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September 2010

# Motorized Travel Management

## Final Environmental Impact Statement

## **Volume 1 of 3**: Record of Decision & Summary

Volunteers assisting Forest Service with maintenance of the Rubicon Jeep Trail

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# Motorized Travel Management Final Environmental Impact Statement

Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sierra and Yuba Counties, California
September 2010

## Volume 1: Record of Decision and Summary


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**Abstract**: This Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) describes seven alternatives, six of which propose changes to the National Forest Transportation System (NFTS) and would prohibit cross country travel on the Tahoe National Forest (TNF). These actions are needed in order to implement the 2005 Travel Management Rule (36 CFR Part 212, Subpart B) while providing for a diversity of motor vehicle recreation opportunities and providing motorized access to dispersed recreation opportunities on the TNF. The FEIS discloses environmental impacts associated with the Proposed Action, a No Action Alternative and 5 additional alternatives developed to meet the purpose and need and to respond to issues raised by the public. A map displaying the Decision is included in digital format on the CD attached to this document and may be found in the Project Record located in the Tahoe National Forest Supervisor's Office in Nevada City, California. The document and map is currently available on the Tahoe National Forest website: http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/tahoe/

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# Record of Decision

## Introduction

This Record of Decision (ROD) documents my decision on the Motorized Travel Management Project for the Tahoe National Forest. The purpose of the Travel Management Project is to implement provisions of the 2005 Travel Management Rule (36 CFR Part 212, Subpart B) designed to enhance management of National Forest System lands, sustain natural resource values through more effective management of motor vehicle use, and provide opportunities for motorized recreation experiences on National Forest System lands. The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) discloses the environmental impacts associated with the Tahoe National Forest's original Proposed Action, a No Action Alternative, and five additional action alternatives developed to meet the purpose of and need for the Tahoe National Forest's travel management project while responding to significant issues raised by the public.

## Purpose and Need

The 2005 Travel Management Rule was developed in response to increased use of national forests by motor vehicles and the effects of that use on ecological, physical, cultural, and social resources. From 1982 to 2000, the number of people driving off-highway motor vehicles in the United States more than doubled (70 Fed. Reg. 68264 – November 9, 2005). The Tahoe National Forest (Forest) is experiencing a similar growth in the use of off-highway motor vehicles, including some adverse impacts on a variety of forest resources.

The existing National Forest Transportation System (NFTS or Transportation System) on the Tahoe National Forest is comprised of approximately 2,396 miles of roads and trails open to wheeled public motorized use (collectively referred to as motorized routes), which have been incorporated into the NFTS through previous management decisions. In addition, the Forest has approximately 830 miles of closed NFTS roads, some of which are currently receiving public motorized use. The Forest has one established "Open Area" available for motorized recreation use: the Prosser Pits Open Area on the Truckee Ranger District. There are approximately 869 miles of unauthorized routes on the Forest. Some of these routes have existed on the ground and have been used by the public for a long time. Many were developed for purposes other than recreation access; past mining operations, timber sale projects, and other access needs led to the creation of many of these routes. Although some routes have been in use for decades, others were recently created as Forest visitors pioneered new routes to travel through the Forest and to reach particular destinations. These unauthorized routes were not necessarily designed to best meet public recreation or access needs, and, in some cases, may be adversely affecting important natural and cultural resources.

I recognize the need to regulate unmanaged motor vehicle travel by the public in a manner that provides for recreational access while protecting natural resources. The following key points were

identified as the underlying need for taking this action at this time (the entire Purpose and Need is described in Chapter 1 of the FEIS):

- The Forest Service needs to regulate where motor vehicles can travel on the Forest. The proliferation of unplanned, unauthorized, non-sustainable roads, trails and areas adversely affects the environment. The provisions of the 2005 Travel Management Rule, 36 CFR Section 212, Subpart B, are intended to prevent resource damage caused by unmanaged motorized travel by the public. Motor vehicle use would be prohibited off designated NFTS roads and motorized trails (36 CFR 261.13).
- The Forest Service needs to make changes to the existing Transportation System on the Tahoe National Forest to provide a diversity of motorized recreation opportunities and to provide access to dispersed recreation opportunities. Needed actions include limited changes to the types of vehicles allowed on NFTS routes and additions of certain unauthorized routes to the NFTS.

## Decision

Based on the analysis in the Tahoe National Forest Motorized Travel Management Project FEIS and the associated project record, I have decided to implement Alternative 6 (the Selected Alternative) as presented in the FEIS and shown on the map included with this ROD, with two slight modifications. These modifications include: (1) adding Route YRN-M2 (0.6 miles) as a motorized trail open to motorcycles only and (2) ending wet weather seasonal restrictions on April 24 (rather than April 30) to coincide with the opening day of trout fishing season. I believe the selection of Alternative 6 best meets the purpose and need and responds to the issues of access, motorized recreation opportunities, and natural resource protection.

My decision will limit motor vehicle travel by the public to designated National Forest Transportation System (NFTS) roads, motorized trails, and areas. To maintain a reasonable level of motorized recreation access and opportunities on the Forest while protecting natural resources adversely affected by motor vehicle use, I have decided to:

- Add specific routes, as identified on the map accompanying this ROD, to the NFTS as follows:
  - 13.1 miles (346 individual segments) of roads and
  - 48.9 miles (107 individual segments) of motorized trails.
- Establish approximately 244 acres of “Open Areas” at Boca, Prosser, and Stampede Reservoirs as open to highway legal vehicles only.
- Make the following changes to the NFTS:
  - allow highway-legal vehicles mixed with non-highway legal vehicles (referred to as motorized mixed use) on a total of approximately 130.8 miles of passenger car roads (with concurrence received from the California Highway Patrol on March 17, 2010), of which approximately 117.5 miles will be open to mixed use only during deer rifle hunting season;

  - allow non-highway legal vehicles to use 122.0 miles of roads as an added benefit of reducing maintenance levels on specific roads where natural resource management objectives can be achieved with a lower road maintenance level;
  - place seasonal restrictions on 1,369.5 miles of roads and motorized trails as follows: (1) on the westside of the Tahoe National Forest, implement wet weather seasonal closures on native surface roads and motorized trails from January 1 through March 31; (2) on the remainder of the Tahoe National Forest, implement wet weather seasonal closures on native surface roads and motorized trails from January 1 through April 23; and (3) allow over-the-snow travel on 3.6 miles of the Fordyce jeep trail when 15 inches of snow is present on the ground; and
  - re-open 11.4 miles (13 individual segments) of existing closed roads (Maintenance Level 1 roads) for motorized use.
- Amend the 1990 *Tahoe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (Forest Plan) to remove the seasonal restriction for the Humbug Sailor Management Area (#84).

Table 1 below summarizes the actions to be implemented under the Selected Alternative. Tables 2 and 3 display the total mileage of roads and motorized trails, respectively, in the NFTS and available for public use on the Tahoe National Forest under implementation of the Selected Alternative. A map displaying the Decision is included in digital format on the CD attached to this document and may be found in the Project Record located in the Tahoe National Forest Supervisor's Office in Nevada City, California.

**Table 1.** Actions to be implemented on the Tahoe National Forest under the Selected Alternative (FEIS Alternative 6).

| **Type of Action** | | **Selected Alternative** (Alternative 6) |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Cross Country Travel** (Acres) | | Prohibited on 835,800 acres.<br>Less than 300 acres established as "Open Areas." |
| **2. Additions to the NFTS** | a. Roads added to the NFTS | 13.1 (miles)<br>346 (roads) |
| | b. Motorized Trails added to the NFTS | 48.9 (miles)[1]<br>107 (trails) |
| **3. Establishment of Motorized "Open Areas" for Highway Legal Vehicles** | | Prosser, Boca and Stampede Reservoirs (244 acres) |
| **4. Changes to the NFTS** | a. Change in Class of Vehicles resulting from approval of mixed use | 130.8 (miles)[2] |
| | b. Change in Class of Vehicles resulting from changes in maintenance levels | 122.0 (miles) |
| | c. Change in Season of Use | 1,369.5 (miles) |
| | d. Reopening Maintenance Level 1 Roads | 11.4 (miles)<br>13 (roads) |
| **5. Amendments to the Forest Plan** | | Management Area 84 (Humbug Sailor) Deer Winter Range Seasonal Restriction Removed |

[1] Includes addition of Route YRN-M2 (approximately 0.6 miles).
[2] Includes approximately 117.5 miles of roads open to motorized mixed only during deer rifle hunting season.

**Table 2.** Total miles of National Forest Transportation System (NFTS) ***roads*** available for public use under the Selected Alternative by class of vehicle and season of use.

| Class of Vehicle | Season of Use | Miles of Roads Available Under the Selected Alternative |
|---|---|---|
| **Roads Open to Highway Legal Vehicles Only** | Apr. 1 - Sep. 15 | 0.0 |
| | Apr. 1 - Dec. 31 | 59.1 |
| | Apr 24 - Dec. 31 | 57.9 |
| | May 1 - Nov. 1 | 17.0 |
| | All Year | 230.2 |
| **Roads Open to All Vehicles** | Jun. 1 - Nov. 1 | 3.4 |
| | Aug. 1 - Dec. 31 | 1.2 |
| | May 1 - Jun. 15 & Jul. 15 - Dec. 31 | 3.4 |
| | Apr. 1 - Sep. 15 | 6.0 |
| | Apr. 1 - Dec. 31 | 798.4 |
| | Apr 24 - Dec. 31 | 715.6 |
| | May 1 – Nov. 1 | 63.7 |
| | May 1 – Sep. 15 | 5.3 |
| | All Year | 4.6 |
| **Roads Open to Highway Legal Vehicles Only, except Open to All Vehicles during Deer Rifle Hunting Season (from 9/22-11/4)** | | 74.2 |
| **Roads Open to Highway Legal Vehicles Only from 5/1 through 9/21; Open to All vehicles during Deer Rifle Hunting Season from 9/22 through 11/4; and Open to Highway Legal Vehicles Only from 11/5 through 12/31.** | | 43.3 |
| | **Total NFTS Roads** | **2,083.4** |

**Note**: Numbers may not add up due to rounding.

**Table 3.** Total miles of National Forest Transportation System (NFTS) ***motorized trails*** available for public use under the Selected Alternative by class of vehicle and season of use.

| Class of Vehicle | Season of Use | Miles of Motorized Trails Available for Public Use Under the Selected Alternative |
|---|---|---|
| **Trails Open to High Clearance Trail Vehicles** (4WDs, ATVs, and Motorcycles) | May 1 – Jun. 15 and Jul. 15 – Dec. 1 | 4.4 |
| | Apr. 1 – Dec. 31 and When 15" snow present | 3.5 |
| | Apr. 1 – Dec. 31 | 88.5 |
| | Apr 24 – Dec. 31 | 58.9 |
| | May 1 – Nov. 1 | 1.1 |
| | May 1 – Sep. 15 | 0.0 |
| | All Year | 0.0 |
| | **Subtotal** | **156.4** |
| **Trails Open to ATV's and Motorcycles Only** | Apr. 1 – Dec. 31 | 34.2 |
| | Apr 24 – Dec. 31 | 4.6 |
| | All Year | 0.0 |
| | **Subtotal** | **38.8** |
| **Trails Open to Motorcycles Only** | Apr. 1 – Dec. 31 | 157.8 |
| | Apr 24 – Dec. 31 | 29.4[1] |
| | May 1 – Nov. 1 | 3.3 |
| | All Year | 0.0 |
| | **Subtotal** | **190.5** |
| | **Total NFTS Motorized Trails** | **385.7** |

[1] Includes addition of Route YRN-M2 (approximately 0.6 miles).

**Note**: Numbers may not add up due to rounding.

My decision includes the implementation of mitigation measures designed to minimize, reduce, or eliminate impacts on sensitive natural and cultural resources for motorized routes added to the NFTS. Required mitigation measures are identified, by route, in Appendix A of the FEIS (Site Specific Road, Trail and Open Area Information). In order to address site-specific resource concerns, routes added to the NFTS as part of my decision will be not be available for public motorized use until required mitigations are completed. Once these 'pre-designation' mitigations are successfully implemented, these routes will be identified on the next revision of the Forest's Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) and designated for public use.

