

Nebraska Off Highway Vehicle Association **NOHVA**

TBQ Sport Club, Incorporated

A Non-Profit Association For All Terrain Vehicle and Off Road Motorcycle Users - Established 1987

Business Office: 2231 West 10th Street, Grand Island, Nebraska 68803

Web site: www.nohva.com

Telephone: 308-381-2143

Email: danno@nohva.com

November 11, 2009

Dear NOHVA Members and Interested Parties,

I am writing this letter to discuss the pro's and con's of the proposed alternatives concerning an upcoming Travel Management Plan decision by the U.S. Forest Service concerning what trails will remain open and what trails will be closed at four U.S. Forest Service locations in Nebraska.

The U. S. Forest Service is asking for your input concerning the alternative trail plans that they have developed. You can submit your comments, ideas, support, non-support via email, fax, or regular mail. Details on how to contact the U. S. Forest Service and suggestions on what to tell them is detailed later in this document under "How To Contact the U. S. Forest Service Concerning the Travel Management Plan".

If you are not sure what the Travel Management Plan involves and want to find out more information, visit <http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/ohv/final.pdf> . ***The deadline has been extended, you now have until December 24th 2009 to submit your comments!***

I know that many of you have attended meetings, have read about the Travel Management Plan in our newsletter or have heard about from other sources. The end for the development of the plan and implementation of the plan is near. After the first of the year, the Forest Service will choose an alternative based upon their studies and from public comments. Once an alternative is decided, a decision appeal period will occur. Those who provide substantive comments about the proposed alternatives during the 45-day comment period ending December 24th are eligible to appeal the decision within 45 days.

The environment impact studies have been completed for areas in our state. For the last couple of years the Forest Service has been talking to trail recreationists, local land owners, environmental groups, groups like NOHVA and many other interest groups and asking about their opinions or ideas concerning motorized travel on Forest Service and National Grassland areas. Additionally the Forest Service has been studying the impact that ATV and dirtbike trails may have to the four U.S. Forest Service locations in Nebraska, and have studied the amount of trails that future funding, Forest Service staff and volunteers will be able to maintain. With all this in mind, a set of four alternatives have been developed for each of four different locations in our state. Alternative plans have also been proposed for locations in South Dakota and every other state in nation. In some states, the new Travel Management Plan has already been implemented.

The four alternatives for each location can be broken down into these basic categories, Alternative One, Alternative Two, Alternative Three and Alternative Four. In this letter we will comment only on alternatives for the Nebraska National Forest, Bessey Ranger District near Halsey and the McKelvie National Forest near Valentine. We are not commenting on other U.S. Forest Service units in Nebraska and South Dakota as we have do not have adequate knowledge of the areas to make a qualified opinion.

To view the results of studies, lists of trails, to view maps of the various alternatives, and inspect other important documents visit the Nebraska National Forest web site at http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/nebraska/projects/travel_management/index.shtml

Please note that under all of the alternatives travel across open land will be prohibited. If anyone in or on a motorized vehicle is caught riding or driving off of the designated routes, you will be fined. Many existing trails will be closed. No matter what alternative is chosen, closed trails will not be marked as closed. It will be the responsibility of trail users to find out what is open and what is closed. All trails will be considered closed unless the trail has a sign and the trail must be on a Forest Service Motor Vehicle Use

Map (MVUM) map.

NOHVA Discussion of the various alternatives:

Alternative 1

Under Alternative 1 at the Bessey Ranger District near Halsey, this proposal calls for many of the existing user created trails we now use to be closed. This alternative would require the closure of the Poison Ivy Trail, the Power Line trail, Camp Five trails, the Hill Climb area, trails south of the hill climb including the Fence Line trail. Also closed will be the Dismal River play area, and most other trails. About 8.46 miles of ATV and dirtbike trails will remain open. About 63 miles of mixed use trails and roads will be open (including 8.46 miles of ATV and dirtbike trails), and zero acres of open motorized use area will remain open.

The Bessey alternative 1 is NOT a good alternative for ATV and dirtbike riders.

Under Alternative 1 at the McKelvie National Forest near Valentine, trails will be open to ATVs and dirtbikes, but only a limited number of trails. About 70.65 miles of trails will remain open to ATV and dirtbike riders under this plan. This is NOT a good alternative for ATV and dirtbike riders.

