

# Summary

The Tonto National Forest proposes to designate a system of roads and motorized trails, in addition to prohibiting motorized cross-country travel, except in designated motorized areas and fixed-distance corridors solely for the purpose of motorized dispersed camping or motorized big game retrieval. The area affected by the proposal includes the entire Tonto National Forest. This action is needed because the increasing number of unmanaged motorized recreationists on the forest has been contributing to resource damage. The project area being analyzed in this document is the entire Tonto National Forest.

On November 2, 2005, the Forest Service announced the final Travel Management Rule regulations governing off-highway vehicles (OHVs) and other motor vehicle use on national forests and grasslands. Under the new regulations, which reiterate direction given in previous *Executive Orders (11644 and 11989)*, forests that do not already restrict OHV travel to designated roads and trails must do so. Motor vehicles, including OHVs, must remain on designated roads and trails systems or in designated areas while on the national forest.

Currently, the Tonto National Forest does not have a forestwide designated road or trail system; cross-country motorized travel is permitted except in areas that are signed closed or restricted to seasonal use. To date, four ranger districts (Cave Creek, Globe, Mesa, and Tonto Basin) are closed to cross-country travel by Closure Orders, direction in the 1985 Tonto National Forest Plan, or other designation that restricts motor vehicle use.

The Tonto National Forest published a proposed action in the Federal Register on February 1, 2013. This original proposed action would have resulted in approximately 3,812 miles of designated National Forest System road and trails and 1,417 acres of designated areas open to motor vehicles on the National Forest, adding approximately 280 miles of unauthorized routes. This alternative was eliminated from detailed study to reflect updated data and in response to public comments and replaced by newly developed Alternative C, which is the preferred alternative. Two other action alternatives (B and D) were developed in addition to the no action Alternative A, which proposes no change from the existing condition.

All three action alternatives (B, C, and D) would require amendments to the Forest Plan. Alternatives A and D would only allow one permit zone, Bulldog Canyon. Alternative B includes the addition of five motorized permit zones, while alternative C includes the addition of four motorized permit zones. Motorized big game retrieval of elk and bear is allowed in Alternatives C and D—up to one mile on both sides of all designated motorized routes—but alternative D also allows retrieval of white tail and mule deer, which nearly doubles the affected acreage. Alternative B does not allow for motorized retrieval off of designated roads or motorized trails. Dispersed camping is restricted to 65 acres in Alternative B. In contrast, Alternatives C and D would allow motor vehicle use for dispersed camping in designated corridors; alternative C proposes 100 feet on both sides of all designated motorized routes, while Alternative D proposes 300 feet on both sides of all designated motorized routes. To clarify, the alternatives are summarized in alphabetical order:

- Alternative A proposes no change to existing conditions. This alternative would not comply with the Travel Management Rule.
- Alternative B, developed in response to public comments during scoping, has the fewest miles of roads and motorized trails open to the public and the most miles of roads proposed for decommissioning. It is the only alternative which does not allow motor

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vehicle use for big game retrieval and motor vehicle use for dispersed camping to designated sites only. This alternative does allow for cross-country travel, up to 300 feet both sides of all designated motorized routes, for fuelwood gathering within designated areas.

- Alternative C has the second lowest number of miles of roads designated to be open to the public, but has the most miles of motorized trails.
- Alternative D has the most miles of motorized roads open to travel by the public and the most acres of cross-country travel for the purposes of dispersed camping and big game retrieval.

Overall, the modified proposed action, Alternative C, would provide the most balance between protection of the natural and cultural resources, while still providing motorized access to the public for a variety of recreational opportunities. All of the action alternatives (one of which must be implemented as per the final rule) increase the forest's ability to protect resources and manage the transportation system more effectively.

Based upon the effects of the alternatives, the responsible official will decide which of the action alternatives will be chosen to implement the Travel Management Rule.