All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm have been adopted in the design of the Selected Alternative. I have included the project design features and mitigation measures that I believe are necessary to avoid, minimize, or rectify impacts on resources affected by the implementation of the Selected Alternative. My decision is based on the best available science. The resource analyses disclosed in Chapter 3 of the EIS identify the effects analysis methodologies, reference scientific sources which informed the analysis, and disclose limitations of the analysis.

## Modifications to Alternative 6 in Response to Comments

In September 2008, a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for Motorized Travel Management on the Tahoe National Forest was released for public comment. Based on public concerns regarding the status of the existing NFTS and valid existing rights of way, the interdisciplinary team undertook a comprehensive review of the existing NFTS. I reviewed the team's findings and determined that preparation of a Supplemental DEIS was warranted to provide the public with the opportunity to review the proposed action and alternatives in light of the corrections to the existing NFTS that were made since the DEIS was circulated. The Supplemental DEIS was released for public comment in February 2010.

I reviewed the public comments received in response to both the DEIS and Supplemental DEIS. I want to highlight the important changes to the Preferred Alternative (Alternative 6) I made between the DEIS and Supplemental DEIS based on the public's comments. These changes were incorporated into Alternative 6 as presented and analyzed in the Supplemental DEIS and have been carried forward into the FEIS. The changes maintained the original theme and intent of the Alternative, but also addressed issues that arose during public comment on the DEIS. Changes I made in Alternative 6 between the DEIS and the Supplemental DEIS (and now FEIS), based on what I heard from the public, include the following:

- I shortened the seasonal restrictions on motor vehicle use by one month for routes on the westside of the Forest to enhance opportunities for motorized recreation. Hence, wet weather seasonal closures will run from January 1 to March 31 on the westside of the Forest.
- I allowed wheeled over-the-snow motor vehicle use on 3.6 miles of the Fordyce jeep trail when 15 inches of snow is present on the ground. In addition, although not a change from the DEIS Preferred Alternative, it is worth noting that the majority of Maintenance Level 3, 4, and 5 roads will remain available for wheeled over-the-snow motor vehicle use. Exceptions are roads on the Truckee Ranger District and those roads designated as snowmobile trails.
- I increased protection for the Forest's Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) by adding only a few motorized trails to the NFTS. None of these routes are currently having adverse resource impacts, and, due to their relatively short lengths and locations, addition of these routes to the NFTS will not adversely affect roadless area characteristics. I have decided not to add Route YRN-M3b, 2.4 miles being located in the West Yuba IRA, to the NFTS. Because this route bisects the IRA, its central location would result in decreased opportunities for solitude due to the noise of motor vehicle use and the evidence of human activities, thereby adversely affecting roadless area characteristics. In addition, the West Yuba IRA contains unique attributes of old forest that were identified in the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project (1996). While this IRA currently exhibits some impacts from mining, it offers a high quality, intact old forest ecosystem. I decided not to add Route YRN-M3b to the NFTS due to the existence of other moderate to high difficulty trails nearby, important old forest conditions within the West Yuba IRA, and the potential for cumulative impacts on roadless area characteristics, particularly with the creation of loops that would result from adding this route.

- I limited year-round motorized mixed use (highway-legal vehicles sharing roads with non-highway legal vehicles) to roads less than 3 miles in length that have a low mixed use crash probability combined with a low mixed use crash severity, or that are consistent with the California Vehicle Code Division 16.5. I am however allowing motorized mixed use on certain roads longer than 3 miles, but only during deer rifle hunting season when log hauling is not occurring, which ensures a low mixed use crash probability and severity will be maintained on these roads. The affected routes are primarily used for travel associated with deer rifle hunting; allowing motorized mixed use on them will enhance recreational opportunities for hunters who make important contributions to local economies, particularly the communities of Sierraville, Foresthill, and Portola.
- I allowed motorized mixed use on certain routes recommended by the public during the comment period. These routes, which have been identified in our NFTS objectives as Maintenance Level 3 roads (typically low speed, single lane roads with turnouts maintained for travel by a prudent driver in a standard passenger car), will now be maintained as Maintenance Level 2 roads (roads open for use by high clearance vehicles). Lowering the maintenance levels of these routes will allow the Forest Service to accomplish the needed management of natural resources on the Forest and will improve the affordability of the NFTS. An additional benefit of reducing the maintenance levels on these routes is that it provides for motorized mixed use. These routes provide connections between various motorized trails so allowing mixed use on them creates opportunities for off-highway vehicle loop trips.
- I ensured that the public has adequate access to important non-motorized recreation opportunities on the Forest by allowing such places to be safely reached in highway legal vehicles. For example, the DEIS Alternative 6 proposed that the maintenance level for Road 0014, which provides access to a trailhead in the Grouse Lakes Area, be reduced to a Maintenance Level 2. Based on comments from the public, I have decided to continue to designate Road 0014 as a Maintenance Level 3 road, open to highway legal vehicles only, to provide passenger car access to this important trailhead.
- I added numerous, primarily short unauthorized route segments recommended by the public to the NFTS to provide motorized access to dispersed recreation sites where I found no significant adverse resource impacts associated with such additions.
- I added “Open Areas” at the Boca, Stampede, and Prosser Reservoirs to provide motorized access to the shorelines. This does not mean the entire shorelines of these reservoirs will be open for cross country motor vehicle travel, but rather that a number of select, established areas along the shorelines will be open to motor vehicles. Each select “Open Area” is connected to the high water line by an existing road and is located to avoid cultural resource sites, perennially wet areas, and other sensitive natural resources. Each “Open Area” will be identified on the ground. To further minimize potential impacts from motorized use on water quality and aquatic species, I am allowing only highway legal vehicles in these “Open Areas” and restricting the season of use with wet weather seasonal closures between January 1 and April 23.

- I incorporated additional mitigation measures for specific routes to minimize impacts associated with motor vehicle use, which will allow these routes to be added to the NFTS in a sustainable manner.

The effects of the changes listed above are analyzed for each affected resource in Chapter 3 of the FEIS. I believe the changes to Alternative 6, reflected in the Selected Alternative, will provide for better management and protection of critical natural resources on the Tahoe National Forest while providing access to important recreation experiences and opportunities.

Finally, I am making two slight modifications to Alternative 6 in this decision. First, I am adding Route YRN-M2 (0.6 miles) in the West Yuba IRA to the NFTS as a motorized trail open to motorcycles only. This small segment will connect two existing NFTS motorized trails (Figure 1). The two existing NFTS trails were approved in previous NEPA decisions and have significant infrastructure investments already in place on the ground. The lower trail (10E02, Downie River) is currently 7.6 miles long. The northern segment (Chimney Rock Trail 0025-023-01-02) is 4.7 miles in length. Route YRN-M2 closes the remaining 0.6-mile gap to connect these two trails. Once connected, this would provide a continuous trail opportunity of 12.2 miles. Route YRN-M2 will thus provide a large benefit for motorized recreation for a relatively small impact on roadless area character. In addition, the resulting trail would connect to other trails providing loop opportunities. The result would be one of the few expert level motorized trail loop opportunities on the Forest. Without this connection, riders would be forced to turn around when they reached the missing segment and retrace their travel, thus increasing the overall motorized impact to the Roadless Area's character. The other possibility for providing this loop opportunity was adding YRN-M3B to the NFTS. This trail is much longer (2.4 miles) and, as previously described, I decided not to add this trail due to its greater impacts on the Roadless Area's character.

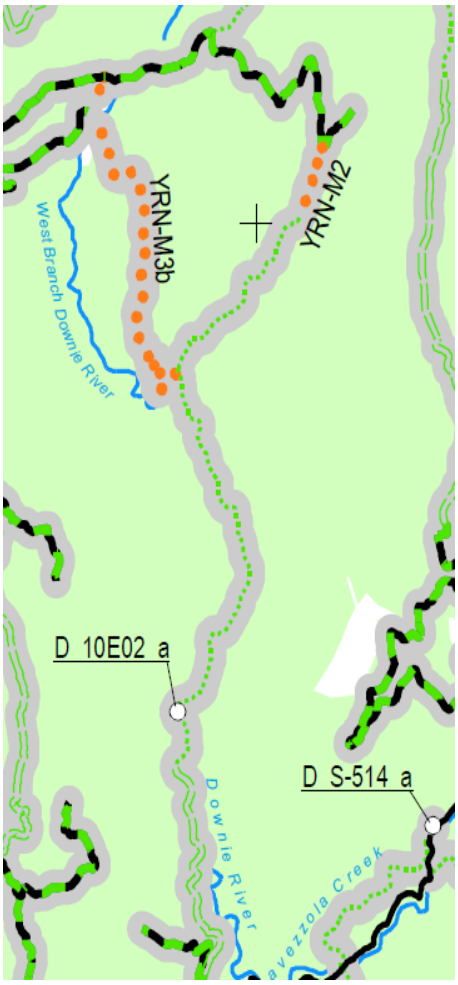


**Figure 1. YRN-M2 provides a large benefit for motorized recreation for a relatively small impact on Roadless Area Character Area character.**

Due to the extreme technical difficulty of Route YRN-M2, motorcycle travel is generally limited to one direction, so users would move through the area. In addition, the difficulty of the route would keep the level of use low. Low use, combined with the slower travel speeds necessary to navigate this difficult segment, would minimize noise from motorcycles. Currently, there are few opportunities for extreme difficulty motorcycle riding on the Tahoe National Forest. The existing NFTS provides approximately 10.8 miles of extreme difficulty motorcycle trails

across the entire Forest. Adding this 0.6-mile segment to the NFTS will provide a valuable loop opportunity for highly experienced motorcycle riders – an opportunity that is currently quite limited.

The second modification to Alternative 6 applies to native surface roads, motorized trails, and "Open Areas" covered under this Alternative's January 1 through April 30 wet weather seasonal closure. My decision ends wet weather seasonal restrictions on April 23 (rather than April 30 as originally proposed) to coincide with the opening day of trout fishing season. This change is in response to public comments on the Supplemental DEIS. The effects of this slight change are insignificant, particularly since seasonal restrictions could be modified if weather conditions dictated the need for a temporary change in season of use.

## Rationale for My Decision

Glancing at a visitor's map of the Tahoe National Forest, one is immediately struck by three key features. First is the thick red band representing Interstate Highway 80, which slices through the center of the Forest. As one of the Nation's major interstate highways, it links Sacramento and the San Francisco Bay Area to the Lake Tahoe Region and Reno, Nevada, which is one of only two major urban centers on the eastern flank of the Sierra Nevada. The Forest, which is less than an hour's drive from Sacramento or Reno and about three hours from the Bay Area, offers high mountain scenery, beautiful river canyons, and numerous campgrounds and trails for the visiting public. The Forest's close proximity to urban areas, combined with its year-round attractive recreation opportunities, results in millions of visitors annually. Indeed, the Tahoe National Forest has repeatedly ranked among the top 20 most visited national forests in the Nation.

The next feature readily apparent on the visitor's map is the expansive checkerboard pattern of green and gray squares that stretch across the Forest. Each gray square represents a section (one square mile) of private land while each green square represents a section of national forest land. Within the administrative boundaries of the Tahoe National Forest, there are large areas where nearly every other section of land is privately owned. This checkerboard ownership pattern is due to the Federal government's historical granting of every other section of land in the vicinity of the transcontinental railroad to the Southern Pacific Railroad Company. These lands have been subsequently sold to various parties; the majority are currently owned by Sierra Pacific Industries. Today, Tahoe National Forest managers are faced with managing national forest lands within the context of this fractured ownership pattern. Add in the fact that the Forest Service does not possess the legal rights-of-way to allow public access across the bulk of the private lands within the Forest, and this makes designating a network of public roads and motorized trails an undertaking of incredible complexity.

Finally, a closer look at the map reveals an extensive network of existing roads and motorized trails that reach into every corner of the Forest. With the exception of the 25,000-acre Granite Chief Wilderness and the Forest's Inventoried Roadless Areas, which lie at the higher elevations and within the steepest river canyons, the Forest is laced with roads, the bulk of which are already part of the NFTS. A large majority of the Tahoe National Forest is currently roaded as a result of historical and ongoing access

needs for mineral exploration and mining, forest and fuels management activities, livestock grazing, recreational activities, fire prevention and suppression, and for reaching the multitude of private land parcels within the Forest.