Alternative 2

Under Alternative 2 at the Bessey Ranger District near Halsey, this proposal calls for preservation of most of the user created ATV and dirtbike trails. This alternative would officially designate as open to ATVs and dirtbikes the Poison Ivy Trail, the Power Line trail, Camp Five trails, the Hill Climb area and several trails south of the Hill climb area. A number of user created trails north and east of the Whitetail Campground would be designated as open. The Dismal River play area would remain open. All trails leading to windmills and all trails west of Circle Road (FS203) would be closed to ATV and dirtbike riding. About 27 miles of ATV and dirtbike trails will remain open to ATV and dirtbike riders, a total of 38.51 miles of mixed use trails and roads will be open (including 27 miles of ATV and dirtbike trails), and 15 acres of open motorized use area (hill climb and Dismal play area) will remain open. Alternative 2 is the U.S. Forest Service preferred alternative.

Bessey Alternative 2 IS A GOOD alternative for ATV and dirtbike riders and closely matches and exceeds the original NOHVA proposal dated March 4, 2008. NOHVA prefers Alternative 2 over the other alternatives. See http://nohva.com/News2008/travel_plan.htm

NOHVA prefers the Bessey Alternative 2 with these changes:

> We ask that the section of FS201-1 that is proposed to be closed to ATVs and dirtbikes but open to Highway Legal Vehicles (HLV) and located between the mixed use road to the Hill Climb (FS414) and trail 12.14 be changed to allow ATVs and dirtbikes as well.

> We would like to see the Dismal River play area boundary fence moved to the boundary of the open sand play area instead of cutting it in half. This fence line in the sand is difficult to enforce and is usually covered with sand. The fence should be moved out to the sand area boundary and may as well be used for recreation as it serves no purpose for grazing. The fence protecting the riparian area along the Dismal River should remain as built.

> For suggestions on what to include in your letter, see *"How To Contact the U. S. Forest Service Concerning the Travel Management Plan"* below.

Under Alternative 2 at the McKelvie National Forest near Valentine, more trails will be open to ATVs and dirtbikes than under Alternative 1. About 76.03 miles of trails will remain open to ATV and dirtbike riders under this plan. The McKelvie alternative 2 IS A FAIR alternative for ATV and dirtbike riders.

Alternative 3

TMP Alternatives for Nebraska National Forest continued...

Under Alternative 3 for the Bessey Ranger District near Halsey, almost all the windmill trails will remain open and all user created trails will remain open. About 30.22 miles of ATV and dirtbike trails will remain open. About 30.22 miles of mixed use trails and roads will be open (including 30.22 miles of ATV and dirtbike trails), and 15 acres of open motorized use area (hill climb and Dismal play area) will remain open.

Bessey Alternative 3 IS A GOOD alternative for ATV and dirtbike riders, but is not the alternative preferred by NOHVA. This alternative contains the most open miles of trails that can be used by ATV and dirtbike riders. Considering the problem of sufficient volunteers and funding for maintenance, the alternative 3 system of trails and roads would be difficult to maintain.

Under Alternative 3 for the McKelvie National Forest near Valentine, almost all the windmill trails will remain open and all user created trails will remain open. About 215.63 miles of mixed use roads will remain open, which include ATV and dirtbike riders.

NOHVA prefers the McKelvie alternative 3 as it IS THE BEST alternative for ATV and dirtbike riders. The use of roads by ATV and dirtbike users now at McKelvie is very low, we see no reason to change the existing routes that ATV and dirtbike riders can use now.

Alternative 4

Under Alternative 4 for the Bessey Ranger District near Halsey, only the Dismal River Trail and a connector route to the White Tail Campground would remain open to ATV and dirtbike riders. About 8.48 miles of ATV and dirtbike trails will remain open. About 8.48 miles of mixed use trails and roads will be open (including 8.48 miles of ATV and dirtbike trails). The Hill Climb and Dismal River Play area would be closed. Bessey alternative 4 is UNACCEPABLE for ATV and dirtbike riders.

Under Alternative 4 for the McKelvie National Forest near Valentine, ALL roads and trails will be closed to ATV and dirtbike riders. McKelvie alternative 4 is UNACCEPABLE for ATV and dirtbike riders.

UTV and Side-by-side Users - Under all of the alternatives, UTVs and Side-by-Sides will be allowed ONLY on the mixed use roads. UTVs and side-by-sides will not be allowed on ATV and dirtbikes trails, which are all under 50". The 50" rule cannot be changed or modified as it is a national U. S. Forest Service trail design issue and cannot be modified at local Forest Service units.

