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**Southwestern
Region**

**Cibola
National
Forest and
National
Grasslands**



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Roads and Access Specialist Report

Kiowa, Rita Blanca, Black Kettle and McClellan Creek National Grasslands Plan Revision

Environmental Impact Statement Analysis

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Executive Summary

One of the management concerns for the Grasslands is a lack of public access in many areas. This concern is acknowledged in both the 1985 Cibola National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1985 Plan) and the proposed Grasslands Plan. The 1985 Plan did not provide direction specific to the Grasslands. The proposed Grasslands Plan, however, provides this specific direction.

Another management concern is the identification and decommissioning of roads not needed for the administration of the Grasslands. The 1985 Plan addresses the decommissioning of user-created roads but not existing National Forest System (NFS) roads. It also does not provide direction regarding decommissioning methods, which consist of physical treatments to restore the road to a more natural state. The proposed Plan addresses all of these aspects of road decommissioning.

The 2005 Travel Management Rule requires all Forest Service units to designate road and trail systems for public use. The process undertaken to fulfill this requirement for the Black Kettle and McClellan Creek National Grasslands and the Kiowa and Rita Blanca National Grasslands will be complete prior to the transition from the 1985 Plan to the new Grasslands Plan. Support for these travel management decisions will be provided in the 1985 Plan through an amendment and will be carried forward in the new Grasslands Plan.

Overview of the Affected Environment

The Kiowa and Rita Blanca National Grasslands have approximately 492 miles of National Forest System (NFS) roads (system roads), while the Black Kettle and McClellan Creek National Grasslands contain approximately 119 miles of system roads. The majority of roads in Grassland units are native surface roads, maintained for high-clearance vehicles. Roads within or leading to administrative sites or developed recreation sites are typically gravel surfaced or paved roads maintained for passenger car traffic.

There are many areas on the Grasslands where there is no legal public access. These areas are accessible only by roads passing through private property with no legal public rights-of-way.

There are many roads on the Grasslands that are not needed for the administration of the Grasslands. Some of these roads are existing NFS roads, while others were created as a result of unmanaged off-road vehicle use.

Summary of Environmental Consequences

Legal Access to Grasslands Units

Alternative A

The 1985 Cibola National Forest Plan (1985 Plan) identifies the lack of legal access to National Forest System lands as a management concern and directs that rights-of-way be obtained to address this concern. However, the 1985 Plan does not provide direction specifically for the Grasslands.

Alternatives B and C

Under Alternatives B and C, specific direction is provided regarding obtaining rights-of-way to gain legal access to Grasslands units. As a result of this specific direction, more emphasis would be placed on obtaining rights-of-way to provide the legal access needed. There would be no difference in the environmental consequences between these alternatives.

Decommissioning Unneeded Roads

Alternative A

The 1985 Plan addresses the need for decommissioning travelways, which it defines as “unconstructed two-track roads resulting from repeated cross-country travel.” The current term most commonly used for travelway is user-created road. The 1985 Plan does not, however, address decommissioning existing NFS roads. In addition, the 1985 Plan does not address methods of decommissioning, which consist of physical treatments to restore the road to a more natural state.

Alternatives B and C

Under Alternatives B and C, the decommissioning of unneeded roads, both NFS roads and user-created roads, is addressed. The travel analysis process is recommended for determining which roads are not needed for the administration of the Grasslands and would therefore be candidates for decommissioning. Potential methods of decommissioning are presented with both of these alternatives in the management approach. There would be no difference in the environmental consequences between these alternatives.

Support of Travel Management Decision

Alternatives A, B and C

There would be no difference in the environmental consequences associated with these alternatives. The Travel Management decisions for the Kiowa and Rita Blanca National Grasslands and the Black Kettle and McClellan Creek National Grasslands will precede the transition to the new Grasslands Plan. The Travel Management decisions will become part of the 1985 Plan through an amendment and will be carried forward in the new Grasslands Plan.

Specialist Report

Introduction

This report discloses and evaluates the potential environmental consequences on the Roads and Access resource that may result with the adoption of a revised land management plan. It examines, in detail, three different alternatives for revising the management direction from the 1985 Cibola National Forest Land Management Plan (only that which is relevant to the National Grasslands).

