Introduction

Background

In August 1999, the Washington Office of the USDA Forest Service published Miscellaneous Report FS-643 *Roads Analysis: Informing Decisions about Managing the National Forest Transportation Syste*m. The objective of roads analysis is to provide decision-makers with critical information to develop road systems that are safe and responsive to public needs and desires, are affordable and efficiently managed, have minimal negative ecological effects on the land, and are in balance with available funding for needed management actions.

In October 1999, the agency published Interim Directive 7710-99-1 authorizing units to use, as appropriate, the road analysis procedure embodied in FS-643 to assist land managers making major road management decisions.

On March 3, 2000, the Forest Service proposed to revise 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 project is not a decision making analysis that would authorize any road closures or on-the-ground projects. It is an assessment using current information intended to assist with future project decisions at the Forest, watershed, and project-level scale. It is not subject to the procedures and regulations required under the National Environmental Policy Act.

The Northern Region of the Forest Service held a training session about the January 2001 Rule in Missoula, Montana on March 20, 2001 to provide guidance to Forests on completing roads analysis.

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 amount of time and effort spent on each step differs by project based on specific situations and available information. The process provides a set of possible issues and analysis questions for which the answers can help managers make choices about road system management. Decision-makers and the analysis team determine the relevance of each question, incorporating public participation as deemed necessary. The following six steps from Report FS-643 guided the process:

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)

?? Products

The product of this analysis is a report for decision-makers and the public that documents the information and analyses used to identify opportunities and set priorities for future national Forest road systems. Included in this report is a map displaying the known road system for the analysis area, and the risks and opportunities for the road or road segment analyzed in detail. The report includes other maps and tables necessary to display summaries of analysis and key findings.

?? Report Organization

This report documents the information and analysis procedure used for the roads analysis. The report contains a table rating each road for annual road maintenance cost value, recreation use value, access value, resource management value, and aquatic risk, mass wasting risk, surface erosion risk, and wildlife risk. It contains management guidelines and opportunities for future actions that will impact the Forest roads system.