



File Code: 2350-5

Date: June 3, 2009

Ron Curry
Secretary
New Mexico Environment Department
P.O. Box 5469
Santa Fe, NM 87502

Dear Mr. Curry:

I enjoyed our meeting this week on Tuesday, May 26. I appreciated the opportunity to discuss your letter of April 20 commenting on the citizen petition related to motorized routes in the Jemez Ranger District of the Santa Fe National Forest.

I am enclosing a copy of my letter to Mr. Kevin Stillman about his petition. I'd also like to add a few additional remarks more specifically related to your letter.

You commented that the protection order identifies a subset of trails and roads within the Jemez Ranger District which have the greatest undesirable impacts to air quality, wildlife, water quality, and soils when compared with other trails and roads in the District. The petition focuses on trails and roads around the Cochiti Mesa area, which are not necessarily the routes with the greatest undesirable impacts. The Cochiti Mesa area has few perennial waterways on Forest Service lands. Though many of these routes do have undesirable impacts, we have been working with the Surface Water Quality Board (SWQB) to focus our restoration efforts first on those with the greatest undesirable impacts on the District using the Respect the Rio Program, collaborative restoration projects, and CWA Section 319 grant funds.

Those routes with some of the greatest impacts being addressed through these projects include routes along key perennial streams in the Jemez Mountains, including the Rio Cebolla, the Rio de las Vacas, and the Rio Guadalupe. For example, in conjunction with the SWQB programs, we recently issued a closure order and placed a gate on FR527, which crosses the Rio Cebolla and goes through a wetland complex adjacent to the river. The Jemez District has also been working over the last ten years to close roads that cross or go along the Rio Guadalupe by using a combination of enforcement, education, and buck-and-pole fencing to block vehicular access to the river. In 2007 and 2008 the Jemez and Cuba Districts worked with the SWQB to authorize a restoration project in the middle Rio de las Vacas to rehabilitate and close-off several OHV trails that are parallel to and cross the river in several locations.

As these examples show, the Forest Service has been working diligently in coordination with NMED to focus on reducing undesirable impacts to wildlife, water quality, and soils in key areas adjacent to perennial streams in the Jemez Mountains.

You expressed a concern that "under-resourced enforcement and maintenance programs compromise the successful closure of motorized routes, resulting in ongoing negative water quality impacts." The main reason we are pursuing the designation of motorized roads and trails through the Travel Management Rule is to facilitate management of motorized use on approved routes. We have been unable to effectively manage this use under the existing set of management direction and regulations, in part because there has been little to enforce. Currently, over half of the Santa Fe National Forest is open to cross country travel. The Travel Management process is a focused effort to create a comprehensive motorized travel system that will protect air quality, wildlife, water quality, and soils. Once this plan is in place, we will be in a much better position to enforce and maintain routes.



We have specifically reviewed and taken into consideration the April 2008 site specific recommendations from the SWQB and are currently incorporating these comments into one or more alternatives for analysis under an Environmental Impact Statement. We thank you for these comments and encourage you to remain involved in the Travel Management process.

Resource protection is driving the Travel Management process. Implementation of the Travel Management Rule is expected to improve resource conditions regardless of which alternative is chosen and implemented. We are required to consider and make available to the public a full environmental and social/economic analysis of a reasonable range of alternatives. We are committed to working openly and collaboratively with all parties to ensure a strong, effective and defensible result. A hastily prepared analysis or one-sided decision would likely result in the decision being invalidated, and the process would need to start over. This would only delay our progress toward more active management of motorized use.

Sincerely,

/s/ Daniel J. Jirón
DANIEL J. JIRÓN
Forest Supervisor

cc: Corbin Newman
Regional Forester