



## Commenters take issue with Camino Real travel plans

By Matthew van Buren

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Those interested in commenting on travel management plans for the Camino Real Ranger District near Taos have until Feb. 23, though Carson National Forest has already received dozens of comments regarding proposed changes.

The National Forest opened its first 30-day comment period regarding the Preliminary Environmental Assessment for Travel Management on the Camino Real district, near Taos, in mid-December.

But the decision was made to reopen it after the holiday season to ensure interested members of the public have ample opportunity to submit their input.

Comments the Forest Service has received so far range from off-highway vehicle enthusiasts arguing for fewer restrictions to environmental groups asking for more, as well as businesses and landowners concerned about potential impacts.

Among the commenters was Sipapu Ski and Summer Resort. Managing partner James Coleman wrote that proposed closures of more than 100,000 acres to cross-country motorized travel “would represent a significant and negative change” and that closing existing trails in the district “would displace many visitors and reduce the quality of recreational experience offered in the Sipapu area.”

“We request that the Forest Service identify all known trails and roads currently used for motorized travel and designate them open for use,” the letter states.

The New Mexico Off-Highway Vehicle Association submitted a number of comments and called for the withdrawal and revision of the preliminary environmental assessment. One comment from the group requested “at least one alternative that includes areas specifically designated for motorcycle trials riding.”

Several concerned members of the public requested that no action be taken.

Rebecca Miller, of Los Alamos, wrote that the idea of seasonal overuse is a “ridiculous assertion” and that closing off motorized vehicle access in areas of the district would be “unacceptable.”

“The assertions made in the assessment are completely at odds with my personal observations,” Miller wrote, later adding, “As one of the OWNERS of the forest, I heartily PROTEST!”

Several commenters raised concerns about how the current use of motor vehicles within the ranger district is noted in the assessment.

Lloyd Bolander wrote that he has been using the Camino Real Ranger District since 1930 and that the “existing conditions” noted in the assessment do not reflect actual conditions in the ranger district. In his comment, Bolander argued that the document “appears biased against motorized use.”

“The whole document is flawed,” he wrote. “Existing conditions are what is actually existing on the ground.”

Other commenters expressed concern that restricting motor vehicles could prevent elderly or disabled people from enjoying the National Forest, and multiple people argued against limiting snowmobile use. Snowmobiles are specifically excluded from the travel rule, however.

Other commenters felt the restrictions do not go far enough to protect wildlife habitat and water quality. A lengthy comment was submitted by conservation groups including Carson Forest Watch, the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance and Amigos Bravos. That comment took issue with the proposed addition of 1.1 miles of user-created roads to the system, among other concerns.

“Motor vehicle use in the Carson, including ORV use, significantly threatens water, soil, vegetation and wildlife resources in the forest,” the comment states. “The damage caused by motor vehicles includes, for example, erosion of hillsides, deep ruts, accumulation of sedimentation in streams, and disturbance of sensitive areas, such as lava caps and meadows.”

A re-evaluation of motor vehicle travel in various ranger districts is required under the Forest Service’s 2006 Travel Management Rule. According to the preliminary environmental assessment, Alternative 2 would decrease roads available to motor vehicle travel by about 41 percent.

“Some forest roads used frequently by recreationalists, including tourists that stay at Angel Fire or Sipapu Ski and Summer Resort, would be eliminated,” the assessment states. “However, it cannot be predicted what level of effect this reduction would have on local business.”

Proposals for the 319,439 Camino Real Ranger District include:

- Eliminating cross-country, or off-road, motorized travel on 100,672 acres where it is currently permitted;
- Opening approximately 1.1 miles of unauthorized route segments off Forest Road 116 (Santa Barbara), Forest Road 161 (Alamitos) and Forest Road 207 (Las Trampas) to motor vehicle use as forest roads;
- Removing 16 miles of 300foot corridor along designated roads;

- Removing six miles of existing 300-foot corridor

along designated trails;

- Converting approximately one mile of forest road near Angostura Canyon to National Forest trail open to vehicles 50 inches or less in width;

- Restricting motor vehicle use to administrative-use only on about 32 miles of existing designated roads;

- Allowing motor vehicle use between May 1 and Dec. 31 on designated forest roads and trails on the entire Camino Real Ranger District; seasonal designations may be modified depending on weather conditions.

Maps, the proposed action and other documents are available at [www.fs.fed.us/nepa/fsusda-pop.php/?project=25677](http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/fsusda-pop.php/?project=25677) .

Comments may be submitted to: Forest Supervisor, Travel Management Team, 208 Cruz Alta Road, Taos, NM, 87571, faxed to (575) 758-6213 or emailed to [comments-southwestern-carson@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-southwestern-carson@fs.fed.us).

Comments should include the name of the project, "Travel Management Camino Real Ranger District." Carson National Forest can be reached by phone at (575) 758-6213.