These three features readily apparent on the Forest visitor's map - ready access from large metropolitan areas, fractured land ownership, and an extensive existing NFTS network - set the context for my decision. What is equally important, and not readily apparent on the visitor's map, is the Forest's rich array of natural resources. The Tahoe National Forest's watersheds provide the source of clean water to millions in California and Nevada. The Forest is home to many rare plants, animals and fish, and a vast array of valuable cultural and historic sites. I heard from many individuals and groups during this travel management planning effort about the critical value of these natural and cultural resources.

With these factors in mind, I did not take this decision lightly. In reaching my decision, I have considered the purpose and need for action, the issues, the Forest Plan and associated amendments, current policies and regulations, effects on natural and cultural resources, public comments received, and the full range of alternatives. I considered the broad range of concerns expressed throughout the environmental planning and analysis process relating to both motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities.

Although my decision will reduce the amount of motorized recreation opportunities available as compared to the existing condition (which permits motorized travel off NFTS roads and trails), it strikes a balance between reductions promoted by some and the increases supported by others. This decision implements a permanent prohibition on cross country motor vehicle travel, which will reduce detrimental effects on natural resource conditions. Importantly, it implements this prohibition while ensuring public motorized access to recreation opportunities across the Tahoe National Forest. My rationale for selecting Alternative 6 (the Selected Alternative) also includes the considerations presented below.

## Striking a Balance

In reaching my decision, I drew upon the local knowledge and experience of employees and the public. This included the resource management and scientific expertise of forest staff, as well as comments I received identifying potential changes to the Forest Transportation System to provide better access to important recreation destinations or protection of forest resources. By understanding these elements, I am able to select an alternative that recognizes and respects traditional uses and access, while seeking to minimize impacts on natural and cultural resources.

Despite apparent differences in opinion, the public, through their comments, revealed a strong connection with public lands on the Tahoe National Forest; connections based on generations of use and exploration as well as traditions still in the making. Comments that I received provided very helpful information on important areas and routes. Public input helped clarify the need for adding some of these routes to the NFTS in order to provide access to important recreation opportunities and experiences. I also heard about valuable forest resources in need of additional protection or mitigation.

I heard from many individuals and groups with particular goals for the types of recreation and uses they consider to be appropriate on National Forest System lands. Some feel all existing unauthorized routes are valuable and important and should remain available for motorized use. For them, having many motorized opportunities from which to choose is important. Some expressed concern that motor vehicles degrade the quality of their recreation experience. Others asserted protection of natural resource values, such as roadless area character, water quality, or fish and wildlife habitat, should take precedence over other needs. They argued that more restrictions on motorized travel should be in place.

## Protecting Natural Resources

I believe that the Selected Alternative strikes the best balance between providing motorized recreation access and protecting critical natural and cultural resources. My decision will protect critical stream courses and watersheds and the significant cultural and historic sites that are so prevalent in the Tahoe National Forest. My decision will protect habitats for a wide range of wildlife species, from Threatened Species, such as the Lahontan cutthroat trout, to Forest Service Sensitive Species, particularly old forest associated species, such as the California spotted owl and northern goshawk, to species associated with aquatic and riparian ecosystems. I carefully considered each potential route to be added to the NFTS, as well as the specified class of vehicle and season of use for each road and motorized trail in the NFTS, in the context of the wide range of recreation desires of the visiting public, the Tahoe National Forest's extensive existing Transportation System, the intermingling of public and private lands, and the need to provide protection for soils, streams, watersheds, plant and animal habitats, and cultural resources.

The Selected Alternative balances the need to provide access to the Forest with substantially reduced impacts from vehicle traffic on aquatic resources by incorporating mitigation measures specifically aimed at reducing sedimentation into water sources. For example, the "Open Areas" around Prosser, Stampede, and Boca Reservoirs have been carefully located away from perennially wet areas and scaled back from 2,700 acres in the original proposal to 244 acres in this decision to protect water quality and habitat for aquatic species while providing access to the reservoirs for recreational activities. In addition, I have decided to continue to maintain the Pole Creek Road where it parallels the stream as a Maintenance Level 3 road to ensure that vehicle use of this road will not adversely affect habitat for the Lahontan cutthroat trout.

My decision includes seasonal restrictions that will limit the time of the year when motor vehicles can travel on specific roads. Wet weather seasonal restrictions will reduce the rutting that occurs on roads and trails as vehicles travel on saturated soils and will improve the longevity of drainage control structures. Hence, these restrictions will minimize the potential for soil erosion and stream sedimentation caused by motor vehicles traveling on wet, muddy roads and trails. Wet weather seasonal restrictions will also provide benefits to mule deer, bald eagles, Lahontan cutthroat trout, Lahontan Lake tui chub, foothill yellow legged frogs, mountain yellow legged frogs, California red-legged frogs, northwestern pond turtles, and Great Basin Ramshorn snails by reducing the time periods when motor vehicles and these animals may be using the same area. Finally, seasonal restrictions will reduce the costs of maintaining roads and trails, helping to improve the overall affordability and sustainability of the NFTS. During the

comment period on the DEIS, I heard strong public concerns that the proposed seasonal restrictions would unduly limit motorized recreational opportunities. To provide additional flexibility for motorized recreation users, I have shortened the originally proposed wet weather seasonal restrictions by one month on the western slopes of the Forest, and I have ensured that wet weather seasonal closures are lifted in time for the opening of trout fishing season. I believe this change strikes the appropriate balance between providing motorized recreation opportunities and enhancing local economies with the need to protect soil, water, native vegetation, and aquatic species. I do, however, anticipate that additional seasonal restrictions may be necessary during unseasonably wet periods. These closures could begin earlier and end later than the dates specified in this decision, based on actual field conditions. Any such closures would be handled under a temporary forest order in accordance with agency environmental policy.

An important mitigation strategy in the Selected Alternative is the avoidance of adverse impacts on critical resources. For example, the "Open Areas" at Boca, Stampede, and Prosser Reservoirs were carefully located to avoid potential adverse impacts from motor vehicle use on the valuable cultural resources found around these reservoirs. In addition, each route proposed for addition to the NFTS was reviewed to assess its potential impact on key habitats for old forest associated species: the routes to be added to the NFTS under the Selected Alternative avoid protected activity centers (PACs) for California spotted owls and northern goshawks to the greatest extent possible while providing access to important recreation destinations. My decision also includes mitigation measures for specific routes to be added to the NFTS. These measures must be completed prior to designating routes for motor vehicle use. Such measures, combined with careful selection of the routes to be added to the NFTS, are central to minimizing impacts to natural resources while providing a quality Transportation System for public motorized use.

## Meeting Needs for Access and Motorized Recreation

The existing NFTS, comprised of approximately 2,068 miles of roads and 328 miles of motorized trails, currently provides access to large areas of the Forest and a diversity of motorized recreation opportunities. For many years, roads were routinely added to the Forest Transportation System based on project-level decisions. System roads were generally those that provided access to recreation areas and for forest management activities. What did not get formally added to the Transportation System were the many short road segments that provide motorized access

**Figure 2. The Fordyce Jeep Trail provides world class four wheel drive recreation opportunities.**

to dispersed camping, picnicking, and fishing sites. As a result, many important dispersed recreation opportunities are not accessible via the present NFTS. The Selected Alternative addresses this need by adding primarily short road segments (and occasionally longer road and motorized trail segments) to the NFTS to provide access to over 400 dispersed recreation sites across the Forest. The Transportation System adopted under this decision will provide access to sites and routes that are important to Forest users for camping, rock hounding, sightseeing, exploring, fishing, hiking, hunting, and equestrian use, among others. Indeed, under the Selected Alternative, over 83 percent of the Tahoe National Forest will be within ½ mile of an authorized road or motorized trail. Approximately 78 percent of the Forest will be within ½ mile of a road open to motorized travel under this decision. Clearly, the NFTS resulting from this decision shows the emphasis that has been placed on providing public access to the Forest.

The Selected Alternative improves the existing transportation system. It does not add duplicative routes and provides interconnected loops. This decision results in a more manageable system of roads and trails. Management objectives for conserving rare plant and animal species and their habitats, protecting important cultural heritage sites, conserving Inventoried Roadless Areas, and enhancing watershed values are also achieved with adoption of Alternative 6. Yet this does not mean that our work is done. Some of the routes added to the NFTS will require mitigation to address resource impacts before they can be designated on the Forest's Motor Vehicle Use Map. We will continue to analyze the existing NFTS to look for opportunities for improvement. It is important to emphasize that this travel management decision was not designed to identify and analyze new road and trail construction opportunities. The Tahoe National Forest is committed to working with the public to further enhance the motorized recreation experience. We recognize that there are additional opportunities to develop new connectors and increase motorized loop experiences. We are optimistic that this can be achieved while protecting forest resources and mitigating conflicts with other users. We are anxious to begin implementation of this decision and to work collaboratively with the public to make further progress.

**Figure 3. Roadless Areas provide opportunities for solitude and quiet recreation as well as motorized access to highly valued dispersed recreation sites.**

## Protecting Inventoried Roadless Areas

A major issue related to this decision is the management of Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs). The Tahoe National Forest has 11 IRAs, comprised of a total of 171,328 acres (approximately 15 percent of the total landbase within the Forest administrative boundary and 22 percent of the National Forest System lands within the Forest boundary). All of the Forest's IRAs currently have some NFTS roads and motorized trails as well as unauthorized routes within their boundaries, with the greatest mileage within the West Yuba IRA (35.1 miles) and East Yuba IRA (41.9

miles). During the scoping and comment periods, I heard extensive concerns from the public related to potential adverse effects of adding motorized routes within IRAs on opportunities for quiet and solitude. For this reason, I looked beyond simply the IRA acreages and motorized route mileages to further consider opportunities for quiet recreation on the Forest. As previously noted, the Tahoe National Forest currently has an extensive network of NFTS routes. Under the existing situation, only about 12 percent of the National Forest System lands on this Forest are located further than ½ mile from a motorized road or trail. If one looks again at the visitor's map, a few largely unroaded blocks of land stand out in an extensively roaded landscape: these blocks are comprised of 9 of the Forest's 11 IRAs. I have carefully considered the issue of adding motorized routes to the NFTS within IRAs, including a thorough analysis of the potential impacts on roadless area characteristics associated with each alternative contained in the FEIS. My decision to select Alternative 6 will add only 4.1 miles of NFTS motorized trails within IRAs. Adding these few essential motorized trails to the NFTS balances the need to protect IRA characteristics, particularly opportunities for solitude and quiet recreation on the Forest, while providing motorized access to highly valued dispersed recreation sites.

An example of this balance is found in my decision relative to the Castle Peak IRA, where a total of 1.02 miles of motorized trail, in five short segments, will be added to the NFTS under the Selected Alternative. The Castle Peak IRA is unique for its setting on the crest of the Sierra Nevada. As such, this area is characterized by high elevations, open alpine settings, and expansive views. The area's setting is further defined by streams, large meadows, lakes, and significant opportunities for camping, hiking, and backcountry solitude. Castle Peak and its surroundings are among the most scenic areas on the Tahoe National Forest, and the Pacific Crest Trail traverses this area. The Castle Peak IRA's close proximity to Interstate Highway 80 makes it extremely popular for hiking in the summer and cross country skiing and snowmobiling in the winter. Nearly as important are several recreation destinations, including Slab Rock and Summit Lake, as well as several dispersed campsites that lie on the southern edge of the Castle Peak IRA. Generations of Forest visitors have enjoyed motorized access to these recreation sites. My desire is to maintain motorized access to important recreation destinations and dispersed recreation sites while protecting IRA characteristics. The Selected Alternative does just that. It allows for four-wheel drive trail access to Slab Rock, Summit Lake, and other dispersed camping opportunities. All five routes enter the Castle Peak IRA along its southern edge, and are close enough to Interstate 80 that traffic noise from the freeway is still noticeable. Adding these routes to the NFTS will have a minor impact on solitude because the noise of motor vehicles is not expected to be louder than the noise from the freeway in the immediate vicinity. One of the route additions, Route TKN-J5, crosses the Pacific Crest Trail and barriers will be placed at this intersection to prevent motorized use of the Trail. Meanwhile, the prohibition of cross country motorized travel in the Castle Peak IRA will serve to halt the proliferation of unauthorized routes and will prevent motorized use of unauthorized routes. My decision will end motorized use on approximately 90 percent of the existing unauthorized route mileage in the Castle Peak IRA, and the roadless area characteristics of this IRA will improve over time as these unauthorized routes passively restore to natural conditions.

