

## **Second public comment period yields more interest in Camino Real forest travel**

By Matthew van Buren

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During a second 30-day comment period, Carson National Forest received another stack of correspondence from members of the public interested in travel management on the Camino Real Ranger District.

Changes to off-highway vehicle travel in the district are being made under the 2006 Forest Service Travel Management Rule. Proposals under discussion would eliminate cross-country motorized travel on 100,672 acres where it is currently permitted, removing 16 miles of 300-foot corridor along designated roads and setting seasonal limits to motorized travel, among other provisions.

### Snowmobiles are exempt from the rule.

The National Forest opened the first comment period concerning its Preliminary Environmental Assessment in mid-December, re-opening it after the holiday season to give concerned parties ample opportunity to offer their input. Forest users, adjacent property owners and others interested in the rule took advantage of the additional comment window, submitting dozens more comments during the second 30-day period.

The comments ran the gamut from those who don't want to see further restrictions on motor vehicles to those who don't think the proposed changes go far enough to protect land and water resources.

Dana Dunlap, of Albuquerque, wrote that she favors an alternative that would limit camping access along corridors but finds the Forest Service's Alternative 2 "unacceptable."

"This action would greatly impact public access to awesome views, hunting and hiking," she wrote.

Other commenters raised concerns about elderly and disabled people being able to access certain parts of the Camino Real district if the proposed road closures move forward, and several wrote that the move would harm the area economically. In its comment, the Santa Barbara Grazing Association notes that grazing and other permitted activities would be allowed to continue under the proposed travel rule but expresses concern that similar restrictions could be applied to them in the future.

“The members of the (association) use motorized vehicles to travel on forest roads and forest trails within the Santa Barbara grazing allotment for the purposes of moving cattle, placing salt and maintaining fences and other range improvements,” the letter states, later adding that, “In certain instances, we are also harmed by the unrestricted recreational use of motorized vehicles. Examples of such harm include cutting of allotment fences, poaching cattle, damage to forage and erosion.”

Ed Wallace wrote that his family recently built a second home in the area and has always followed the National Forest’s rules and regulations.

“I have contacted two Texas U.S. Senators who have promised investigation of this matter,” he wrote. “Hopefully you will reconsider the closure.”

Anthony Herald, of Sandia Park, said off-highway vehicle users maintain trails and opined on the “continued closure of public lands.”

“Shoving an environmentalist extreme agenda and laughable (Environmental Assessment) down our throats is just par for our bully government,” he wrote.

Others lauded the plan and encouraged the National Forest to implement further restrictions on off-highway vehicle travel.

Stephen Gates, of Taos, wrote that his family owns land inside the forest boundaries, and he would like to see more enforcement of current restrictions. He wrote that the proposed plan “strikes a good balance between the competing needs.”

Deborah Ragland, of Taos, wrote that motorized, off-road vehicle-users are a minority among forest-users and that the vehicles “disturb the silence of the mountains, frighten away all wildlife and ruin the experience” for others.

Kristen Davenport, of Llano, wrote that her family owns land that borders the Camino Real district. In her comment, she argues that off-highway vehicles are “ripping our forests to shreds,” and she would like to see more limitations put in place.

“Over the past 20 years, I have spent many days (in fact, weeks) in the forest on foot and on horseback,” she wrote. “Over the past several years, the pressure from ATV traffic on all the old logging roads in the National Forest is simply ridiculous and obscene.”

A response from the National Forest is expected in the coming weeks.

For more information, or to view documents related to the travel rule, visit [www.fs.fed.us/nepa/fs-usda-pop.php/?project=25677](http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/fs-usda-pop.php/?project=25677).

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Newly elected members of the Pe-asco Independent School District School Board, Mary Trujillo Mascare-as, Juliet Garc'a-Gonzales and Audrey Medina-Dom'nguez, were sworn in at a special meeting March 5. From left, are Superintendent Dr. Theresa Baca-Watson; Vice President Norman Esquibel; Secretary Mascare-as; Magistrate Judge Jeff Shannon; Garc'a-Gonzales; Medina-Dom'nguez; and President Leroy Lòpez.

Photo Courtesy Pe-asco Independent School District