Description of the Route Evaluation Tree Process©

The Route Evaluation Tree Process©[1] (Advanced Resource Solutions, Inc.), and associated software, is a tool designed to assist land management agencies with the systematic neutral collection and compilation of data for the thorough evaluation, analysis and/or designation of both motorized and non-motorized routes. It builds upon the history of past efforts of route designation, assists with addressing various issues and concerns raised by both private and public entities (e.g. planning policy, sensitive resource protection, commercial access needs, recreational access preferences) and helps to capture the information necessary for compliance with numerous state and federal statutory requirements that must be considered in the planning process. These state and federal statutory requirements would include the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Endangered Species Act (ESA), National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), Presidential Executive Orders and Proclamations, Agency Organic Acts, mining and grazing acts and other acts pertinent to federal land use planning. Additionally, the Route Evaluation Tree Process© helps to build into the planning process a means by which to achieve desired outcomes that are specifically tailored to the unique needs and issues in a planning area.

The Route Evaluation Tree Process© is not a replacement for NEPA process, documents, or analysis. Rather, it is a tool designed to assist with the systematic collection of sensitive resource and route use information, the data from which can be subsequently used to analyze and designate routes in a NEPA-compliant manner.

To address the many facets of route evaluation and transportation planning, the Route Evaluation Tree Process© is divided into a number of smaller finite tasks or steps that allow for the fine-tuning of the collection of information needed to successfully evaluate, analyze and designate routes. The process is illustrated on the attached Route Evaluation Tree Process© for Travel Management Planning (see Attachment 1). Specific steps in the process allow for the identification and/or delineation of planning areas/units at a number of geographic scales (e.g. Management Areas/Units, sub-regions, watersheds, etc.) thereby allowing the fine tuning of management guidelines at various geographic scales tailored to specific project needs or issues. The result of Route Evaluation Tree Process© is the creation of different route network options that utilize specific thresholds of acceptable impacts to address the various issues identified.

Sub-step 17 within the Route Evaluation Tree Process© identifies the use of the Route Evaluation Tree© software to evaluate each route (see Attachment 2). Specifically, the Route Evaluation Tree© software systematically guides the "evaluator" through a series of questions and associated drop-down menus to assist with achieving compliance with a variety of pertinent statutory

[1] The process has previously been referred to as the "Route Evaluation/Designation Decision Tree Process" or "Decision Tree". A "decision tree" is a technique or tool for assisting in the decision making process by leading one through a series of yes/no questions based upon input received (flowchart). A "decision" in the context of NEPA has a more legalistic meaning specifically relating to the NEPA process. The name "Decision Tree" was used to indicate it was created in a flowchart style, however to avoid the potential for misunderstanding of the meaning of the word "decision", it has been removed from the title of the process. Similarly, the word "Designation" has also been removed as that word has a more legalistic meaning relating to agency actions.

requirements and sensitive resource concerns. The questions and menus provide narrowly focused route-by-route and landscape scale assessment (the latter of which allows for better consideration of broader network or combined effects). Additionally, the software provides for the development of project-specific menu choices that allow for the systematic consideration of resource impacts and selection of measures designed to address impacts to those resources.

The Route Evaluation Tree© software compiles the data collected during the evaluation into a Microsoft Access database that can be queried directly or integrated with other Microsoft Access-based databases (e.g. GIS). Whether used as a stand alone database or integrated with other databases, the information collected can assist in the environmental impact analysis process required by NEPA and/or with other planning activities. The data collected may also be exported to a Microsoft Excel table format or exported to Microsoft Word in a report format. When the process is carried out properly, the database that is created not only consists of that information which is necessary for the proper evaluation and designation of routes, but when integrated with GIS may assist agency staff by organizing data about the planning area and routes for use in the creation of a range of alternatives, utilizing the data in the creation of maps, and in the analysis of specific environmental impacts and cumulative effects as part of their NEPA documentation.

The Route Evaluation Tree Process© is being and has been successfully used by BLM Field Offices and USDA National Forests in the states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho and Utah. Specifically, it is or has been utilized in eight EIS-level documents, seven RMPs and four EA-level documents. Four of these planning efforts include National Monuments and one includes a National Conservation Area. The process has been carefully honed to meet or exceed the needs of the BLM Planning Handbook and the new USFS rule concerning OHVs and travel management and is continually being refined in response to feedback both from the public and agency staff. The process is not confined exclusively to motorized planning and also has been or is being used to evaluate non-motorized access needs.

In summary, the Route Evaluation Tree Process© is a dynamic tool that can adjust to the needs of the individual agencies and planning areas. It is appreciated by agency planners, NEPA specialists, resource specialists and managers as a tool for its ability to prompt staff in the systematic collection of a variety of sensitive resource, recreational and commercial data that is necessary for statutory compliance and to meet concerns raised by the public and that can be accessed at a later time during analysis in the planning process. The data is stored in a standardized and neutral manner that is easily retrievable, presentable to the public in an easily understood format, and readily linked to GIS or utilized in a Microsoft Access, Excel, or Word format. The Route Evaluation Tree Process© and Route Evaluation Tree© software go beyond route evaluation and travel management by creating a central repository of data that can be utilized by planners, specialists and GIS analysts not only for travel management planning but also for future planning projects where spatially-based data is necessary.