

Draft Record of Decision

Plumas National Forest Over-Snow Vehicle Use Designation

**USDA Forest Service
Plumas National Forest
Butte, Lassen, Plumas, Sierra,
and Yuba Counties, California**

Decision and Reason for the Decision

Background

This Record of Decision documents my decision for the Plumas National Forest Over-Snow Vehicle (OSV) Use Designation Project. The purpose of this project is to effectively manage OSV use on the Plumas National Forest by providing wintertime recreation access, ensuring OSV use occurs where there is adequate snowfall, promoting the safety of all recreation users, enhancing public enjoyment, minimizing impacts to natural and cultural resources,¹ and minimizing conflicts between various winter recreation uses. The Forest Service needs to take action to provide a manageable, designated system of OSV trails and areas within the Plumas National Forest that is consistent with, and achieves the purposes of, the Forest Service's Travel Management Rule (36 CFR §212, Subpart C). Further, to comply with the terms of a Settlement Agreement between the Forest Service and *Snowlands Network et al.*, the project identifies which designated OSV trails are available for snow grooming and discloses the effects of the snow grooming program.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Plumas National Forest Over-Snow Vehicle Use Designation Project discloses the environmental impacts associated with the proposed action (modified), a no action alternative, and three additional action alternatives developed to meet the purpose of and need for this Project while responding to significant issues raised through scoping.

Decision

Based on my review of the Plumas National Forest Over-Snow Vehicle Use Designation FEIS, supporting documentation, and review of public comments, I have decided to select alternative 2 - modified as presented in the FEIS. I believe the selected alternative best meets the purpose and need for this project and responds to the significant issues associated with providing quality motorized and non-motorized recreation experiences and natural and cultural resource protection. The FEIS (volume I, pp. xv-xvi, 9, 21-27, and 28-30) provides a detailed description of alternative 2 - modified, including areas designated

¹ **42 USCS § 9601** the term natural resources means "land, fish, wildlife, biota, air, water, ground water, drinking water supplies, and other such resources belonging to, managed by, held in trust by, appertaining to, or otherwise controlled by the United States

for public OSV use. The alternative 2 - modified map in the FEIS, volume II, appendix A, figure A-2, displays the decision's designated OSV areas and trails.

Alternative 2 - modified includes:

Approximately 74 percent of NFS lands within the Plumas National Forest administrative boundary are designated for cross-country OSV use in alternative 2 - modified. The existing condition allows OSV use on 1,147,825 acres of NFS land; alternative 2 – modified reduces available NFS lands by 25 percent.

Approximately 858,436 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands designated for public cross-country OSV use, generally above 3,500 feet elevation (FEIS, volume II, appendix A, table A-3, figure A-2). There are 2,753 miles of undesignated, unmarked, ungroomed, underlying roads and trails within designated OSV-use areas in this alternative.

Alternative 2 – modified retains 100 percent of current groomed OSV trails and increases ungroomed OSV trails by approximately 370 percent.

A total of approximately 225.9 miles of OSV trails will be designated (FEIS, volume II, appendix A, tables A-4 through A-7, figure A-2), as follows:

- ♦ Approximately 142.9 miles of designated OSV trails available for grooming.
- ♦ Approximately 82.9 miles of designated OSV trails not available for grooming.
- ♦ Approximately 67 miles of undesignated OSV trails will be groomed or ungroomed under the jurisdiction of Plumas and Sierra Counties, as follows:
 - Approximately 60.1 miles of undesignated OSV trails under other jurisdiction available for grooming (County roads).
 - Approximately 6.9 miles of undesignated OSV trails under other jurisdiction not available for grooming (County roads).
- ♦ Approximately 1.4 miles of OSV trails that cross private lands, are under Forest Service jurisdiction, and available for grooming.

Forest-wide snow depth requirements for public OSV use will be implemented by:

- ♦ Public, cross-country OSV use in designated OSV-use areas is allowed when there are 12 or more inches of snow or ice covering the landscape, to avoid damage² to surface and subsurface resources and comply with 36 CFR §261.15.
- ♦ Public OSV use on designated, ungroomed OSV trails is allowed when there is adequate snow depth to avoid damage to natural and cultural resources. To avoid damaging³ resources on designated and undesignated, ungroomed OSV trails with underlying roads, a minimum of 6 inches of snow or ice is typically needed. Groomed and ungroomed OSV trails for public OSV use in all alternatives overlie existing paved, gravel, or native surface travel routes with the exception of four trail segments with a total length of 0.74 mile.

² Examples of damage may include (but is not limited to) the following: road and trail rutting; uprooted vegetation or vegetation and soil mixed with snow; compressing the subnivean space (wildlife habitat between the snowpack and ground).

³ **36 CFR §261.2 Definitions.** *Damaging* means to injure, mutilate, deface, destroy, cut, chop, girdle, dig, excavate, kill or in any way harm or disturb.

- ♦ The minimum snow depth for trail snow grooming to occur is 12 to 18 inches (consistent with California Snowmobile Grooming Standards).

Class 1 OSVs are allowed on all designated OSV trails and areas. Class 2 OSVs are only allowed on designated OSV trails available for grooming. [Class 1 OSVs are over-snow vehicles that typically exert lower ground pressure and include the following OSV types: snowmobiles, tracked motorcycles, snowcats, tracked all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and tracked utility terrain vehicles (UTVs). Class 2 OSVs are over-snow vehicles that typically exert higher ground pressure and include the following OSV types: tracked four-wheel-drive sport utility vehicles (SUVs) and tracked four-wheel-drive trucks.]

Sixteen OSV crossings of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) are designated (FEIS, volume II, appendix A, table A-8, figure A-2). These crossings are located in areas where OSV use is designated on either side of the PCT. In all cases, OSVs crossing the PCT are required to do so at 90 degrees, or as close to 90 degrees as is safe, to minimize the time and distance needed to cross the trail. OSV users are to make crossings at, or as near as possible, to the designated crossing locations.

- ♦ Twelve designated crossings utilize roads identified on the Plumas National Forest's Motor Vehicle Use Map and are the width of the road (approximately 14 feet).
- ♦ In coordination with the Tahoe National Forest, four proposed OSV crossings of the PCT at the shared forest boundary in the Lakes Basin open area would not use roads and would range in width up to 0.25 mile. Some of these proposed OSV crossings are wider than the width of a road because they are located in areas where snow conditions are highly variable during the course of a winter, for example areas prone to wind loading of snow and formation of cornices. These wider crossings give OSV users options to select a safe crossing of the trail under constantly changing, variable snow loading conditions.

Areas and trails designated for public OSV use under alternative 2 - modified are summarized in tables 1 and 2. Designated OSV areas and trails are spatially displayed in the FEIS, volume II, appendix A, figure A-2.

