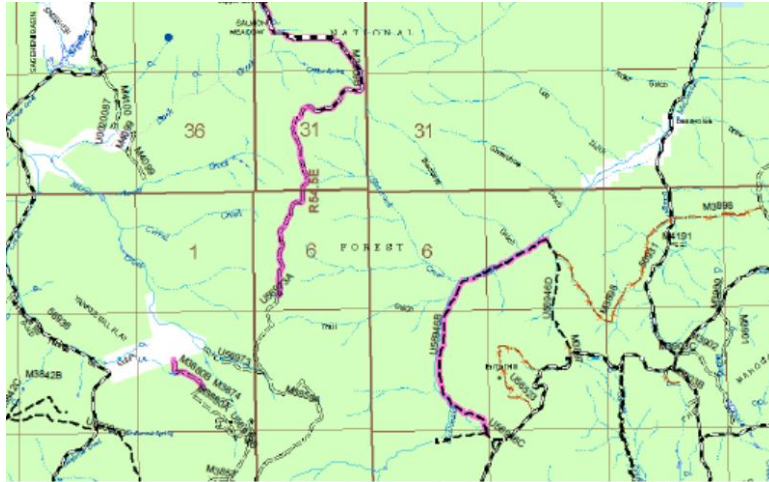


Opposition to the Travel Management Plan

By Larry Hyslop



Open and closed roads in the Mountain City Ranger District

Last week, I presented the details of the Travel Management Plan based on talking to Troy Phelps, acting Mountain City District Ranger for the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest (USFS). This week, I follow up the discussion by presenting the opposite viewpoints.

Demar Dahl is chairman of the Elko County Board of Commissioners. He has found the plan's process to be very confusing. The USFS seemed not to know the details of the plans so the county has not been able to get the whole story. In 2009, the county was told there would be no need to close any roads, before hearing the plan would close over a thousand miles of roads. (The Travel Management Plan states 131 miles of roads will need to be closed.) This change prompted the county commissioners to withdraw as a cooperating agency, although they have since become a coordinating agency.

Demar feels other roads will be closed, specifically those roads outside of the plan's 2,000 miles of authorized roads. (Troy told me he knows of no other roads that will be closed outside of the 131 miles.)

"If it's working now, if no damage is being done, why change it?" Demar feels the correct approach is using good science and monitoring to decide if a particular road needs to be closed because of damage to the environment or endangering an endangered species.

With reference to dispersed camping, Demar wants to see the problems being caused by any dispersed campsites before it is restricted. Concerning game retrieval, the USFS has said all cross-country travel must be stopped and this ban is not negotiable. Yet Demar wonders why if some cross-country travel is ok for retrieving killed elk, then why not for mule deer retrieval. Why not allow retrieval farther off the road than a half mile?

In the past, Demar feels most private land owners allowed travel across their private land to access further USFS roads, although they might say no if conditions were bad or other visitors were already using the road. He feels with this travel plan in place, private landowners will not sign an official easement since that allows visitors to always travel across their property.

He also feels the USFS's national directive to mark open roads, not closed roads, will not work. It will make law breakers out of those who inadvertently end up on the wrong road.

"These things go a little bit at a time, you lose a little bit here, a little bit there." He is worried that Elko County will end up like Eureka County, who did not oppose their Travel Management Plan and now regrets it. He feels any travel management plan should be based on the county's land use plan.

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