Under Alternative 1 at the Bessey Ranger District near Halsey, 54.74 miles of roads will be open to UTVs and Side-by-Sides.

Under Alternative 1 at the McKelvie National Forest near Valentine, 70.65 miles of roads will be open to UTVs and Side-by-Sides.

Under Alternative 2 at the Bessey Ranger District near Halsey, 11.49 miles of roads will be open to UTVs and Side-by-Sides.

Under Alternative 2 at the McKelvie National Forest near Valentine, 76.03 miles of roads will be open to UTVs and Side-by-Sides.

Under Alternative 3 at the Bessey Ranger District near Halsey, 149.98 miles of roads will be open to UTVs and Side-by-Sides.

Under Alternative 3 at the McKelvie National Forest near Valentine, 215.63 miles of roads will be open to UTVs and Side-by-Sides.

Under Alternative 4 at the Bessey Ranger District near Halsey, 3.51 miles of roads will be open to UTVs and Side-by-Sides.

Under Alternative 4 at the McKelvie National Forest near Valentine, zero miles of roads will be open to UTVs and Side-by-Sides.

To view the results of studies, lists of trails, to view maps of the various alternatives, and inspect other

TMP Alternatives for Nebraska National Forest continued...

important documents visit the Nebraska National Forest web site at http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/nebraska/projects/travel_management/index.shtml

How To Contact the U. S. Forest Service Concerning the Travel Management Plan

The U. S. Forest Service is asking for your input concerning the alternative trail plans that they have developed. You can submit your comments, ideas, support, non-support via email, fax, or regular mail. ***The deadline has been extended, you now have until December 24th 2009 to submit your comments!***

In your comments to the Forest Service, mention specific items that are of interest to YOU!

- State what alternative you prefer and why. Provide sound reasons that are sensible and can be substantiated.
- Are there certain trails you would like to see remain open? If so, note the names of the trails in your letter. Provide sound reasons that are sensible and can be substantiated. To view the various trail maps visit http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/nebraska/projects/travel_management/index.shtml
- BE SURE to mention that you would like to see additional trails built using the EDAW trail plan and why you think it's needed.
- You can also argue against statements in the Draft Environmental Impact Study (DEIS) or other documents that have been prepared by the Forest Service.
- Keep your comments civil.

We depend upon the U. S. Forest Service to help provide lands in Nebraska where ATV and dirtbike riders can recreate responsibly. There are only five public ATV and dirtbike areas in Nebraska that contain over 30 acres to ride. Three of these areas will be effected by the proposed Travel Management Plan. If you want to preserve your privilege to ride at the Nebraska National Forest, I encourage you to make your best effort to get your comments to the Forest Service before December 24th 2009.

If you have any questions, I can be reached in Grand Island at 308-381-2143 and leave a message if no one answers. My email address is danno@nohva.com .

How to Comment

Comments on the Nebraska Travel Management DEIS and alternative plans must be made within a 45-day period following publication of its Notice of Availability (NOA) in the Federal Register.

http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/nebraska/projects/travel_management/deis/Appendix%20A%20Travel%20Mgt%20Rule.pdf

Written, facsimile, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or time frame information provided by any other source. Written comments must be submitted to the Responsible Official (that is, the person who will make this decision):

Jane Darnell, Forests and Grasslands Supervisor
Nebraska National Forest and Grasslands
c/o Mark Reichert
1312 Fairlane Road
Yreka, CA 96097

Electronic facsimile must be sent to (530) 841-4463 and date stamped no later than the 45th day after publication in the Federal Register.

Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to comments-rocky-mountain-nebraska@fs.fed.us (please enter "NNFG

Travel Management DEIS Comments" on subject line). Electronic comments must be received by December 24, 2009. Those who provide substantive comments during the 45-day comment period (40 CFR 1503.1) are eligible to appeal the decision pursuant to 36 CFR part 215 regulations. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for appeal eligibility. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one way to provide verification.

If you have any questions, call Mark Reichert at 530-841-4422 or Paul Sweeney at 715-627-6285.

Other Important Issues to Consider

About U. S. Forest Service lands in Nebraska

For those who are not familiar with some of the terms used in this document. Many people mistakenly call the area a state park or a national park. The area is a National Forest and the title of the "Halsey" area is officially the "U. S. Forest Service, Nebraska National Forest and Grasslands, Bessey Ranger District". This area is commonly referred to as "Bessey", or "Halsey", with Bessey being the accurate term. The land is Federal land, managed by the U.S. Forest Service which is part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Contrary to popular belief, the area is not a 'park', it is not operated by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. The area is operated by the U.S. Forest Service, a federal agency. If the area were operated or managed by the State of Nebraska, it would have been closed to us long ago!