I decided not to add routes to the NFTS in IRAs if they did not provide the sole access to important recreation destinations or valuable loop opportunities, or if their location was likely to significantly reduce opportunities for quiet recreation on this Forest. My decision to do so was driven by the need to maintain IRA characteristics such as outstanding opportunities for solitude; habitat for rare species, like the mountain yellow-legged frog; habitat for wide-ranging species, such as the California spotted owl and marten; and watershed health. In the Castle Peak IRA, and in many other places in the Forest, my decision requires implementing important mitigation measures that will minimize impacts on natural and cultural resources while providing a quality opportunities for public motorized use.

Limiting motorized recreation within the IRAs is particularly important in the Tahoe National Forest given the very small amount of the Forest within Congressionally designated Wilderness. At just over 25,000 acres, the Tahoe contains far less Wilderness than most other western national forests. Consequently, opportunities for quiet recreation and solitude are quite limited. Preserving opportunities for these experiences in the IRAs is an important aspect of my decision.

## Cooperating with Private Landowners

Cooperation with the Forest's many intermixed private landowners is paramount in this decision. My decision does not add motorized routes to the NFTS that require access across private land where the landowner has expressed opposition to allowing the public access on their land. For added routes that require access through other private lands, the necessary permission will be obtained from the private landowner before the route is included on the Motor Vehicle Use Map. Routes for which the Forest Service has a valid right-of-way from the private landowner will be shown on the Motor Vehicle Use Map.

I recognize that some of the existing NFTS roads that I have decided to maintain at a lower maintenance level (changing from Maintenance Level 3 to Maintenance Level 2) are covered under cooperative road maintenance agreements. I am making this change for roads that are generally in a Maintenance Level 2 condition on the ground and do not need to be maintained at a higher level to achieve the Forest Service's natural resource management objectives. Lowering the maintenance level in these situations will help improve the overall affordability of the NFTS. In addition, the cooperator will retain the ability to temporarily upgrade these routes, if necessary, for hauling logs, subject to NEPA. To mitigate safety concerns, some OHV use may be restricted during these periods. Cooperative agreement roads that are currently being maintained at a higher standard (Maintenance Level 3 or higher) were generally not reduced to Maintenance Level 2 under the Selected Alternative, recognizing the investment that has been made in these roads.

I received many comments from concerned private landowners regarding my original proposal to establish the Greenhorn "Open Area." I have decided not to establish the Greenhorn area as an "Open Area," because of my desire for the Forest Service to be a good neighbor. The Greenhorn area is adjacent to a number of private land holdings as well as public land managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Local land owners are very concerned about the impacts of public motorized use in this area, including the associated large gatherings, littering and dumping, noise from motor vehicles, and the

potential for fire ignitions. The Forest Service does not have an easement across the private lands that provide access to a 40-acre portion of the Greenhorn area north of Buckeye Road. In addition, the adjoining southern half of the Greenhorn area is private land, and the land owner has closed access to the public. Finally, the BLM has closed its lands in this area to off-highway motor vehicle use. The following factors contributed to my decision not to establish the Greenhorn area for motor vehicle use: numerous past litter and dumping problems, illegal fires, natural resource damage, trespass issues (stemming from use extending out from the Greenhorn area), and the lack of sufficient funds to properly manage this area. That said, I continue to be open to discussions with motorized recreation groups concerning the future use of the Greenhorn area for managed motor vehicle use subsequent to this decision, given the following criteria: (1) motor vehicle user groups bring the other affected parties (including the southern private land owner, northern private land owner, BLM, Nevada County, other adjacent private land owners, and the Forest Service) into a collaborative process to consider management for this area and (2) through a collaborative process, the affected parties and user groups develop a volunteer-based plan that addresses how to manage past problems and abuses in the area. We would need assurance that there is a significant volunteer base that is willing and able to support and implement such a plan.

### Maintaining and Administering the NFTS

This decision will result in a decrease in the cost of maintaining the NFTS on the Tahoe National Forest by over $1 million annually. This decrease in needed funding is due to my decision to reduce the maintenance levels, where appropriate, on specific NFTS roads. Securing adequate funding to complete needed maintenance of the Forest Transportation System is an ongoing challenge in the face of declining timber sale and cooperative road agreement collections as well as decreases in appropriated funding. I expect that we will need to pursue grant funding more aggressively, further prioritize needed maintenance, as well as explore more creative solutions, such as road maintenance agreements or volunteer trail adoption programs; however, I am committed to maintaining NFTS roads and trails consistent with their established management objectives.

Finally, some have questioned the long-term sustainability of local economies as a result of perceived effects of my decision. Some believe implementation of certain action alternatives will harm small businesses, recreation users, local economies, and reduce public access to Federal lands. I disagree. I believe the Selected Alternative results in a thoughtful network of roads, trails, and areas available for public motorized use. More importantly, I believe my decision maintains opportunities for quality, long-term recreational motor vehicle use, as well as non-motorized recreation opportunities, resulting in a variety of economic opportunities for individuals and communities more effectively than either the existing network of NFTS and unauthorized routes or the other action alternatives. This decision will provide a broad spectrum of recreation opportunities across the Tahoe National Forest while protecting critical natural and cultural resources.

## Implementation of Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule

My decision has been carefully designed to implement the provisions of Subpart B of the Travel Management regulations (36 CFR 212). Subpart B of the Travel Management regulations implements the Executive Orders that direct Federal agencies to ensure the use of off-road vehicles on public lands will be controlled and directed so as to protect the resources of those lands, to promote the safety of all users of those lands, and to minimize conflicts among the various uses of those lands. The Travel Management regulations implement those orders by requiring designation of roads, trails, and areas for motor vehicle use and prohibiting motor vehicle use off the designated system. The Selected Alternative (Alternative 6) fully implements this direction. Publication of a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) following resolution of any appeals of this decision will complete the process by designating the roads, trails, and areas available for public motorized use. The prohibition of motor vehicle use off the designated system will take effect once the MVUM is published. For more about compliance with the Travel Management regulations, see the Legal and Regulatory Compliance section below.

## Public Involvement

We began working with the public on this project more than six years ago. Our public involvement process was designed to be open, inclusive, and collaborative and to involve many diverse interest groups, individuals, agencies, and American Indian Tribes.

The following characterizes the types of public involvement efforts we used throughout the Tahoe National Forest's travel management planning process:

- Numerous public meetings and workshops were held over the past five years to engage the public in helping the Forest Service manage motorized routes on the Forest. These workshops gave the public opportunities for providing comments and feedback on the Forest's inventory of unauthorized routes, bringing forward ideas for developing the proposed action, discussing the proposed action, and understanding how we developed and analyzed the alternatives presented in the DEIS.
- Over the past five years, numerous informal meetings and briefings were held and regular newsletters were published to share the Forest's progress on this project with the public. Field visits, face-to-face meetings, and phone calls were regular forms of communication the Forest Service used to actively engage with the public to answer questions and respond to their issues and concerns.
- During the summer, 2006, a variety of interested individuals with a range of perspectives provided suggestions for designing a public participation process that would allow affected individuals, communities, and the visiting public to help the Forest Service begin building the Proposed Action. Approximately 20 individuals provided suggestions for this part of the public involvement process.
- The Forest Service developed a Proposed Action and alternatives based on broad-based and route-specific comments provided by the public during a series of public workshops held during the fall

of 2006 as well as through meetings, letters, and phone calls. In addition, several groups submitted alternatives to the proposed action, and these alternatives formed the basis for several of the alternatives analyzed in detail in the DEIS, Supplemental DEIS, and FEIS.

After release of the DEIS in September 2008, I received comments from both the environmental and off-highway vehicle communities, questioning whether the DEIS had either erroneously included or excluded certain routes from the NFTS. To respond to these concerns, we conducted an extensive forest-wide, route-by-route review to ensure the accuracy of the NFTS. The details of this review are presented in Chapter 1 of the Supplemental DEIS, released in February 2010, and carried forward into the FEIS. The overall outcome is that the FEIS displays a NFTS that has approximately 405 fewer miles than that displayed in the DEIS (from approximately 2,800 miles in the DEIS to approximately 2,395 miles in the FEIS). We disclosed these changes in the Supplemental DEIS and provided a 45-day comment period for the public to comment on the environmental analysis. During March 2010, I held a series of public meetings in Sierraville, Nevada City, and Auburn to discuss the analyses presented in the Supplemental DEIS and respond to questions and concerns from the public. In addition, I made presentations regarding the Supplemental DEIS at Board of Supervisor meetings for Sierra, Placer, and Nevada Counties. Finally, I personally met with members of the environmental and off-highway vehicle communities to explain our process for defining the existing NFTS and the findings from our review and to get their input on the changes to the NFTS between the DEIS and Supplemental DEIS. In all cases, they appreciated our efforts to ensure the accuracy of the existing NFTS.

**Figure 4. Volunteers assist the Forest Service with maintenance of the Chimney Rock Trail.**

## Implementation Strategy

My decision includes the following implementation strategy:

- Produce a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) based on the Selected Alternative by February 2011, and make it available to the public at no cost. This map will be the legal document that designates NFTS roads and trails and establishes areas on the Forest that may be legally traveled with a motor vehicle, as well as identifies the allowed vehicle class, and any seasonal or other use restrictions.
- Revise and reissue this MVUM as needed to accommodate future changes in the NFTS roads and trails on the Tahoe National Forest.
- Implement mitigation measures for specific roads and motorized trails that will be added to the NFTS as well as the established “Open Areas” at Boca, Stampede, and Prosser Reservoirs. This decision’s mitigation measures, relative to each specific route to be added to the NFTS and “Open

Area" to be established, are included in Appendix A of the FEIS (Site Specific Road, Trail and Open Area Information). The mitigation measures specified for each route must be implemented prior to opening the route for public motorized use (in other words, prior to designating the route on the MVUM). Scheduling of mitigation measures will be prioritized based on the following considerations: (1) roads and trails where route location or deteriorated condition is causing substantial adverse effects on riparian, watershed, threatened, endangered or sensitive species, or significant cultural resources; (2) mitigation measures that are relatively inexpensive and easy to implement (for example, signage or simple barriers); (3) roads and trails that provide Transportation System connectivity, access to important destinations, or key public benefits and recreation opportunities. Upon completion of the required mitigation, the route will appear as a designated public road or motorized trail on subsequent revisions of the MVUM.

- A gully has been created by water flow that is being concentrated on an access road to Big Dawg Cove at Boca Reservoir. Before this area is opened to motorized travel, waterbars will be installed on the road to prevent sediment from entering the Reservoir. My decision further adds annual effectiveness monitoring to ensure that the specified mitigation is indeed preventing sediment from entering the Reservoir. If necessary, we will take further steps (with the requisite environmental analysis) to ensure that sediment does not enter the Reservoir from this access road.
- Supplement the MVUM by signing NFTS roads and trails that are open to public use on the ground with a road or trail number and applicable regulatory information.
- Continue working with groups interested in the management of NFTS roads and trails and "Open Areas" on the Tahoe National Forest by providing stewardship opportunities for the public. Activities of these groups could include, but are not limited to:
  - Developing a public volunteer strategy to identify opportunities for the public to help implement, enforce, maintain, and fund the designated route system.
  - Expanding a volunteer core capable of supporting ongoing resource protection measures, disseminating public information, conducting effectiveness and resource monitoring, and helping maintain NFTS infrastructure (including signs, kiosks, roads, trails, and restoration efforts).
  - Developing a public education strategy to educate forest visitors about the designated route system, assist the public with reading the MVUM, and educate forest visitors about best practices for minimizing impacts resulting from motorized travel activities.
  - Assisting with the implementation of actions included in this decision, such as mitigations, signage, monitoring, and maintenance.

## Alternatives Considered in Detail but Not Selected

In addition to the Selected Alternative, I considered six other alternatives in detail, which are summarized below. A more detailed comparison of these alternatives can be found in Chapter 2 of the FEIS.