Table 1. Areas designated for OSV use under alternative 2 - modified

Areas Considered for OSV Use Designation	Area size (Total acres of NFS lands)	OSV Designated Use (Acres of NFS lands)
Antelope	135,290	115,944 (86%)
Bucks	243,964	136,876 (56%)
Canyon	91,740	58,009 (63%)
Davis	181,118	138,493 (76%)
Frenchman	278,044	263,958 (95%)
Lakes Basin	46,897	33,480 (71%)
La Porte	183,742	111,676 (61%)
Total	1,160,793	858,436
Percentage of Plumas NF where OSV use would be designated	=	74%

Table 2. Designated and undesignated OSV trails under alternative 2 - modified

Trail	Trail Length(Miles)	Areas
Designated OSV Trails Available for Grooming (NFS)		
LNF Managed OSV Trail (Fredonyer)	9.7	Antelope
Ararat Loop	7.9	Bucks
Cold Water Loop	7.2	Bucks
Cutoff / Lookout Rock	3.9	Bucks
Bald Eagle Mountain	1.9	Bucks
Granite Basin	12.9	Bucks
Gravel Range	12.8	Bucks
Grizzly Forebay Loop	15.3	Bucks
Grizzly Summit	3.2	Bucks
Letterbox Loop	7.7	Bucks
Lower Daniels	3.1	Bucks
Mill Creek Trail	3.4	Bucks
Upper Daniels	2.4	Bucks
Willow Creek	6.9	Bucks
Gold Lake	0.7	Lakes Basin
Black Rock Loop	6.7	La Porte
Camel Peak Trail	7.0	La Porte
Little Grass Valley Loop	10.9	La Porte
Silvertip/Quincy Road Loop	13.3	La Porte
Wagon Wheel/Lexington Hill Loop	6.0	La Porte
Total	142.9	
Designated OSV Trails Not Available for Grooming (NFS)		
Antelope Lake Northeast	4.0	Antelope
Antelope Lake West	0.9	Antelope
Indian Cove	0.4	Antelope
Blue Cedar	0.8	Davis
Camp Five	0.6	Davis
Cow Creek	1.6	Davis
Eagle Point	1.2	Davis
Freeman Point	1.3	Davis
Jackson Creek North	11.6	Davis
Jackson Creek South	5.9	Davis
Little Long Valley	9.8	Davis
Paradise Creek	2.0	Davis
West Side Lake Davis	7.9	Davis
Willow Creek	12.4	Davis
Antelope Lake West	0.4	Frenchman
Gold Lake	1.7	Lakes Basin
Sloat McRae Road	17	Lakes Basin/La Porte
Onion Valley	3.5	La Porte
Total	83	

Trail	Trail Length(Miles)	Areas
Forest Service Grooming Approved by Other Jurisdictions (County roads)		
LNF Managed OSV Trail (Fredonyer)	1.6	Antelope
Big Creek	9.3	Bucks
Four Trees/Bucks Summit Trail	15.5	Bucks
Gravel Range	0.7	Bucks
Gold Lake Highway	5.8	Lakes Basin
Howard Meadow	1.2	Lakes Basin
Mills Peak	1.0	Lakes Basin
Baptist Camp	2.3	La Porte
Hogback Trail	6.5	La Porte
Little Grass Valley Loop	4.3	La Porte
Silvertip/Quincy Road Loop	9.3	La Porte
Wagon Wheel/Lexington Hill Loop	2.5	La Porte
Total	60.1	
Other Jurisdictions Not Available for Grooming (County roads)		
Frazier Falls	5.8	Lakes Basin
Johnsville McRae Road	1.1	Lakes Basin/La Porte
Total	6.9	
OSV Trails Available for Grooming (NFS roads crossing Private Ownership)		
Mills Peak	0.6	Lakes Basin
Little Grass Valley Loop	0.3	La Porte
Wagon Wheel/Lexington Hill Loop	0.5	La Porte
Total	1.4	

My decision includes the mitigations found in the FEIS in Appendix D: “Mitigations to Address the Minimization Criteria in the Travel Regulations for Areas Designated for OSV Use” and Appendix E: “Mitigations to Address the Minimization Criteria in the Travel Regulations for Trails Designated for OSV Use.” In addition, this decision includes the monitoring and enforcement procedures described in the FEIS, volume I, chapter 2 (pp. 36 – 40) and volume III, appendix J.

In reaching this decision, we drew upon local knowledge, experience of employees, and the public. This included the resource management and scientific expertise of Forest Service staff, as well as comments we received from the public. All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm were adopted in the design of the selected alternative (alternative 2 - modified). This decision includes the project design features and mitigation measures that we believe are necessary to avoid, minimize, or rectify impacts on resources affected by the implementation of the selected alternative. This decision is based on the best available science. The resource analyses disclosed in chapter 3 of the FEIS identify the effects analysis methodologies, reference scientific sources that informed the analysis, and disclose limitations of the analysis. This analysis hinged on Regulatory Framework (FEIS, volume II, appendix B) and Water Quality Best Management Practices (FEIS, volume II, appendix C).

Decision Rationale

The Plumas National Forest's unique location relative to large population centers, year-round highway access, and readily accessible terrain in the wintertime make it a popular wintertime recreation destination. The Plumas National Forest often receives visitors from surrounding areas that want less of an urban and more of a semi-primitive or primitive experience. State Route 70, the principal west-east thoroughfare through the Feather River Canyon, also designated as a scenic byway, is open year-round, and runs through the Plumas National Forest. As one of the State's scenic byways, State Route 70 links US 395 (Reno, Nevada) and State Route 99 north of Sacramento, California, which is one of three major urban centers on either side of the northern most portion of the Sierra Nevada. In addition to State Route 70, Highways 49, 89, 149, and 284, along with County Routes A15, A23, and A24 provide year-round access to public lands within the Plumas National Forest. The forest, which is slightly over an hour's drive from Reno and about three hours from Sacramento, offers high mountain scenery and a plethora of wintertime recreation activities for the visiting public, including three unique systems of groomed snow trails available for motorized users, one groomed snow trail for non-motorized users, areas established solely for non-motorized winter recreation use (e.g., cross-country skiing and snowshoeing), and large expanses of backcountry available for adventurous over-snow vehicle (OSV) users, backcountry skiers, and hybrid users.⁴ The forest's accessibility from urban areas, combined with its year-round attractive recreation opportunities, results in thousands of visitors annually. I am committed to providing outstanding recreational opportunities across the Plumas National Forest for all, while protecting the natural and cultural resources on these public lands. I believe this decision fulfills this commitment.

Despite apparent differences in opinion, the public, through their comments and participation in meetings and open houses held across the forest during scoping and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) comment period, revealed a strong connection with the Plumas National Forest: connections based on individuals and multiple generations of families enjoying wintertime recreation activities and exploration, as well as traditions in the making. This decision to designate specific areas and trails and vehicle classes on the Plumas National Forest for public OSV use strikes a balance between providing motorized winter recreation opportunities, providing winter recreation opportunities for users who prefer non-motorized settings, and protecting the forest's natural and cultural resources. This balance also includes not designating certain areas for public OSV use [for example, Bucks Lake Wilderness; Semi-Primitive Area and Bald Eagle Habitat Prescriptions (Rx-8 and 11) from the Land and Resource Management Plan; Inventoried Roadless Areas; wild zones of designated and eligible Wild and Scenic River segments; Challenge Experimental Forest; designated and proposed Special Interest Areas (botanical, scenic, and geological); and Research Natural Areas, among others] as well as designating OSV trails through areas otherwise not designated for OSV use (for example, private lands, prohibited and restricted areas, among others) to allow OSV users access to designated OSV areas that lie beyond these undesignated areas.

Many roads and trails accessing NFS lands are not under the jurisdiction of the Forest Service. Roads and trails over which the Forest Service has jurisdiction may be considered for designation (Forest Service Manual 7700 – Travel Management, Chapter 7710 – Travel Planning, section 7715.72 – Road and Trail Jurisdiction and Coordination, p. 23). Grooming of trails, for which the Forest Service has no legal jurisdiction (e.g., State or county roads), does occur, and is included in all alternatives. The Forest Service grooms these trails under authorizations from the governing, non-Federal entity of those trails. Although the Forest Service has authorization to groom these trails for public OSV use, the Forest Service has no authority to designate these trails as NFS OSV use trails in the record of decision for this project. Despite not being designated, the groomed non-jurisdiction trails located within the administrative boundary of

⁴ skiers and snowboarders who use OSVs to access areas for skiing and snowboarding

the Plumas National Forest will be displayed on the OSVUM produced as a product of this decision for public convenience.