Why did NOHVA decided to support Alternative 2?

We decided to support alternative 2 WITH a few extra miles of 201 added and the fence at the Dismal River play area relocated to the boundary of the sand area because this alternative is more sustainable. What does sustainable mean? It means to have the ability to maintain and fund a trail with the available number of volunteers and available funding. In the original proposal that we made back in March of 2008 (see http://nohva.com/News2008/travel_plan.htm), NOHVA described a number of tasks we would do to help the Forest Service maintain and manage trails at Bessey. While we want to see as many trails as possible open to us, we can't possibly maintain all the trails as proposed in alternative 3.

Funding

One of the big hurdles that will need to be overcome will be finding funds to implement trail management that fits federal land management standards. The war in Iraq and Afghanistan and now the federal bailouts have been draining funds from almost every federal agency including the U.S. Forest Service. The Federal agencies that manage our nation's trail systems are being hit hard, and Nebraska is most likely to see little funding for U.S. Forest Service trails for years to come. The net result of budget cuts could mean a big reduction in public land that will be open to motorized recreation as there will be no funding available to even minimally manage recreational off-road trails. To properly manage and maintain the existing trail system we now enjoy at Bessey, it could easily cost over \$250,000 a year.

Nebraska has it tougher than many other states as we have no state level user based trail funding mechanism other than meager funding that organizations like NOHVA can provide. Unlike many other states, Nebraska has no trail use fee or ATV/dirtbike registration program for trails. Some of the areas in Nebraska we now ride are supported with meager fund from NOHVA and volunteers. While we support the concept of a state wide registration program that helps fund trails and we would welcome a reasonable mandatory trail use fee, our fear is that once the state collects the fees, the money would be tied up in red tape, administration costs or end up going to the school districts like all of our other property taxes that we pay. We've seen this happen before, and a state trail use fee needs to be carefully crafted with input from enthusiasts, and that's not likely to happen in Lincoln. If a trail use fee is to be charged, we prefer a local trail use fee be charged and a local committee of trail managers and enthusiasts decide together where the money would be used.

Travel Management Plan (TMP) versus the EDAW Trails Planning Project – These are two totally separate projects!

The issue that we are now concerned about is the Travel Management Plan (TMP). One of the goals that we need to pursue AFTER the Travel Management Plan is in effect is the Bessey EDAW Trails Plan. This plan was completed last year and was requested by Nebraska National Forest Supervisors Office. Projects

like this are seldom requested above the local office, so it can be assumed that the plan has a credible amount of promise. If the Bessey EDAW Trails Plan is implemented, it would greatly expand any of the trail systems proposed in the four Travel Management Plan alternatives. The Bessey EDAW Trails Plan includes designs for ATV, dirtbike, UTV and Jeep trails that will be designated across the entire 92,000 acres at the Bessey Ranger District.

The Role of Volunteers in a New Travel Management Plan

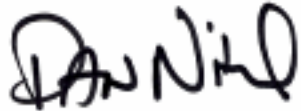
Over the last 13 years volunteers have been the backbone of the continued existence of ATV and dirtbike trails at the Nebraska National Forest near Halsey. Beginning in 1996, NOHVA volunteers built and provided funding of existing ATV trails at the Bessey Ranger District near Halsey. As part of NOHVA's TMP proposal to the U. S. Forest Service, we will propose that our Halsey Trails Club volunteers help maintain the ATV and dirtbike trails. The Halsey Trails Club was organized in 2007 as a chapter of NOHVA, and has been very active in helping with trails at Bessey. If this group of volunteers did not exist, then we would be lucky to retain ANY trails at the Bessey Ranger District near Halsey! NOHVA and it's chapter, the Halsey Trails Club will strive to help keep our existing trails open for us all to enjoy.

At the present time there is no group of volunteers for trails at the McKelvie National Forest near Valentine. For the Pine Ridge area near Chadron, the Pine Ridge Cycle Association helps maintain trails in that location.

WHEW! In Closing.....

Please consider sending your comments to the U.S. Forest Service. Pass this document onto your friends as well. We need to get as many credible comments as possible from ATV and dirtbike enthusiasts as possible. It's been a long journey to get to where we are at now. Thanks for reading all of this.

Sincerely,



Dan Nitzel, Business Manager and Co-founder
Nebraska Off Highway Vehicle Association