## Alternative 1 (No Action)

The No Action Alternative represents existing conditions and provides a baseline for comparing the other alternatives. Under the No Action Alternative, the 1990 Tahoe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP or Forest Plan), as amended, would continue to guide travel management on the Forest. The Travel Management Rule would not be implemented, and no Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) would be produced. Under the No Action Alternative, cross country motor vehicle travel off designated NFTS roads and trails and outside established "Open Areas" would continue as would public motorized use on approximately 869 miles of existing unauthorized routes. Unauthorized routes would not be added to the NFTS and would continue to have no status or authorization as NFTS facilities. Finally, no changes would be made to the current NFTS, which includes approximately 2,396 miles of roads and motorized trails.

There are a number of reasons for not selecting this alternative. The primary reason, however, is that it would not meet the purpose of, and need for, taking action here and now. Motor vehicle use on the Tahoe National Forest would continue without adequate management. Although drivers are currently prohibited from operating vehicles off NFTS roads in a manner that damages or unreasonably disturbs the land, wildlife, or vegetative resources (36 CFR 261.15(h)), allegations of resource damage are difficult to substantiate using this prohibition. As a result, current difficulties associated with prosecuting motor vehicle users whose activities result in adverse resource impacts would continue under Alternative 1. This alternative would have the greatest likelihood of route proliferation, which would be unacceptable in terms of adverse effects on wildlife, biological diversity, fisheries, soils, and water quality. With the anticipated growth in population and increased visitor use, this alternative has the potential to create serious resource problems in the future.

Although Alternative 1 would allow for the continued use of 869 miles of existing unauthorized routes, these routes would have no status as NFTS roads. Routes would continue to be used that have unacceptable effects on forest resources, such as soil and water resources, habitat for aquatic species, cultural resource sites, terrestrial habitat, and sensitive plants.

## Alternative 2

Alternative 2 responds to the issue of inadequate motorized recreation opportunities. During scoping, the Tahoe National Forest received numerous site-specific suggestions for adding roads, motorized trails, and established "Open Areas" to the NFTS to improve public access and enhance motorized recreation opportunities. Alternative 2 adds unauthorized motorized routes and "Open Areas" site-specifically suggested by the public during scoping, to the extent they are consistent with law, regulation, and policy. Under Alternative 2, approximately 60 miles of new roads and motorized trails would be added to the NFTS and approximately 2,649 acres of "Open Areas" would be established. Alternative 2 includes the following actions:

- prohibiting cross country motorized travel off of designated roads, trails and areas;
- adding 5.0 miles of unauthorized routes as NFTS roads;

- adding 54.6 miles of unauthorized routes as NFTS motorized trails;
- establishing 2,649 acres as "Open Areas";
- allowing licensed operators of non-highway legal vehicles to operate on 398.7 miles of NFTS roads (where such use is currently prohibited);
- placing seasonal restrictions on NFTS roads and motorized trails only where specified in the existing Forest Plan; and
- amending the Forest Plan for the Humbug Sailor Management Area (#84) to remove the seasonal closure (from November 1 to May 1) for motor vehicle use on key deer winter range.

I did not select Alternative 2 because it does not adequately balance the need to access recreation opportunities with the protection of important resource values and public safety. The absence of wet weather seasonal closures on any roads or motorized trails under this alternative would result in soil erosion and stream sedimentation, with unacceptable adverse effects on water quality and aquatic species and their habitats. In addition, the large open OHV riding areas below the high waterline at Boca, Stampede, and Prosser Reservoirs would put cultural resource sites at risk and would adversely impact water quality impact and habitat for aquatic species. Finally, Alternative 2 would add several motorized routes in the West Yuba and East Yuba Inventoried Roadless Areas that would result in significant adverse impacts on the roadless character of these Areas. As I have previously described, the Tahoe National Forest currently has limited opportunities for quiet recreation and solitude: adding these routes would further reduce these opportunities.

Under Alternative 2, licensed operators of non-highway legal vehicles would be allowed to operate such vehicles on approximately 399 miles of NFTS roads (where such use is currently prohibited). Of the roads analyzed for mixed use under this alternative, approximately 169 miles (42 percent) had moderate to high mixed use crash severity ratings and were inconsistent with California Vehicle Code Division 16.5. These serious safety concerns were another reason I did not select this alternative.

## Alternative 3

Alternative 3 responds to issues of (1) adverse effects of motorized recreation use on non-motorized recreation experiences and (2) potential adverse impacts from motorized recreation use on natural and cultural resources. As such, this alternative prohibits cross country motor vehicle travel while not adding any new roads or motorized trails to the NFTS. None of the existing 869 miles of unauthorized routes would be added to the NFTS under this alternative. Like Alternative 1, this alternative also provides a baseline for comparing the long-term impacts of other alternatives that propose adding routes to the NFTS and making changes to the season of use and class of vehicles allowed on existing NFTS roads and trails. Alternative 3 includes the following actions:

- prohibiting cross country motorized travel off of designated roads and trails;
- not adding existing unauthorized routes as NFTS roads or motorized trails;
- not establishing "Open Areas"; and

- placing seasonal restrictions on NFTS roads and motorized trails only where specified in the existing Forest Plan.

Because Alternative 3 would not add any routes to the Forest Transportation System, potential adverse effects on cultural, biological, and physical resources associated with motor vehicle use on routes added to the NFTS would be avoided. This alternative would provide the fewest opportunities for loop touring and access to dispersed recreation opportunities. Because this alternative would not impose seasonal restrictions on the existing NFTS, soil erosion and subsequent stream sedimentation associated with motor vehicle use on NFTS roads and trails during wet weather periods would continue. I did not select this alternative because restricting motorized recreation use to existing NFTS roads and trails would eliminate critical dispersed recreation opportunities, particularly when one considers that the potential adverse environmental effects of the Selected Alternative's route additions have been effectively minimized.

## Alternative 4

Alternative 4 is based on an alternative that was submitted by a coalition of environmental groups. As such, it responds to issues of (1) adverse effects of motorized recreation use on non-motorized recreation experiences and (2) potential adverse impacts from motorized recreation use on natural and cultural resources. This alternative does not add any motorized routes to the NFTS within Inventoried Roadless Areas, including citizen-inventoried roadless areas. In addition, Alternative 4 does not add any unauthorized routes that are located within existing California spotted owl or northern goshawk Protected Activity Centers to the NFTS, nor does it add motorized trails on slope gradients greater than 15 percent. This alternative allows minimal motorized mixed use opportunities (approximately 3.4 miles of mixed use compared to 130.8 miles of mixed use under the Selected Alternative). In addition, it does not provide any motorized access to the shorelines of Boca, Stampede, and Prosser Reservoirs. Alternative 4 includes the following actions:

- prohibiting cross country motorized travel off of designated roads and trails;
- adding approximately 3.7 miles of unauthorized routes as NFTS roads;
- adding approximately 22.6 miles of unauthorized routes as NFTS motorized trails;
- not establishing additional "Open Areas" on the Forest;
- allowing licensed operators of non-highway legal vehicles to operate on 3.4 miles of NFTS roads (where such use is currently prohibited);
- adding the following seasonal closures to those specified in the existing Forest Plan: wet weather seasonal closures on native surface roads and motorized trails from January 1 to May 31 in the Burlington area and January 1 to April 30 on the remainder of the Forest; and
- re-opening 0.1 miles of an existing closed road to motor vehicle use.

Of the five action alternatives that propose route additions to the NFTS (Alternatives 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7), Alternative 4 adds the least miles of roads and trails to the NFTS. Alternative 4 emphasizes avoiding

potential adverse impacts on natural resources, which is primarily accomplished by avoiding sensitive areas (unless there is an overriding need for the route).

This alternative avoids adverse resource impacts in Inventoried Roadless Areas resulting from motorized use of routes added to the NFTS in these areas. In addition, potential adverse impacts on sensitive and watchlist plant species as well as cultural resources are minimal. However, I cannot accept the effects Alternative 4 would have on motorized dispersed recreation opportunities. Routes that have been used for decades to access important recreation destinations, such as Slab Rock, Andesite Peak, and the Rubicon River as well as the shorelines of Boca, Prosser, and Stampede Reservoirs, would no longer be available for motorized use under Alternative 4. This alternative would not provide sufficient diversity of motorized recreation opportunities, nor would it maintain traditional access to key dispersed recreation opportunities. While Alternative 4 would provide slightly higher resource protection compared to the other action alternatives that add routes to the NFTS, I believe that it does so at the expense of recreational opportunities. Alternative 6 (the Selected Alternative) provides a better, more balanced, approach. By applying appropriate mitigations to roads and trails, and designating a limited number of motorized trails primarily on the peripheries of Inventoried Roadless Areas, similar resource protection goals can be achieved while still providing sufficient public motorized access. It is for these reasons that I did not select Alternative 4.

## Alternative 5

Alternative 5 is based on an alternative that was submitted by the Blue Ribbon Coalition and responds to the issue of inadequate motorized recreation opportunities. This alternative focuses on adding unauthorized routes to the NFTS and making changes to the existing NFTS to provide enhanced motor vehicle access and motorized recreation opportunities across the Forest. Of all action alternatives, Alternative 5 adds the greatest mileage of motorized roads and trails to the NFTS. It also re-opens the most closed NFTS roads for motorized public use (approximately 93.4 miles under this alternative compared to 11.4 miles under the Selected Alternative). Alternative 5 includes the following actions:

- prohibiting cross country motorized travel off of designated roads, trails and areas;
- adding 5.0 miles of unauthorized routes as NFTS roads;
- adding 75.4 miles of unauthorized routes as NFTS motorized trails;
- not establishing additional “Open Areas” on the Forest;
- allowing licensed operators of non-highway legal vehicles to operate on 398.7 miles of NFTS roads (where such use is currently prohibited);
- adding the following seasonal closures to those specified in the existing Forest Plan: wet weather seasonal closures on native surface roads and motorized trails from January 1 to May 1 in the Burlington Area and January 1 to April 30 on the remainder of the Forest;
- amending the Forest Plan for the Humbug Sailor Management Area (#84) to remove the seasonal closure (from November 1 to May 1) for motor vehicle use on key deer winter range; and
- re-opening 93.4 miles of closed NFTS roads to motor vehicle use.

In some cases, Alternative 5 adds roads or trails in areas that are not of particular recreational need and duplicates other more recreationally important roads. Many of the existing closed roads proposed for re-opening under this alternative do not provide access to important recreational destinations. While this alternative provides the most total miles of roads and trails of all the action alternatives, many are not necessarily needed for accessing high quality recreational opportunities. In addition, because Alternative 5 results in the greatest mileage of NFTS roads and motorized trails, potential adverse impacts on air quality, watershed condition, habitats for terrestrial and aquatic wildlife species, and roadless area character are greatest under this alternative compared to the other action alternatives. For these reasons, I did not select this alternative.

## Alternative 7

Alternative 7 is the Proposed Action described in the Notice of Intent (NOI) published in the Federal Register on April 11, 2007. The Proposed Action represents our initial starting point for meeting the purpose of and need for this project; hence, it includes a prohibition on cross country motorized travel as well as additions and changes to the existing NFTS. Specifically, Alternative 7 includes the following actions:

- prohibiting cross country motorized travel off of designated roads, trails and areas;
- not adding unauthorized routes as NFTS roads;
- adding 36.7 miles of unauthorized routes as NFTS motorized trails;
- not establishing additional “Open Areas” on the Forest;
- allowing licensed operators of non-highway legal vehicles to operate on 3.4 miles of NFTS roads (where such use is currently prohibited);
- not adding wet weather seasonal restrictions on NFTS roads or motorized trails beyond those specified in the existing Forest Plan; and
- re-opening 1.1 miles of existing closed roads to motor vehicle use.

Alternative 7 represents a starting point for a system of routes based on public input and comment. Although it formed the basis for the final Selected Alternative, it does not provide adequate access to dispersed recreation sites, nor does it incorporate many of the actions needed to ensure protection of critical resources. Alternative 7 does not add all of the routes site-specifically recommended by the public during the scoping and DEIS comment period, a number of which provide access to important dispersed recreation opportunities. In addition, this alternative does not include a number of the Selected Alternative’s important resource protection measures, particularly seasonal wet weather restriction and protection for Inventoried Roadless Areas. I did not select this alternative because it does not provide sufficient recreation opportunities nor does it provide adequate protection for forest resources.