We received 211 comment letters during the 127-day comment period and modified OSV use designations for specific areas and trails under alternative 2 - modified (the selected alternative). Public comments addressed OSV use designations, vehicle class, access, snow depth, Pacific Crest Trail, minimization criteria, purpose and need, resource damage, user conflicts, safety, elevation limit, enforcement, open areas, compliance with the Forest Plan and other laws, Forest Plan amendments, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Endangered Species Act, air quality, noise and solitude, and many more.

We modified the selected alternative (FEIS, alternative 2 - modified) between the Draft and Final EIS to respond to public concerns about: (1) providing winter recreation opportunities (both motorized and non-motorized) in specific areas of the forest, (2) designating OSV use for different classes of vehicles by changing the vehicle class definition, (3) providing OSV access between designated OSV areas separated by private lands or undesignated NFS lands, (4) designating OSV use adjacent to the PCT and OSV crossings of the PCT, (5) removing NFS OSV trail designations specific to County roads and kept them available for grooming if originally proposed in the proposed action, and (6) addressing the Travel Management Rule's minimization criteria at 36 CFR §212.55(b).

Updated information was added between the Draft and Final EIS for some, but not all, resource areas. For wildlife, GIS layers for all the species were reassessed to comply with the modified Alternative 2 changes. Species models were rerun accordingly and the wildlife section updated with the new acreages. Air added a statement relative to the air quality standards and minimization criteria, addressing why air impacts are similar across alternatives. Fisheries confirmed that the GIS and associated tabular data were correctly used. Transportation added verbiage to clarify why transportation effects were generally similar across alternatives. Botany made clarifications as to plant species' occurrence in the Forest.

Socioeconomics made the following changes: (1) added the discussion of social bonding to the values, beliefs, and attitudes section; (2) added discussion of cumulative effects related to economic activity common to all alternatives; (3) developed the economic effects analysis by forest area; and (4) updated data or changes in the alternatives by updating the effects analysis and figures based on the modifications to the alternatives and updated OHV state registration data and the related discussion of trends in the affected environment section.

Recreation made the following changes: (1) added clarification between ROS class and Forest Plan prescription; (2) corrected the description of PCT non-motorized zone; (3) for the affected environment, updated all area descriptions to describe the semi-primitive areas that were considered under RARE11 in the Forest Plan; (4) added information into the text of the analysis that is included in the minimization criteria worksheets (such as request for context of conflicts that are described in the worksheets); (5) removed duplicate items under each area for minimization criteria to a section "common to all"; (6) conducted additional GIS analysis and narrative description of the proximity of areas designated for OSV use within 500 feet of the PCT to areas that are likely to receive winter non-motorized use (within 5 miles of plowed trailheads); and (7) conducted additional GIS analysis and prepared maps to include miles of PCT where OSV use is designated within 500 feet of the trail.

Purpose and Need

We believe the selected alternative best meets the purpose and need for this project and responds to the significant issues associated with providing quality and available motorized and non-motorized recreation experiences and natural and cultural resource protection. Alternative 2 - modified provides high-quality, public OSV access by designating a system of NFS OSV trails and areas on NFS lands that are designated

for OSV use where snowfall is adequate and complies with the Settlement Agreement by designating NFS snow trails where grooming would occur. Alternative 2 - modified applies minimization criteria to each open area and designated and groomed OSV trails, incorporating best available science; Water Quality National Core Best Management Practices; standards and guidelines from the Forest Plan; and laws, regulations, and policies. Minimizing conflicts between OSV use and other recreational uses was accomplished by providing a balance between designated and undesignated areas based on current uses, high-quality areas, and adequate snow. This alternative promotes safety for all users and minimizes conflicts between different vehicle classes by defining vehicle class and applying vehicle class restrictions to designated OSV areas and trails. Alternative 2 - modified also considered the compatibility with the existing condition in populated areas, taking into account sound, emissions, and other factors.

Winter Recreation Opportunities

Public comments provided very helpful information about important areas and trails throughout the forest, highly valued by different winter recreation users for a variety of reasons. For example, numerous commenters expressed the desire for motorized access in Lakes Basin, near Jamison Creek, Grass Lake, Rock Lake, Mt. Washington and Mt. Elwell, and on the west side of Lakes Basin in Florentine Canyon, McRae Meadow, and Eureka Ridge. Other commenters requested that we consider expanding the Lakes Basin area in the alternative 2 - modified to include groupings of lakes that accommodate snow camping associated with short duration skiing and snowshoeing. Others asked us to consider not designating OSV use between Pilot Peak and Stafford Mountain along historic ski trails known as the 'Lost Sierra Ski Traverse' to reduce potential conflicts with non-motorized wintertime users traveling along the PCT. These, along with other suggestions and recommendations from the public, helped me find a balance between designating specific areas and trails to provide OSV access to wintertime recreation opportunities (both motorized and non-motorized) and not designating other areas to provide for quiet wintertime recreation opportunities and solitude.

To highlight a few site specific changes applied to alternative 2 - modified, we added OSV use designations for several National Forest System parcels near the Meadow Valley near NFS road 24N03A and included NFS road 24N29X (Silver Lake Road); Indian Valley near Iron Dyke; east of Greenville; and near Harrison Flat Campground. We added OSV use designations for: (1) NFS road 24N33 to the intersection of 24N89X, to the intersection of 24N89XA (available for grooming), and (2) NFS road 28N08 (not available for grooming) to provide OSV access to the area south of Sloat. We expanded the undesignated area south of the Bucks Summit area from a ridge to a groomed county road to reduce conflict with non-motorized users traveling to and from the PCT and Bucks Summit. We removed the OSV use designation from NFS lands located along non-motorized ski trails and adjacent to creeks in the Bucks and Lakes Basin open areas. For a complete list of site specific changes, please refer to the FEIS, Volume III, Response to Comments, pp. 42–48.

Vehicle Classes

Designating where different classes of OSVs can be used is one of the approaches in this decision to ensure impacts to natural and cultural resources underlying the snow are minimized, consistent with Subpart C of the Forest Service's Travel Management Regulations (36 CFR §212.81(d)) while also providing OSV users with a safe and enjoyable recreation experience. In the DEIS, alternative 2 proposed designating classes of vehicles based on vehicle width. This approach elicited public concerns that vehicle width is not necessarily directly related to adverse resource impacts, and basing OSV use designations on vehicle width would unduly limit recreation opportunities for OSV users with machines that were not causing adverse impacts to resources underlying the snow. To respond to these concerns, we changed the approach for defining classes of vehicles. Under this decision, Class 1 OSVs are authorized to operate on

all areas and trails designated for OSV use, while Class 2 OSVs are restricted to designated OSV trails available for grooming. This decision bases vehicle class on the ground pressure exerted by different types of OSVs to better align with potential resource impacts (as heavier vehicles create deeper tracks and can potentially cause resource damage). Limiting Class 2 OSVs to groomed trails also reduces safety concerns of colliding with buried objects and the risk of heavier vehicles adjacent to or on cliffs, icy slopes, side-hills, etc. The revised Class 1 OSVs include those that typically exert a lower ground pressure. This class includes snowmobiles, tracked motorcycles, tracked all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), tracked utility terrain vehicles (UTVs), and snowcats. The revised Class 2 OSVs include those that typically exert a higher ground pressure. This class includes tracked four-wheel drive (4WD) sport utility vehicles (SUVs) and tracked 4WD trucks.

Backcountry travel off the groomed OSV trails requires expert technical skills. OSV users should be aware of existing, non-posted hazards such as rocks, trees, cliffs, steep, icy slopes, side-hills, and possible avalanche areas.

Access to Designated OSV Use Areas

A number of OSV users raised concerns about access to isolated “islands” of designated OSV use areas. This situation was particularly problematic in areas of the forest where elevation was limited to small patches of NFS land. To remedy this situation, this decision includes removing isolated patches of NFS lands within open areas that occur adjacent to designated areas (Semi-Primitive Area Prescription, Inventoried Roadless Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers, etc.). Other isolated patches were connected by either designating an OSV trail or connecting open areas with small amounts of NFS lands. I am committed to coordinating with the surrounding Counties to provide better access to NFS OSV open areas using County roads plowed by the Counties.