Relevant Laws, Regulations, and Policy that Apply

36 CFR 212 Travel Management; 36 CFR 261 Prohibitions; FSM 5460 Right-of-Way Acquisition; FSM 7701.2 Travel Management; FSM 7702 Travel Management, Objectives; FSM 7703 Travel Management, Policy; FSM 7710 Travel Management, Travel Planning; FSM 7730 Road Operation and Maintenance; FSH 2509.22 Soil and Water Conservation Handbook; FSH 7709.55 Travel Planning Handbook; FSH 7709.56 Road Preconstruction Handbook; FSH 7709.59 Road System Operations and Maintenance Handbook; Forest Service Washington Office correspondence dated November 10, 2010 RE: Travel Management, Implementation of 36 CFR, Part 212, Subpart A (36 CFR 212.5(b)); Forest Service Washington Office correspondence FY 2010 Final Program Direction

Methodology and Analysis Process

The National Forest System road mileage on the Grasslands was obtained from the forest infrastructure database (Infra).

Assumptions

In the analysis for this resource, the following assumptions have been made:

- The land management plan provides a programmatic framework for future site-specific actions.
- Land management plans do not have direct effects. They do not authorize or mandate any site-specific projects or activities (including ground-disturbing actions).
- Land management plans may have implications, or environmental consequences, of managing the forests under a programmatic framework.
- The plan decisions (desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, management areas, monitoring) will be followed when planning or implementing site-specific projects and activities.
- Law, policy, and regulations will be followed when planning or implementing site-specific projects and activities.
- Monitoring will occur and the land management plan will be amended, as needed.
- We will be funded similar to past budget levels (past 5 years).

- The planning timeframe is 15 years; other timeframes may be analyzed depending on the resource (usually a discussion of anticipated trends into the future).

Revision Topics Addressed in this Analysis

Legal Access to Grasslands Units

Decommissioning Unneeded Roads

Support of Travel Management Decisions

Summary of Alternatives

Legal Access to Grasslands Units

Alternative A provides no direction specific to the Grasslands.

Alternatives B and C provide direction specific to the Grasslands.

Decommissioning Unneeded Roads

Alternative A provides direction regarding decommissioning user-created roads but not NFS roads. Also, no direction is provided regarding methods of decommissioning.

Alternatives B and C provide direction regarding decommissioning user-created and NFS roads. The process recommended for identifying existing roads not needed for administration of the Grasslands, the travel analysis process, is addressed in the management approach. Methods of decommissioning are also addressed.

Support of Travel Management Decisions

Alternatives A, B and C all provide support for the Black Kettle and McClellan Creek National Grasslands and Kiowa and Rita Blanca National Grasslands.

Description of Affected Environment (Existing Condition)

The Kiowa and Rita Blanca National Grasslands have approximately 492 miles of National Forest System (NFS) roads (system roads), while the Black Kettle and McClellan Creek National Grasslands contain approximately 118 miles of system roads (USDA Forest Service 2010). The majority of roads in Grassland units are native surface roads, maintained for high-clearance vehicles. Roads within or leading to administrative sites or developed recreation sites are typically gravel surfaced or paved roads maintained for passenger car traffic.

Because of the checkerboard pattern of ownership within the Grasslands administrative boundaries, many portions of Grassland units are accessible only by roads passing through private property for which there are no legal public rights-of-way. While many property owners allow passage through their property to access federal lands, some do not.

There are more NFS roads than are needed for the administration of the Grasslands. Road maintenance budgets have steadily declined over the last several years, and this trend is expected to continue in the foreseeable future.

In addition to the excess of existing NFS roads, there is a concern regarding roads created as a result of unmanaged off-road vehicle use. These user-created roads are not maintained, and many are either causing environmental damage or are likely to cause damage at some point in the future if not addressed. The issue of user-created roads is more of a concern on the Kiowa and Rita Blanca National Grasslands, where off-road vehicle is allowed, than it is on the Black Kettle and McClellan Creek National Grasslands, where off-road vehicle use has been prohibited for some time.

To comply with the 2005 Travel Management Rule, the Forest Service is in the process of developing designated road and trail systems for public use. This travel management process has been completed for the Black Kettle and McClellan Creek National Grasslands, and a motor vehicle use map (MVUM), which displays the designated road and trail systems on the Grasslands, has been published. The travel management process for the Kiowa and Rita Blanca National Grasslands is scheduled to be completed prior to the transition to the new Grasslands Plan.

Environmental Consequences

The land management plan provides a programmatic framework that guides site-specific actions but does not authorize, fund, or carryout any project or activity. Because the land management plan does not authorize or mandate any site-specific activities or ground-disturbing actions there can be no direct effects. However, there may be implications, or longer term environmental consequences, of managing the forests under this programmatic framework.

Legal Access to Grasslands Units

Alternative A

The 1985 Cibola National Forest Plan (1985 Plan) identifies the lack of legal access to National Forest System lands as a management concern and directs that rights-of-way be obtained to address this concern. However, the 1985 Plan does not provide direction specifically for the Grasslands.

