

Clearwater NF Roads Analysis Report

Executive Summary

Introduction

On March 3, 2000, the Forest Service proposed to revise Code of Federal Regulations 36 CFR Part 212 to shift emphasis from transportation development to managing administrative and public access within the capability of the lands. The proposal was to shift the focus of National Forest System road management from development and construction of new roads to maintaining and restoring needed roads and decommissioning unneeded roads within the context of maintaining, managing, and restoring healthy ecosystems.

On January 12, 2001, the Forest Service issued the final National Forest System Road Management Rule. This rule revises regulations concerning the management, use, and maintenance of the National Forest Transportation System. Consistent with changes in public demands and use of National Forest System resources and the need to better manage funds available for road construction, reconstruction, maintenance, and decommissioning, the final rule removes the emphasis on transportation development and adds a requirement for science-based transportation analysis. The final rule is intended to help ensure that additions to the National Forest System road network are those deemed essential for resource management and use; that construction, reconstruction, and maintenance of roads minimize adverse environmental impacts; and that unneeded roads are decommissioned and restoration of ecological processes are initiated.

This roads analysis process does not make final decisions concerning site-specific projects or the allocation of money for road management. It does not identify where new roads will be built or roads that will be decommissioned. It is not subject to the procedures and appeal processes required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Process

Roads analysis is a six-step process. The steps are designed to be sequential with the understanding the process may require feedback and iteration among steps over time as new information becomes available. The six steps are:

- Step 1. Setting up the analysis
- Step 2. Describing the situation
- Step 3. Identifying the issues
- Step 4. Assessing benefits, problems and risks
- Step 5. Describing opportunities and setting priorities
- Step 6. Reporting (Key Findings)

The results of this analysis is a report for decision-makers and the public that documents the information and analyses used to identify opportunities and provide information that will assist with setting priorities for future management of the Clearwater National Forest road system.

Key Findings

?? Road maintenance funding is not adequate to maintain and sign roads to standard.

This road analysis clearly shows that annual appropriated maintenance funding is inadequate to maintain the current road system on the Forest. Many roads will continue to build up additional deferred maintenance costs and degrade unless increases in road management funding become available.

?? Road access may not be adequate for future management needs.

The arterial and collector road system outside of inventoried roadless areas is nearly complete to adequately manage vegetation resources. A few areas, for example on the Palouse Ranger District, will require additional local roads for vegetation and fire protection purposes. Depending on management allocations from the revision of the Forest plan, future strategies may require road access for management activities.

Some arterial, collector and local roads are not being maintained to specified standards. In some areas the road system will continue to degrade and this will affect future access to areas served by these roads.

?? Management of the Forest road system can affect cultural and traditional uses (such as plant gathering, access to traditional & cultural sites) and American Indian treaty rights.

The Nez Perce, Coeur D'Alene, and Salish-Kootenai tribes are all historic users of the lands that comprise the Clearwater National Forest. Maintaining access for traditional and cultural uses by American Indians is a very important function of the Forest road system. Most of the Clearwater National Forest is ceded territory of the Nez Perce Tribe, who retain strong traditional cultural ties to these lands. This tribe also retains rights to hunt, gather, and fish at usual and accustomed places on these ceded lands through the Treaty of 1855. Northern portions of the Palouse and North Fork districts are within the ceded territory of the Coeur D'Alene Tribe who also maintains traditional ties to these lands.

These tribes have several locations that are significant for traditional gathering, fishing, hunting, and religious purposes. Several locations on the Forest are held to be sacred by members of these tribes. Tribal members are active users of these traditional areas.

?? Some roads are causing adverse impacts and should be prioritized for evaluation at the subforest level.

Subforest watershed analysis will include an analysis of classified and unclassified roads. Potential projects to address adverse impacts from existing roads will be identified.

?? Existing roads provide public access and may be needed for future management activities not currently planned.

The potential to increase opportunities for roaded and unroaded recreation is dependent on funding, public input and agency policy. Trends in budgets for timber dollars to construct and maintain roads have decreased and funding for road construction may have to come from another source, such as recreation.

The current road system provides access for planned fuel management activities on many parts of the Clearwater NF. The road system plays an integral role in providing defensible boundaries and in some cases will act as control lines for the units that are situated along Forest roads. In other areas where treatment units are not situated next to, or in close proximity to roads, the road system will act as a staging area for helicopter operations to provide access to those treatment units.

In many areas of the Clearwater National Forest, the suitable timber base has arterial or collector roads to access the general area. Local roads are then needed to provide access to the immediate area needing silvicultural or other treatment. Additional local roads in the roaded or inventoried roadless areas may be needed to facilitate vegetation and prescribed fire management activities.