Snow Depth

Commenters raised concerns about protecting valuable forest resources that could be impacted by OSV use, particularly as it relates to sensitive resources underlying the snow. This decision’s approach for minimizing impacts from OSV use on water, soil, terrestrial wildlife habitat, and aquatic wildlife recognizes that constantly changing and highly variable snow conditions (based on snow quantity, slope and aspect of terrain, water content, snow faceting, diurnal temperature fluctuations, etc.) make consistently measuring and enforcing a specific snow depth challenging. Further, a specific snow depth in a particular location may be adequate for protecting underlying forest resources on one day, while on another day this same depth at the same location may not be adequate. For these reasons, this decision does requires that the snow is of sufficient depth to avoid damage to natural and cultural resources. The snow depth language for alternative 2 - modified provides guidelines to help OSV users determine when snow depth would be sufficient to avoid resource damage. For cross-country OSV travel, a minimum of 12 inches of moderate to heavy density, uncompacted snow is typically needed. Alternative 2 –modified also provides examples of resource damage, including, but not limited to, road and trail rutting; uprooted vegetation or vegetation and soil mixed with snow; and crushing small mammal tunnels. On designated OSV trails with underlying roads, a minimum of 6 inches of uncompacted snow is typically needed to avoid damage to the underlying road surface.

We consulted with law enforcement, other government agencies, and State agencies to arrive at this decision as it pertains to snow depth requirements. Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR §261.9 and §261.12 are clear that responsibility to protect natural and cultural resources is on the OSV user. Under this decision, OSV users are responsible for ensuring that their OSV use is not damaging forest resources underlying the snow.

Pacific Crest Trail

We heard many concerns about designating areas for OSV use adjacent to the PCT. Some commenters felt that OSV use areas should not be designated adjacent to the PCT, while others believed that restricting OSV use near the trail was not necessary, reasoning that the trail receives minimal use during the wintertime.

This decision considered these public comments, while ultimately being guided by the National Trails System Act of 1968 (P.L. 90-543), as amended, the Comprehensive Management Plan for the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (Comprehensive Plan 1982). This decision regarding OSV use designations adjacent to the PCT is aligned with the Comprehensive Plan's guidance to mitigate the conflict of noise associated with motorized use where cross-country skiing and/or snowshoeing are planned for the trail and where there are no motorized trails and NFS lands adjacent to the PCT designated for OSV use. Based on observed wintertime use of the PCT by the Plumas National Forest's winter recreation specialists and from public comments, we identified sections of the trail on which non-motorized winter recreation use (cross-country skiing and snowshoeing) typically occurs, as these are places where noise conflicts can be an issue.

Most wintertime recreation use along the PCT originates from the few plowed winter trailheads. We identified the winter plowed public parking locations that access the PCT, and the typical one-day snowshoeing or cross-country skiing distance on the PCT from these access points. Most recreationists access the PCT in the winter at Bucks Summit off of Plumas County Road 414. Within a day non-motorized users can travel north on the PCT into the Bucks Lake Wilderness toward Spanish Peak, outside of the wilderness toward Black Gulch, or travel south on the PCT toward McFarland Ravine to the east or Haskins Valley to the west. Some visitors make a multi-day trip between Eureka State Park, McRae Meadows, Stafford Mountain, and Pilot Peak, spending 2 to 3 nights along the way.

This decision does not designate OSV use adjacent to the PCT along the trail segments referenced in the paragraph above, as these are areas where noise conflicts may be an issue and to protect the non-motorized nature and purpose of the PCT. Areas not designated for OSV use adjacent to the PCT are applied at Bucks Summit, a congested, high-use staging area, and from the general area of Pilot Peak to Stafford Mountain, to include the preservation of historic ski trails. Areas not designated for OSV use adjacent to the PCT vary from approximately 620 to 6,000 feet wide.

Areas not designated for OSV use adjacent to the PCT occur when the PCT overlies undesignated NFS lands or when NFS roads and/or motorized trails intersect, crisscross, or parallel the PCT. Undesignated NFS lands do not authorize OSV use and an additional area not designated for OSV use is not necessary. NFS roads and/or motorized trails that intersect, crisscross, or parallel the PCT within the previous 500-foot area not designated for OSV use originally proposed in the proposed action affects the nature and purpose of the PCT in the non-winter months. Resolving the effects of the roads and/or motorized trails is not within the scope of this project and applying an area not designated for OSV use is impractical under these circumstances.

Public comments also raised concerns about the number and frequency of designated OSV crossings of the PCT. Some argued that OSV users should not be allowed to cross the PCT while others felt that OSV users should be able to cross the trail at any point. Many OSV users were concerned about safety related to OSV crossings of the Trail.

Motorized travel on the PCT is prohibited by Section 7(c) of the National Trails System Act. In areas where OSV use is designated on both sides of the PCT, designated crossings are needed to allow OSV users to get across the trail, and is consistent with the PCT Comprehensive Plan.

This decision recognizes the changing and potentially dangerous nature of snow. A PCT crossing location may be safe to cross on a snowmobile one day and may be unsafe another day due to snow and weather conditions (wind, snow quantity, slope and aspect of terrain, water content, snow faceting, diurnal temperature fluctuations, etc.) interacting with topography. To address public concerns about the safety of OSV crossings of the PCT, this decision designates 16 OSV crossings of the PCT to alleviate safety concerns as well as address the practicality of crossing the trail in the wintertime. This decision clarifies that OSV users are to make PCT crossings at as close to 90 degrees as is safe and at, or as near as possible to, the identified crossing locations as is safe to do so.

Travel Management Rule Minimization Criteria (36 CFR §212.55(b))

We have carefully considered and applied Travel Management Rule's minimization criteria at 36 CFR §212.55(b) to each area and trail designated for public OSV use. We did not designate OSV use in areas with sensitive natural and cultural resources (36 CFR §212.55(b)(1) and (2)). Generally we did not designate OSV use in: (1) most of the forest below 3,500 feet, (2) key deer winter range, (3) Bald Eagle Habitat Prescription (Rx-11), (4) occupied critical habitat for the Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog population Goose and Haven Lakes in the Lakes Basin area, (5) Semi-Primitive Area Prescription (Rx-8), (6) Inventoried Roadless Areas, (7) wild zones of designated and eligible Wild and Scenic River segments, (8) Challenge Experimental Forest, (9) designated and proposed special interest areas with unique botanical, scenic, or geological values, (10) research natural areas, and (11) open, flowing or frozen water (FEIS, pp. 29–31).

In certain cases, we did not designate OSV use as a means of addressing potential recreational use conflicts (36 CFR §212.55(b)(3)). For example, we did not designate OSV use in existing popular non-motorized areas; we are not designating OSV use adjacent to the PCT where noise conflicts may be an issue; and we are not designating OSV use in certain areas that provide unique non-motorized opportunities close to winter plowed parking (FEIS, pp. 29–30).

This decision's snow depth and vehicle class requirements are designed to minimize damage to soil, watershed, vegetation, and other forest resources (36 CFR §212.55(b)(1)) and minimize harassment of wildlife and significant disruption of wildlife habitats (36 CFR §212.55(b)(2)). Snow depth, specifically 12 inches, was considered during minimization criteria evaluation. A minimum snow depth of 12 inches minimizes effects to meadows, wetlands, and riparian areas; vegetative cover and should or trail surfaces; road surfaces; threatened, endangered, and Region 5 Forest Service Sensitive plant species; Sierra Nevada Yellow-legged frogs and their habitat; and historic properties (Stipulation 2.1(b), appendix E of the R5 Heritage Resource Programmatic Agreement (2018) (FEIS, p. 29).

