area. Species specific information is included within the BE (project record and summarized in EA Sections 3.5 and 3.7).

I concur with the determinations made within these documents.

Violations of Federal, State, or Local Law or Requirements

The action will not violate Federal, State or local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. The action is consistent with the Kaibab Forest Plan, as amended with this decision. The Kaibab National Forest conducted extensive government to government consultations with all concerned tribes (EA Section 4.1).

Summary

I find that the decision and Environmental Assessment are in compliance with all Federal, State, and local environmental protection laws. Based on the EA and the above considerations, I find that the Selected Alternative is not a major action and it will not constitute a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, it does not require the preparation of an environmental impact statement.

Administrative Review (Appeal) Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to regulations at 36 CFR 215. Those who provided comments during the comment period are eligible to appeal the decision under the regulations. The appeal must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, express delivery or messenger service) with the appropriate Appeal Deciding Officer. Submit appeals to:

Corbin L. Newman Jr., Regional Forester
Appeal Deciding Officer
333 Broadway SE,
Albuquerque, NM 87102
Fax: (505) 842-3173
Email: appeals-southwestern-regional-office@fs.fed.us

If hand delivered, the appeal must be received at the above address during business hours (Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. MDT) excluding holidays. Electronic appeals must be submitted in a format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Adobe (.pdf), or Word (.doc). The appeal must have an identifiable name attached to it. Verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature may serve as verification on electronic appeals.

Appeals, including attachments, must be in writing, fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14, and filed (postmarked) within 45 days following the date this notice is published in the *Arizona Daily Sun*. This publication date is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. When using the electronic mailbox, you will receive an automated reply if the message is received. If you do not receive this automated reply, it is the responsibility of the appellant to

ensure the appeal is received by the deadline. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframes provided by any other source.

Individuals or organizations who submitted comments during the comment period specified at 215.6 may appeal this decision.

Implementation

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.

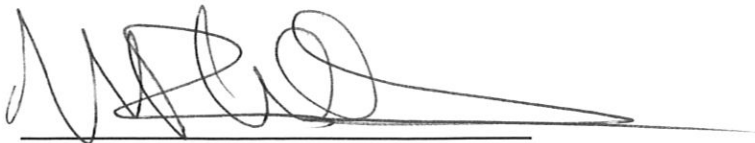
Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact:

Paul Hancock, South Zone NEPA Coordinator
Williams Ranger District
742 S. Clover Rd
Williams, AZ 86046
Phone: (928) 635-5649

Signature and Date

I am delegated the authority and am the Responsible Official for the decisions outlined in this Decision Notice. This decision summarizes information described more completely in the Environmental Assessment. For more detailed information, please refer to the EA and project record.



MICHAEL R. WILLIAMS
Forest Supervisor
Kaibab National Forest

1/31/2011
Date

**Tusayan Ranger District Travel Management Project
Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact**

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Appendix 1 – Forest Plan Amendment

Under the National Forest Management Act (NFMA, 16 USC 1604(f)(4), Forest Land and Resource Management Plans (Forest Plans) may “be amended in any manner whatsoever after final adoption and after public notice.” Federal regulations at 36 CFR 219.14 allow forests to use the provisions of the planning regulations in effect before November 9, 2000 in order to amend forest plans. These regulations state that the responsible official shall: 1) Determine whether proposed changes to a land management plan are significant or not significant in accordance with the requirements Forest Service Manual (FSM) 1926.5; 2) Document the determination of whether the change is significant or not significant in a decision document; and 3) Provide appropriate public notification of the decision prior to implementing the changes.

Implementation of the Selected Alternative will require an amendment to the Kaibab National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. My decision will add a Forest Plan standard that will improve the District’s ability to meet the goals and objectives of the Forest Plan.

The need for this amendment, in order to meet the purpose and need for the Tusayan Ranger District Travel Management Project, was first disclosed in the scoping letter for this project. I have determined that adding the following Forest Plan Standard is insignificant (per FSM 1926.5). I have also determined that based upon the analysis provided in the EA this change in management will have no significant effects. This amendment would not alter the goals, objectives, or the desired outputs of the Forest Plan. Additionally, the Forest Service Handbook indicates that the later the change, the less likely it is to be significant to the current forest plan; the Kaibab National Forest Plan was approved over 21 years ago. The public has been notified of this amendment throughout the NEPA process and it is my decision that a non-significant Forest Plan amendment be made for the Tusayan Ranger District.

Forest Plan Amendment

Since the 1988 plan permits cross country travel in most areas of the Tusayan RD, and does not incorporate the MVUM as the enforcement tool for motorized travel designation, the plan would be amended to implement the MVUM provisions of the Travel Management Rule for the Tusayan Ranger District.

To provide for consistency between the plan and the Travel Management Rule, the following amendment is made:

Add the following Standard (page 34-1; just above Other Forest-wide Guidelines):

5. Motor vehicle use off the designated system is prohibited on the Tusayan Ranger District, except as identified on the MVUM.

Direct, Indirect, and Cumulative Impacts of this Amendment

The direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of this amendment are disclosed in the Tusayan Ranger District Travel Management Project Environmental Assessment (January 2011). There are no significant direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts associated with this amendment.

Application of Significance Criteria

The Forest Service Land and Resource Management Planning Manual (FSM 1926.5) provides a framework for consideration when determining if a proposed change to a Forest Plan is not significant or significant. The proposed amendment is not significant because it does not significantly alter the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management or significantly alter the long-term relationship between levels of multiple-use goods and services originally projected (dispersed Recreation Visitor Days) for the Kaibab National Forest (AMS 1986).

This standard will improve the District’s ability to meet the resource goals and objectives of the Forest Plan. The original EIS for the forest plan recognized that “ORV use will increase and future closures or restrictions may be needed for protection of natural resources” (p. 104). The 1988 Forest Plan, as amended, provides direction to “Establish off-road vehicle [ORV], (corrected to off highway vehicle [OHV]) closures as needed to maintain other resource objectives. Manage OHV use to provide OHV opportunities while protecting resources and minimizing conflicts with other users” (Kaibab Forest Plan p. 18).

The proposed amendment will allow the Tusayan Ranger District to provide ample services, including opportunities for recreational activities (EA, Chapter 3). The 36 CFR 212.51(a) exemptions allow the District to authorize exceptions for permitted activities and administrative uses which mitigate potential effects to other uses and management objectives of the Forest Plan.

Conclusion on Significance or Non-Significance

Based on the criteria set forth in FSM 1926.51 and 1926.52, I have determined that this amendment is not significant because it will not significantly alter the multiple-use goals and objectives in the plan. Although this amendment applies to the entire Tusayan Ranger District, the change affects only a small proportion of recreation use (see Chapter 3 of the EA).

Corrections to the Forest Plan

The following direction regarding off-highway vehicle use in the forest plan would be corrected in the Forest Plan. This does not constitute an amendment because the intent of the forest plan direction is not being changed.

Change the following:

**Table 7. Acres Closed to Off Highway Vehicle Use, Except as Identified on the MVUM.
 (Page 11)**

Acres Closed	This Plan (as amended)	Previous Plan
	Acres Closed 910,656	Acres Closed 11,392
These figures do not include acres of classified wilderness also closed to OHV use or significant landforms on the Forest effectively closed because of rough terrain.		