## Environmentally Preferable Alternative

The environmentally preferable alternative is often interpreted as the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; however, other factors relevant to this determination

are provided in Section 101 of NEPA. These include fulfilling the responsibilities of each generation as a trustee of the environment for succeeding generations; assuring safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings for all Americans; and achieving a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities. Based on my consideration of these factors and the effects disclosed in the FEIS, I consider Alternative 4 to be the environmentally preferable alternative. My reasons for not selecting Alternative 4 are provided above.

## Legal and Regulatory Compliance

My decision complies with the laws, policies, and executive orders listed below and described in Chapter 3 of the FEIS.

## Forest Plan Consistency

My decision includes one amendment to the management direction contained in the *Tahoe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan* (LRMP, 1990). Information about this amendment and the evaluation of significance under the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) is provided below.

## Forest Plan Amendment

Existing Forest Plan direction for the Humbug Sailor Management Area (#84) includes the following: "Off-Highway Vehicle Restrictions - On key winter deer winter range, closed November 1 to May 1. This restriction can be amended if weather conditions are such that deer are not on the winter range." Selection of Alternative 6 requires a forest plan amendment to remove the seasonal closure (from November 1 to May 1) on key deer winter range within the Humbug Sailor Management Area. Under the Selected Alternative, a wet weather seasonal restriction for motor vehicle use on native surface roads and motorized trails will be in effect on key deer winter range in the Humbug Sailor Management Area from January 1 to March 31. This amendment will provide a three-month longer season for motorized recreation activities in the Sugar Pine area during April and November and December while continuing to provide important habitat for the Blue Canyon Deer Herd, which has key deer winter range in this area as well as adjacent areas.

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires that proposed forest plan amendments be evaluated for whether they would constitute a significant change in the long-term goods, outputs, and services projected for the national forest. The following criteria are used to determine the significance of forest plan amendments (Forest Service Manual 1926.51-52).

**1. Actions that do not significantly alter the multiple-use goals and objectives for the long-term land and resource management.**

The amendment is consistent with the Forest Plan goals to "provide a broad range of developed and dispersed recreation opportunities in accordance with identified needs and demands" (LRMP, p. V-5) and

to "manage fish and wildlife habitats to maintain viable populations of all vertebrate species (LRMP, p. V-8). This amendment will provide additional opportunities to engage in motorized recreational activities in the Sugar Pine area by allowing motorized use within the Humbug-Sailor Management Area during April, November, and December. In the meantime, existing Forest Plan direction aimed at minimizing disturbance from off-highway vehicles on the Blue Canyon Deer Herd when deer may be using key winter range will continue to minimize potential adverse effects associated with motor vehicle use across most (over 92 percent)of the Herd's key winter range. (Refer to Significance Item #3 below.)

The FEIS (Chapter 3, Part 3.03, "Mule Deer: Environmental Consequences – Amendments to the Forest Plan") discloses the potential effects of amending the Forest Plan to allow motor vehicle use during April, November, and December in the portion of the Blue Canyon Herd's key winter range that lies within the Humbug Sailor Management Area. The analysis shows that reducing the seasonal restriction period by three months along 8.6 miles of existing NFTS roads in the Humbug-Sailor Management Area could result in motor vehicle noise potentially disturbing or displacing deer on approximately 7.6 percent (1,228 acres) of the Blue Canyon Deer Herd's total key deer winter range. This Forest Plan amendment is not expected to pose a significant risk to the overall condition and trend of the Blue Canyon Deer Herd, particularly since annual weather conditions are more likely to have a greater influence on deer herd numbers in the area than motorized use along existing roads during the months of November, December, and April. Furthermore, motorized use in this area is relatively low during these months, especially in April when the area may still be under snow. Motor vehicle and deer interactions are likely to be negligible since concurrent motorized use and deer presence along the 8.6 miles of affected roads is likely to be minimal. Therefore, this Forest Plan amendment will have little effect on the Blue Canyon Deer Herd.

**2. Adjustments of management area boundaries or management prescriptions resulting from further on-site analysis when the adjustments do not cause significant changes in the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management.**

This amendment will not change management area or management prescription boundaries. The amendment will not trigger changes in the classification and management of key deer winter range on the Forest. Ultimately, this amendment serves to support the achievement of multiple-use goals for providing a broad range of recreation opportunities while maintaining key habitat for deer.

**3. Minor changes in standards and guidelines.**

The amendment will not change the forestwide standards and guidelines for deer habitat management (LRMP, pg. V-30). The forestwide standard and guideline for deer habitat management directs managers to "limit vehicle access on key deer winter ranges when deer are present."

Key deer winter range for the Blue Canyon Deer Herd encompasses approximately 16,108 acres and is located within portions of a number of the Forest's management areas, including the Casa Loma, American, Macy, North Fork, Humbug Sailor, Sugar Pine, Big Oak, and Little Oak Management Areas. While this amendment makes a minor change in the motor vehicle restrictions on key deer winter range

within the Humbug Sailor Management Area, it will not change the existing motor vehicle use closures and seasonal restrictions for the management areas displayed in Table 4.

This amendment will remove the following motor vehicle seasonal restriction for key deer habitat within the Humbug Sailor Management Area: "Key Deer Winter Range – Closed November 1 to May 1. This restriction can be amended if weather conditions are such that deer are not on the winter range." However, motor vehicle use on native surface roads and motorized trails will be restricted in key deer winter range within the Humbug Sailor Management Area from January 1 through March 31 through the wet weather seasonal restrictions, which will beneficially affect deer that may be present in the area during this time.

**Table 4. Forest Plan Off-Highway Vehicle Seasonal Restrictions: Blue Canyon Deer Herd Key Winter Range Management Areas (MA).**

| MA # | MA Name | Motor Vehicle Use Restriction | Restricted Dates |
|---|---|---|---|
| **59** | Casa Loma | Off-Highway Vehicle Restrictions - Designated routes only. Seasonal closure on key deer winter range November 1 to May 1 when deer are using the area. | November 1 to May 1 |
| **82** | North Fork | Closed to off-highway vehicle use | Year round |
| **87** | American | Closed to off-highway vehicle use | Year round |
| **95** | Macy | Closed to off-highway vehicle use | Year round |
| **106** | Big Oak | Off-Highway Vehicle Restrictions: Designated routes only in summer. Closed November 1 to May 1on key deer winter range. This restriction can be amended if weather conditions are such that deer are not on the winter range. | November 1 to May 1 |
| **108** | Little Oak | Off-Highway Vehicle Restrictions: Designated routes only in summer. Closed November 1 to May 1 on key deer winter range. This restriction can be amended if weather conditions are such that deer are not on the winter range. | November 1 to May 1 |

**4. Opportunities for additional projects or activities that will contribute to achievement of the management prescription.**

As described in the sections above, existing forest plan seasonal closures, combined with the wet weather seasonal closures that are part of this decision, will contribute to achieving the goal of minimizing disturbance to the Blue Canyon Deer Herd when these animals are utilizing key winter range. Further, this decision's prohibition on cross country motorized travel on approximately 16,108 acres of key winter range for the Blue Canyon Deer Herd will provide an overall net benefit by reducing the potential for motor vehicle disturbance of deer.

**5. Changes that would significantly alter the long-term relationship between levels of multiple-use goods and services originally projected (36 CFR 219.10(e)).**

This amendment does not alter the long-term relationships between the levels of goods and services projected by the 1990 Tahoe National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. This amendment constitutes a minor change to a standard and guideline for a small portion of the Humbug Sailor

Management Area. As such, this amendment will not alter the long-term relationship between levels of multiple-use goods and services originally projected in the Forest Plan.

**6. Changes that may have an important effect on the entire forest plan or affect land and resources throughout a large portion of the planning area during the planning period.**
This amendment will affect a small portion (approximately 7.6 percent) of the Forest Plan's identified key deer winter range for the Blue Canyon Deer Herd, one of four major deer herds on the Tahoe National Forest. In addition, the seasonal wet weather restrictions that are part of this decision will have an associated beneficial effect of minimizing disturbance to deer utilizing this key winter range for a 3-month period during the height of winter. This amendment will not change land allocations or management direction for other elements of the LRMP. It affects a small portion (approximately 7.6 percent) of the overall key winter range for a relatively short time period (3 months), and will not affect the entire Forest Plan, nor will it affect land and resources throughout a large portion of the planning area during the planning period.

**Conclusion**. The proposed amendment is fully consistent with the Forest Plan goals to provide a broad range of recreation opportunities balanced with managing wildlife habitats to maintain viable populations of all vertebrate species. Given the importance of the Sugar Pine area for motorized recreation activities and the importance of this use to local economies, providing three additional months for motorized recreation activities, combined with the existing Forest Plan seasonal restrictions and those put in place by this decision, strikes a balance between these goals. Based on consideration of the factors above and the analysis contained in Chapter 3.03 of the FEIS, I have determined that adoption of this amendment is not significant in the context of NFMA.

I hereby amend the 1990 Forest Plan with this non-significant amendment to remove the 1990 Forest Plan's seasonal restrictions for off-highway vehicle use on key deer winter range in the Humbug Sailor (#84) Management Area.

## Travel Management Regulations

The Travel Management regulations require that certain criteria be considered when designating routes for motor vehicle use (36 CFR 212.55(a) through (e)). These criteria have been considered at all stages of this process beginning with the development of the underlying Purpose and Need (FEIS Chapter 1), development of the alternatives, analysis of effects (as documented in the 'Compliance with the Forest Plan and Other Direction' sections of each resource's analysis in Chapter 3 of the FEIS), and ultimately my selection of Alternative 6. Throughout the ROD and the FEIS, there are many specific examples of how I considered the Travel Management Rule criteria in making this decision. The following details have been included to underscore the importance I gave to these criteria in my decision:

- **Cultural resources.** My decision reduces effects to cultural resources by mitigating all identified and potential adverse effects to 62 cultural sites associated with use of routes added to the transportation system (FEIS Chapter 3.05). Further, this decision is in full compliance with Programmatic Agreements with the State of California.

- **Public safety.** The Selected Alternative authorizes the use of proposed Maintenance Level 2 roads or motorized trails that have been determined to be generally safe (FEIS Chapter 3.08). In addition, public safety has been my top priority when considering whether to allow mixed use on passenger car roads (FEIS Chapter 3.08, Appendix J [Roads Analyzed for Motorized Mixed Use], and Mixed Use Analysis Reports).
- **Access to public and private lands.** When identifying routes to add to the NFTS, I focused on meeting the needs of the public by providing access to the most desired routes and areas on the Forest. In addition, my decision will not impact access to private lands, as this project does not designate roads or trails through private lands where the Forest Service does not have right-of-way nor will it change existing rights-of-way for adjacent private landowners.
- **Availability of resources for maintenance and administration of roads, trails and areas that would arise if the uses under consideration are designated.** As stated previously, the Selected Alternative will reduce annual operations and maintenance costs below current levels, resulting in a more affordable Transportation System. (Refer to FEIS Chapter 3.08.)
- **Minimizing damage to soil, watershed, vegetation and other forest resources.** Routes added to the NFTS as part of my decision are expected to maintain and improve water quality and satisfy Federal and State water quality requirements. My decision minimizes impacts to both soil and water resources, including riparian and aquatic habitats, by only adding routes where adverse impacts could be either avoided or mitigated to acceptable levels. The full analysis displaying these effects can be found in Chapter 3 of the FEIS.
- With respect to **botanical resources**, the *Biological Evaluation for Sensitive Plants and Fungi* and the analysis presented in Chapter 3.06 of the FEIS determined that my decision is not likely to result in a trend toward federal listing or loss of viability for any sensitive plants or fungi. The project includes species-specific mitigation to reduce or avoid potential impacts to rare plants. Mitigations include placing barriers to protect rare plants from impacts associated with motor vehicle use (FEIS Appendix A: Site Specific Road, Trail and Open Area Information). Lastly, my decision includes mitigation to instruct road and trail maintenance crews on weed identification and reporting and to manually treat weed occurrences adjacent to designated routes.(FEIS Appendix A: Site Specific Road, Trail and Open Area Information).
- **Minimizing harassment of wildlife and significant disruption of wildlife habitat.** Routes with known or potential conflicts with rare wildlife species or their habitat were not proposed for addition to the NFTS unless mitigation measures were identified to minimize or eliminate the conflict (FEIS Chapter 3.03). For all sensitive species, it was determined that the Selected Alternative would not result in a trend towards federal listing or a loss of population viability. The California red-legged frog and Lahontan cutthroat trout will not be adversely affected by my decision (USFWS concurrence letters, August 13, 2010 and July 7, 2010 respectively).
- **Minimizing conflicts between motor vehicles and existing or proposed recreational uses of National Forest System lands.** The Selected Alternative was developed in an interdisciplinary setting, with the objective of avoiding potential conflict between motor vehicle use and non-

motorized recreational use. Further, the Selected Alternative does not add roads or trails to the NFTS in Inventoried Roadless Areas where such additions would have a significant adverse impact on roadless area characteristics. The Selected Alternative also includes mitigation measures to prevent motor vehicles on designated NFTS roads and trails from traveling on non-motorized trails. Finally, it allows only highway legal vehicles to use roads accessing the Grouse Lakes Inventoried Roadless Area (specifically Roads 843-037, 17, 17-6, 14, 14-1, 14-7, and 18-6) to prevent potential off-highway vehicle incursion into the IRA and potential conflicts between motorized and non-motorized use.

