



Questa travel management decision by Carson Forest upheld

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Carson National Forest's travel management decision for the Questa Ranger District has been affirmed despite several appeals.

The travel management decision was issued as per the requirements of the Forest Service's 2005 travel management rule, which calls for national forests and ranger districts to designate roads, trails and areas that various types of motor vehicles can legally access. According to information from the Forest Service, increased off-highway vehicle use impacts soil, water, wildlife habitat and other forest users.

The Questa Ranger District comprises almost 170,000 acres south of the Colorado border and includes Questa, Red River and Taos Ski Valley. According to a Forest Service announcement, the decision designates 158 miles of roads as open to all motor vehicles and about 28 miles of motorized trail.

Forest Service Supervisor Kendall Clark signed the Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact last November, opting for "alternative 1," which restricts motor vehicle use to administrative use only on about 15 miles of roads in Midnight Meadows, Bitter Creek, Middle Fork Lake, El Rito, Lama, San Cristóbal and other areas. It also adds about 13 miles of unauthorized routes to the system in the Questa, Lama and San Cristóbal areas, removes 34 miles of 100-foot corridors along designated roads, places seasonal restrictions on motor vehicle use in wintering areas for big game and prohibits motor vehicle use off specifically designated roads, trails and areas without authorization.

Three appeals of the decision were filed with the Forest Service.

The Center for Biological Diversity, along with Taos nonprofit Amigos Bravos, opposed the addition of unauthorized routes, among other proposals in the decision. In the appeal, the groups argued that certain routes, including Largo Canyon Road, Middle Fork Lake Road and others, should be "obliterated" to address erosion and other concerns.

The New Mexico Off-Highway Vehicle Alliance (NMOHV) also filed an appeal of its own, as well as joining an appeal filed by the town of Red River. Those entities argued that certain closures, such as Middle Fork Lake Road, were not justified. Red River's appeal claimed the proposed closures would negatively impact the town's economy, and the NMOHV asked that the process be started over.

The appeals were reviewed by the Deputy Regional Forester and Appeal Deciding Officer of the Southwestern Region Gilbert Zepeda, who affirmed the travel management decision, with instructions, according to the Forest Service.

“I find the Forest Supervisor made a reasoned decision and has complied with all laws, regulations and policy,” Zepeda wrote to the appellants.

Zepeda instructed Clark to provide more information about the work required to add a mile of unauthorized route as a motorized trail and convert two miles of roads to motorized trails in the Elephant Rock and Fourth of July Canyon areas, according to the Forest Service. He also instructed Clark to describe more clearly how motor vehicle users will be affected by restricting currently open roads to administrative use only.

According to information from the Forest Service, a motor vehicle use map of the system will be available to the public at no charge by this summer. The Forest Service will sign roads and develop a public education plan before it begins to issue warnings.

The environmental assessment, decision and appeal letters can be read in their entirety at www.fs.fed.us/r3/carson/plans/nepa_projects.shtml?project=25675.