In addition, vehicle class requirements are designed to minimize conflicts among different classes of motor vehicle uses (36 CFR §212.155(b)(4)). Finally, we relied on motorized use prohibitions for wilderness areas and national scenic trails (e.g., the Bucks Lake Wilderness and PCT) as well as existing Forest Plan direction (e.g., standards and guidelines pertaining to bald eagles, spotted owl and goshawk activity centers, marten den sites, wolverine detections, recreation opportunity spectrum, etc.) to address the minimization criteria in certain instances. For more information about the process we used to apply the Travel Management Rule's minimization criteria to this project, please refer to FEIS, volume I, chapter 1, Travel Management Regulations – Subpart C, pp. 2–5; chapter 2, Applying the Minimization Criteria and Other Specific Designation Criteria, pp. 23–26 and Refinement of the Action alternatives, pp. 29–31. We refer the reader to FEIS volume II, appendices D and E for a detailed description of how the minimization criteria were applied on area-by-area and trail-by-trail basis.

In arriving at this decision, I gave considerable thought to the variety of opinions and information provided by the many participants in the process. I greatly appreciate the time and energy people contributed to this process and decision. This participation was essential in meeting our goal of providing outstanding recreational opportunities for all, while protecting natural and cultural resources. This decision includes many ideas and contributions from participants in the process.

Designating areas and trails for public OSV use and displaying this information on a published over-snow vehicle use map (OSVUM) will benefit all winter recreationists by providing clear information about where OSVs may or may not be operated. Non-motorized recreationists can choose to use the OSV designated areas and trails if they are not concerned about interacting with OSVs, or they can choose areas where OSV use is not designated if they prefer a quieter recreation experience. In addition, the Forest Service will be able to provide better OSV use enforcement, including enforcing illegal OSV use outside the established designated OSV areas and trails. The OSVUM will contain specific information to educate all winter recreation users regarding rules and regulations governing winter recreation in the forest.

Socioeconomic Summary

The socioeconomic analysis considered the social and economic consequences of management alternatives to designate trails and areas for public OSV use in the Plumas National Forest. The human environment is central to the purpose and need for this project. OSV use designation in the Plumas National Forest seeks to protect public values related to access, safety, recreational enjoyment, and natural and cultural resources (ecosystem services). The economic affected environment was modeled using IMPLAN Professional Version 3.1 with 2014 data (FEIS, volume I, p. 316).

Overall, alternative 2 – modified results in an increase in labor income and jobs. Given the 7.4 percent decrease in high-quality OSV areas and no net change in the miles of snow trails available for grooming, economic contributions from OSV use would decline negligibly.

Alternative 2 - modified will not to create or disproportionately distribute risk to low-income or minority communities related to the Plumas National Forest. The discussion under effects common to all alternatives provides information on the considerations and rationale supporting this determination (FEIS, volume I, p. 347).

We received public comments around values, beliefs, and attitudes including the legitimacy of the need to designate OSV use; equity in decision making; OSV recreation and a sense of freedom; social bonding; local economic development; quiet recreation; natural resource conditions; and safety. Both commenters who are in favor of designation of OSV areas and those who are not, demonstrated beliefs in their comments that each perspective (motorized and non-motorized recreationists) represented the majority of the public and that the majority should weigh substantially in the decision-making process. Alternative 2 - modified demonstrates a balanced consideration of the diversity of interests and perspectives more so than the other action alternatives. In selecting this alternative, both commenters who value non-motorized winter recreation and those that value motorized recreation may feel that their voices were heard and concerns addressed to a limited extent, and are more likely to feel that the decision-making process reasonably considered and reflected the breadth of concerns and perspectives (FEIS, volume I, pp. 334-336, 347).

Public Involvement

We relied on public involvement to ensure that a reasonable range of alternatives, representing a broad array of perspectives, would be analyzed in this project's FEIS. Scoping was a valuable step in the analysis and decision-making process, allowing me to share the proposed action with the public and other Federal, State, and local agencies. Scoping and the DEIS comment period provided me with new information, helping me define the overall scope of the analysis, identify issues used to develop and refine alternatives, and develop and refine the environmental analysis.

A scoping letter describing the proposed action and seeking public comments was sent via regular mail or email to approximately 278 interested groups, individuals, tribes, and agencies on September 28, 2015, with comments requested to be returned by October 29, 2015. A notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement was published in the Federal Register on September 29, 2015. Two additional notices were sent, extending the scoping comment deadline, and making minor corrections to the scoping notice, with the final comment period deadline of November 30, 2015. Several press releases were sent to local news media outlets announcing the opportunity to comment, and extensions of the comment period. In addition, five public scoping meetings were held in local affected communities. All letters, notices, and press releases included a web address for the project's website where comments could also be submitted.

During October and November 2015, alternative 6, the first iteration of the proposed action was presented in a series of public meetings in communities surrounding the Plumas including Quincy, Portola/Graeagle, Oroville, and Sierra City. The meetings were held to inform members of the public about the Plumas National Forest Over-snow Vehicle Use Designation Project and for the forest to hear from the public about their interests and concerns regarding OSV use. This information was used to help refine the initial proposed action (alternative 6). Information gathered included:

- Areas and trails identified as desirable by OSV enthusiasts;
- Areas and trails identified as desirable by quiet, non-motorized recreation enthusiasts;
- Concerns related to impacts to non-motorized recreation;
- Concerns related to OSV access and connectivity; and
- Concerns related to forest resources (e.g., wildlife, soil, water, vegetation)

Based on the concerns expressed during the public meetings, the proposed action was further refined prior to scoping. The proposed action advertised (scoped) in September 2015, was a compilation of the Forest Service's efforts, as well as, public input.

We received and considered responses from 190 interested groups, individuals, and agencies in the form of letters, emails, and website submissions (FEIS, appendix H). We appreciate the time and perspectives shared by each commenter, and the willingness of all to engage in the environmental analysis process.

Letters dated November 10, 2015, were received from the plaintiffs and intervenors from the *Snowlands et al.* lawsuit, describing their preferred alternatives. Follow-up letters were sent to both the plaintiffs and intervenors on May 31, 2016, requesting clarification of the alternative components that had been submitted and informing them of the components of their requests that were believed to be outside of the scope of this project. The plaintiffs and intervenors sent letters of response to the Forest Service dated June 28, 2016, and June 20, 2016, respectively.

We met with representatives of the plaintiffs (April 27, 2016) and local recreation groups (Friends of Plumas Wilderness, May 13, 2016, and Sierra Access Coalition, May 19, 2016) to clarify their alternative submissions and discuss overall project status.

Forest staff met with the Plumas County Coordinating Council OSV subcommittee on 14 occasions between March 5, 2015, and June 9, 2016, to brief them on the purpose and need and the overall analysis process. The subcommittee met with the local recreation groups on three occasions in 2016 (May 13, May 20, and May 26) to understand the various positions and bring together any common recommendations related to the proposed action or alternatives. These meetings ended with agreement regarding the definition of OSV crossings for the PCT: “adequate crossings along the PCT wide enough for changing conditions for motorized uses, as long as motorized access is designated on each side of PCT, while maintaining historic routes.”

A letter notifying the public that the DEIS was available for review and comment for 45 days was sent via regular mail or email to more than 211 interested groups, individuals, tribes, and agencies. The notice of availability notifying the public that the DEIS was available for review and comment for 45 days was published in the Federal Register on October 26, 2018 (83 FR 208, page 54105). On October 24, 2018, we also published a notice of the opportunity to comment in the *Feather River Bulletin* (newspaper of record) and sent a press release to local news media outlets.