- **Minimizing conflicts among different classes of motor vehicle uses of National Forest System lands or neighboring federal lands.** I have considered the vehicle class and use of routes on adjacent lands to ensure compatible designations for the adjoining route segments on National Forest System lands. As described previously, mixed use proposals have been designed to maintain safety for the public and minimize conflicts between different vehicle classes on passenger car roads (FEIS Chapter 3.08).
- **Compatibility of motor vehicle use with existing conditions in populated areas, taking into account sound, emissions, etc.** Most of the routes added to the NFTS are located far from populated areas.
- **Speed, volume, composition, and distribution of traffic on roads.** Based on the analysis disclosed in the FEIS, I have determined that limitations dictated by the terrain, site distance, and condition of the road surface make the routes suitable for addition to the NFTS as low standard roads or motorized trails rather than higher standard roads. Signs to warn drivers of the class of vehicles authorized and expected on particular routes will be posted as part of the implementation of this decision: signs will be placed where roads open to all vehicles intersect with roads open to highway legal vehicles only. Authorized vehicles will be shown on or adjacent to all route markers. Maintenance Level 3 NFTS routes designated for mixed use will be signed appropriately to warn drivers of mixed use.
- **Compatibility of vehicle class with road geometry and road surfacing.** As described above, routes added to the NFTS will be entered into the System as either Maintenance Level 2 roads or motorized trails based on vehicle compatibility considerations and the need to provide a range of different recreational opportunities. The analysis of each Maintenance Level 3 road proposed for motorized mixed use considered the compatibility of each vehicle class with the road geometry and surfacing based on an assessment of the type and size of vehicle in conjunction with the driver's level of skill.

## Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

The National Environmental Policy Act at 40 CFR 1502.25(a) directs "to the fullest extent possible, agencies shall prepare draft EIS concurrently with and integrated with …other environmental review laws and executive orders." Each resource section in the FEIS includes a list of applicable laws, regulations,

policies and Executive Orders that are relevant to that resource. Surveys, analyses, and findings required by those laws are specifically addressed in Chapter 3 of the FEIS. These laws include:

- **National Forest Management Act.** See the Forest Plan Consistency section above.
- **Clean Water Act.** The project is designed to comply with this law and its implementing regulations and policies. The primary method for assuring compliance with the Clean Water Act is through implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs). BMPs are implemented as mitigation measures specified in Appendix A (Site Specific Road, Trail and Open Area Information) for any motorized trail to be added to the National Forest Transportation System or any lands to be established as "Open Areas." These mitigation measures would meet water quality objectives and maintain and improve the quality of surface water on the Forest. All of the action alternatives will improve water quality on the Forest (FEIS Chapter 3.02).
- **Endangered Species Act.** In 2006, the Forest Service's Pacific Southwest Region entered into programmatic consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) for motor vehicle route designation (travel management) in 14 national forests in California. In a letter dated December 27, 2006, the FWS concurred with the document entitled "Route Designation: Project Design Criteria for 'No Effect' or 'May Affect Not Likely to Adversely Affect' Determination for TE Species – October 2006 Version 1" (USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region, October 6, 2006). This programmatic consultation document and the Tahoe NF Motorized Travel Management Project Biological Evaluation/Assessment for Birds, Mammals, Reptiles, and Amphibians (Tina Mark, August 2010) are incorporated by reference in the FEIS. Project-specific consultation with FWS was completed via the above-referenced programmatic consultation at the Regional level for all listed species, except the Lahontan cutthroat trout and California red legged frog. Consultation for the Lahontan cutthroat trout was completed with the Reno Office of the FWS, and the FWS concurred with the Forest Service's determination that the Selected Alternative "may affect but would not adversely affect" this species in a letter dated July 7, 2010. Consultation for the California red-legged frog was completed with the Sacramento Office of the FWS, and the FWS concurred with the Forest Service's determination that the Selected Alternative "may affect but would not adversely affect" this species in a letter dated August 13, 2010.
- **Executive Order 13112 Invasive Species 64 FR 6183 (February 8, 1999).** Consistent with this Order, this project has incorporated feasible and prudent mitigation measures in the Selected Alternative to minimize risk of harm caused by invasive species. As documented in the noxious weed risk assessment prepared by the Project Botanist contained in the project record (Van Zuuk, July 2009), all high risk routes that have known high priority weeds within 100 feet will be treated in the early stages of project implementation, consistent with Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (2004) direction to mitigate high risk actions. Required weed treatment mitigations are detailed in the FEIS Appendix A: Site Specific Road, Trail and Open Area Information.
- **National Historic Preservation Act.** This project was designed to meet this act by following the *Programmatic Agreement among the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Intermountain Region's Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest, California State*

*Historic Preservation Officer, and Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Regarding the Process for Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for Designating Motor Vehicle Routes and Managing Motorized Recreation on the National Forests in California* (2005).

## Special Area Designations

I have determined that the Selected Alternative complies with laws, regulations, and policies that pertain to the following special areas. In addition, I believe that this decision enhances the values that make these special areas unique.

- **Research Natural Areas**. No routes within RNAs are added to the NFTS.
- **Special Interest Areas.** No routes within SIAs are added to the NFTS.
- **Inventoried Roadless Areas.** As documented in Chapter 3.09 of the FEIS, the Selected Alternative would improve the roadless area character of IRAs on the Forest by prohibiting motorized cross country travel and reducing the amount of roads and trails available for public motorized use.
- **Wilderness Areas.** No routes are added to the NFTS for public use within **w**ilderness areas.
- **Wild and Scenic Rivers.** No routes will be added within all but one of the Forest's eligible and designated wild and scenic river segments. The Selected Alternative will add a few short motorized trails to the NFTS to provide access to dispersed recreation sites along the South Yuba River. These additions will not affect the segment's classification, will not modify the free-flowing character of the river, and will protect identified outstandingly remarkable values (FEIS Chapter 3.09).

## Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 215. In accordance with the April 24, 2006 order issued by the U. S. District Court for the Missoula Division of the District of Montana in Case No. CV 03-119-M-DWM, only those individuals and organizations who provided comments during the comment period are eligible to appeal [36 CFR 215.11(a), 1993 version]. Appeals must be filed within 45 days from the publication date of the legal notice in the Grass Valley's **The Union** newspaper. Notices of appeal must meet the specific content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14. An appeal, including attachments, must be filed (regular mail, fax, e-mail, hand-delivery, express delivery, or messenger service) with the appropriate Appeal Deciding Officer [36 CFR 215.8] within 45 days following the publication date of the legal notice. The publication date of the legal notice is the exclusive means for calculating the time period to file an appeal [36 CFR 215.15 (a)]. Those wishing to appeal should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Appeals must be submitted to Regional Forester, USDA Forest Service, 1323 Club Drive, Vallejo, CA 94592, (707) 562-8737. Appeals may be submitted by FAX [(707) 562-9091] or by hand-delivery to the Regional Office, at the address shown above, during normal business hours (Monday-Friday 8:00am to

4:00pm). Electronic appeals, in acceptable [plain text (.txt), rich text (.rtf) or Word (.doc)(docx)] formats, may be submitted to appeals-pacificsouthwest-regional-office@fs.fed.us with Subject: Tahoe Motorized Travel Management.

For electronically mailed appeals, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgment from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgment of the receipt of the appeal, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means [36 CFR 215.6(a)(4)(iii)].

## Implementation Date

If no appeals are filed within the 45-day appeal period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, five 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 Person

The FEIS and supporting documents are available for public review at the Tahoe National Forest, Supervisor's Office, 631 Coyote Street, Nevada City, CA 95959, (530) 265-4531. For further information on this decision, contact David Arrasmith, Project Team Leader, at the above address or phone (530) 478-6220.

### Signature and Date

**Tom Quinn**
Forest Supervisor, Tahoe National Forest
Nevada City, CA

September 21, 2010
**Date**

# Summary

## Proposed Action as Described in the Notice of Intent

1. **Prohibition of Cross Country Travel**: Public wheeled motor vehicle travel off designated NFTS roads, NFTS trails, and outside designated motorized use areas would be prohibited, except as allowed by permit or other authorization.
2. **Additions to the NFTS**:
   a. No unauthorized routes would be added as roads to the NFTS.
   b. 36.7 miles (36 routes) of unauthorized routes would be added as motorized trails to the NFTS.
3. **Establishment of Motorized "Open Areas"**: No additional motorized "Open Areas" would be established.
4. **Changes to the NFTS**:
   a. **Change Vehicle Classes through Mixed Use**: No changes would be made to allow licensed operators of non-highway legal vehicles to operate on NFTS roads where such use is currently prohibited through approval of mixed use.
   b. **Change Vehicle Classes through Maintenance Levels:** Change vehicle class on 3.4 miles to allow operators of non-highway legal vehicles to operate on NFTS roads where such use is currently prohibited through the conversion of ML 3 roads (maintained for passenger cars) to ML 2 (maintained for high clearance vehicles).
   c. **Changes in Seasonal Restrictions:** No changes in seasonal restrictions would be made.
   d. **Reopening Maintenance Level 1 Roads**: Two Maintenance Level 1 roads (1.1 miles) would be reopened to motorized use.
5. **Amendments to the Forest Plan**: No amendments would be made to the Forest Plan.

Including the additions and changes described above, the Proposed Action would result in a system of 2,068.5 miles of NFTS roads and 365.0 miles of NFTS motorized trails open to public motorized use. A more detailed description of the Proposed Action can be found in Chapter 2 (The Alternatives). A map of the Proposed Action is available on compact disc. Appendix A (Site Specific Road, Trail and Open Area Information) shows the specified vehicle class, season of use and any required mitigations associated with any facility added to the NFTS under this proposed action.

## Significant Issues

Internal and external scoping identified the following significant issues which were used in developing the action alternatives. The significant issues include the following:

**Table S-1. Significant Issues**

| Issue/Element | Cause and Effect |
|---|---|
| **Significant Issue Statement #1**. The route inventory identified approximately 1,596.3 miles of existing unauthorized routes and the Proposed Action only adds 36.7 miles of these to the NFTS. Reducing the miles of routes available for public motorized use and prohibiting cross country travel as described in the Proposed Action will adversely affect the quality and quantity of motorized recreation experiences | |
| **Motorized Recreation Opportunities** | • Does not provide adequate access to key destinations, including campsites, scenic overlooks, and hunting areas.<br>• Reduces loops and connectors to provide longer riding time and spurs for exploration.<br>• Reduces the diversity of opportunities for different vehicles (ATVs, motorcycles, 4WD).<br>• Reduces semi-primitive riding opportunities and experiences. |
| **Significant Issue Statement #2.** Public motorized use of roads and trails as described in the Proposed Action will adversely affect non-motorized recreation experiences. | |
| **Non-Motorized Recreation Opportunities** | • Increases in engine noise will impact non-motorized recreation opportunities.<br>• Increases in dust will impact non-motorized recreation opportunities.<br>• Increases in motorized use will result in user conflicts between forest visitors.<br>• Increases in motorized use will reduce aesthetic values. |
| **Significant Issue Statement #3.** Public motorized use of roads and trails as described in the Proposed Action will adversely affect forest resources. | |
| **Resource Impacts** | • Increased erosion, soil compaction, and reduction in water quality;<br>• Degradation of habitat for fish, wildlife, and rare plants;<br>• Damage to heritage resources;<br>• Proliferation of weeds; and<br>• Impacts to Inventoried Roadless Area character compromising future potential wilderness designation. |
| **Significant Issue Statement #4**: The NFTS is already too large to provide adequate maintenance and administration. | |
| **Affordability** | • Current and future budgets may not provide adequate funding for maintenance, administration and enforcement of the proposed road and trail system.<br>• Additions to the NFTS may require additional mitigation measures to prevent serious and adverse environmental impacts. |

## Alternatives Considered in Detail

The TNF developed seven alternatives; the No Action, the Proposed Action, and 5 other action alternatives developed to meet the purpose and need and to respond to the significant issues listed above. Alternative 6 is the Preferred Alternative. The seven alternatives considered in detail for this analysis are listed in Table S-2 below. Complete details of the alternatives are found in Chapter 2 of the FEIS.