Alternatives B and C

Under Alternatives B and C, specific direction is provided regarding obtaining rights-of-way to gain legal access to Grasslands units. As a result of this specific direction, more emphasis would be placed on obtaining rights-of-way to provide the legal access needed. There would be no difference in the environmental consequences between these alternatives.

Decommissioning Unneeded Roads

Alternative A

The 1985 Plan addresses the need for decommissioning travelways, which it defines as “unconstructed two-track roads resulting from repeated cross-country travel.” The current term most commonly used for travelway is user-created road. The 1985 Plan does not, however, address decommissioning existing NFS roads. In addition, the 1985 Plan does not address

methods of decommissioning, which consist of physical treatments to restore the road to a more natural state.

Alternatives B and C

Under Alternatives B and C, the decommissioning of unneeded roads, both NFS roads and user-created roads, is addressed. The travel analysis process is recommended for determining which roads are not needed for the administration of the Grasslands and would therefore be candidates for decommissioning. Potential methods of decommissioning are presented with both of these alternatives in the management approach. There would be no difference in the environmental consequences between these alternatives.

Support of Travel Management Decision

Alternatives A, B and C

There would be no difference in the environmental consequences associated with these alternatives. The Travel Management decisions for the Kiowa and Rita Blanca National Grasslands and the Black Kettle and McClellan Creek National Grasslands will precede the transition to the new Grasslands Plan. The Travel Management decisions will become part of the 1985 Plan through an amendment and will be carried forward in the new Grasslands Plan.

Cumulative Environmental Consequences

The area inside the Grasslands administrative boundaries was selected as the cumulative effects analysis area. Any potential effects on areas outside the Grasslands administrative boundaries from future activities involving roads on the Grasslands would be addressed at that time.

Legal Access to Grasslands Units

There would be no cumulative environmental consequences associated with the topic.

Decommissioning Unneeded Roads

There would be no cumulative environmental consequences associated with the topic.

Support of Travel Management Decision

There would be no cumulative environmental consequences associated with the topic.

Unavoidable Adverse Impacts

The land management plan provides a programmatic framework that guides site-specific actions but does not authorize, fund, or carryout any project or activity. Before any ground-disturbing actions take place, they must be authorized in a subsequent environmental analysis. Therefore none of the alternatives cause unavoidable adverse impacts.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

The land management plan provides a programmatic framework that guides site-specific actions but does not authorize, fund, or carryout any project or activity. Because the land management

plan does not authorize or mandate any ground-disturbing actions, none of the alternatives cause an irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources.

Adaptive Management

All alternatives assume the use of adaptive management principles. Forest Service decisions are made as part of an on-going process, including planning, implementing projects, and monitoring and evaluation. The land management plan identifies a monitoring program. Monitoring the results of actions will provide a flow of information that may indicate the need to change a course of action or the land management plan. Scientific findings and the needs of society may also indicate the need to adapt resource management to new information. The Forest Supervisor annually evaluates the monitoring information displayed in the evaluation reports through a management review and determines if any changes are needed in management actions or the plan itself. In general, annual evaluations of the monitoring information consider the following questions:

- What are the effects of resource management activities on the productivity of the land?
- To what degree are resource management activities maintaining or making progress toward the desired conditions and objectives for the plan?
- What changes are needed to account for unanticipated changes in conditions?

In addition to annual monitoring and evaluation, the Forest Supervisor reviews the conditions on the land covered by the plan at least every 5 years to determine whether conditions or demands of the public have changed significantly. The forest plan is ordinarily revised on a 10-year cycle and the Forest Supervisor may amend the plan at any time.

Consistency with Law, Regulation, and Policy

All alternatives are designed to guide the Kiowa, Rita Blanca, Black Kettle and McClellan Creek National Grasslands' management activities in meeting federal law, regulations, and policy.

Other Planning Efforts

There are no potential conflicts between the proposed action and the objectives of Federal, regional, State, local, or Tribal land use plans, policies, and controls for the area concerned?

List of Preparers

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References

Forest Service Washington Office correspondence dated November 10, 2010; RE: Travel Management, Implementation of 36 CFR, Part 212, Subpart A (36 CFR 212.5(b))

Forest Service Washington Office correspondence; RE: FY 2010 Final Program Direction

USFS, 2010. INFRA Database

United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, 2011. Draft Land and Resource management Plan for the Kiowa, Rita Blanca, Black Kettle, and McClellan Creek National Grasslands