On Friday, December 7, 2018, we published an amended notice in the Federal Register (83 FR 235, page 63162) extending the comment period from December 10, 2018, to January 24, 2019, to accommodate requests for an extension due to the nearby Camp Fire; which impacted the ability of some potentially interested stakeholders to submit comments by December 10, 2018. On December 3, 2018, we also sent a press release to local news media outlets confirming the comment period extension.

On Friday, February 8, 2019, we published a second amended notice in the Federal Register (84 FR 27, page 2860) extending the comment period from January 24, 2019, to March 1, 2019, as a result of the government shutdown. On February 8 and 11, 2019, we also sent a press release to local news media outlets.

During the DEIS 127-day opportunity to comment period, two public open house meetings were held to discuss the DEIS: February 26, 2019, in Blairsden-Graeagle, California, at the Graeagle Fire Hall; and February 27, 2019, in Oroville, California, at the Southside Oroville Community Center. The meetings were attended by 38 individuals.

We received 211 comment letters postmarked or received prior to the end of the 127-day comment period. We considered all comments and responded by modifying alternatives; supplementing, improving, or modifying the analysis; making factual correction; or explaining why the comments would not warrant further response. These comments and our responses are available in volume III, appendix I of this FEIS.

Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative (alternative 2 - modified), we considered four other alternatives, which are summarized below. Alternative 5 is the environmentally preferred alternative, based on the definition at 36 CFR §220.3. More detailed descriptions and comparison of these alternatives can be found in the FEIS, volume I on pages 30–35. The FEIS, volume II, appendix A provides spatial displays of the alternatives.

Alternative 1: No Action (Continued Current Management)

The no-action alternative is required under the National Environmental Policy Act regulations [40 CFR §1502.14(d)]. This alternative reflects the current management activities related to snowmobile use in the Plumas National Forest, and represents the existing baseline condition or trends by which the action alternatives are compared. Several components of this alternative are not consistent with the Travel Management Regulation – Subpart C. Therefore, this alternative will serve as a baseline for comparison of the other proposed alternatives.

Under alternative 1, no areas would be designated for OSV use; however, public OSV use would continue to be allowed in all areas of the Plumas National Forest (1,147,825 acres) except for areas with existing prohibitions (Bucks Lake Wilderness (21,000 acres), Challenge Experimental Forest (3,400 acres), the Pacific Crest Trail (79 miles) (approximately 170 acres), within Rx-11 Bald Eagle Habitat Prescription (Plumas Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) EIS, USDA Forest Service 1988, pp. 3-24 and 4-96). The wild zone of Wild and Scenic Rivers. Permit no additional motorized access routes along the Middle Fork of the North Fork Feather River (Plumas Forest Plan, USDA Forest Service 1988, pp. 4-69 and 4-70) (appendix B). The total acres presented as “available” for OSV use in alternative 1 is an over-representation of where OSV use may actually occur. Some of these acres are under 3,500 feet elevation, and therefore, are unlikely to receive snow in quantities adequate enough to support OSV use, if at all.

The Plumas National Forest has a total of approximately 227 miles of OSV trails available for use. Approximately 203 miles of designated OSV trails are available for grooming, and 24 miles are marked for OSV use, but are not groomed. There are 2,879 miles of unmarked, undesignated trails available for use in alternative 1 (FEIS, volume II, appendix A, tables A-1 and A-2, and figure A-1).

Although public cross-country OSV travel would be available, alternative 1 does not (1) designate a system of OSV trails or areas as directed by Subpart C of the Final Travel Management Rule (36 CFR §212), and (2) identify the location of, or analyze the effects of, groomed trails. The Forest Plan does not establish a minimum snow depth for trail or cross-country public OSV use.

The Forest Plan does not provide specific management direction for OSV trail-grooming activities; however, the Plumas National Forest follows the California State Parks’ Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division snow depth standard for grooming, which is currently 12 to 18 inches of snow.

Approximately 79 miles of the PCT traverse the Plumas National Forest. Of that, 76 miles of the PCT are on National Forest System lands. OSV use on the PCT is prohibited by the National Scenic Trails Act, P.L. 90-543, Section 7(c). There are no designated OSV crossings of the PCT.

Specific monitoring elements that would be implemented in connection with any of the action alternatives are included in the FEIS, volume I, chapter 2; and volume II, appendix J.

Alternative 3

Alternative 3 is a detailed alternative submitted by Snowlands Network and Winter Wildlands Alliance during the public scoping period. Components of this alternative would address significant issues and concerns relating to the availability of non-motorized over-snow recreation opportunities; quality of motorized and non-motorized over-snow recreation experiences; and effects to air quality. This alternative would not require a Forest Plan Amendment. The following summarizes how the Forest Service would manage public OSV use in the Plumas National Forest under this alternative:

- Designate approximately 600,542 acres of National Forest System lands for public cross-country OSV use (FEIS, volume II, appendix A, table A-9 – table 11, figure A-3). There are 1,499 miles of undesignated, unmarked, ungroomed, underlying roads and trails within designated OSV-use areas in this alternative.
- Designate areas with elevations above 5,000 feet for public OSV use.
- Designate approximately 273 miles of trails for OSV use and available for grooming. This includes 73 additional miles of trail that are not part of the existing groomed trail network and would be available for grooming if additional funding became available (FEIS, appendix A, table A-8).
- Forest-wide snow depth requirements for public OSV use would be established, as follows:
 - ◆ Public, cross-country OSV use in designated OSV-use areas would be permitted when there are 18 or more inches of snow or ice covering the landscape, to prevent impacts to surface and subsurface.
 - ◆ Public OSV use on designated trails would be permitted when there are 18 or more inches of snow covering the trail to prevent impacts to surface and subsurface resources.
 - ◆ The minimum snow depth for snow trail grooming to occur would be 12 inches.
- This alternative would designate nine OSV trails across the PCT (FEIS, volume II, appendix A, table A-12). Motorized routes (roads or trails) identified on the Plumas National Forest's Motor Vehicle Use Map and where NFS motorized trail 12E39 joins the PCT (west of Gold Lake) would be utilized.
- An area adjacent to the PCT would not be designated for cross-country OSV travel to minimize noise disturbance to non-motorized recreationists on the PCT and to retain the non-motorized characteristics of this national scenic trail. Areas where the PCT is in close proximity to designated OSV trails available for grooming would be designated for OSV use.
- OSV use would be restricted to the designated trails only when designated trails pass through bald eagle territories.

Alternative 4

Alternative 4, which was submitted by Blue Ribbon Coalition and Sierra Access Coalition in accordance with the settlement agreement in the case of *Snowlands Network et al. v. U.S. Forest Service*, addresses the significant issue of the availability of motorized over-snow recreation opportunities. The areas designated for OSV use and the designation of OSV trails available for grooming would be maximized.

Funds for grooming are available through State grants and additional funds for new grooming are not anticipated. This alternative would require additional facilities to support increased grooming. Evaluation of these additional facilities is beyond the scope of this project. This alternative also proposes to change

the management of the currently non-motorized cross-country ski trails at Gray Eagle Creek and Bucks Creek Loop to provide for OSV use in these areas.

NFS lands and OSV trails determined to be inconsistent with the Forest Plan were removed from this alternative and not considered in detail at the discretion of the responsible official (FEIS, pp. 11–12 and 33–34). With these changes, this alternative would not require a Forest Plan Amendment.