**Table S-2. List of Alternatives Considered in Detail**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Alternative 1:**<br>**No Action Alternative** | The No Action Alternative provides a baseline for comparing the other alternatives. Under the No Action Alternative, no changes would be made to the NFTS and there would be no prohibition of cross country travel. Current management plans would continue to guide project area management. The Travel Management Rule would not be implemented, and no motor vehicle use map (MVUM) would be published. Motor vehicle travel by the public would not be limited to designated routes. Unauthorized routes would continue to proliferate and would have no status or authorization as NFTS facilities.<br>• **Cross Country Travel**: Does not prohibit motorized cross country travel.<br>• **Additions to the NFTS**: No unauthorized routes added to the NFTS as roads or motorized trails under this alternative.<br>• **Establishment of Motorized "Open Areas"**: No additional motorized "Open Areas" established.<br>• **Changes to the NFTS**: No changes to the NFTS made.<br>• **Amendments to the Forest Plan**: No amendments made to the Forest Plan. |
| **Alternative 2:**<br>**Increased Motorized Recreation and Access Opportunities** | Alternative 2 responds to the issue of inadequate motorized recreation opportunities. This alternative is based on the Proposed Action (Alternative 7), with additional routes and mixed use to provide more access and motorized recreation opportunities. During scoping, the Tahoe National Forest received numerous site specific suggestions for additional motorized roads, trails and established "Open Areas" that would improve public access and enhance motorized recreation opportunities. Unauthorized routes and closed NFTS roads site-specifically requested by the public during scoping were added in this alternative, provided they were consistent with law, regulation, and policy. In addition, site specific recommendations for "Open Areas" proposed by the public during scoping were also established in this alternative provided they were consistent with law, regulation and policy.<br>• **Cross Country Travel**: Prohibits motorized cross country travel.<br>• **Additions to the NFTS**: Adds 5.0 miles (114 segments) of unauthorized routes to the NFTS as roads.<br>Adds 54.6 miles (87 segments) of unauthorized routes to the NFTS as motorized trails.<br>• **Establishment of Motorized "Open Areas"**: Establishes four areas (2,649 acres) as motorized "Open Areas" open to all vehicles.<br>• **Changes to the NFTS**:<br>Allows 241.5 miles of mixed use.<br>Changes Class of Vehicles on 157.2 miles by changing maintenance levels.<br>Seasonal restrictions removed for deer winter range in Sugar Pine Area.<br>No Maintenance Level 1 roads reopened.<br>• **Amendments to the Forest Plan:** Amendment made to remove deer winter seasonal restriction in Sugar Pine area. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Alternative 3:**<br>**Cross Country Travel Prohibition Only – No Changes to the Existing National Forest Transportation System** | Alternative 3 responds to issues of (1) adverse effects of motorized recreation use on non-motorized recreation experiences and (2) potential adverse impacts from motorized recreation use on natural and cultural resources. This alternative provides a baseline for comparing the impacts of other alternatives that propose changes to the NFTS.<br>• **Cross Country Travel**: Prohibits motorized cross country travel.<br>• **Additions to the NFTS**: No unauthorized routes added to the NFTS.<br>• **Establishment of Motorized "Open Areas":** No additional motorized "Open Areas" established.<br>• **Changes to the NFTS**: No changes to the NFTS made in this alternative.<br>• **Amendments to the Forest Plan**: No amendments made to the Forest Plan. |
| **Alternative 4:**<br>**Increased Resource Protection** | Alternative 4 responds to issues of (1) adverse effects of motorized recreation use on non-motorized recreation experiences and (2) potential adverse impacts from motorized recreation use on natural and cultural resources. It addresses these issues by prohibiting cross country travel and adding fewer routes to the NFTS than the Proposed Action. Alternative 4 is based on the Proposed Action contained in the Notice of Intent as modified by an alternative submitted by an environmental group coalition during scoping.<br>• **Cross Country Travel**: Prohibits motorized cross country travel.<br>• **Additions to the NFTS**: Adds 3.7 miles (85 segments) of unauthorized routes to the NFTS as roads.<br>Adds 22.6 miles (27 segments) of unauthorized routes to the NFTS as motorized trails.<br>• **Establishment of Motorized "Open Areas"**: No additional motorized "Open Areas" established.<br>• **Changes to the NFTS**:<br>Allows no mixed use.<br>Changes class of vehicles on 3.4 miles by changing maintenance levels.<br>Wet weather seasonal closures added on native surface roads and motorized trails.<br>One Maintenance Level 1 road (.1 mile) reopened.<br>• **Amendments to the Forest Plan**: No amendments made to the Forest Plan. |
| **Alternative 5:**<br>**Increased Motorized Recreation Access plus Reopening Maintenance Level 1 and Temporary Roads** | Alternative 5 responds to the issue of inadequate motorized recreation opportunities. This alternative is based on the Proposed Action contained in the Notice of Intent as modified by an alternative submitted by the Blue Ribbon Coalition during the scoping process. This alternative focuses on adding unauthorized routes to the NFTS and making changes to the existing NFTS to provide enhanced motorized vehicle access and motorized recreation opportunities across the Forest.<br>• **Cross Country Travel**: Prohibits motorized cross country travel.<br>• **Additions to the NFTS**: Adds 5.0 miles (112 segments) of unauthorized routes to the NFTS as roads.<br>Adds 75.4 miles (141 segments) of unauthorized routes to the NFTS as motorized trails.<br>• **Establishment of Motorized "Open Areas"**: No additional motorized "Open Areas" established.<br>• **Changes to the NFTS**:<br>Allows 241.5 miles of mixed use.<br>Changes class of vehicles on 157.2 miles by changing maintenance levels.<br>Wet weather seasonal closures added on native surface roads and motorized trails.<br>113 Maintenance Level 1 roads (93.4 miles) reopened.<br>• **Amendments to the Forest Plan**: Amendment to remove deer winter seasonal restriction in Sugar Pine area. |

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| **Alternative 6:**<br>**Preferred Alternative Motorized Access and Resource Protection** | Alternative 6 is the Preferred Alternative. It responds to issues of providing motorized public access and recreation opportunities while minimizing impacts to natural and cultural resources. It is designed to provide a diversity of road and trail opportunities for experiencing a variety of environments and modes of travel consistent with the National Forest's recreation role and land capability. Alternative 6 would provide motorized access to dispersed recreation opportunities and a diversity of motorized recreation opportunities<br>• **Cross Country Travel**: Prohibits motorized cross country travel.<br>• **Additions to the NFTS**: Adds 13.1 miles (346 segments) of unauthorized routes to the NFTS as roads.<br>Adds 48.3 miles (106 segments) of unauthorized routes to the NFTS as motorized trails.<br>• **Establishment of Motorized "Open Areas"**: Establishes three areas (244 acres) as motorized "Open Areas" open to highway-legal vehicles only.<br>• **Changes to the NFTS**:<br>Allows 130.8 miles of mixed use, 117.5 miles of which open only during deer rifle-hunting season.<br>Changes class of vehicles on 122.0 miles by changing maintenance levels.<br>Wet weather seasonal closures added on native surface roads and motorized trails.<br>Thirteen Maintenance Level 1 roads (11.4 miles) reopened.<br>• **Amendments to the Forest Plan**: Amendment to remove deer winter seasonal restriction in Sugar Pine area. |
| **Alternative 7:**<br>**Proposed Action as Identified in Notice of Intent (NOI)** | Alternative 7 is the Proposed Action as published in the Notice of Intent in the Federal Register.<br>• **Cross Country Travel**: Prohibits motorized cross country travel.<br>• **Additions to the NFTS**: Adds 36.7 miles (36 segments) of unauthorized routes to the NFTS as motorized trails.<br>• **Establishment of Motorized "Open Areas"**: No additional motorized "Open Areas" established.<br>• **Changes to the NFTS**:<br>Allows no mixed use.<br>Changes class of vehicles on 3.4 miles by changing maintenance levels.<br>No changes to seasonal restrictions.<br>Two Maintenance Level 1 roads (1.1 miles) reopened.<br>• **Amendments to the Forest Plan**: No amendments made to the Forest Plan. |

# Comparison of Alternatives

The table below compares the activities that would occur under each alternative.

**Table S-3. Comparison of Alternatives**

| **Action type** | | **Alt 1** | **Alt 2** | **Alt 3** | **Alt 4** | **Alt 5** | **Alt 6** | **Alt 7** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Cross Country Travel** (Acres) | | Prohibitions continue on 81,975 acres<br><br>Continues on 754,066 acres | Prohibited on 833,392 acres<br><br>2,649 acres established open | Prohibited on 836,000 acres<br><br><100 acres established open | Prohibited on 836,000 acres<br><br><100 acres established open | Prohibited on 836,000 acres<br><br><100 acres established open | Prohibited on 835,800 acres<br><br><300 acres established open | Prohibited on 836,000 acres<br><br><100 acres established open |
| **2. Additions to the NFTS** | a. Roads added to the NFTS<br>(Number of Miles)<br>(Number of Roads) | <br>0.0<br>0 | <br>5.0<br>114 | <br>0.00<br>0 | <br>3.7<br>85 | <br>5.0<br>112 | <br>13.1<br>346 | <br>0.00<br>0 |
| | b. Motorized Trails added to the NFTS<br>(Number of Miles)<br>(Number of Trails) | <br>0.0<br>0 | <br>54.6<br>87 | <br>0.0<br>0 | <br>22.6<br>27 | <br>75.4<br>141 | <br>48.3<br>106 | <br>36.7<br>36 |
| **3. Establishment of Motorized "Open Areas"** | | None | Greenhorn Area (60 acres)<br>Prosser, Boca and Stampede Reservoirs (2,589 acres) | None | None | None | Prosser, Boca and Stampede Reservoirs (244 acres) | None |

| **Action type** | | **Alt 1** | **Alt 2** | **Alt 3** | **Alt 4** | **Alt 5** | **Alt 6** | **Alt 7** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **4. Changes to the NFTS** | a. Change in Class of Vehicles resulting from approval of mixed use | 0.0 | 241.5 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 241.5 | 130.8 | 0.0 |
| | b. Change in Class of Vehicles resulting from changes in maintenance levels | 0.0 | 157.2 | 0.00 | 3.4 | 157.2 | 122.0 | 3.4 |
| | c. Change in Season of Use | 0.0 | 10.5 | 0.00 | 1,312.1 | 1,396.7 | 1,369.5 | 0.00 |
| | d. Reopening Maintenance Level 1 Roads<br>(Number of Miles)<br>(Number of Roads) | <br><br>0.0<br>0 | <br><br>0.0<br>0 | <br><br>0.0<br>0 | <br><br>0.1<br>1 | <br><br>93.4<br>113 | <br><br>11.4<br>13 | <br><br>1.1<br>2 |
| **5. Amendments to the Forest Plan** | | None | Management Area 84 (Humbug Sailor) Deer Winter Range Seasonal Restriction Removed | None | None | Management Area 84 (Humbug Sailor) Deer Winter Range Seasonal Restriction Removed | Management Area 84 (Humbug Sailor) Deer Winter Range Seasonal Restriction Removed | None |