

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
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Instruction Memorandum No. ID-2008-016
Expires: 9/30/2009

To: District Managers
Attn: Field Managers, Planning and Recreation Leads

From: State Director

Subject: Vehicle Use in Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs)

Program Area: Land use planning and all program areas which may involve vehicle use within WSAs.

Purpose: The purpose of this Instruction Memorandum (IM) is to reinforce existing policy and guidance for addressing vehicle use and travel management designations in WSAs as part of the land use planning process in accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), Sec. 603(c); the BLM's Interim Management Policy For Lands Under Wilderness Review (H-8550-1), dated July 5, 1995; and the BLM Land Use Planning Handbook (H-1601-1), Appendix C. Collectively this guidance provides direction for the development of Resource Management Plans (RMPs) including the implementation and monitoring of actions associated with these plans.

Policy/Action: Each office is responsible for addressing vehicle use and travel management within WSAs in new or revised RMPs and subsequent travel management plans. This includes determining if past or existing vehicle use or mechanized transport in WSAs has caused impairment to wilderness character. In general, BLM's standard for interim management is that lands under wilderness review be managed so as not to impair their suitability for preservation as wilderness.

Timeframe: Effective immediately.

Budget Impact: None.

Background: As stated in the BLM’s Interim Management Policy for Lands Under Wilderness Review (H-8550-1) I.A, *“The BLM’s management policy is to continue resource uses on lands under wilderness review in a manner that maintains the area’s suitability for preservation as wilderness... until Congress acts on the Secretary’s recommendations.”* This policy further states that mechanical transport, including all motorized devices as well as trail and mountain bikes, may only be allowed on existing ways and within “open” areas that were designated prior to the passage of FLPMA (October 21, 1976). **These ways or primitive routes for motorized or mechanical use that existed at the time of the passage of FLPMA are neither grandfathered uses nor valid existing rights.** It is normally presumed that these ways would “disappear” upon designation of an area as wilderness as a result of discontinued use. Notwithstanding unresolved RS2477 issues, these ways are only allowed to remain open at BLM’s discretion providing that they continue to meet the non-impairment standard.

The management of vehicle use and travel management planning is further guided by the Interim Management Policy as stated in Chapter III.H.11.

“Except for emergency situations as defined in Chapter I.2.12, vehicle designations in WSAs are to be handled through the land-use planning process. Until WSAs are designated as wilderness or released from study status, vehicle use within each WSA is governed by the terms and conditions identified in Chapter I.B.11 and land use planning decisions. Open areas may be designated only: (1) as sand dune or snow areas for use by appropriate sand or snow vehicles or (2) where an area was designated prior to October 21, 1976. No vehicle designation in a WSA may allow vehicles to travel off existing ways and trails except in these two circumstances.”

In our analysis for an RMP, we must clearly articulate where and what vehicle uses were occurring within a WSA, prior to the passage of FLPMA as described in the wilderness inventory. Additionally, we need to describe the past monitoring activities and those we will use in the future to determine if wilderness values have been impaired or not by continued vehicle use. Because of the rapid growth in the numbers of Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV) used on public lands, especially All-Terrain Vehicles (ATV) and Off-Highway Motorcycles (OHM), it is important to continue to monitor the use of these vehicles in WSAs, assessing compliance with existing regulations. The BLM must determine if the volume and nature of those uses result in impairment to the wilderness character of WSAs. This provides a basis for management decisions that address continuing, restricting, or prohibiting existing vehicle uses and serves as the foundation for travel management planning.

Because the preservation of wilderness values within a WSA is always of paramount concern, the BLM has an obligation to periodically evaluate the impact of use on ways that have been allowed to continue in relation to wilderness values, and if use of these ways is impairing such values, to take measures to end the impairment. The land use planning process, travel management planning, and on-going monitoring help to ensure we meet this obligation.

Manual/Handbook Sections Affected: This IM reinforces the implementation of existing guidance provided in BLM's Interim Management Policy For Lands Under Wilderness Review (H-8550-1) and Land Use Planning Handbook (H-1601-1) consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA).

Coordination: The BLM Idaho State Office (ISO) Resources Services division prepared this guidance with consultation from the ISO External Affairs staff and Washington Office National Landscape Conservation System staff.

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Boise District with Union: Management is reminded to notify and satisfy any bargaining requirements prior to implementation.

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