The following summarizes how the Forest Service would manage public OSV use in the Plumas National Forest under this alternative:

- Designate approximately 1,160,793 acres of National Forest System lands for public cross-country OSV use (FEIS, appendix A, table A-10, figure A-4). There are 2,610 miles of undesignated, unmarked, ungroomed, underlying roads and trails within designated OSV-use areas in this alternative.
- Designate approximately 750 miles of trails available for grooming. This mileage includes the addition of 477 miles of trails that would be available for grooming should additional funding become available. These additional miles include an extension of the Mill Creek OSV trail to allow for a safe turnaround for the grooming machine, and the Bucks Lake groomed trail system into the Fourth Water and Tamarack areas, as well as historically groomed and potential trails on existing roads (FEIS, volume II, appendix A, table A-13 – table 15, figure A-4).
- Forest-wide snow depth requirements for public OSV use would be established, as follows:
 - ♦ Public, cross-country OSV use in designated OSV-use areas would be permitted when there are 12 or more inches of snow or ice covering the landscape, to prevent impacts to surface and subsurface resources.
 - ♦ There would be no minimum snow depth requirement for designated trails.
 - ♦ There would be no minimum snow depth requirement for grooming to occur.
- Approximately 5 miles, of the existing 85 miles, of non-motorized trail currently not available for OSV use, would be designated for OSV use.
- This alternative would designate 31 OSV trails across the PCT where motorized routes shown on the Plumas motor vehicle use map cross the trail and where recommended by local snowmobile enthusiasts (FEIS, volume II, appendix A, table A-16). This includes 25 crossings that overlie roads or trails and 6 linear features that would be wider than a road.

Alternative 5: Environmentally Preferred Alternative

Alternative 5 is a detailed alternative submitted by Friends of Plumas Wilderness during public comments and further modified by the interdisciplinary team. Alternative 5 addresses all three significant issues: availability of non-motorized over-snow recreational opportunities; quality of motorized and non-motorized over-snow recreation experiences; effects to air quality; and effects to terrestrial and aquatic wildlife and botanical resources. This alternative would not require a Forest Plan Amendment. The following summarizes how the Forest Service would manage public OSV use in the Plumas National Forest under this alternative:

- Designate approximately 651,877 acres of National Forest System lands for public cross-country OSV use (FEIS, appendix A, table A-13, figure A-5). There are 1,660 miles of undesignated, unmarked, ungroomed, underlying roads and trails within designated OSV-use areas in this alternative.

- Designate areas with elevations above 5,000 feet for public OSV use.
- Designate approximately 200 miles of trails for OSV use and available for grooming (FEIS, volume II, appendix A, table A-18 and table A-20).
- Approximately 5.2 miles of designated trail would not be available for grooming; this includes 1.6 miles of trail that is currently groomed (FEIS, volume II, appendix A, table A-19).
- Forest-wide snow depth requirements for public OSV use would be established, as follows:
 - ♦ Public, cross-country OSV use in designated OSV-use areas would be allowed when there are 24 or more inches of snow or ice covering the landscape, to prevent impacts to surface and subsurface resources;
 - ♦ Public OSV use on designated OSV trails would be allowed when there are 12 or more inches of snow or ice covering the trail; and
 - ♦ Follow California State Department of Parks and Recreation Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division snow depth standards for grooming, currently requiring 12 to 18 inches of snow accumulation.
- This alternative would designate 16 OSV trails across the PCT to connect designated open OSV areas (FEIS, volume II, appendix A, table A-21). OSV trails would use motorized routes (roads or trails) identified on the Plumas National Forest's motor vehicle use map and would be the width of the road (approximately 14 feet).
- An area within 500 feet of centerline of the PCT would not be designated for cross-country OSV travel to minimize noise disturbance to non-motorized uses on the PCT and to retain the non-motorized characteristics of this national scenic trail. OSV use across the PCT would be restricted to designated OSV trails only.
- Alternative 5 would include the same bald eagle restricted areas as the modified proposed action (alternative 2 - modified). OSV use would be restricted to the designated trails only when designated trails pass through bald eagle territories.
- OSV use would be restricted to the designated trail available for grooming only when designated trails pass through or are adjacent to northern goshawk breeding areas.
- Class 1 OSVs would be allowed on all designated OSV trails and areas. Class 2 OSVs would only be allowed on designated OSV trails available for grooming. Class of vehicle definitions can be found in the FEIS, volume II, appendix K.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision complies with the laws, regulations, and policies listed below and described in the Regulatory Framework appendix of the FEIS (appendix B).

National Forest Management Act of 1976 (90 Stat. 2949; 16 U.S.C. 1608)

Specifically for off-highway vehicle management, the National Forest Management Act requires that this use be planned and implemented to protect land and other resources, promote public safety, and minimize conflicts with other uses of the National Forest System (NFS) lands. The National Forest Management Act also requires that a broad spectrum of forest and rangeland-related outdoor recreation opportunities be provided that respond to current and anticipated user demands.

The National Forest Management Act and regulations require that the economic impacts of decisions or plans affecting the management of renewable resources are analyzed and that the economic stability of communities whose economies are dependent on national forest lands is considered. This analysis meets the requirements of the National Forest Management Act by specifically considering the economic impacts of the implementation of the OSV use designation project and its impacts on local communities and minority populations.

Section 8(b) of the National Forest Management Act states, “any road constructed on land of the National Forest System in connection with a timber contract or other lease shall be designed with the goal of reestablishing vegetation cover on the roadway and areas where vegetation cover has been disturbed by the construction of the road, within ten years after the termination of the contract, permit, or lease.” This section of the act further states, “Such action shall be taken unless it is determined that the road is needed for use as a part of the National Forest Transportation System.”

This legal direction states that lands no longer needed for, and dedicated to, transportation or access uses should be returned to a vegetated state. Implicit in this legal direction is Forest Service responsibility to recover soil productivity on these lands, to the extent that vegetation can be re-established. Type and degree of soil recovery necessary for re-establishment of vegetation would depend on site-specific conditions and land management objectives for that area.

Section 8(c) of this act states “Roads constructed on National Forest System lands shall be designed to standards appropriate for the intended uses, considering safety, cost of transportation, and impacts on land resources.”

The National Forest Management Act prevents watershed conditions from being irreversibly damaged and protects streams and wetlands from detrimental impacts. Land productivity must be preserved. Fish habitat must support a minimum number of reproductive individuals and be well distributed to allow interaction between populations.

Motorized recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS) classes are located on landscapes where the topography, geology, and soils can support motorized use and the associated roads and motorized trails. ROS provides a framework where recreational opportunities, activities and expected experiences are integrated to ensure compatibility with the landscape’s natural and cultural resource values. The ROS establishes recreational settings particularly informative for decisions on infrastructure and the built environment, but is not intended to be the sole framework for managing recreational uses and activities.

In regard to future land management planning for the Plumas National Forest, OSV use designations will not preclude areas from being considered and recommended for wilderness designation during forest plan revision because OSV designations do not include permanent improvements or other physical modifications to an area. Designating where OSVs are allowed to operate in the Plumas National Forest does not preclude any area from being considered for wilderness in the future.

Travel Management Rule (36 CFR §212), Subpart C

This decision complies with the Forest Service’s Travel Management Rule (36 CFR §212), Subpart C, including the rule’s provisions for designating OSV use where snowfall is adequate for the use to occur (36 CFR §212.81(a)) and the criteria for designating OSV area and trails (36 CFR §212.55). The responsible official determined that elevations above 3,500 feet have adequate snowfall for OSV use to occur. As such, this decision generally does not designate OSV use areas below 3,500 feet, because lower elevations on the Plumas National Forest typically do not have sufficient snowfall for OSV use.

The FEIS (volume I, pp. 2–5) describes how the Travel Management Rule’s designation criteria were applied for the Plumas National Forest OSV Use Designation Project. Documentation of how the criteria at 36 CFR §212.55(b) were addressed for each designated OSV area and trail is presented in the FEIS, volume II, appendix D “Mitigation to Address the Minimization Criteria in the Travel Regulations for Areas Designated for OSV Use” and appendix E “Mitigation to Address the Minimization Criteria in the Travel Regulations for Trails Designated for OSV Use.”

National Trails System Act and Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail Comprehensive Plan

This decision complies with the National Trails System Act of 1968 (P.L. 90-543), as amended. Section 7(c) of the Act states: “National scenic trails may contain campsites, shelters, and related public use facilities. Other uses along the trail, which will not substantially interfere with the nature and purposes of the trail, may be permitted by the Secretary charged with the administration of the trail. Reasonable efforts shall be made to provide sufficient access opportunities to such trails and, to the extent practicable, efforts shall be made to avoid activities incompatible with the purposes for which such trails were established. The use of motor vehicles by the general public along any national scenic trail shall be prohibited...” This decision does not designate OSV use along the PCT.

The act does not prohibit public motorized use adjacent to national scenic trails, and this decision does designate OSV use in some areas adjacent to the PCT. Section 7(a)(2) of the act specifies that national scenic trails shall harmonize with and complement management for multiple uses on lands adjacent to such trails. The act recognizes that segments of national scenic trails may traverse the natural and historical areas of the national park system, national wildlife refuge system, and national wilderness preservation system where use of motorized vehicles is presently prohibited or on other Federal lands where trails are designated as being closed to such use by the appropriate Secretary (Section 7(c)). OSV use is prohibited within the Plumas National Forest’s Bucks Lake Wilderness, which the PCT traverses.

This decision is consistent with the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail Comprehensive Plan (1982), which states: “Within Federal lands outside National Parks and Wilderness (77 percent of the trail), the trail must co-exist in harmony with all other resource uses and activities of the land as determined through the land management planning process. The trail will cross a mosaic of areas differing in primary management emphasis. This could be grazing, key wildlife habitat, special interest such as scenic or geologic, developed recreation, unroaded recreation, research natural, or intensive timber management. Viewing and understanding this array of resources and management is one of the primary recreation opportunities to be made available over these portions of trail” (pg. 21).

This decision’s designated OSV crossings of the PCT is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan’s direction: “Snowmobiling on the trail is prohibited but crossing at designated locations is consistent with the purpose of the trail when such [OSV] use is permitted on lands adjacent to the trail and does not cause damage to the trail, related resources, or facilities.”

The Comprehensive Plan (p. 21) provides further guidance for winter recreation use on the PCT, including the following:

“Snowmobiling along the trail is prohibited by the national Trail System Act, P.L. 90-543, Sec 7(c). Winter sports plans for areas through which the trail passes should consider this prohibition in determining areas appropriate for snowmobile use. Winter sports brochures should indicate designated snowmobile crossing of the Pacific Crest Trail where it is signed and marked for winter use. If cross-

country skiing and/or snowshoeing are planned for the trail, any motorized use of adjacent land should be zoned to mitigate the noise of conflict.”

As described in the Decision Rationale section of this Record of Decision, this decision does not designate OSV use adjacent to the PCT along the trail segments where noise conflicts between winter motorized use and non-motorized recreation use may be an issue. Areas not designated for OSV use adjacent to the PCT vary from approximately 620 to 6,000 feet wide.

Clean Water Act

The Clean Water Act of 1948 (as amended in 1972 and 1987) establishes Federal policy for the control of point and non-point pollution, and assigns the states the primary responsibility for control of water pollution. The Porter-Cologne Water-Quality Act, as amended in 2006, provides for the protection of water quality by the State Water Resources Control Board and the Regional Water Quality Control Boards, which are authorized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to enforce the Federal Clean Water Act in California. The State Water Resources Control Board and Regional Water Quality Control Boards entered into agreements with the Forest Service to control nonpoint source discharges by implementing best management practices. Forest Service best management practices are in conformance with the provisions and requirements of the Federal Clean Water Act and within the guidelines of the Basin Plans developed for the nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards in California. This decision adopts Best Management Practices to Protect Water Quality (FEIS appendix C) in compliance with the Clean Water Act.

Endangered Species Act

Pursuant to the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 et seq.), Federal agencies shall ensure that any action they authorize, fund, or carry out is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered species or threatened species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of habitat of such species. Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, as amended, requires the responsible Federal agency to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) concerning endangered and threatened species.

The Forest Service will complete consultation with the USFWS for the following federally listed species and their designated critical habitat for this project: California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*) and designated critical habitat – Threatened, Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog (*Rana sierrae*) and designated critical habitat – Endangered, and gray wolf (*Canis lupus*) – Endangered. Consultation with the USFWS for the Plumas National Forest Over-snow Vehicle Use Designation Project will be completed prior to the final decision and will comply with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act.

National Historic Preservation Act

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, directs all Federal agencies to take into account the effects of their undertakings (actions, financial support, and authorizations) on historic properties included in or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Implementing regulations are found at 36 CFR §800.

This decision complies with stipulations found within the *First Amended Programmatic Agreement Among the USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5), California State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation Regarding the Processes for Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for the Management of Historic Properties by the National Forests of the Pacific Southwest Region (Regional Heritage PA 2018)*.

Specifically, within Appendix E – Approved Standard Protection Measures, part 2.1(b) stipulates the presence of sufficient snow depth (a minimum of 12 inches of compacted snow or ice) over historic properties to prevent surface and subsurface impacts.

Administrative Review or Objection Opportunities

The project-level decision (which includes all elements of this draft decision) is subject to the objection regulations at 36 CFR §218, Subparts A and B.

Who May File an Objection

Individuals or entities who have submitted timely, specific written comments about the proposed project during any designated opportunity for public comment are eligible to file an objection on the project (36 CFR §218.5(a)).

Required Content for an Objection

Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted timely, specific written comments regarding the proposed project unless based on new information arising after the designated comment opportunities. Objections on the project must include the following information (36 CFR §218.8(d)): (1) objector's name and address, with a telephone number, if available; (2) objector's signature or other verification of authorship; (3) identification of a single lead objector when applicable; (4) project name, responsible official name and title (Christopher Carlton, Forest Supervisor), and name of affected national forest(s) and/or ranger district(s); (5) description of those aspects of the project being objected to, including specific issues related to the proposed project; (6) specific reasons for, and suggested remedies to resolve, the objection; and (7) description of the connection between the objection and the objector's prior comments, unless the objection concerns an issue that arose after the designated opportunities for comment. Documents incorporated by reference must adhere to 36 CFR §218.8(b).

Where to File an Objection

The Regional Forester is the reviewing officer for objections for this project filed under the 36 CFR §218 regulations. Objections must be submitted to: Regional Forester, USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, Attn: Plumas OSV Objection; 1323 Club Drive, Vallejo, California 94592. Objections may be submitted via mail, FAX (707-562-9229), or delivered during business hours (Monday through Friday 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.). Electronic objections, in common (.doc, .pdf, .rtf, .txt) formats, may be submitted to: objections-pacificsouthwest-regional-office@usda.gov with the subject: "**Plumas OSV Objection.**"

When to File an Objection

Objections on the project-level decision must be submitted within 45 days following the publication of the legal notice in the *Feather River Bulletin*. The date of the published legal notice is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Those wishing to object should not rely upon dates or timeframes provided by any other source. It is the objector's responsibility to ensure evidence of timely filing of a written objection with the reviewing officer (36 CFR §218.9)

Implementation Date

If no objection is filed on the project, a Record of Decision may be issued in accordance with 40 CFR §1506.10, but not before the fifth business day following the close of the objection filing period (36 CFR §218.12(c)(2)). If an objection to this decision is filed in accordance with 36 CFR §218, then this Record of Decision may not be signed until all concerns and instructions from the reviewing official in the objection response have been addressed (36 CFR §218.12 (b)). After the decision is signed, implementation may begin immediately.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Katherine Carpenter, Forest Environmental Coordinator, Plumas National Forest, 159 Lawrence Street, Quincy, California 95971; 530-283-7742.

CHRISTOPHER CARLTON
Forest Supervisor
Plumas National Forest

DATE

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